

Meddling with Masterpieces: the On-going Adaptation of *King Lear*

by

Lynne Bradley  
B.A., Queen's University 1997  
M.A., Queen's University 1998

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of English

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University of Victoria

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## Abstract

The temptation to meddle with Shakespeare has proven irresistible to playwrights since the Restoration and has inspired some of the most reviled and most respected works of theatre. Nahum Tate's tragic-comic *King Lear* (1681) was described as an execrable piece of dementation, but played on London stages for one hundred and fifty years. David Garrick was equally tempted to adapt *King Lear* in the eighteenth century, as were the burlesque playwrights of the nineteenth. In the twentieth century, the meddling continued with works like *King Lear's Wife* (1913) by Gordon Bottomley and *Dead Letters* (1910) by Maurice Baring. But many of these twentieth-century works display a complexity and ambivalence quite at odds with their theatrical predecessors. Plays like *Lear* (1971) by Edward Bond and *Seven Lears* (1989) by Howard Barker use elements from Shakespeare's play to write critically about contemporary politics and literature, while *Lear's Daughters* (1987) by the Women's Theatre Group expands the role of female characters as a way to challenge restrictive representations of femininity. These plays express more varied and problematic positions toward literature and society than Tate and Garrick, suggesting not only that the nature of adaptation has changed but that the playwright's relationship to Shakespeare has changed as well.

To understand how adaptation has changed and why, chapter one examines the differences in works by Tate, Garrick, and the burlesque writers, locating traditional critical models – which characterize adaptation as either collaborative or repudiative –

within a more historicized framework. Chapter two considers how changes in early twentieth-century Shakespeare criticism impacted adaptations by playwrights like Bottomley, and how traditional models of adaptation begin to break down when applied to more ironic works by Baring and Stoppard. Chapter three evaluates a new model of adaptation in regard to plays by Bond and Barker which articulate a more problematic relationship to Shakespeare, a model that is further tested in chapter four against feminist adaptations by Paula Vogel, Ann-Marie MacDonald, and the Women's Theatre Group. This new model conceives of adaptation as a complex double gesture that collaborates with Shakespeare and rejects him at the same time; it allows playwrights to acknowledge their debt to Shakespeare while commenting on contemporary issues and expressing modern beliefs. It allows playwrights to express more modern subject positions with regard to their literary heritage and to themselves, and to engage with broader debates about how art, society, and the self interact.

## Table of contents

Supervisory committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of contents	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter one: “Why, this is not Lear”: adaptations before the twentieth century	47
Chapter two: “...other accents borrow”: Bottomley, Baring, and a new approach to adaptation	112
Chapter three: “Only we shall retain the name”: Bond’s <i>Lear</i> and Barker’s <i>Seven Lears</i>	178
Chapter four: “Re-vision” of the kingdom: feminist adaptations of <i>King Lear</i>	271
Conclusion: “...[t]he promised end?”	346
Works cited	361

## **Acknowledgments**

With deepest thanks to my parents,  
and to Dr. Sheila Rabillard and Dr. David Staines.

## Introduction

[As] to the propriety of meddling with masterpieces...All I can say is that the temptation to do it, and sometimes the circumstances which demand it, are irresistible.

George Bernard Shaw.

Early in 1681, an actress playing Cordelia stepped out on a London stage to deliver a tour-de-force performance as the romantic lead in a new comedy, *The History of King Lear*. The fact that one of western literature's most famous tragedies could dominate the English stage as a romantic comedy indicates the power of imagination and innovation to triumph over nostalgia and authenticity. This is the power of adaptation. But is the impulse to adapt consistent and quantifiable, or does it change over time? *King Lear* continues to be adapted today, but is it adapted in the same way for the same reasons that it was in 1681, or has the process of adaptation adapted itself over time?

In the wake of twentieth-century critical theory, western culture's understanding of the transmission of its literary heritage has undergone a dramatic transformation as the fundamental ideas of "author," "origin," and "work" are called into question. That same critical theory has called Shakespeare – the man and his plays – into question. Yet the study of adaptation lags behind. All too often work on Shakespeare adaptations simply catalogues new plays alongside their sources, rather than studying the methodology behind them or the impulses that motivate them. Ruby Cohn's seminal *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (1972) looks broadly at adaptations of Shakespeare into multiple media, as do Gary Taylor's *Reinventing Shakespeare* (1990), and John Gross's *After Shakespeare* (2002), but the scope of these works is too broad to examine a particular play adapted into a particular medium. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier's *Adaptations of Shakespeare* (2000) and Richard Schoch's *Not Shakespeare* (2002) are much more

particular in their examinations of theatrical adaptations and Shakespeare burlesques respectively, but still they try to encompass the entire canon and stop short of theorizing adaptation as a specific modern genre. As a result, plays like *Lear* (1971) by Edward Bond, *Seven Lears* (1989) by Howard Barker, or *Lear's Daughters* (1987) by the Women's Theatre Group are most often mentioned as anomalies or corollaries of Shakespeare's work rather than as characteristic examples of a unique genre.

The preponderance of twentieth-century Shakespeare adaptations suggest that this is a thriving and autonomous genre whose complexity mirrors the deep ambivalence western culture feels about Shakespeare in this particular historical moment, yet no study has been done on the evolution of adaptation, how these modern works differ in kind and motivation from earlier works. This critical oversight is exacerbated by the fact that theoretical models of adaptation tend to view the genre as static, and tend to describe it in simplified dichotomous terms in which a playwright either collaborates with Shakespeare or replaces him. These models may be adequate for early adaptations but they limit and oversimplify the complex interaction displayed in twentieth-century adaptations of Shakespeare, which neither collaborate wholly with Shakespeare nor reject him entirely. It is this complexity and ambivalence that distinguishes these adaptations from earlier works and which needs to be studied.

To begin the process of theorizing modern adaptation, this paper will first look at adaptations from a historical perspective to determine the extent to which twentieth-century works differ from their predecessors. Examining Nahum Tate's *History of King Lear* (1681), adaptations by David Garrick in the mid-eighteenth century, and

Shakespeare burlesques of the nineteenth century, I will consider how and why these works alter Shakespeare's original play. Within this historical framework, I will deploy traditional models of adaptation in a more accurate way that acknowledges the historical differences in adaptive practices and recognizes that early adaptations may be modeled differently than modern adaptations. Subsequent chapters will compare the early works of Tate and Garrick to twentieth-century adaptations by Gordon Bottomley, Edward Bond, Howard Barker, and the Women's Theatre Group, to assess how and why modern adaptations differ from their predecessors. Because these modern works articulate a more complicated relationship with Shakespeare, they often contradict traditional models of adaptation. In each case, I will consider how traditional models fall short in describing these works, and develop a new model that accommodates the fact that twentieth-century adaptation is a unique genre.

An indicator of the paucity of critical work done on adaptation is the absence of any workable definition of the term "adaptation." In contrast to other genres – satire, parody, burlesque – adaptation lacks a definition that is universally acknowledged or generally used. Instead there is a plethora of terms used to describe the variously related processes of appropriation, burlesque, and parody. Ruby Cohn refers to adaptations as "offshoots," Charles Marowitz to "transmutations" (*Recycling* 9), and Richard Proudfoot to "re-writing, or revisions, or appropriations, or adumbrations" which he uses synonymously (139). Even more strange are critics who coin new terms to avoid having to define adaptation: Robert Brustein uses "theatrical parasites" and William E. Gruber "colloidal suspension" (110). In the introduction to their anthology, *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, Fischlin and Fortier engage in a lively analysis of "The Problem of

Naming,” admitting at last to using adaptation as a default term, “the word in most common usage and therefore capable of minimizing confusion” (3). They conclude by defining adaptations for the purpose of their study as “works which, through verbal and theatrical devices, radically alter the shape and significance of another work so as to invoke that work and yet be different from it – so that any adaptation is, and is not, Shakespeare” (4). Fischlin and Fortier’s explication is useful insofar as it *initiates* the process of defining adaptation; still, their definition remains vague.

To use the term adaptation with any degree of precision requires further refinement and distinction, both in terms of *what* the adaptation refers back to or changes in Shakespeare, and in terms of *how* the author intends the adaptation to work. Used in this dissertation, the term Shakespeare adaptation refers specifically to works in which the author makes an explicit connection to a play by Shakespeare, whether in terms of narrative, character, title, language, or issues, which invites a particular response from the audience to compare the adaptation to their memories of the original. Foundational to this definition is the explicit nature of the connection to Shakespeare, meaning the reference is not implied but readily observable and clearly expressed. This distinction eliminates a vast body of work that refers obliquely to Shakespeare, such as Keats’ sonnet “On sitting down to read King Lear.” An explicit reference suggests a deliberate interest on the part of the author to compare and contrast the new work with Shakespeare’s original. Also critical to this definition is the fact that Shakespeare adaptations refer to Shakespeare’s works, not to his biography. Despite the growing number of works that portray characterizations of Shakespeare – from Edward Bond’s *Bingo* (1974), to Timothy Findley’s *Elizabeth Rex* (2001), and Tom Stoppard’s

*Shakespeare in Love* (1998) – writing an original work about Shakespeare’s life reflects a very different process than adapting his plays.

If there is a paucity of definitional work done on adaptation, it is matched by a paucity of theoretical work, particularly regarding how adaptations function in relation to their source works. Critical consensus holds that adaptations function in one of two ways, either as a collaborative process that celebrates the original author or as a destructive process that effects the author’s replacement: Gary Taylor refers to the “twin imperatives” of authenticity and novelty that motivate our interactions with Shakespeare (*Reinventing* 51), Peter Erickson describes adaptation as either conciliatory or oppositional, and Susan Bennett contrasts the term “nostalgia,” which is collaborative, with the term “creative vandalism,” which is destructive. Fischlin and Fortier similarly represent adaptation in dichotomous terms. “[A]daptors of Shakespeare,” they write, “undertake a number of responses to Shakespeare’s canonical status: some seek to supplant it or overthrow; others borrow from Shakespeare’s status to give resonance to their own efforts” (6). These models suggest that there are two distinct types of adaptation which function differently from each other. It is worth exploring these disjunctive terms to understand how adaptation is thought to have worked.

In *Performing Nostalgia*, Bennett explores how literary texts function nostalgically. These works create community in the audience, reinforce literary tradition, and collaborate with and celebrate the original author. They seek to evoke common literary experiences and unite audiences in the recollection of a shared past and common culture. When an audience sees a Shakespeare burlesque, for example, it coalesces into a

community of people who “get” the play because they have likely all seen *King Lear*. The adaptation reminds them of their shared culture, a culture in which Shakespeare and his characters are well-known; it unites them as a community of people with common literary traditions. Moreover, because the burlesque relies on *King Lear* to enhance its meaning, the adaptation reinforces the value of literary heritage: the value of Shakespeare’s play is increased as it becomes a means for understanding other works. Burlesques thus collaborate with Shakespeare to create meaning, and reiterate Shakespeare’s value.

In contrast to nostalgic adaptations, Bennett describes adaptations that function oppositionally. For this, she recalls Jonathan Dollimore’s use of the term “creative vandalism” from the programme notes to Barker’s *Women Beware Women* performed at the Royal Court in 1986. Creative vandalism is consistent with Erickson’s sense of adaptations functioning in the oppositional mode. These adaptations do not create community but shatter it. Instead of appealing to a common literary heritage, they destroy that heritage and focus on what makes audiences different from the past and each other. Instead of celebrating Shakespeare and collaborating with him to add value to the original work oppositional adaptations “take up a deliberately antagonistic relationship to their source” (Bennett 1). By writing in the gaps and margins of the original, they disrupt both the coherence and the integrity of Shakespeare’s work. They suggest alternatives, point out inadequacies, advocate replacement. Often they represent what has been cut out or excluded from the original.

These traditional models of adaptation work well with earlier works, but they begin to break down when applied to later adaptations that express more complicated and problematic positions toward literature and society. The argument that nostalgic adaptations create a sense of community is particularly unsustainable in a postmodern environment of diversity. Bennett acknowledges this flaw, citing Fred Davis (from *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*) who argues that nostalgia may create a sense of community by promoting a shared past, but that it does so by effacing “divisive positionalities” such as class, race, and gender. Davis warns that nostalgia, when experienced collectively, “can promote a false and likely dangerous sense of ‘we’” (qtd. Bennett 5). Moreover, by focusing exclusively on the collaborative aspects of adaptation, a nostalgic interpretation disregards the extent to which an adaptation *alters* its source work. Adaptation necessarily implies that something is excised or changed, which in turn implies a necessary writing against (read: rejection) of the original work or author. Fischlin and Fortier concur. “Adaptation features a specific and explicit form of criticism,” they write, “a marked change from Shakespeare’s original cannot help but indicate a critical difference” (8). No adaptation can be purely celebratory or collaborative, but fundamentally entails the alteration and rejection of the original work. A nostalgic reading of adaptation as a collaborative, community-forming experience is an interpretive oversimplification. Yet, an exclusively oppositional interpretation of adaptation is equally flawed. Where the nostalgic view effaced the extent to which the adaptation altered the source text (focusing primarily on collaboration with Shakespeare), the oppositional view tends to efface the extent to which adaptation borrows from its source: it discounts the collaboration with Shakespeare. What these either / or

interpretations fail to recognize is that re-writing encompasses both collaboration *and* replacement.

To understand why the nature of adaptation has changed, it is helpful to consider what has changed in the adaptor's relationship to Shakespeare. Before the twentieth century, playwrights tended to focus either on their outright differences from Shakespeare (as Tate did in the late seventeenth century) or in the wake of bardolatry, on their debt to Shakespeare (as Garrick did in the mid-eighteenth century). As the twentieth century progressed, relationships to Shakespeare became more complicated as playwrights' *own* positionalities become more complicated. Fischlin and Fortier write that critical theory took hold in the twentieth century in academic institutions, such that issues of "text and source, text and context, authorship, originality, interpretation, and the production of meaning" altered our relationship to literature (1). While Shakespeare is still recognized as a core of western literary heritage, he has become more and more identified as a product of a particular age, class, race, nationality, and gender. As playwrights in the twentieth century articulate a more complicated relationship with Shakespeare, they begin to express an awareness of both their debt to him and their difference from him. Their interactions with Shakespeare reflect a need to acknowledge him and to write against those positions he is seen to represent.

These interactions must be balanced carefully in order for playwrights to participate in their literary heritage and distinguish their own positionalities in contradistinction to Shakespeare's. Rather than simplify these interactions by reading them as monovalent gestures, critics need a new model that more accurately reflects the

richness of these modern works. The work of Marianne Novy, Erickson, and Bennett needs to be extended and modern adaptations understood as anxious intersections of collaboration and rejection through which playwrights both acknowledge their dependence on literary tradition and distinguish themselves as relevant, modern authors. Within this model, adaptation is theorized as a complex double gesture that celebrates Shakespeare and rejects him at the same time. It constitutes both a figurative collaboration with the author – in which the old text adds meaning to the new text, and the new text adds meaning to the old – as well as a deliberate rejection of the author, an assertion that original meaning is either irretrievably lost to us or no longer desirable. This model encompasses both the nostalgic and oppositional impulses, and recognizes that a literary work can both be motivated and function in self-contradictory ways. Because of its inherent duality, modern adaptation allows us, as playwrights, readers, and audiences, to interact with Shakespeare in a unique way: It allows us to acknowledge our debt to Shakespeare without being derivative or compromising our own modern beliefs; at the same time, it allows us to author and experience new works and new ideas that express twentieth- and twenty-first-century concerns without severing all ties to the cultural traditions that underlie our society.

My focus in this dissertation concerns how this unique double gesture plays out specifically in theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare. Studies of film adaptations of Shakespeare have become ubiquitous but their focus tends to be more on film theory than the theoretics of adaptation. Moreover, in film adaptations, the adaptive process is less visible, tangled as it is in the necessity of translating from one medium to another. A similar problem overshadows studies of Shakespeare adaptation into fiction. While I will

briefly consider Maurice Baring's *Dead Letters* (1910) and Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991), my interest in such works is tangential since they can only ever draw attention to adaptation as a corollary of translation. By focusing on theatrical adaptations I hope to examine adaptation in its most straightforward manifestation, from drama to drama. To maintain this clarity of focus, I will further limit my primary study to theatrical adaptations of *King Lear*. Tracing adaptation as it is practiced on one particular work creates consistency of focus around the methodology of adaptation, and eliminates the inevitable variables that would arise from studying multiple original texts.

*King Lear* is an obvious text for a study on adaptation. From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, adaptations of *King Lear* have dominated and dogged the stage, providing a unique opportunity to study shifts in the nature of adaptation over time. The particular wealth of twentieth-century adaptations further allows for in-depth analysis of modern adaptation, how and why it differs from earlier approaches, and why traditional models of adaptation – models that work well for earlier works – begin to break down when applied to works in the twentieth century. Comparing and contrasting modern adaptations of *King Lear* maintains the focus on methodology that will enable the extension of traditional models for adaptation into more apt modern schematics. While the history of *King Lear* is characteristic of the overall process of adapting Shakespeare, it also offers a unique opportunity to look at Shakespeare's own practice of adaptation. The disarming existence of multiple original texts of *King Lear* (as explored in the revisionist work of Michael Warren, Steven Urkowitz, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells) raises the possibility that Shakespeare not only adapted the work of his predecessors but

his own work as well, creating an unusually fruitful starting point for the study of adaptation.

To initiate this discussion, my introduction will try to pin down exactly what we mean by *King Lear* by examining the origins of the story in myth, performance, and text. We must first dispense with the notion that Shakespeare's *Lear* is the apogee: either the culmination of a series of primitive *Lear*-related discourses or the inception of the *Lear* story as we know it today. Briefly, then, and with a view to Shakespeare's own adaptive process, my introduction will examine the various sources of Shakespeare's *Lears* from the first written narrative in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the King's of Britain* (c.1136), through John Higgins' *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1574), Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), Philip Sidney's old and new *Arcadias* (1590) and the anonymous 1605 play *Leir*. I will briefly consider the work of Michael Warren and Steven Urkowitz to examine the revisionist argument that Shakespeare might have significantly altered his own work from quarto to folio texts. The purpose of this discussion is quite specifically to do away with any notion of a single original Shakespearean *Lear* text, and to discriminate, within the plurality of *Lear*-narratives, the text or concept referred back to when writers adapt *King Lear*.

Moving away from the study of source works in my introduction, chapter one will focus on Nahum Tate's *History of King Lear* (1681) with the intention of locating adaptations and models of adaptation within their appropriate historical contexts. Written in a unique period in Shakespeare's afterlife when he had little value as a playwright, Tate's adaptation is more a response to technical innovations, new aesthetic standards,

and evolving social forces than a desire to collaborate with a formative playwright. It is an excellent example of oppositional adaptation as theorized by Bennett and Erickson. Unlike later adaptations, Tate's play does not rely on the audience's recollection of the original or on a shared literary heritage to give it meaning; an understanding of Shakespeare does nothing to enhance Tate's *King Lear*. Rather, Tate replaces that heritage with something new and different. His adaptation seeks to transform Shakespeare, and replace an inadequate and outdated tragedy with a more contemporary romantic comedy. As an oppositional adaptation, Tate's *King Lear* draws attention to its difference from Shakespeare: it writes against the original author, halts the transmission of literary heritage, and replaces community with distance and difference.

Contrasting Tate's oppositional adaptation to David Garrick's revivals in the mid-eighteenth century and the Shakespeare burlesques of the nineteenth century, the second half of this chapter will explore how the desire for novelty is replaced by the desire for authenticity in Shakespeare adaptations. Garrick's adaptations, which capitalize on nostalgia and the period's growing sense of bardolatry, show how the change in Shakespeare's status affects the adaptation of his work as much as the period's changing understanding of authorship, creativity, and originality. Shakespeare burlesques of the nineteenth century are similarly nostalgic. Like Garrick's work, they unite the audience as a community of people who understand and appreciate Shakespeare in common ways. They reinforce literary traditions by maintaining consistency with a Shakespearean ideal, by striving for authenticity or by criticizing inconsistency in performance. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to examine adaptation from a more or less historicist perspective in order to establish a firm point of departure for twentieth-century adaptors;

and to begin to historicize traditional models of adaptation by locating nostalgic and oppositional models within specific contexts.

As anticipated, traditional models of adaptation work well with earlier works, but they begin to break down when applied to later adaptations that express more complicated and problematic positions toward literature and society. Chapter two will explore how adaptations change in the early twentieth century, and why traditional models based on an oppositional / collaborative dichotomy become inadequate in light of the more contradictory relationship to Shakespeare articulated in the twentieth century. In contrast to Tate and the early adaptors, the twentieth century saw a radical reconception of the idea of adaptation. No longer simply burlesquing an original text, playwrights like Gordon Bottomley use adaptation as a means to create an alternate textual reality for Shakespeare's characters. In its attempt to reify fictional characters, Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife* (1913) relates directly to the romantic obsession with character that inspired such works as *Shakespeare's Heroines* (1832) by Anna Jameson, and *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850-52) by Mary Cowden Clarke, and to character-based Shakespeare criticism of the late nineteenth century, such as A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904).

Despite its modernity, Bottomley's adaptation remains steadfastly nostalgic. In contrast, Bottomley's contemporary Maurice Baring uses irony in his epistolary adaptation *Dead Letters* (1910) which confounds traditional models of adaptation and hints at the type of double gesture that will emerge as the defining feature in later twentieth-century adaptations. Comparing the methodologies of Bottomley and Baring

shows the limits of nostalgic and oppositional models of adaptation, and how a new model must accommodate the intersections of these impulses. As a conclusion to this chapter, I will consider Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) in light of this newer model of adaptation. Like Baring, Stoppard treats character criticism and adaptation ironically. His play emphasizes the absurdity of making characters independent of their texts, and satirizes both the flawed critical tendencies of Shakespeare scholars and playwrights like Bottomley who sought to make *King Lear* more real than real. The purpose of this chapter is to show the innovative nature of early twentieth-century Shakespeare adaptations, to examine the difference in kind and motivation from earlier works, and to explore the limits of traditional models for adaptation. Understanding how and when these models break down is the first step in constructing a new model for the double gesture of modern adaptation.

Where Bottomley's drama constituted a straightforward nostalgic gesture, the plays of Edward Bond and Howard Barker deploy nostalgia and alienation in varying and paradoxical ways that suggest more problematic adaptive gestures. In the third chapter, I consider Bond's *Lear* (1971) and Barker's *Seven Lears* (1989) as attempts to balance collaboration and opposition in adaptation. Using a highly stylized method of cathexis and deconstruction, Bond collaborates with Shakespeare by evoking *King Lear*, and then proceeds to take the story apart and rebuild it around contemporary issues of nationhood, war, and peace. As the familiar *King Lear* falls apart, the contemporary significance of the play emerges along with Bond's adjuration to political action. In the context of traditional models of adaptation, Bond is creating both a community based on the shared recognition of the original work and one based on shared and acknowledged difference

from Shakespeare: audiences “get” *Lear* because they likely know *King Lear*, but they also “get” that Bond is asserting his (and their own) difference from Shakespeare by deconstructing the original and replacing it with something new. Thus, audiences perceive how Bond is both reviving their literary heritage (in the constant reiterations of the original on stage and in the audience’s memories) and curtailing that heritage (by altering those things they perceive as foundational to the original work). The success of Bond’s play is that it operates both nostalgically and oppositionally.

Barker’s work similarly acknowledges both a debt to Shakespeare and a difference from him. Like Bond, he employs and deconstructs *King Lear*, using the violence of the latter to shock audiences into a state of self-analysis. But where Bond rebuilds *King Lear* and re-employs it in the service of political action, Barker simply annihilates the original. The double gesture of collaboration and rejection is less balanced in Barker, who stresses his difference from Shakespeare by writing against what he sees as a cultural machine that reproduces docility and ignorance. While both playwrights engage in adaptation as a double gesture – collaborating and rejecting Shakespeare at the same time – the different effects of their adaptations reflect the differences in their modern and postmodern ethos, and their different opinions about Shakespeare’s continued relevance.

Although both Bond and Barker collaborate with Shakespeare and reject him as a means to write critically about contemporary politics and literature, their rejection of Shakespeare tends to be broad and unfocused. In contrast, the Women’s Theatre Group employs and rejects Shakespeare to articulate the particular political concerns of a

specific group. My fourth chapter will consider in detail the feminist project of adapting Shakespeare with a view to understanding how it satisfies the unique needs of modern women writers. Because of its inherent double-gesture, adaptation allows feminists to show their debt to Shakespeare and their engagement in their literary heritage, and also to write against the traditional and negative representations of femininity they see reflected there. While the focus of this study is on theatrical adaptations of *Lear*, I will briefly discuss Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991), Paula Vogel's *Desdemona* (1977), and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Good Night Desdemona (Good Morning, Juliet)* (1988) as examples of the genre. What constitutes a feminist adaptation? Why is adapting Shakespeare so important to feminist playwrights? Why *King Lear*? In considering these questions, I will discuss Adrienne Rich's theories on re-vision and suggest ways that feminist adaptors incorporate and expand upon re-vision in their work. The primary text for consideration in this chapter is *Lear's Daughters* (1987), written by the Women's Theatre Group. As a re-vision of *King Lear* told through the female characters, *Lear's Daughters* incorporates strategies common to feminist adaptation, and engages in the double gesture of collaboration and rejection common to other modern Shakespeare adaptors. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the extent to which the double gesture of modern adaptation affords women a unique opportunity to engage with a part of their literary heritage that often marginalizes them without sacrificing their feminism.

The conclusion to this work is both a summary of issues raised around the development of a theoretic of adaptation as well as a potential introduction to any broader issues the study of adaptation raises. In revisiting the unique, almost post-dialectical structure of twentieth-century adaptation, this discussion examines the

rhetorical similarities between adaptation and postmodern conceptualizations of aesthetics and subjectivity, exploring how adaptation might participate in these broader debates about the relationship between art and a writer's sense of self in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. In conclusion, this section assesses the unique value that adaptation has as an expression of identity, criticism, cultural tradition, and artistic independence, as a solution to an increasingly challenging relationship with a problematic cultural past and a strategy for navigating an equally problematic cultural present.

### **Sources of *King Lear***

Although the story of *King Lear* has become synonymous with Shakespeare and his genius for tragedy, its true roots are neither Shakespearean nor particularly tragic. The story most likely had some basis in fairy tales, in which the motif of a father submitting his three daughters to a love-test is common and almost always ends in a moment of happy reconciliation and marriage. In *Will in the World*, Stephen Greenblatt writes that “the fate of Lear was principally rehearsed in Shakespeare’s time both as a piece of authentic British history from the very ancient past (c.800 B.C.E.) and as a warning to contemporary fathers not to put too much trust in the flattery of their children” (327).

Stories of a king called Ler (or Leir, Lyr) can be found in both English and Irish mythology, and there is a long tradition of a Celtic ocean god called Llyr. The first written record of the king associated with the Lear legend is Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* written around 1136. Monmouth, a Welsh bishop, undertook

this nascent history of Britain in an attempt to create a narrative heritage linking Aeneas to the Roman period in Britain. As part of a series of fabulous tales, he describes King Leir, the son of Bladud, as a pre-Christian warrior king ruling southern Britain for a period of almost sixty years and the founder of the city of Leicester. The story begins in the familiar way: having no male heirs, Leir decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters, conceiving of the love-test as a way to determine who should receive the fairest amount of the kingdom and make the best marriages. His eldest daughters Goneril and Regan answer accordingly, but his youngest daughter Cordeilla answers:

You are worth just as much as you possess, and that is the measure of my own love for you. (82)

Leir spurns Cordeilla. Instead he marries Goneril and Regan with advantage to Maglaunus, Duke of Albania, and to Henuinus, the Duke of Cornwall. Cordeilla, without land or dowry, is married to Aganippus, King of the Franks, and dispatched to Gaul. As Leir ages, he divides his time between Goneril and Regan, who gradually dismiss his retinue. In poverty, Leir travels to Gaul where Cordeilla restores him. With the help of Cordeilla and Aganippus, Leir heads an army back to Britain, where he overpowers the forces of his sons-in-law and regains his kingdom. After three years of rule, Leir dies and Cordeilla inherits the kingdom of Britain, which she rules for five years before her nephews, Marganus and Cunedagius, begin to revolt against the rule of a woman. They defeat Cordeilla in an insurrection and imprison her. “There she grieved more and more over the loss of her kingdom and eventually she killed herself” (87). In an effort to date this period, Monmouth writes: “At that time Isaiah was making his prophecies; and on the eleventh day after the Kalends of May Rome was founded by the twin brothers

Remus and Romulus” (87). Despite its fable-like qualities, Monmouth’s account purports to be history.

It is some time before the story of Lear is taken up again, in the more deliberately romantic *Mirror for Magistrates* by John Higgins (1574) in the section titled “The Tragoedye of Cordila. Cordila shewes how by despaire when she was in prison she slue herselfe. The yeare before Christ. 800.” Telling her sad tale in narrative verse, Cordila explains:

[...] if I more willing be to tell my fall,  
 And shew mishaps to ease my burdened brest and minde:  
 That others haply may avoide and shunne like thrall,  
 And thereby in distresse more ayde and comfort finde.

She goes on to tell of her father Leire and her older sisters Gonerell and Ragan. Leire establishes the love-test to divide his kingdom between his daughters, and “by flattery fayre they won their fathers hart.” Cordila instead responds:

I lov’de you ever as my father well,  
 No otherwise, if more to know you crave:  
 We love you chiefly for the goodes you have.

As in Monmouth, Gonerell and Ragan are married off, to the King of Albany and to Hinnine, the Duke of Cornwall, and Cordila is given to Aganippus, the King of Fraunce. Leire, deprived of his “crowne and right,” continues to live in Britain. Gonerell and Ragan take away Leire’s entourage of knights; he repents his harsh words to Cordila and flees to France. Cordila raises a force and returns with Leire to Britain to vanquish their enemies. Again Leire rules for three years before he dies and the kingdom passes to Cordila. As in Monmouth, Cordila is challenged by her nephews Morgan and Conidagus,

who imprison her. In prison, Cordila is visited by the ghost of Despaire who offers her a knife and escape in suicide.

The account of King Lear was taken up again by Raphael Holinshed in 1577 in his retelling of Monmouth's history, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. As R.A. Foakes points out, Holinshed's emphasis, like Monmouth's, is on civil wars, the uprising of Albany and Cornwall against Lear, and the insurrection of their sons against Cordelia (95). Holinshed dates Lear's rule in "the year of the world 3105." The story follows Monmouth's account faithfully, albeit providing Cordelia with a more fleshed out response to Lear's love-test. She says:

Knowing the great love and fatherly zeal that you have always borne toward me (for the which I may not answer you otherwise than I think and as my conscience leadeth me), I protest unto you that I have loved you ever and will continually (while I live) love you as my natural father. And if you would more understand of the love that I bear you, ascertain yourself that so much as you have, so much you are worth, and so much I love you and no more. (Verse 13)

Another notable difference in Holinshed's account is that Gonerel and Regan are made less responsible for alienating Lear. Holinshed is specific that it is Albany and Cornwall who diminish Lear's retinue of knights; likewise, it is Aganippus, not Cordelia, who organizes an army to reclaim Lear's kingdom, although in Holinshed and Monmouth she accompanies Lear and the army back to Britain. From there, the story continues much as it was written in Monmouth, although with Lear ruling for two not three years after his restoration. It is, of course, impossible to determine what of Holinshed Shakespeare would have read. His debt to the *Chronicles* seems clear in his history plays, so it is perhaps safe to assume that he would have been familiar with Holinshed's account of Lear and Cordelia.

While Monmouth and Holinshed were clearly concerned with the historical treatment of the Lear story, Edmund Spenser, like Higgins before him, was more interested in its poetic qualities. Writing in decametric verse, Spenser incorporated the legend into his poetic epic, the *Faerie Queen* in 1590:

Next him kin Leyr in happie peace long raind,  
But had no issue male him to succeed,  
But three faire daughters, which were well uptraine,  
In all that seemed fit for kingly seed:  
Mongst whom his realme he equally decreed  
To have divided. (Book 2, Canto X)

As in Higgins, the story moves quickly through Lear's love test and Cordelia's reply:

But Cordeill said she lov'd him, as behoov'd;  
Whose simple answer, wanting colours faire  
To paint it forth, him to displeasance moov'd,  
That in his crowne he counted her no haire,  
But twixt the other twaine he kingdome whole did shaire. (Book 2, Canto X)

Spenser's account proceeds quickly along conventional lines: Lear is stripped of his companion knights, repents his harsh words to Cordelia, travels to France and recovers his kingdom. After Lear's death, Cordelia inherits the kingdom and rules for five years before her nephews' revolt. What is perhaps the most notable addition in Spenser's work is Cordelia's suicide *by hanging* in prison.

Till that her sisters children, woxen strong  
Through proud ambition, against her rebeld,  
And overcommen kept in prison long,  
Till wearie of that wretched life, her selfe she hong. (Book 2, Canto X)

It seems likely that Shakespeare would have read Spenser's work, and that he conceived her death by hanging through this influence.

While these four source works were most likely read by Shakespeare, the most obvious source for his tragedy is the anonymous play *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters, Gonerill, Ragan and Cordella*, published in 1605. Probably this was the same play mentioned in Henslowe's diary, performed by the Queen's Men and the Earl of Sussex's Men in April 1594 (Foakes 89), and entered into the Stationers' Register in May 1594 as "Leire Kinge of England and his Three Daughters". Foakes writes: "The connections are strong enough to suggest that Shakespeare read the old play carefully" (99). Certainly the emphasis on motivation, reconciliation, and pathos which distinguish the anonymous *King Leir* from other sources makes the play a more obvious theatrical predecessor to Shakespeare's work.

Shifting the focus from civil wars towards the fortunes of the king and his daughters, *King Leir* turns a history lesson into a family intrigue. Cordella's motive in replying frankly to her father – hitherto left ambiguous in the source texts – is made manifest in her desire to marry only for love. Leir, in contrast, has his sights set on a dynastic marriage for Cordella, but knowing her state of mind, he plans to trick her into complaisance. This creates the necessary conflict that drives the love-test; Leir stages the test anticipating that Cordella will outdo her sisters in her love for her father, a love he can then insist she prove by marrying his choice. Recognizing her dilemma, Cordella replies succinctly "what love the child doth owe the father" (1.3). Leir storms out disowning Cordella who resigns herself to working as a seamstress for a living. To add to the romantic intrigue, the King of Gallia arrives in disguise as a palmer named Will and falls in love with Cordella. From here the play proceeds as we would expect: Leir goes to stay with Gonorill, who halves his allowance; Leir despairs of his state, but is

comforted by his noble friend Perillus. He travels to his daughter Ragan, who vows to curb his manipulation and weakness, and who eventually plots to have Leir and Perillus killed. In a new twist, Leir and Perillus are set upon in a nearby forest by a messenger who tells them of Ragan's murderous intent. When Leir and Perillus call on God for salvation, they are saved by a flash of thunder and lightning which frightens the messenger to repent. Leir and Perillus escape to France, where they are met by Cordella and Gallia in disguise on the seashore. They reconcile. Leir and Gallia set sail for Britain, which they regain. Gonorill and Ragan depart, at each others' throats, Leir abdicates in favour of Gallia, and they all retire happily to France.

Shakespeare's tragedy owes many obvious debts to the anonymous play *Leir*. In *Leir*, the playwright establishes a narrative arc that begins with the love-test, escalates with Leir's mistreatment at the hands of his daughters, and is resolved by his reconciliation with Cordella, a trajectory that Shakespeare's play consistently follows. And like *Leir*, Shakespeare's play puts considerable emphasis on the love-test, making that the primary source of conflict to be resolved; the subsequent civil war and invasion of France act in both plays as corollaries to the domestic dispute. Both plays end with domestic reconciliation of a sort, unlike their source texts which extend the narrative a further eight years into another civil war, imprisonment, and suicide.

Despite these similarities, Shakespeare's particular interest in psychology transforms the raw theatrical material of *Leir* into a nuanced and complex representation of the story. Beyond the tragic ending, the most notable differences between the plays are Shakespeare's portrayal of Lear's madness, the addition of the Fool, and the

Gloucester / Edgar / Edmund subplot. It seems most likely that the subplot derives from Sir Philip Sidney's account of the Paphlagonian prince in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, published after Sidney's death in 1590. The episode occurs in Book 2, Chapter 10, in which Pyrocles and Musidorus come across a blind man, once the Prince of Paphlagonia, begging his son Leonatus to lead him to a promontory so that he can kill himself. The Prince explains that he was exiled by his other son Plexirtus, a bastard whose scheming turned the Prince against Leonatus. Plexirtus took power of the Prince's kingdom, blinded him, and exiled him. With the help of Pyrocles and Musidorus, the Prince and Leonatus regain their kingdom, Leonatus is crowned, and the Prince dies, weeping tears of joy and sadness.

The parallels between Sidney's story and Shakespeare's subplot are obvious, though with a number of salient differences. In his introduction to the Arden *King Lear* (2000), R.A. Foakes argues that Shakespeare enriches and complicates the story he remembered from the *Arcadia*, and that these changes "in effect transform it" (101). He points out that Shakespeare tends to shy away from Sidney's blatantly good / evil dichotomy, portraying the brothers in more complex terms. "Sidney's sons are simply heroic or wicked, and the old Prince, presented largely as the victim of the villainy of Plexirtus" (101). In contrast, neither Edmund nor Edgar is entirely good or evil in the chivalric sense; each is a complex and problematic character. Edmund does not take part in his father's mutilation, a fact that Foakes uses to mitigate Edmund's villainy when contrasted to Plexirtus'. To extend Foakes' argument further: Edmund is noticeably softened in *Lear* by his role in the love-triangle with Goneril and Regan, by his death-bed repentance, and by his eleventh-hour attempt to stop the murders of Cordelia and Lear.

He is further made sympathetic by soliloquies and asides which invite the audience to sympathize with him. Although he is the villain in *Lear*, his villainy is tempered by a sort of love and by his attempts to justify his actions.

Edgar and Gloucester are similarly less simply drawn than their prototypes in Sidney. Edgar's delay in revealing his identity to his father at Dover, which prolongs the old man's suffering and delusion, shows a distinct lack of charity, a marked difference to the kindly Leonatus. His character is further complicated by his disguise as Poor Tom and his perplexing behaviour on the heath. Shakespeare's invention of the Poor Tom role allows him to develop the character of Edgar into a strange hybrid of prince and fool, a hero who acts in flawed and inappropriate ways but who is fundamentally good. The conflict in Edgar as he struggles to remain good through familial discord and loss of identity, and as he emerges into surrogate hero differentiates him from the bland chivalry of Leonatus. Like Edgar, Gloucester undergoes a similar transformation in Shakespeare's adaptation. From a slightly dotty prince in Sidney, he is expanded into the misguided, tormented but fundamentally well intentioned father he becomes in Shakespeare. In Shakespeare's hands, Sidney's stock characters take on shifting dimensions of personality that elevate them beyond simple heroes or villains.

The result of these newly complicated characters is newly complicated relationships. In his adaptation of Sidney, Shakespeare shows the father / son dynamic in all its nuanced, fragmented, and often misguided iterations. He portrays resentment and jealousy, partiality and unfairness, disillusionment and despair long before he leads these characters to redemption and forgiveness. This transition, the fact that Shakespeare

shows relationships moving in non-linear ways through growth, disintegration, and reconnection, is a marked contrast to the static love and hate triangle in Sidney. While Foakes' argument suggests that Shakespeare enriches his characters along moral lines, blurring the boundaries between good and evil, it overlooks the subsequent interaction between these characters and the more significant way Shakespeare uses these interactions to show change and emotional growth.

At the same time that Shakespeare adds complexity and the dimension of growth to his characters, he excises background and motivation from their actions. A notable difference between *Lear* and the source play is the seeming inexplicability of Cordelia's answer in the love-test. The anonymous *Leir* is specific in identifying Cordelia's motive for rejecting Leir: she wants to marry for love, and refuses to be implicated in his manipulative contrivance for a dynastic marriage. Even in the four earlier source texts, Cordelia's response to Lear is motivated generally by a sense of revolt against her sisters' flattery. But Shakespeare makes no such claims. Instead, he strips away Cordelia's motivation so that her response seems unmotivated, capricious, and unexpectedly blunt. In *Will in the World*, Stephen Greenblatt argues that this excision of motive is a deliberate dramatic gesture by Shakespeare: "Once again, as he did in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, Shakespeare simply cut out the motive that makes the initiating action of the story make sense" (328). Similarly, Lear's response, stripped of the motivation it had in *Leir*, is equally capricious and vastly out of proportion. "By stripping his character of a coherent rationale for the behavior that sets in motion the whole ghastly train of events, Shakespeare makes Lear's act seem at once more arbitrary and more rooted in deep psychological needs" (Greenblatt 328).

Comparing *Lear* to Shakespeare's sources, Greenblatt identifies a number of instances where Shakespeare pares down motivation and rationale – “what would seem indispensable to a coherent, well-made play” (325) – to get at a deeper psychological truth in his characters. To explain this strategy, he suggests that Shakespeare must have experienced a conceptual breakthrough while writing *Hamlet*, a breakthrough that changed the way he wrote and which subsequently informed his great tragedies, *Othello* (1603), *King Lear* (1608), and *Macbeth* (1606). He associates this breakthrough with a deliberate strategy to withhold motives or explanations, a strategy he calls “opacity.” He uses the idea of opacity to explain the choices Shakespeare made when putting together his tragedies: Hamlet's enigmatic madness, Iago's unmotivated villainy, Cordelia's senseless rejection of her father, or Lear's inexplicable rage. Instead, he argues, motivation is suggested through consistent repetition of key terms and images that reveal an inward logic from which an audience must deduce meaning. Opacity suggests a distinct preference for “things untidy, damaged, and unresolved over things neatly arranged, well made, and settled” (Greenblatt 324), a preference that is more than pronounced in *King Lear*.

Although Greenblatt's argument is convincing, he is considering only a narrow aspect of the play, the Lear / Cordelia story. What his argument fails to take into account is the presence of a unique and highly indicative subplot that distinguishes *Lear* from other Shakespearean tragedies. The Gloucester / Edmund / Edgar subplot is striking if for nothing else than the fact that it is original to Shakespeare's adaptation. None of the historical sources, nor indeed the source play, involves a subplot. This alone invites the

question why Shakespeare would include a subplot in his adaptation, and why this one in particular. The subplot in *Lear* is unique among Shakespeare's tragedies in two additional ways: i) the extent to which it mirrors the main plot, and ii) the way that it uniquely interacts with the main plot to supply, or more accurately to *imply*, any motivation missing from the main plot. Although Greenblatt is right to argue that motivation is missing from the *Lear* / Cordelia narrative, his sense of opacity needs to change in order to encompass the unusual way the subplot in *Lear* supplements opacity with transparency.

Critics have often noted the careful parallels between the subplot and the main plot in *Lear*, though they have tended to overlook how unique this is in Shakespeare's tragedies. None of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, or *Macbeth* has a subplot in which the action of the main plot is so closely replicated. What does this replication serve? The most obvious conclusion is that Shakespeare wanted to draw a thematic parallel between *Lear* and Gloucester. The parallels are clear: a father deceived by the flattering words of a child; a faithful child disowned and exiled; the father's recognition and despair; finally the father's forgiveness, reunion, and death. Focusing primarily on thematic parallels has meant that criticism has often overlooked the more pertinent ways in which the subplot *strategically interacts* with the main plot. An examination not of the similarities but of the differences between the main plot and the subplot reveals how the subplot functions dramaturgically to supplement the main plot, particularly around the articulation of motive.

Motive abounds in the subplot, in contrast to the main plot. From Edmund's "Thou, Nature, art my goddess" speech (1.2.1-22), which proclaims his villainy in act one, to Edgar's "I heard myself proclaimed" speech in 2.2 when he decides to flee, motive is made manifest. Shakespeare informs us explicitly and often repeatedly of the reasons behind Edmund's villainy, Edgar's ineffectual goodness, or Gloucester's misguided actions. Unlike the opacity of the main plot, there is an abundance and a transparency to the motivation in the subplot at odds with Greenblatt's sense of Shakespearean opacity.

Moreover, because the subplot is so like the main plot in action, the motivation from the subplot effectively crosses over and informs the main plot, suggesting motivation where none is provided. Edmund's jealousy of Edgar, for example, suggests motivation that explains Goneril and Regan's resentment of Cordelia. He says:

Wherefore base?  
When my dimensions are as well compact,  
My mind as generous and my shape as true [...] (1.2.6-8)

What Edmund is articulating is both the unfairness of fate and his resentment towards those who benefit from fate where he does not; specifically, he is expressing his jealousy towards his brother who is preferred for seemingly arbitrary reasons. But Goneril and Regan suffer as much from jealousy and unfairness as Edmund. Conscious of their father's preference for Cordelia, Goneril and Regan must similarly curse their fate and resent their sister. Like Edmund, they are motivated by jealousy, resentment, and revenge, but their motivation is not expressed as clearly as Edmund's soliloquy to the audience. Instead, Edmund's motivation, coming as it does immediately after Goneril

and Regan decide to join ranks against their father, fills in the missing motivation in the main narrative.

In a similarly supplementary act, Edgar articulates motive missing from Cordelia's actions. His decision to flee rather than fight – "I will preserve myself" (2.2.177) – shows an awareness that he is opposing forces he cannot conquer. His decision to flee is a decision to maintain his integrity, much like Cordelia's decision to remove herself from Lear's love-test. Both recognize how ineffectual they are in the face of flattery and deceit, and both opt to withdraw in order to remain true to themselves. But an interesting intersection occurs at precisely the moment in the play that Edgar articulates his motives. At the end of a long speech ("I heard myself proclaimed" 2.2.172-192) in which he clearly states that he is leaving court in order to save himself – "While I may scape / I will preserve myself" – he concludes by saying "Edgar I nothing am," a comment strongly reminiscent of Cordelia's repeated "Nothing" in act one. In Greenblatt's argument, Cordelia's "Nothing" stands out as an example of Shakespearean opacity, as an "intense representation of inwardness," (Greenblatt *Will* 323) in which motivation is suggested but not articulated. In Greenblatt's argument, the audience is provided *only* with these key terms and images from which they must deduce motivation; but Greenblatt overlooks the extent to which Edgar's "I nothing am" evokes Cordelia's "Nothing" at the precise moment that he expresses a motivation similar to Cordelia's. Edgar's simultaneous allusion to Cordelia and expression of intent supplements the key terms and images of the main plot and provides its missing motivation, a more complicated, reciprocal gesture than Greenblatt's opacity would suggest.

The intersecting nature of these narratives suggests that the subplot serves a strategic purpose. By echoing the events of the main plot, it draws obvious thematic parallels, but by carefully and specifically detailing motivation, it supplies *by implication* what is missing from the main plot. This complementary interaction allows Shakespeare to pare down the main plot, perhaps even further than he does in *Hamlet* or *Othello*, permitting a full exploration of the deeper psychological imperatives in human nature – all that is unspoken in the main plot – without sacrificing motivation as a necessary dramatic tool to make sense of the play. Where Greenblatt astutely notes the excision of motive in Shakespeare’s main plot, he overlooks the extent to which the unusual subplot in *Lear* strategically interacts with the main plot to articulate motive. The uniqueness of Shakespeare’s adaptation is the way opacity meets transparency, and the way composite parts combine to provide a meaningful whole.

Beyond the subplot, the most notable difference in Shakespeare’s adaptation of his sources is the ending of *Lear*. Here Shakespeare took leave of his sources and created a work of unparalleled despair, a “tremendous explosion of rage, madness, and grief” (Greenblatt *Will* 357). The ending is unprecedented and unexpected. “Is this the promised end?” Kent asks (5.3.262). None of Shakespeare’s sources end in anything but happy reconciliation. Greenblatt argues that the ending is consistent with Shakespeare’s newfound refusal to provide familiar interpretations or comfortable resolutions. He writes that the last scene in *Lear* shows the mastery of Shakespeare’s opacity, that his determination to “cut out the triumph of Cordelia” was a determination to cut out “the vindication that made moral sense of the whole narrative” (328-29). Instead, the image of the ruined king cradling his dead daughter and “howling with grief” (329) uncovers

emotions that are immeasurably more profound and troubling: a powerful ending not easily forgotten.

Greenblatt's argument does not explain *why* Shakespeare wrote this ending. Assuming that Shakespeare adapted deliberately, that is, not for random reasons like the number of actors available or what props were on hand, he must have had a reason to write not only against his sources but against history itself. The simple conclusion is that Shakespeare is suggesting an amoral Providence, one indifferent to virtue and vice, reward and punishment, a bleak universe where the good are not necessarily rewarded by virtue of being good. There are no moral consequences here, and no justice; "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods" says Gloucester (4.1.38). By this argument, Cordelia's death is one more unresolved, untidy, empty event, more damaged cause and effect. But if Cordelia's death is so meaningless, why did Shakespeare go to the trouble of changing history so dramatically? The heightened tragedy of the death scene, the almost-avoidable last-minute bid to save Cordelia's life, suggests a carefully planned dramatic moment much more sophisticated than mere untidiness. The deliberate nature of this portrayal suggests that Cordelia's death serves a dramatic purpose beyond simply a nod to the meaninglessness of the universe.

Critical to Shakespeare's adaptation is the fact that Cordelia's death is a murder, and not, as the sources indicate, a suicide. This alteration is significant. Murder implies a darker and more sinister causality than depression; it entails premeditation, motive, and an altogether more menacing level of crime and vice. In the sources Cordelia dies because she despairs. In *Lear* she dies because she represents a threat to Edmund's

ambition, in a crisis brought about by her sisters' ambition and her father's pride. In the context of the play, her death serves two immediate dramatic purposes: it kills Lear, and it leaves succession open to Albany, Edgar or Kent. The consequences of pride and ambition are more significant in Shakespeare's adaptation than they are in the source texts: in *Lear* pride and ambition have immediate mortal consequences and devastating long-term dynastic effects.

The representation of pride and ambition as mortal sins marks a radical departure from the morality expressed by Shakespeare's sources. In *Leir*, the king's pride and the sisters' ambition are punished with exile, he to France for the duration of the play and they to their own kingdoms at the end. Despite the civil war, no one seems the worse at the end of *Leir* – pride and ambition are repented and overcome, proven insufficient to overturn the status quo. As such, they are relegated to the less significant level of wrongdoing that can be forgiven and overcome. In contrast, in Shakespeare's adaptation, pride and ambition not only kill Cordelia, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, and Lear, but they terminate a dynasty and imperil the destiny of a kingdom. Although it can be argued that Goneril, Regan, and Edmund commit enough other crimes to deserve death, and that Lear dies not of pride but of a broken heart, Cordelia's guiltlessness suggests that her death is a direct result of the pride and ambition of others. Her death, rather than meaning nothing at all or betokening an amoral Providence, serves the dramatic purpose of delivering a heavy moral censure on pride and ambition.

The fact that Shakespeare re-wrote history, complicated characters, and re-arranged outcomes in his adaptation of *Lear* is no great surprise; like the playwrights who

would later adapt his own work, he re-wrote his sources for a variety of theatrical, aesthetic, and ideological reasons. In the context of the theoretical models of adaptation discussed by Bennett and Erickson, Shakespeare's strategies are oppositional. He writes in the gaps and margins of the original texts to point out difference and advocate replacement. He writes about what is *not* in Sidney, Monmouth, or the anonymous source play. His re-characterization of Providence, for example, is typically oppositional. In *Leir*, the good characters are saved on numerous occasions by a benign Providence, as in scene nineteen where Leir and Perillus face the messenger sent by Goneril and Regan to kill them. When Leir and Perillus repeatedly call upon the "the King of heaven" (19.295) for salvation, dramatic rolls of thunder and lightning cow the terrified messenger to repent. He drops his daggers and Leir and Perillus are saved, proving that "fervent prayer much ill hap withstands" (19.17). In contrast, in *King Lear*, Lear and Cordelia are conspicuously not protected by a benign Providence; situations arise in which they could be saved but are not, suggesting that Shakespeare may have adapted *Leir* with a darker ideology in mind, wanting to use the source's story and characters but replace its optimistic view of Providence with his own stricter and darker view. Here, Shakespeare's use of his source material is more vandalistic than collaborative, taking and replacing without acknowledging the value of the source as anything beyond raw material. This style of adaptation, seen again in Tate's adaptation of *King Lear* (1681), expresses the casual disregard for authorship characteristic of a particular historical moment prior to bardolatry and the Romantic idealization of the author.

While Shakespeare's adaptation was primarily oppositional, there is the possibility that he also used his sources collaboratively, hinting at the type of double-

gesture adaptations more common in the twentieth century. Considering that his source play, *Leir*, published in 1605 (Foakes 89), may recently have been performed and may have been fresh in the minds of his audience, it is possible that Shakespeare may have capitalized on his audience's familiarity with the story to heighten the dramatic effect of his own tragic ending. Because Shakespeare's play so closely follows the plot of the earlier play, audiences would potentially have anticipated the same happy ending staged in *Leir*. And Shakespeare almost gives it to them. The final scene in *King Lear* sets the stage for a last-minute reprieve in which Lear and Cordelia could emerge happily from prison. The Folio text in particular capitalizes on the audience's expectations for a happy ending; Lear's final lines almost suggest that Cordelia might have escaped death: "Look on her: look, her lips, / Look there, look there!" (5.3.309-310). Shakespeare's technique of circling back to the story's presentation in *Leir* compounds dramatic effect when indeed he stops returning to *Leir* and delivers the startlingly bleak multiple-death scene in act five. If this were the case, that Shakespeare was deliberately evoking the original and then rejecting it in order to heighten the tragic effect in his adaptation, than *King Lear* would be a unique early example of the type of double-gesture adaptation common in twentieth-century re-writings of his own work.

Yet while Shakespeare may have been collaborating / rejecting his sources, the double gesture expressed by twentieth-century adaptors importantly articulates a sense of nostalgia absent in Shakespeare's adaptation. Adaptors like Bond, Barker, and the Women's Theatre Group adapt Shakespeare because of the status of the original work, because Shakespeare is foundational to their culture and to their sense of self as writers. Their collaborations with Shakespeare express a desire to connect with their literary

heritage and validate shared cultural traditions, even while they reject that heritage and identify the limitations of those traditions. In contrast, there is no way of knowing whether or not *Leir* had the same complicated cultural resonance for Shakespeare that Shakespeare has had for twentieth-century writers. It is unlikely that Shakespeare identified the author of *Leir* as a literary forefather, and only slightly more likely that he identified Monmouth, Holinshed, or Sidney in this way. Clearly, he saw their works as raw material, but he displayed no sense that he was collaborating with them in order to reinforce the value of their work, or engaging with them to revive a sense of literary heritage in his community. Without that awareness of status and that sense of deference, Shakespeare's adaptation remains more oppositional than nostalgic, and cannot be considered a double gesture akin to that of twentieth-century playwrights.

The nature of Shakespeare's approach to adaptation is relevant in that it contributes to the historicization of the theoretical models for adaptation discussed by Bennett and Erickson. To the extent that Shakespeare's strategy is oppositional, it has similarities to Tate's, similarities which suggest that adaptation responds, at least in part, to prevailing notions of authorship and literary tradition. That is, that adaptation is rooted in its historical moment. When authorship and literary tradition have little value, original work is regarded as raw material; adaptation, motivated by a desire for novelty, seeks to replace this work with something new and different. It is vandalistic in nature. As authorship and literary tradition gain in value, the desire for novelty is replaced by nostalgia, that quality that recognizes value in tradition and the past. Adaptation, now motivated by a desire for authenticity, seeks to collaborate with the original work in order

to reinforce literary tradition and increase value in the adapted work. It becomes collaborative and nostalgic.

Shakespeare's reworking of earlier writers is consistent more with oppositional than nostalgic adaptation, but do these models hold up when an author adapts his own work? *King Lear* is unique among Shakespeare's plays, and intriguing in the context of adaptation studies, because of the possibility that Shakespeare may have adapted his *own* draft of the play. Critics have long been troubled by the existence of two different versions of *King Lear*: the Quarto published in 1608 as *M. William Shak-speare: his true chronicle historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three daughters*, and the Folio version that appeared in Heminge's and Condell's collected works in 1623 as *The Tragedie of King Lear*. These two texts differ in a number of pertinent ways, not least of which is the fact that the Quarto contains some 285 lines not evident in the Folio, and the Folio some 120 lines not evident in the Quarto. The most notable discrepancies have become famous cruxes in the textual criticism of the play: Kent's description of the French forces landing (Q - 3.1.17-42) and the Fool's prophecy (F - 3.2.76-96); the mock-trial sequence in which Lear tries Goneril and Regan (Q - 3.6); the compassion of Gloucester's servants following his blinding (Q - 3.7); and the Gentleman's description of Cordelia's reaction to news of Lear's madness (Q - 4.3). The differences between the two texts have significant ramifications, and have been a hurdle for both editors and critics alike since 1623.

Some of the discrepancies between Q and F alter what Graham Holderness refers to as the geopolitical world of the play (*Textual* 135). Kent's allusion to French forces

landing at Dover, apparent in Q 3.1 but not in F, is a notable instance. In Q, Kent sends a knight to Dover, where he will find “some that will thank [him]” for his news, a reference conventionally taken to mean that French forces have landed at Dover. In F, the reference is more veiled; Kent suggests instead that English spies sympathetic to Lear are sending news back to French forces still stationed in France. In *Revising Shakespeare* (1991) Grace Ioppolo summarizes that the variations here “shift the audience’s view of war from an ‘unprovoked’ foreign invasion to a ‘provoked’ civil rebellion” (166). R.A. Foakes, in contrast, disagrees that the lines cut from Q to F significantly alter the nature of the conflict in *King Lear*. In his introduction to the Arden *King Lear* (2000), he argues that despite the textual emendations, enough references remain in F to suggest the invasion of a French army on British soil (140-141).

Other discrepancies between Q and F relate to the theatricality of the play in performance. One example is the mock trial of Goneril and Regan, appearing in Q 3.6 but not in F. In “The Folio Omission of the Mock Trial: Motives and Consequences” (1983) Roger Warren argues that this “elaborate theatrical device” (45) was likely cut because it was theatrically confusing. “[I]n rehearsal or performance,” Warren suspects, “it became clear that the focus of the scene had shifted from Lear’s mock-justice to eccentric individual detail – the Fool’s joint-stool joke, Edgar’s songs and devils – leading to a generalized sense of chaos” (46). Other variants in Q and F relate to character. Ioppolo argues that the 56 lines that appear in Q 4.3 “substantively alter the audience’s view” of Cordelia, “as well as her integral relationship to other characters and to the play’s major themes” (166-167). Q, writes Ioppolo, establishes Cordelia as “an active, foreign queen who exercises strength even when not present on stage” (167), whereas F “recasts her as

a submissive, nonpolitical, and nonmonarchical daughter who embodies strength only when present on stage” (167). Similarly, R. A. Foakes and John Kerrigan both write that differences in Q and F alter the Fool “more than any other character” (Foakes 133), changing his personality from a “blathering natural” in Q to a “canny rationalist” in F (Kerrigan 218). “In F,” Kerrigan writes, “the Fool is consistently a wise and worldly jester, more urbane and more oblique than his precursor” (219). Like Ioppolo, Foakes, and Kerrigan, Michael Warren contends that characters are dramatically altered from Q to F. In “The Diminution of Kent” (1983) he argues that Kent undergoes “a substantial change” from Q to F in the last half of the play, shrinking almost to a marginal role just prior to Lear’s final scene (60). Stephen Urkowitz similarly notes changes in the character of Albany in *Shakespeare’s Revision of King Lear* (1980), and R.A. Foakes notes changes to Lear, Edmund, Goneril, and Regan.

The traditional solution to these variant versions is the conclusion that Shakespeare wrote only one draft of the play, a manuscript now lost, and that both the Quarto and the Folio versions are based on this lost original. The textual discrepancies between Q and F have been explained by a series of increasingly far-fetched excuses: copyist and compositor errors, inefficiencies in Elizabethan shorthand, shoddy memorial transmission, even illicit textual piracy.<sup>1</sup> To overcome or at least to efface the problem of

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<sup>1</sup> These explanations begin with Heminge and Condell, editors of the first Folio, who claim that the Folio’s discrepancies stem from their intention to replace “stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealths of iniurious impositors” (Foakes 117). Attempts to explain textual discrepancies in *King Lear* continue with Alexander Pope (1725) who suggested that the Quarto plays were early draft copies of the Folio plays, and that certain low passages in the Folio plays were attributable to the interference of actors who cut and added for their own purposes (Murphy 25-26). Pope’s view was sustained by a number of eighteenth-century editors, such as Edward Capell and Edmond Malone, and nineteenth-century critics such as Charles Knight (Murphy 26). Other editors, like Lewis Theobald, suggested that the textual discrepancies resulted from faulty transmission of the texts by copyists who had

these textual differences, editors traditionally have conflated the Quarto and Folio texts, using the rationale that a conflated text would more accurately approach the hypothetical lost original than either of the “incomplete” extant versions (Q or F). This conflated version has existed as the official or modern *King Lear* text since Theobald first tried to reconcile the differences between Q and F in 1733.

But what if the differences between Q and F were deliberate? What if these discrepancies reflect not the distance from a lost original, but an intentional process of revision from an early to a later draft of the play? What if *Lear* were composed in stages? Or written in draft form and revised for performance? These questions were

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acquired them by means of shorthand transcription, a theory maintained into the twentieth century when it was called into question by William Matthews in the 1930s (Murphy 30).

Modern critics like Peter Blayney, (*The Texts of ‘King Lear’ and their Origins* vol. 1) and R.A. Foakes both give credence to Theobald’s idea that Q was sloppily printed, suggesting that two composers, “one of them possibly inexperienced,” (Foakes 111) working for a printer “who had never before printed a play text” (Foakes 111) could account for many of the errors. Foakes goes on to suggest that the second quarto (Q2) was intended as a corrected version of Q1 which nonetheless initiated further errors, but which is significant as the source of F (112-113).

Other twentieth-century critics (Clare, Patterson) have argued the case that censorship accounts for many of the passages present in Q but omitted from F. Janet Clare suggests that F omits almost all references to the French arriving to capitalize on the civil unrest in Britain (Kent’s speech in 3.1 for example), as well as the Fool’s speech referencing King James’ propensity to hand out monopolies (1.4.145-148), both potentially politically sensitive topics which would have been flagged by the Master of the Revels. Gary Taylor argues convincingly, however, that censorship could not account for the changes made to F unless the text had been substantially revised first and the re-submitted to the Master of the Revels. Instead, like Warren and Urkowitz, Taylor argues that F constitutes a substantial artistic reimagining of Q.

Foakes, Ioppolo, and Andrew Murphy all summarize and evaluate other common explanations for textual discrepancies between Q and F: that Q was a reported text, transcribed during performance or reconstructed from memory (Foakes 115, Murphy 27) by one or more of the actors, an argument taken up by G.I. Duthie and Kenneth Muir (Ioppollo 163); that Q was based on Shakespeare’s foul papers, already significantly marked up by the playwright’s own notes and revisions. Foakes also considers W.W. Greg’s argument that Q was a result of hastily copied short-hand transcription taken surreptitiously during performance at court, and that F was based on a collation of Q and the theatrical promptbook, with errors introduced by a collator or book-keeper (115). Murphy concludes her argument by noting, astutely: “Perhaps the best – albeit unsatisfactory – explanation that can be provided for the divergent texts is that they offer variant conceptions of the plays, marked by complex theatrical and extra-theatrical histories and arriving into print by routes which are not amenable to a single explicatory narrative.” (30) For further reading, see Grace Ioppolo *Revising Shakespeare* (1991).

brought to bear in “Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar,” a paper presented by Michael Warren at the International Shakespeare Congress in 1976. Warren’s paper took three basic but startlingly revolutionary principles as its starting point:

- a) that there may be no single “ideal play” of *King Lear*...that there may never have been one, and that what we create by conflating both texts is merely an invention of editors and scholars;
- b) that for all its problems Q is an authoritative version of the play of *King Lear*; and
- c) that F may indeed be a revised version of the play, that its additions and omissions may constitute Shakespeare’s considered modification of the earlier text, and that we certainly cannot know that they are not. (qtd. Wells *Once and Future* 14)

Warren argues that the differences between the Q and F texts of *King Lear* “go beyond those which may be expected when two texts descend in corrupted form from a common original; they indicate that a substantial and consistent recasting of certain aspects of the play has taken place” (qtd. Wells *Once and Future* 14).

Working concurrently with Warren, Steven Urkowitz concurred that the Folio text is a “careful and dramatically sensitive revision of the Quarto” (*Shakespeare’s Revision* 3). Focusing on the theatrical nature of the changes between Q and F, he argues that the lines cut or altered may seem to make only slight literary difference, but signal radical changes in the way the text was performed (16). Most likely, Urkowitz argues, the Folio text was printed from a Quarto version that had been carefully brought into agreement with a playhouse promptbook (129), revised by Shakespeare into something more closely resembling actual theatrical practice. Grace Ioppolo consolidates these revisionist claims, stating conclusively in her introduction to *Revising Shakespeare* (1991) that Shakespeare must be regarded as “a deliberate, consistent, and persistent reviser” (5).

Urkowitz, like Ioppolo, Warren, and Taylor, specifically uses the word “revision” when discussing the changes made to the Quarto text. John Kerrigan is equally careful to distinguish between revision and adaptation in his essay on the changes made to the Quarto *King Lear*. In “Revision, Adaptation and the Fool in *King Lear*” he argues that the Folio is a revision of the Quarto – that is, a text reorganized by the author – and not an adaptation – a work rewritten without authorial assistance. He suggests that authors often revised their texts by tinkering with minor alterations, like those in *King Lear*, while adapters tend to work with larger units of text. He uses this distinction between revision and adaptation to argue that the changes made to the Quarto text are more characteristic of authorial revision than they are of adaptation, suggesting that it was Shakespeare himself who authored the changes. Kerrigan’s essay defines revision in contradistinction to adaptation, which is a useful contribution, but his argument is undermined by a number of rash and highly subjective conclusions:

The excellence of the new material [in the Folio] helps support a second argument: the [Folio] Fool is dramatically superior to his [Quarto] equivalent; the only writer capable of surpassing Shakespeare at the height of his powers was Shakespeare; therefore the Fool’s part was revised, not adapted. (230)

The superiority of the Folio text, whether real or imagined, cannot be taken as evidence that Shakespeare was responsible for it. As Gary Taylor points out “Shakespeare was not, after all, the only competent dramatist alive in England at some time between 1605 and 1623” (“*King Lear*” 352). But despite Kerrigan’s conclusions, his argument is consistent with the work done by Warren, Urkowitz, Taylor, and Wells: the changes made to the Quarto text are consistent with an effort to make the play more conducive to

theatrical practice, and the resultant Folio text likely represents revisions made by the author.

In the context of adaptation studies, it is important to reiterate Urkowitz and Kerrigan's conclusion that the Folio *King Lear* constitutes a revision but not an adaptation of the Quarto version. This finding is consistent with my own sense that adaptation refers to the reworking by one author of another author's work, and that it excludes authorial revision. The questions that arise around Shakespeare's own style of adaptation must be directed exclusively, then, towards the reworking of his source works *not* to the reworking of his own work.

Where Urkowitz and Kerrigan's arguments do pertain to this study is the significant identification of problematic source material. The existence of multiple Shakespearean *King Lear*s complicates the question of adaptation because it destabilizes the notion of an original text, of what exactly is being adapted. When Tate adapts *King Lear* in 1681, it is unclear whether he is adapting the Quarto or Folio text. Similarly, when Garrick tries to wrestle Shakespeare back from Tate in 1773, he allegedly restores much of the original text – but *which* original text is not certain. The problem of adapting from multiple sources becomes even more complicated with the Shakespeare burlesques of the nineteenth century. Burlesque satire was directed towards contemporary Shakespeare performances which were seen as a degradation of a Shakespearean ideal. For the burlesque to succeed, an audience needed to make the distinction between Shakespeare in contemporary performance and a mythically pure Shakespearean performance. To understand what exactly was being adapted here requires sifting

through layers of nineteenth-century stage *Lears*, nineteenth-century printed editions of *Lear*, and all their various and convoluted sources in Quarto and Folio versions of the play. In these adaptations, an original *King Lear* becomes an almost unidentifiable source.

Yet here, perhaps, is the key to understanding the play's enduring appeal to adaptors: in its unidentifiable-ness, it acquires an uncommon elasticity and scope. Because *King Lear* exists in multiple original forms, because it has had so many different manifestations on the stage and on the page, it has acquired an identity that transcends specific texts and performances. Grace Ioppolo refers to this as *King Lear*'s "abstract textuality" (161), a phenomenon common in literary critical interactions with the play: "When new historicist, deconstructive, semiotic, psychoanalytic, or feminist and gender critics discuss and analyze the 'text' of a Shakespearian play, they are, in great measure, creating the 'text' as they interpret it" (161). Ioppolo could easily add adaptors to the list of people who are working as much from a conceptual idea of a text than an actual physical object. Often, when critics and adaptors refer to *King Lear* they do not necessarily mean to identify the Quarto version, or the Scofield performance, but a type of conceptual composite *King Lear* made up of all the sources, images, and collective associations western literary culture has of the play. When, in later adaptations of the play, a writer asks audiences to compare an adaptation to the original, it is not usually to a specific original text or performance but to this culturally shared conceptual entity: the *idea of King Lear*.

The cultural critic Fredric Jameson relates a similar phenomenon, albeit in a different context. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson identifies an analogous collective mis-conception in the use of the past in historical novels and nostalgic films. He argues that novels like *Ragtime* (1975) by E.L. Doctorow and films like *American Graffiti* (1973) by George Lucas evoke a conceptual past – not a real historical past, but our ideas and stereotypes about the past, a type of fantasy. Jameson refers to this phenomenon as our “collective ‘objective spirit’” of the past (25). Because the ‘real’ past is lost to us, these novels and films can only ever evoke the past in a series of surface images (fashion or appliances, for example, specific to a particular time). These images help to evoke specific, commonly held fantasies about “pastness” (what it looked and sounded like) while glossing over the work’s lack of genuine historicity.

Adaptations of Shakespeare employ a similar device. They can never access the one, “original” *King Lear* – the play exists in too numerous and varied written manifestations, and performances are too ephemeral to identify anything as original. Instead, they employ a series of iconic images (Lear in the storm, Lear carrying the dead Cordelia on stage), character names, and themes associated with *King Lear* to evoke the “collective objective spirit” of the play. This conceptual *King Lear*, made up of images and associations, like the collective objective spirit of the past in Jameson’s historical novels and films, represents western literary culture’s shared ideas and stereotypes about *King Lear*. This entity is a pastiche, reflecting an original without ever having to acknowledge the existence of a specific original.

To return to Urkowitz and Taylor, the arguments made by revisionists may be foundational to an accurate textual understanding of *King Lear*, and they initiate useful discussions around the idea of original sources, but their focused attention on difference de-values the significant presence of a unified, culturally shared, conceptual *King Lear*. It is this *King Lear* – not the Quarto or Folio text, nor any specific theatrical incarnation but an imaginative, remembered *King Lear* – that has the most cultural currency and is most often evoked in adaptations.

**Chapter One**  
**“Why, this is not Lear”:** adaptations before the twentieth century

In his book, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, Gary Taylor refers to the “twin imperatives” of authenticity and novelty that so often motivate our treatment of Shakespeare (51). Taylor is right to remark that modern interactions with Shakespeare are characterized by complex and often antagonistic motives, but he is here oversimplifying the process of adaptation. What Taylor calls the imperative for *authenticity*, that force that draws us back to Shakespeare and holds him in such sacred esteem, seems more to be a complex combination of deference, nostalgia, and a sense of cultural or artistic inferiority. Pushing against these forces is what Taylor calls the imperative for *novelty*, that force that drives us to innovate and change Shakespeare. Again, this innovating force is darker and more complex than simple novelty; it is made up of resentment, a sickness with tradition (the past?), a desire for independence, and a desperate need to assert the self.

It is out of these twin imperatives that the double gesture of adaptation emerges. But the process of adaptation is also culturally specific, and depends as much on Shakespeare’s evolving status in the western literary canon and culture as it does on the various imperatives of individual authors. This chapter examines how the act of re-writing Shakespeare has changed from its roots in the 1680s through to the end of the nineteenth century, tracing how and when the double gesture of later adaptations begins to emerge. To do this, I will examine both the form and motivation of early adaptations, and set them against a more historical analysis of Shakespeare’s changing status in the western theatrical, literary, and cultural landscape. I will show that the earliest re-

writings of Shakespeare, like Nahum Tate's *King Lear* (1681), do not exhibit the double-gesture qualities of later adaptation, in part because they happen at a unique point in Shakespeare's after-life that pre-dates his ascension to cultural icon. In contrast, later adaptations, like the Shakespeare burlesques of the late nineteenth century, begin to show signs of a more troubled and ambiguous process – what emerges into the double gesture of the twentieth century – as Shakespeare becomes more and more a figure to write against.

Tracing the trajectory of Shakespeare's after-life, Gary Taylor identifies a convenient starting point for this study: the year 1659, what he calls the “nadir of Shakespeare's posthumous history” (*Reinventing* 12). As Shakespeare's status is to become such a central factor in the way his works are adapted, it is important to consider a time before he took on such symbolic importance. The year 1659 represents an almost unique point in the history of early modern culture in which Shakespeare hardly factors at all. “Almost no publication, almost no performance, almost no biography, almost no criticism,” Taylor goes on to say (*Reinventing* 12). For a unique moment in time, Shakespeare did not matter.

Barbara Murray identifies a similar nadir, although she dates this low-point in Shakespeare's afterlife immediately *after* the Restoration. “[The] state of knowledge of Shakespeare by 1662 ostensibly bodes ill for the development of bardolatry,” she writes in *Restoration Shakespeare: Viewing the Voice*. “[G]etting hold of Shakespeare to read was difficult and expensive, what folio readers would have regarded as authentic Shakespearean plays were rarely staged, and playgoers could not rely on the relationship

to the folio of a play whose title seemed to promise Shakespeare” (202). While Murray is right to identify a point at which Shakespeare was little known, her choice of 1662 as a date seems late. By 1662, Shakespeare had already begun to be restored by playwrights and theatre-goers in the Restoration theatre boom. Regardless, what both Murray and Taylor seek to convey is that Shakespeare’s reputation experienced a long dormancy after his death and indeed throughout most of the Interregnum. Unlike many ghost stories, Shakespeare’s afterlife did not begin with his death.

Since his death in 1616, and despite Heminge’s and Condell’s folio masterpiece in 1623 and a reprint of his collected works in 1632, Shakespeare had begun to fade from the cultural landscape. In part, this was due to the inevitable vagaries of taste as Jacobean playwrights like Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher seized English imaginations. But the dearth of printed and performed Shakespeare was compounded by the civil war and emergent Commonwealth that so radically reconfigured English culture between 1640 and 1660. Fearing public mirth in a time of calamity, Long Parliament passed a resolution on September 2, 1642 banning theatre as “spectacles of pleasure, too commonly expressing lascivious Mirth and Levitie.” No doubt, Parliament was influenced by the strong antitheatrical sentiments of Puritans like William Prynne, whose behemoth encyclopedic *Histriomastrix* (1633) linked theatre-going with a catalogue of horrors, perversion, and devil-worship. Parliament’s ban on performance lasted 18 years, impacting not only staged production of Shakespeare but the print demand for his plays as well. Remarkably, only three reprints of Shakespeare’s plays were commissioned during the Interregnum: *The Merchant of Venice* in 1652, and *King Lear* and *Othello* in 1655.

Despite the best efforts of Parliament, a passion for theatre persisted, often in private houses or in discreet locations outside of London. Twice again the government had to issue ordinances against acting, in 1647 and 1648, finally threatening actors with execution if they should persist. On one notable occasion in 1648, a performance of Fletcher and Massinger's tragedy *Rollo, Duke of Normandy* at the Phoenix Theatre was interrupted by a party of soldiers who carried the entire cast, fully costumed, to prison at Hatton House (Wiggins 42). Despite such treatment, or perhaps because of it, most actors declared themselves staunch monarchists.

One of the most tenacious, albeit illegal, forms of performance during the theatre ban was the droll. Not to be confused with an earlier use of the term which signified a puppet-show, Commonwealth drolls or "droll-humours" were farcical scenes taken from well-known plays, staged primarily at fairs or taverns, sometimes on makeshift stages or scaffolds and occasionally at proper theatres (Cambridge 8.1). Perhaps because of their extemporaneous nature (although printed copies did emerge after the Restoration in 1662 and 1673), drolls were more difficult to police and almost impossible to regulate. While little critical work has been done on this often overlooked genre, its significance in the legacy of Shakespeare performance cannot be overstated. Thanks to drolls like "The Gravediggers," "The Merry Conceits of Bottom the Weaver," "The Bouncing Knight" from *Henry IV* and "The Buckbasket Mishap" from *The Merry Wives*, Shakespeare retained at least some small presence in the bleak cultural climate of the Interregnum.

As the Interregnum wore on and the climate showed signs of moderation, enterprising playwrights like William Davenant began to look for ways around the ban.

Once master of the King's company of actors at the Cockpit, and poet laureate in 1638, Davenant spent most of the Interregnum in France. Returning to England, he set about producing what he called operas – “declamation and music, in the manner of the ancients” (Cambridge 8.3) – that narrowly sidestepped the ban's definition of theatre. Dryden's definition of opera, published later in his preface to *Albion and Albanus*, shows a careful avoidance of all reference to drama or the stage. Despite this, Dryden's definition does show how closely opera was related to the theatre:

opera is a poetical Tale, or Fiction, represented by Vocal and Instrumental Musick, adorn'd with Scenes, Machines, and Dancing. (qtd. Murray *Restoration* 27)

The first of these operas, called *The First Day Entertainment at Rutland House*, was performed in May 1658, followed in August by Davenant's famous *The Siege of Rhodes*. Widely considered to be the first English opera, *The Siege of Rhodes* established Davenant as a force to be reckoned with in artistic circles. But Davenant's work, by his own admission, was not theatre, and it certainly was not Shakespeare. Despite Davenant's claims to be Shakespeare's godson, he was clear to avoid any association with the bard's work while the theatre ban was still in effect.

By the nadir point in 1659, Shakespeare was at his most immaterial: he had been dead for 43 years; only three recent reprints of his plays were circulating; and his work was carelessly performed piecemeal by amateurs in taverns. At best, he was considered by critics as a mid-ranking playwright, more esteemed than Jonson but less so than Beaumont and Fletcher in the pantheon of English writers (Taylor *Reinventing* 27). With the sudden restoration of the monarchy, however, in March 1660, a number of factors conspired to bring theatre, and specifically Shakespeare, back from the dead.

Almost immediately after his coronation, the new King Charles II granted two royal warrants, dated August 21, 1660, to open theatres.<sup>2</sup> The first of these warrants went to Thomas Killigrew. Raised as a page in the court of Charles I, Killigrew was a privileged servant and great favourite of Charles II. Many of his early plays were written during his sojourn with the court in France before the Restoration. On receipt of his warrant in 1660, Killigrew bought Gibbon's Tennis Court in Clare Market on Vere St. to house his company and announced his claim to the Shakespearean tradition by naming this company The King's Men. The second warrant went to William Davenant who built a new theatre on Lisle's Tennis Court in Lincoln's Inn Fields to house his company, The Duke of York's Men (Murray *Restoration* 16). Theatre had returned; but where was Shakespeare?

Not surprisingly, the new theatres were confronted with an unprecedented dearth of material as playwrights had long abandoned their outlawed trade. Killigrew was in the fortunate position of holding rights to many old plays, chief among which were popular works by Beaumont and Fletcher that had seen such success before the Interregnum (S. Clark xl-xlii)). He had also secured rights to three of Shakespeare's most popular plays, *Othello*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *1 Henry IV*, through his close connection to the king. In addition, Killigrew was farsighted enough to have cultivated those veteran actors who had weathered the Interregnum and could claim rights to (or at least strong recollections of) additional plays from the Caroline period.

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<sup>2</sup> Despite this, there is some suggestion that John Rhodes secured an acting license from existing authorities *before* Charles's return from France, and that acting companies had started to form themselves in the months before the Restoration. Michael Dobson and Martin Wiggins also both argue that acting companies had formed and already begun productions as early as late 1659.

Davenant was not so fortunate. Wasting no time, he immediately petitioned the king for rights to theatrical material of his own. In his petition, submitted late in 1660, Davenant significantly asked the Lord Chamberlain for the rights not only to *act* certain plays, but for the rights to *reform* plays as well.

Whereas Sr William Davenant, Knight hath humbly presented to us a proposition of reformeing some of the most ancient playes that were playd at Blackfriers and of makeinge them fitt for the Company of Actors appointed under his direction and Command, Viz: the playes called the Tempest, Measures, for Measures, Much adoe about Nothings, Rome and Juliet, Twelwe night, the Life of Kinge Henry the Eyght . . . Kinge Lear, the Tragedy of Mackbeth, the Tragedy of Hamlet prince of Denmarke. (qtd. Murray *Restoration* 39)

Davenant's petition was granted on December 12, 1660. It is significant that Davenant laid claim to nine plays by Shakespeare and only two works by other playwrights. His first full-scale adaptation, in 1662, was a hybrid of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *Much Ado About Nothing* called *The Law Against Lovers*. The play was not a particular success. Murray writes: "Apart from the performance Pepys saw three days after the first, there is evidence of only one further staging of the adaptation – in December of the same year" (*Restoration* 49). Davenant's later credits include re-writing sections of *Macbeth*, transforming *Romeo and Juliet* into a romantic comedy, and adapting *The Two Noble Kinsmen* into *The Rivals*. His most famous work, and one of the most enduring Shakespeare adaptations of all time, was his collaboration with Dryden on an operatic version of *The Tempest*. Davenant's success proved that restoring old plays was not only expedient, but profitable and popular; as Gary Taylor writes, reviving pre-Commonwealth culture contributed to a broader fantasy of

restoration, the congenial “communal illusion” that the past was being restored (*Reinventing* 26).

Despite Davenant’s work and the popularity of his adaptations, it would be wrong to think that Shakespeare’s plays were not still being performed in their original form during the Restoration. Murray notes that seventeen Shakespeare plays were performed between 1661 and 1681 (*Restoration* 10). Pepys corroborates this: in the decade following 1660, while he records seeing 27 adaptations of Shakespeare, he still notes seeing 15 performances of the original plays.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, these unadapted performances of Shakespeare were relatively uncommon and not particularly well-received. Pepys panned a 1662 production of *Romeo & Juliet*, and said of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that it was “the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life” (September 1662). Adaptations were clearly popular, but Shakespeare was not adapted solely to appeal to audiences. Behind the popularity of a work like Davenant and Dryden’s *Enchanted Island* (1667) was a complex set of factors ranging from new aesthetic standards to rising political concerns that motivated the adaptation of Shakespeare.

Perhaps the most obvious impetus to adapt Shakespeare in the Restoration was what Stanley Wells calls “sheer theatrical necessity” (“Elusive” 2-3), an imperative that included the need to overcome a dearth of new material and trained actors, capitalize on new female actresses, and incorporate new stage technology. The Commonwealth ban

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<sup>3</sup> For the sake of comparison, it is worth noting that Pepys records seeing 76 plays by Beaumont and Fletcher, of which only a handful were adapted. From such evidence, Gary Taylor postulates that Beaumont and Fletcher’s works were less frequently adapted because they were stylistically more suited to a Restoration audience.

on acting in 1640 halted not only the performance of plays but subsequently their creation as well. Simply put, there were no new plays at the outset of the Restoration. This dearth of new material alone left entrepreneurs like Davenant and Killigrew with little option but to restore old plays. But a more positive factor made adapting Shakespeare desirable as well as necessary: actresses emerged. While many critics suggest that the appearance of women on the English stage happened rather suddenly in the Restoration, it was probably a much less dramatic process than is often suggested. Women had been on stage in England in various capacities since 1629. In “Elizabethan playhouses, actors, and audiences” Martha Fletcher Bellinger reports that a visiting French troupe had brought a number of actresses to London in 1629 to perform at Blackfriars. These actresses were not well received, Bellinger writes. One English writer, William Prynne, branded them as “monsters,” and they were reportedly hissed off the stage (Bellinger 207-213). Women may have been *present* on stage but they were not generally *accepted* there until 1656 when Davenant’s two operas featured Mrs. Coleman in principal roles. Even then, actresses were not regarded as conventional until the 1660s, after the inaugural performance of Mrs. Hughes as Desdemona in Killigrew’s *Othello* on December 8, 1660.

With Mrs. Hughes’ debut, the fashion of actresses took off, impelled by an odd mixture of necessity, decorum, and titillation. The long ban on acting during the Interregnum meant that no boy actors had been properly trained to play female roles for the better part of eighteen years. To teach boys to act as women took more time than men like Davenant had at their disposal. In addition, the Puritan era had left behind a

new sense of decorum that frowned upon the Renaissance practice of men dressing as women, more so than it did on the practice of women acting. Murray writes:

The sight of cross-dressed males was formerly offensive and must go, an assertion that neatly and unanswerably preempts as an argument in favour of professional actresses the prescription of Deuteronomy against cross-dressing. (*Restoration* 9)

Both necessity and decorum were compounded by the new and distinctly continental tastes of a court raised largely in France, and of a monarch with a particular taste for actresses. In Charles's patent to Killigrew, he makes specific provision for actresses.

The patent states:

we do likewise permit and give leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either of the said two companies for the time to come may be performed by women. (qtd. Dobson "Improving" 49)

Whatever the motivation, playwrights quickly recognized the salability of titillation. Murray writes that while actresses may have been regarded as a corrupting influence on the stage, they "were indeed soon to be deployed to interest the audience by the sight both of exposed legs in 'breeches' parts ...and, later on, of their physical distress in plots involving assault" (*Restoration* 9). Pepys heartily corroborates. His diary entry from October 28, 1661 reads:

I to the Theatre and there saw *Argalus and Parthenia*; where a woman acted Parthenia and came afterward on the stage in man's clothes, and had the best legs that ever I saw; and I was very well pleased with it. (43)

Women's success on stage may have been prompted by necessity and continental tastes, but it was secured by the voyeuristic appetites of English audiences. What emerges from this period is a fascinating paradox around women and the stage: figures who simultaneously embody the Restoration appeal to morality and proclivity for titillation. In "Rewritten Women: Shakespearean Heroines in the Restoration," Jean Marsden

articulates this paradox. “[S]imultaneously elevated and exploited,” she writes, “[actresses] provided a spectacle of female suffering which underscores the contradictory nature of a world where chastity represents sexuality and pathos becomes a source of pleasure” (54).

Shakespeare adaptors were quick to capitalize on this paradoxical source of pleasure. John Lacy notoriously added a bawdy boudoir scene to Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* in *Sauny the Scot* (1663), a play that proscribes female behaviour at the same time as it exploits the female body-as-object. Similarly, in *The Enchanted Island* (1667) Davenant and Dryden massively restructured *The Tempest* to exploit the dual-nature of women on stage, creating three entirely new characters: Dorinda as a sister for Miranda, Milcha as a partner for Ariel, and Sycorax as a sister for Caliban. Despite this play’s tremendous popularity – it was the most frequently revived play of the Restoration – it has been subsequently overlooked by scholars and demonized by most critics: Odell called it “the worst perversion of Shakespeare in the two-century history of such atrocities” (qtd. Clark xlv), and Furness said: “to be fully hated, it must be fully seen” (qtd. Clark viii). Regardless of its later critical reception, the Davenant / Dryden *Tempest* presents a fascinating snapshot of Restoration Shakespeare adaptation, exploiting the actress paradox to its fullest potential. It would be interesting to explore the impact of characters like Dorinda to the understanding of gender identity in the Restoration, a question that would be further complicated by the fact that Dorinda’s male lover, Hippolito, was conventionally played by a woman. Regardless of the paradox that actresses represented (or perhaps because of it?), playwrights lost no time in expanding Shakespeare’s roles for women or in creating new and more complicated roles entirely.

In addition to creating new roles for women, Shakespeare adaptors saw opportunities for change in dramatic new theatre technologies; the innovation of moveable scenery led to massive re-workings in Shakespeare's plays. Although used in masques as early as 1636 and in Davenant's two operas in 1656, moveable scenes did not become conventional until the early 1660s. In fact, it was Davenant's decision to create a custom built theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, a theatre that could specifically accommodate moving sets, that made scenery such a ubiquitous part of the theatrical experience. In this new theatre, Davenant exploited stage technologies to the fullest. Consider, for example, the scenic effects required for the opening scene of his *Tempest*, or *The Enchanted Island*:

the scene ... represents a thick Cloudy Sky, a very Rocky Coast, and a Tempestuous Sea in perpetual Agitation. This Tempest (supposed to be raised by Magick) has many dreadful Objects in it, as several Spirits in horrid shapes flying down amongst the Sailors, then rising and crossing in the Air. And when the Ship is sinking, the whole House is darkened, and a shower of Fire falls upon 'em. This is accompanied with Lightning, and several Claps of Thunder, to the end of the Storm ... In the midst of the Shower of Fire the Scene changes. The Cloudy Sky, Rocks, and Sea vanish; and when the Lights return, discover that Beautiful part of the Island, which was the habitation of *Prospero*. (from *The Tempest; or The Enchanted Island*, 1674 acting edition)

The Restoration's delight in scenic innovation cannot be overstated. Richard Flecknoe wrote in his *Short Discourse on the English Stage* (1664) that scenic devices are "excellent helps of imagination, most grateful deceptions of the sight ... transporting you easily without lassitude from one place to another, or rather by a kindle of delightful Magick, whilst you sit still, does bring the place to you" (qtd. Murray *Restoration* 39). But the temptation to exoticize Shakespeare with glamorous set pieces had to be counter-balanced by practical concerns like cost and mobility. While large descriptive passages

could be cut from a play in favour of visually recreating the setting, scenery was heavy and awkward, which meant that most scenes had to be longer and conform to an unprecedented unity of place. Shakespeare was cut and pasted accordingly as Restoration audiences came to expect variety in spectacles, machines, music, and dance.

While actresses and scenery altered the way Shakespeare was presented on stage, changes in aesthetic standards altered the way Shakespeare was appreciated. Most adaptors in the late seventeenth century responded in some way or other to the sense that Shakespeare was uneven and indecent. He needed to be cleaned up. Addressing this criticism, Taylor helpfully recalls that Restoration editions of Shakespeare did not distinguish between plays written by Shakespeare and those attributed to him. A 1664 edition of collected works indiscriminately included *Lochrine*, *The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle*, *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, *The London Prodigal*, *The Puritan*, and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (Taylor *Reinventing* 31). “Taken together,” Taylor writes, “the added plays inevitably reinforced the impression that his lifework was a mess, a collection of ‘indigested’ plays that mixed genius and ineptitude haphazardly” (31). As critics and adaptors turned their attention towards Shakespeare’s reformation, their concern focused naturally on language and the rules of art. As Dryden said, “words and phrases must of necessity receive a change in succeeding ages” (qtd. Clark xlii).

The question of cleaning up Shakespeare’s language, and Dryden’s participation in it, is easily understood in the context of the broader Restoration language debate. In 1664, The Royal Society committed the great minds of the day, including John Dryden, Abe Cowley, and Edmund Waller, to improving the English language. In addition to

advocating a “mathematical plainness” of speech, the committee praised the practical vernacular of ordinary country folk over the elevated discourse of wits and scholars. It called for a business English. Subsequently these critics cited the verbosity and crudeness of Shakespeare’s language as particularly inappropriate. They objected to his puns, his metaphors, his vulgar similes and emotion. In his preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, now known as *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*, written in 1679, Dryden wrote that Shakespeare’s “whole style is so pestered with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure.” He goes on to write that Shakespeare

often obscures his meaning with his words, and sometimes makes it unintelligible...that the fury of his fancy often transported him, beyond the bounds of Judgment, either in coyning of new words and phrases, or racking words which were in use, into the violence of a catachresis.

Dryden sums up Shakespeare by saying “He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him” (from *Of Dramatic Poesy*, qtd. Bate *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* 7). In *Restoration Shakespeare: Viewing the Voice*, Barbara Murray argues that the reformation of Shakespeare’s language in this period, as advocated by Dryden, was bound not only to the reformation of morality in his plays but to the technical innovations of the time as well. She writes that “the overriding need was both to make his language operate more like speaking pictures, in coherent visual imagery and metaphor, so that it would inculcate instruction more efficiently, and also to accommodate this language to the added emotional power of scenery, music, and acting delivery” (*Restoration* 33).

Of additional concern to Restoration critics and adapters was Shakespeare's continued violation of the rules of art. In *Lettres philosophiques*, Voltaire notably remarked that Shakespeare "had a genius full of force and fecundity, of the natural and the sublime, without the least glimmer of good taste and without the least knowledge of the rules" (qtd. Bate "The Romantic Stage" 5). These rules were founded in part on Aristotle's discussion of tragedy in the *Poetics*, developed more fully in the drama of Corneille and later Racine in France, where so much of the English court and English taste had refined itself. Corneille had been performed in translation before the Interregnum at the Cockpit in 1637, and translated into print in English in 1655 and 1656. More recently, his work had been translated by Mrs. Katherine Philips in 1663, after which they were performed frequently and quite successfully in England. The skill with which Corneille and Racine accommodated Aristotle's rules of art made an impression on English playwrights and critics, and became the focus of almost obsessive critical attention in the Restoration. In *The Impact of Restoration Critical Theory*, Jaquelyn Walsh sums up the Restoration's nearly blind faith in these rules:

The application of the rules of art to the native genius of Shakespeare could only lead . . . to greater beauty, higher moral usefulness, and ultimately perhaps, the 'architectonike' which Sir Philip Sidney saw as the true end of all art. (2)

While modern critics have spent years identifying the ways that playwrights like Davenant and Dryden conformed Shakespeare to the rules of art in the Restoration, more recent critics have pointed out that this was a much less simple task. In particular, Walsh notes that no one has yet established "the direct relationship between the application of the unities and the adaptations of Shakespearean and Renaissance-Jacobean plays" (61). While most Restoration critics seem to agree on both the utility and desirability of the

unities, they are less sanguine in their application of these unities. Walsh draws attention to the works of Dryden and John Dennis, both of whom advocate adherence to the unities but often fail to incorporate them into their own work.

For example, Dryden was an outspoken proponent of the unities. His “Essay: Of Dramatic Poesy” outlines the period’s attempts to come to terms with such rules, and using Aristotle to back up his own opinions he advocates further for the unities in “A Defence of the Epilogue;” but even Dryden seems to recognize the difficulty of applying these rules, noting in his 1690 Preface to *Don Sebastian* that he has not exactly maintained the “three mechanic rules of unity” (Walsh 29). Similarly, Dennis, author of *A Plot and No Plot* (1702), writes that when observed with judgment the unities can

heighten the probability of the Action, promote the agreeable Deceit of the Representation, and add Cleanliness, Grace, and Comeliness to it. (qtd. Walsh 30)

But Dennis qualifies his statement by adding, “if they are practiced without Discretion, they render the Action more improbable and the Representation more absurd” (qtd.

Walsh 30). It seems the unities were better perceived as guidelines rather than rules. In fact, as Francis Galloway points out in *Reason, Rule and Revolt in English Classicism*, as rules they were “often questioned, frequently modified, and, in general, respected only when it could be shown that reason and the rules were the same” (qtd. Walsh 33).

While the Restoration was not, perhaps, a period that demanded strict adherence to the unities (as has been hitherto suggested), it was a period which did engage in fierce and ongoing debate about them. Shakespeare’s plays were often caught in the crossfire. His frequent use of double plots and his incorporation of high and low elements into one play were seen by many Restoration critics as violations of the unity of action and were

subsequently deleted. Oftentimes, though, this unity of action was disputed, and it was frequently argued that a subplot was acceptable if interwoven into the main action. In discussing this, Walsh points out the apparent disparity that masques, songs and dances were not considered disruptive to plot and were added in abundance to Shakespeare (76) in apparent contradiction to the unity of action.

Similarly, although not expressly discussed by Aristotle, contraventions of the unity of place were criticized and duly excised from many of Shakespeare's works. Taylor points out that that the fashion of burdensome moveable scenery in the 1660s would have particularly emphasized how often and how broadly Shakespeare violated this particular unity (*Reinventing* 18). Given the expense and the hassle of changing sets, the plays would almost have had to be adapted – if for nothing else than Wells' "sheer theatrical necessity" ("Elusive" 2-3). An example of these attempts to unify place is Charles Gildon's adaptation of *Measure for Measure* in which he cuts Shakespeare's fifteen scene changes down to eight, moving from eleven different locations in the original to four in the adapted play. Similarly, Burnaby's adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, *Love Betray'd*, cuts the original seventeen scene changes down to ten, and uses only four locations to Shakespeare's six (Walsh 69).

Whether for necessity or aesthetics, and whether applied fastidiously or in the abstract, the unities provided a methodology through which stage representation could approach verisimilitude. "The neoclassic strictures were an attempt to employ artifice to the end of greater realism," Murray writes, "to concentrate the action, setting, and chronology, and to keep the audience's attention by avoiding ridiculous violence,

improbability, and linguistic confusion” (*Restoration* 18). Perhaps more accurately, Walsh writes that Restoration playwrights “discovered the discipline they needed in the rules of art, rules which in no way limited their actual freedom” (18). Regardless, the Restoration’s interest in these rules established a precedent in theatre for realism and for the type of verisimilitude that was to become such an important factor in Shakespeare adaptations of the eighteenth century.

While aesthetic concerns like the rules of art often led to changes to the *structure* of Shakespeare’s plays, the most significant *thematic* changes were motivated by ideological or political imperatives. “Restoration playwrights and audiences habitually interpreted plays in terms of contemporary politics,” Taylor writes (*Reinventing* 23). We can never forget that the Restoration not only followed a period of tremendous political upheaval but was itself a time of ideological change, political uncertainty, and factionalized government. In *Pen for a Party*, Philip Harth writes of the

incredible tangle of cabals, allegations, rumours, insurrections, and abortive attempts to revolt in the 1660s, each breeding fears of more conspiracies still concealed [and serving as reminders] that the Restoration Settlement could come undone as quickly as it had been made. (qtd. Murray *Restoration* 38)

Nor can we overstate the power of every aspect of the theatre to function as an ideological operator – that is, as a vehicle for social and political commentary. Old plays were adapted by turns to increase or decrease their political topicality, but also, as Taylor noted, to encourage the communal fantasy that the past was being restored.

In October of 1661, Davenant premiered his own play *Love and Honour*, an insignificant theatrical event except for the fact that Thomas Betterton, playing the dashing Prince Alvaro, wore the actual coronation robes of Charles II. This simple

costuming decision immediately changed a fairly innocuous play into a significant political allegory. Gestures like Davenant's costume selection must not be overlooked, but understood in the context of their political environment, what Michael Dobson refers to as "astute experiments" in politicizing and depoliticizing the Restoration stage (*The Making* 64). Revisions made to *Titus Andronicus* (1678 by Edward Ravenscroft), *Troilus and Cressida* (1679 by Dryden), and to *Cymbeline* (1682 by Dufey) were deliberately carried out and carefully performed to resonate with contemporary political events. In some cases, playwrights wrote political allegories in response to their own experiences. Thomas Otway had been employed as a soldier in Flanders until troops were recalled in 1679. He returned to write *The History and Fall of Caius Marius* in 1680, a politically charged adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Most of the significant political turmoil in the Restoration seems to have focused on succession, a theme brought obsessively to bear in many adaptations of Shakespeare in the 1680s and 1690s (see Maguire, Murray, Dobson). In particular, the Popish Plot of 1682 and the subsequent Exclusion Crisis lent an air of topicality to plays like *King Lear* and *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth*. But playwrights had to tread a careful line between political topicality and treason. Nahum Tate's *History of King Richard the Second; or The Sicilian Usurper* (1680) was banned by the Master of the Revels before it could be acted more than twice (Murray *Restoration* 144). The story, about the usurpation and assassination of a king, was clearly not appropriate in a time when succession was so dangerously debated. Despite the fate of Tate's *Richard II*, he continued to choose highly political plays for adaptation and admitted more to

emphasizing political parallels than to discouraging them (Dobson *Making* 80-83, Maguire 30).

In regard to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a play that endured massive rewriting in the late Restoration, there is evidence of political as well as practical and aesthetic motivation for its adaptation. In this sense, *Lear* is highly indicative of the overall process of Shakespeare adaptation in this period. This section will look specifically at the form and motivation of the changes made to *King Lear* during the Restoration.

While *Lear* was included in the nine Shakespeare plays that Davenant petitioned the king to reform in 1660, the play aroused little interest in adaptors in the early Restoration period. Davenant made no effort to adapt it. Instead, he tried to mount straight productions in 1661 and 1665, and again in 1674 and 1675, but they met with little success. Perhaps the play was too topical? A work in which an English king is deposed by his own family and has to rely on French military forces to restore his throne must have had uncomfortable resonance in the 1660s. It was not until the play was extensively adapted by Nahum Tate in 1681 that it attracted any real public interest. At this point, the play becomes of critical interest to us, both as an example of Shakespeare adaptation, and as an anomaly to it as well.

Nahum Tate was born into an academic Puritan family in Dublin in 1652. He was educated at Trinity College, and moved to London in 1676. Despite working as a translator and editor, his most noted non-theatrical works were his poetic collaborations, particularly his work with Dryden on the second half of *Absolam and Achitophel* in 1682. Later appointed Poet Laureate (in 1692) and Historiographer Royal (in 1702), he was

remembered as a “quiet, rather modest, but learned and intelligent man” (Murray “Introduction” 1), hardly the monster he is made out to be by later critics. Regardless, Tate’s adaptation of *King Lear* in 1681 produced one of the most maligned plays ever written. Writing in 1848, a hundred and fifty years after Tate’s adaptation, the critic H. N. Hudson was still incensed enough to refer to Tate’s play as “this shameless, this execrable piece of dementation” (qtd. Clark xlv). Hudson did not stop there, but went on to coin the term “tatifaction” to refer to the heinous bastardization of a work of art.

Turning Shakespeare’s famous tragedy into a romantic tragicomedy may have outraged centuries of critics, but it intrigued and delighted the Restoration. Tate’s *Lear* was played early in 1681, in February 1683, in May 1687 at court, and in February 1699 at Drury Lane by the United Company. In addition to a well-received stage life, quarto versions of the play were reprinted in 1689, 1699 and 1702. Years later, in 1765, Samuel Johnson noted that the critical reception of the play did not matter because the public had clearly decided in favour of Tate (Taylor *Reinventing* 153). Johnson went on to say:

Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And if my sensations could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia’s death that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play until I undertook to revise them as an editor. (qtd. Murray *Restoration* 153)

It is often argued that Tate re-wrote *Lear* because it was too tragic, too bleak to appeal to late seventeenth-century audiences. Indeed, Johnson’s sense of shock, quoted above, at the original ending encourages the notion that *Lear* could not be supported on stage. As late as 1812, David Baker still wondered if “the catastrophe, as originally penned by Shakespeare, could be borne by a modern audience” (qtd. Murray 154). What

is more likely is that Tate saw an opportunity to bring an old play up-to-date with practical innovations, improved aesthetics and some much needed ideological repositioning. The most significant changes made to the play – Cordelia’s new role, a re-integrated subplot, and the discreet eradication of the French – are all consistent with changes made to other Shakespeare plays in the period in the name of innovation, aesthetics, and politics.

Like many re-writings of Shakespeare in the Restoration, *King Lear* was an ideal opportunity to showcase the new fashion for female actors. Tate was quick to capitalize on this potential with a much fuller role for Cordelia – a strangely absent figure in Shakespeare, but a character full of possibilities for Tate. Like Lacy and Davenant before him, Tate literally fleshed out the female role, taking advantage both of his actresses’ broader range of talents and the salability of their sexuality. Titillation is used as a theatrical tool right from the outset of Tate’s new play. Instead of disappearing to France, Cordelia quickly (and needlessly) sheds her clothes for a breeches role (3.3) whereupon she is immediately threatened with sexual assault (3.4). Tate also uses actresses to enact the new romantic fantasy he creates between Edgar and Cordelia, and the love triangle he plays up between Edmund and Goneril and Regan. The love story between Edgar and Cordelia, already set in motion as the play begins, creates a more obvious motivation for Cordelia’s refusal to participate in Lear’s game. What in Shakespeare is a rather ambiguous and troubling rejection of Lear is justified in Tate as a rejection not of the father but of the arranged marriage Lear is proposing between Cordelia and Burgundy. Tate thus goes on to re-write large stretches of the play to

accommodate Cordelia's new role, her romance, her cross-dressing, her eventual victory over her sisters, and finally her engagement and succession to the throne.

In addition, like Davenant and Dryden, Tate was conscious of the need to bring Shakespeare more in line with aesthetic standards of the late seventeenth century. Chief among these new standards was a stricter adherence to the classical unities. Both Tate's *Epistle Dedicatory* and his *Prologue to King Lear* make repeated references to the need to bring order to the rough raw material of Shakespeare's texts. Tate writes of dazzling jewels that need to be re-strung (*Epistle*), of flowers that will find fresh beauty in new order (*Prologue*). And new order is exactly what Tate provides. While largely ignoring the unities of space and time, Tate puts considerable effort into making the action of the play more consistent and more seemly. The Gloster / Edmund / Edgar subplot is cleaned up and neatly integrated into the action of the Lear / Cordelia narrative. By substituting Edgar for France as Cordelia's suitor, Tate further simplifies plot and motivation in the play. Edgar and Edmund become more straightforward characters, as the hero and the villain, matched now against each other not only for a father's love but for Cordelia's love as well, and eventually for control of the kingdom.

The resulting play is more blatantly moralistic and more didactic. Again, this is consistent with Restoration models of theatre that shy away from complex moral ambiguity. Characters are more unequivocally good or bad, and paradoxes of character – like Albany's conscience-ridden villainy – are avoided. As Bordinat and Blaydes wrote, the purpose of theatre was quite simply to portray in simple dichotomy “the heroic virtues to be pursued and the bad vices to be shunned” (qtd. Walsh 34). Tate's straightforward

representations of morality could act more fully as the “useful and instructive representations of human life” James Wright advocated in *Historica Historionica* in 1699 (qtd. Murray *Restoration* 9).

Tate’s changes to *Lear* satisfy the desire for moral justice, mentioned by Bordinat and Blaydes, with complementary poetic justice. The term “poetic justice” was coined just three years before Tate’s play, in 1678 by Thomas Rymer. Rymer, the self-styled “Plain-Dealer” of English letters, is often regarded as the first professional literary critic in England. In his work *The Tragedies of the Last Age*, he defines poetic justice as:

that necessary relation and chain, whereby the causes and the effects, the virtues and the rewards, the vices and the punishments are proportional and link’d together...[evincing] how deep and dark soever are laid the springs and however intricate and involv’d are the operations [of Providence]. (qtd. Walsh 20)

Rymer’s discussion of tragedy focuses primarily on plays by Beaumont and Fletcher; it notably does not discuss Shakespeare. It was not until *A Short View on Tragedy* in 1693 that Rymer turned his attention to Shakespeare’s plays, but his definition of poetic justice, and his sense of its importance, can still be applied to Shakespeare’s work.

According to Rymer’s definition, poetic justice was decidedly lacking in Shakespeare. In fact, what makes *Lear* so bleak is precisely the fact that our expectation for poetic justice is so colossally disappointed. In *Shakespearean Intertextuality: Studies in Selected Sources and Plays*, Stephen J. Lynch writes that “poetic justice is not simply trashed” in Shakespeare’s plays “but repeatedly evoked, partially fulfilled – and then trashed” (54). At exactly the moment when we expect to find poetic justice, the moment when Albany declares “All Friends shall / Taste the wages of their virtue, and all Foes / The cup of

their deservings,” Lear dies, holding the body of his murdered daughter. The bad are not punished in Shakespeare’s *Lear* and the good are decidedly not rewarded.

Writing three years after Rymer, Tate’s adaptation of *Lear* takes poetic justice to its most logical conclusion, giving us the play that Shakespeare snatches away from us at the last moment. Cordelia is saved in Tate’s version, and her virtue rewarded with a husband and a crown; Edgar’s constancy wins him a queen and a kingdom; and Lear’s sanity and sovereignty are equally restored. Lear can, at last, retire at the end of the play, as he had hoped in Act 1.1.40, “Unburdened, [to] crawl toward death.” It should be noted, however, that not all critics agreed with Tate and Rymer’s poetic justice. In *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison wrote on April 16, 1711 that the play was the worse for Tate’s alterations: “as it is reformed according to the chimerical notions of poetical justice, in my humble opinion it has lost half its beauty” (qtd. Murray *Restoration* 153).

While the idea of restoration is important aesthetically, it is even more important politically in Tate’s *Lear*. Written during the Exclusion Crisis of 1680, the play participates fully in the contemporary turmoil surrounding questions of sovereignty and succession. The very decision to perform *Lear* would have been a political choice; the decision to adapt it to emphasize issues of insurrection, usurpation, and abdication an even more expressly political choice. An audience could not have missed the obvious parallels between Edmund (the Bastard’s) bid for power in the play and the king’s own bastard son, Monmouth’s, bid to be named in succession. Writing on the political topicality of *Lear*, John M. Wallace notes that “the audience in 1681 would have had to have been asleep if it failed to recognize it was watching another anti-Exclusion play”

(qtd. Maguire 30). With the Exclusion Crisis so near at hand, it cannot be a coincidence that Tate makes the threat of banishment so much more manifest in his adaptation of Shakespeare. Tate's *Lear* quickly banishes Edgar, Cordelia, and Kent within the first hundred-and-seventy-five lines of the play.

Moreover, Tate, who openly opposed Monmouth's succession, specifically highlights the parallel between Monmouth and the villainous Edmund in his adaptation. When Tate's Edmund declares, "And possibly a king might be my Sire," Tate draws a manifest parallel to Monmouth, making a pointed reference to the Exclusion Crisis. He continues to use the shared experience of illegitimacy to connect Edmund and Monmouth, and through this association connects Monmouth to Edmund's villainy. In a marked departure from Shakespeare's original, Tate opens the play with Edmund's famous "Nature" soliloquy, a speech which foregrounds issues of legitimacy, inheritance, and deceit:

Thou Nature art my Goddess, to thy Law  
 My Services are bound, why am I then  
 Depriv'd of a Son's Right because I came not  
 In the dull Road that custom has prescrib'd?  
 Why Bastard, wherefore Base, when I can boast  
 A Mind as gen'rous and a Shape as true  
 As honest Madam's Issue? Why are we  
 Held Base, who in the lusty stealth of Nature  
 Take fiercer Qualities than what compound  
 The scanted Births of the stale Marriage-bed?  
 Well then, legitimate *Edgar*, to thy right  
 Of Law I will oppose a Bastard's Cunning.  
 Our Father's Love is to the Bastard *Edmund*  
 As to Legitimate *Edgar*: with success  
 I've practis'd yet on both their easie Natures:  
 [...]  
 And Base-born *Edmund* spight of Law inherits. (Tate *King Lear*. 1.1-21)

Throughout his play, Tate accentuates Edmund's villainy, adding attempted rape and sexual deceit to his crimes. He further excoriates Edmund by cutting the quasi-redemptive near-death confessional of Shakespeare's original. By doing so, Edmund is more obviously made the villain, his actions more illicit and his words more shocking.

The parallel between Edmund and Monmouth is not Tate's only contemporary political reference. In Nancy Klein Maguire's politically sensitive reading of Tate's play, she points out that "Tate's *Lear* vividly recalls and nearly re-enacts the act of regicide" (35). Only twenty years after the Restoration and thirty-two years after the execution of King Charles I, the threat of regicide would have had uncomfortable resonances with an audience in 1681. But as Maguire suggests, Tate's regicide is made more horrible by the fact that it is Goneril, the king's own daughter, who orders the execution, not Edmund. Maguire also astutely points out that Tate's play does not end in a war with France, but in a bloody civil war, a harsh warning of the dangers of negligent succession and regicide.

Using *Lear* as a thinly disguised metaphor for state, Tate makes it quite clear that a bastard must be defeated and legitimate succession assured. In contrast to the original *Lear*, Tate's king regains his judgment and his physical power, he explicitly passes his kingdom on to his daughter in a proper display of succession, and he legally engages her to marry the legitimate Edgar. *Lear*'s restoration and his dutiful foresight in establishing a clear route of succession deliver a reassuring theatrical / political fantasy for Restoration audiences.

But the means of reinstating *Lear* posed another problem for Tate. In Shakespeare's play, it was a simple device for the French to sweep in and restore the

king. But French salvation was a much less palatable solution in the Restoration and more of a real political menace. In fact, the first performance of Tate's *Lear* coincided with the much-publicized trial of Oliver Plunkett on charges of trying to land a French army on British soil (Bate *Shakespearean* 61). Presumably appreciating that his audience would have little patience with the pro-French sentiment of Shakespeare's play, Tate very clearly writes all references to the French out of his adaptation. Instead, the role of the French prince is played by Edgar, the forces who rescue Lear are English, and the Queen does not end the play married to a Frenchman, but to her reassuringly, legitimately English Edgar.

Like many Restoration adaptations, particularly those of the 1680s, Tate's *Lear* is a highly politicized play, produced and performed during a highly tumultuous political moment in English history, a play that not only alludes to the ideological turmoil of the day, but unequivocally takes a side in it.

While politics might have driven Tate's adaptation of *Lear*, and while innovation and aesthetics certainly inspired it, there remain still more elusive and personal reasons for adapting Shakespeare. In the case of Nahum Tate, novelty and a desire to bring new value to Shakespeare dominate. Writing in his epistle and prologue, Tate expresses a distinct sentiment that we see little evidence of in modern adaptations: that the original play is little more than raw material – having value for its component parts but little value as a whole and less value as a product of Shakespearean authorship. Tate writes that Shakespeare's play is a "Heap of Jewels, unstrung and unpolisht," "dazzling in their Disorder" (*Epistle*). He later refers to it as a "Heap of Flow'rs" that will "fairer Show"

when composed into a fresher garland (*Prologue*). His goal, he writes, is to restring these jewels, to re-hang these flowers, to “rectifie what was wanting in the Regularity and Probability” of the original (*Epistle*).

In the epistolary letter dedicated to Thomas Boteler, Tate refers to his play as a “Revival ... with Alterations,” but his use of the term is misleading. Revival suggests a nostalgic desire to bring back a lost or forgotten past, to conjure up the spirit of the original, to give it new life. Revival expresses remorse that the original was lost, and the desire that the original can and should be restored. For a play to be revived it must have value as a whole in the first place, or be valued as an artifact of authorship. In Taylor’s terms, revival suggests authenticity, not novelty. But Tate’s description of *King Lear* expresses no desire to bring back the past; he sees no value in past works beyond their use as raw material; he expresses no remorse that the original is lost, only a desire to replace it with something better. Tate is motivated by novelty, not authenticity. Instead of reviving Shakespeare’s original, he ransacks it for story lines, characters, and dialogue. Tate is not reviving *King Lear*, he is replacing it.

Tate’s disregard for Shakespeare is consistent with the Restoration understanding of authorship. Many of the surviving printed adaptations of Shakespeare from this period – notably Davenant’s *Macbeth* (1664) and *Law Against Lovers* (1662), and Lacy’s *Sauny the Scot* (1667) – do not make reference to Shakespeare as author. Barbara Murray identifies only eight attributions to Shakespeare, likely written in an attempt to pre-empt charges of plagiarism. These references to Shakespeare appear in: Davenant / Dryden’s *The Tempest* (1667), Otway’s *The History and Fall of Caius Marius* (1679), Crowne’s

*The Misery of Civil-War* (1680), Crowne's *Henry the Sixth* (1681), Tate's Prologue to *The History of King Lear* (1681) and his Epilogue to the same play, Tate's *Coriolanus* (1681), Dryden's *Troilus and Cressida* (1679) (Murray *Restoration* 203-205).

In his preface to *An Evening's Love* (1671) Dryden nimbly articulates the Restoration understanding of authorship *vis-a-vis* the borrowing of earlier texts. Citing writers from Virgil to Shakespeare as literary precedents, Dryden affirms that the worth of an adapted text lies in the work of the adaptor: "the price lies wholly in the workmanship" (qtd. Murray *Restoration* 102). His sense that earlier texts were available as source materials for modern re-crafting was typical of Restoration adaptors. Consistently, Shakespeare is described as raw material: Thomas Shadwell calls him a scion to be grafted (*Timon*); Tate refers to his work as jewels needing to be restrung, as flowers to be turned into garlands; John Crown speaks of "old gather'd Herbs" in need of new dressing (*Henry VI*). In *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769*, Dobson writes that for many Restoration playwrights, "Shakespeare's plays as they stand are not quite works, and Shakespeare is thus treated as not quite an author, his texts available for recycling much as the old *Leir* [...] had been in Shakespeare's own time" (33). Thus, when Tate's prologue identifies itself as "a new Name to *our* old honest Play" (my italics), its author is revealing not only his devaluation of *King Lear* based on its familiar homeliness, but articulating the common Restoration conception of authorship as a communal, not an individual, enterprise.

The idea that Shakespeare was "not quite an author" is crucial to the nature of seventeenth-century adaptations. With no sense of authorship *per se*, adaptation could be

a much more fluid process of cutting and pasting raw theatrical material; certainly, it was a more fluid process than we encounter later, after the Romantic notion of the author is enshrined and the author becomes a figure to write against. In contrast to later adaptors, Restoration playwrights show little self-consciousness about re-writing Shakespeare's works, and almost no sense of a need to write *against* Shakespeare. Without the presence of an author, there is no need to reject an author, nor is there any need to make space or draw attention to the self as author. Works are treated simply as works – not as the incarnation of an author or the symbol of a culture, but as raw material for other works.

Again, such free play could have been possible only at a very specific point in Shakespeare's afterlife. Restoration adaptations like Tate's *Lear* are unique because they occupy a unique moment in history before Shakespeare's apotheosis and before the idealization of the author. As the century draws to a close and Shakespeare's status begins to change, the process of adaptation begins to take on a much more ambivalent nature.

As the century turns, two unrelated but intriguing phenomena occur that together mark a dramatic paradigm shift in the understanding of Shakespeare. The first of these occurs in *Beauty the Best Advocate*, Charles Gildon's 1700 adaptation of *Measure for Measure*, in which Shakespeare's ghost appears as a character at the end of the play.

Stepping out to deliver the epilogue, the ghost admonishes:

Enough 'your Cruelty Alive I knew;  
 And must I Dead be Persecuted too?  
 Injur'd so much of late upon the Stage,  
 My Ghost can bear no more; but comes to Rage.

The Ghost goes on to rail against poor acting and the abysmal state of drama, targeting particularly those upstart playwrights (Gildon excepted) who try to adapt his works: “My plays, by Scribblers, Mangl’d I have seen.” A year later, George Granville uses a similar device to lend authority to his re-writing of Shakespeare. In the prologue to *The Jew of Venice* (1701) Shakespeare’s ghost appears again, and again sanctions the adaptation: “These scenes in their rough Native Dress were mine / But now improv’d with nobler Lustre shine.” As a character brought into an adaptation of his work, Shakespeare’s ghost adds value and authority to an adaptation, validating the work by virtue of his presence and benediction from beyond the grave. Yet when we recall the almost total indifference to authorship displayed in the Restoration – that a scant eight works made reference to Shakespeare at the end of the previous century – this sudden interest in Shakespeare as a person suggests a more significant change: a new and unprecedented bow to authorship in a period that began to reevaluate Shakespeare’s reputation and his role as author.

The second indicator of Shakespeare’s improved status is Nicholas Rowe’s *Collected Works of Shakespeare* (1709). This work is significant not only as the first in a long line of eighteenth-century Shakespeare editions, but as the first to include a biography of Shakespeare. Written in collaboration with the actor Thomas Betterton, the biography includes as many fictionalized anecdotes as fact – notably the deer poaching incident that would become part of the Shakespeare mythology – but like the ghosts in Gildon and Granville, it acknowledges a growing interest in Shakespeare as an author and as a man.

What both of these phenomena suggest is a radical shift in thinking about authorship. Where before, Shakespeare's works belonged to the theatre and, broadly speaking, British culture, they were now being identified as a coherent body of work associated with a particular individual. Moreover, Shakespeare's identity as author – his presence within the text as a ghost or in a biography – was seen to *add value* to the works themselves, and subsequently to their adaptations. And so begins a new era in Shakespeare's afterlife, one in which Shakespeare's identity becomes as important a factor in the adaptation of his works as the works themselves. But it is no coincidence that these bell-wethers of Shakespeare's changing reputation occur *both* in print and on stage. The following section will explore how these two paradigm shifts (the change in Shakespeare's status, and the split in print and performance culture) redefined the way his work was adapted in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In many ways, the years between 1700 and 1800 mark the birth of the Shakespeare we know today. But that identity had to be first fabricated by biographers, bifurcated along class and cultural lines, and then purged of profanity before it could be reconsolidated as the national poet. The reconsolidation of Shakespeare began in 1709, when Rowe set out to compile the *Collected Works of Shakespeare*, complete with editorial additions, a frontispiece portrait based on the Chandos painting, and a biography. In *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (1928), David Nicoll Smith writes that Rowe's edition was the first Shakespeare compilation to be edited in the modern sense, meaning that it was the first to be "superintended" by one of the leading writers of the day (31). Certainly, Rowe was the first editor of Shakespeare to add modern appari

like a *dramatis personae*, stage directions, and notes about where each scene was set. In his Dedication, Rowe frankly acknowledges this editorializing:

I must not pretend to have restor'd this Work to the Exactness of the Author's Original Manuscripts: Those are lost, or, at least, are gone beyond any Inquiry I could make; so that there was nothing left, but to compare the several Editions, and give the true Reading as well as I could from thence. This I have endeavour'd to do pretty carefully, and render'd very many Place Intelligible that were not so before. (qtd. Smith *Shakespeare* 32)

Despite Rowe's claims to have consulted multiple copies, his work seems primarily to have been based on the 4<sup>th</sup> Folio (1655), the folio generally regarded by later critics as the latest and worst copy of Shakespeare.

More pertinent to the eighteenth-century understanding of Shakespeare, Rowe's edition included a biography, "Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespeare" (De Grazia 72). His intention was to publish an edition of Shakespeare "like those of his fraternity," he wrote, "with the appendages of a life and a recommendatory preface" (Cambridge 11.10). Rowe's comment suggests not only that this sort of biographical work was being done on other authors at the time, but also that it had hitherto not been done on Shakespeare. He acknowledges later in the text, however, that his biographical material had originated with the actor Thomas Betterton, who had travelled to Stratford "on purpose to gather up what Remains he could of a Name for which he had so great a Value" (qtd. in De Grazia 72). Despite the questionable authenticity of Rowe's sources, his account remained the standard biography of Shakespeare until 1821, when Edmund Malone's posthumously published second edition replaced the inherited anecdotes with an account based on documentary evidence (De Grazia 74).

Rowe's biography, the story that created Shakespeare's identity, gained authority with its inclusion in Alexander Pope's *The Collected Works of Shakespeare, Collated and Corrected* of 1725. Where Rowe had standardized Shakespeare's identity, Pope standardized his works. His edition set out to "correct" the plays and make them as consistent as possible with his sense of what was Shakespearean. As Dobson points out, Pope's strenuous editing tended to associate moral corruption – any evidence of vulgarity in the plays – with textual corruption. In other words, anything that did not fit with Pope's sense of propriety and genius was thought to have been a textual error or the work of some inferior poet interjected into an otherwise pure Shakespearean text. Or more likely, he felt, it was the corrupting influence of the Elizabethan stage. In his preface, Pope wrote that such vulgar theatrical interpolations resulted from Shakespeare "being a Player, and forming himself first upon the judgments of that body of men whereof he was a member" and from being "obliged to please the lowest of people, and to keep the worst of company" (qtd. in D.N. Smith 63). Pope relegated these low passages to what Dobson calls the "non-Shakespearean space" at the bottom of the page, and highlighted, in contrast, the most shining passages in the text with inverted commas, to distinguish what he felt was most clearly Shakespearean (Dobson *The Making* 129). Despite his somewhat biased approach, many of Pope's alterations became standard editorial practices: he divided all acts into scenes, and sometimes altered where acts were divided, he arranged prose into verse, omitted some words and inserted others, sometimes whole lines altogether. All these efforts, Pope felt, were needed to elevate Shakespeare and divorce him from what the eighteenth century would have considered improper.

The editorial tradition begun by Rowe and Pope continued throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth in an odd editorial lineage. In *Shakespeare Verbatim*, Margreta De Grazia refers to this lineage as “dynastic” both because each edition was supported by the powerful Tonson publishing house (3), but also because each edition was either based on or presented as a correction to the previous edition. She notes that the practice of basing a new edition on the most recent previous edition rather than on the edition closest to Shakespeare was common until the late eighteenth century (52). “In both the reprinting and the correcting of the text, the earliest version was commonly ignored, not necessarily because it was unavailable but because no particular sanctity was accorded to the copy closest to the author” (De Grazia 53). In this tradition, Pope’s work became the basis for Lewis Theobald’s *Shakespeare Restored* (1726), and for Sir Thomas Hanmer’s first Oxford edition of Shakespeare (1744). Theobald’s work in turn formed the basis of William Warburton’s 1747 edition, despite Warburton’s charges against Theobald of plagiarizing his work. Somewhat later, Samuel Johnson (1765) and Edward Capell (1768) broke with tradition to return to original quarto or folio documents, but De Grazia notes that their claims to authenticity were often spurious (54-55). The conflict and in-fighting that characterized much of this dynastic editorial tradition continued throughout the eighteenth century, De Grazia writes, reflecting not only the “irascible and petulant personalities” involved but also “a radical uncertainty about both the source of the editor’s authority and the relation of his contributions both to those of other editors and to Shakespeare’s text itself” (67-68).

The era of the great editorial debates reached its peak in Edmund Malone’s ten volume work *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare*, published in 1790. De Grazia

singles out Malone's edition as the first to implement those principles that have formed the basis of modern Shakespeare studies – authenticity, periodization, individuation, chronology (1) – into an “integrated textual schema” (2):

[Malone's edition] was the first to emphasize the principle of authenticity in treating Shakespeare's works and the materials relating to them; the first to contain a dissertation of the linguistic and poetic particulars of Shakespeare's period; the first to depend on facts in constructing Shakespeare's biography; the first to include a full chronology for the plays; and the first to publish, annotate, and canonize the 1609 Sonnets. (De Grazia 2)

Before his death in 1812, Malone left instructions with James Boswell for the completion of the second edition of his work, a massive twenty-one volume edition known as “Boswell's Malone” published in 1821 (De Grazia 3). This work is significant not only for continuing and expanding Malone's editorial practices, but for the biography of Shakespeare it included, the first new account since Rowe. But despite Malone's best efforts to standardize editorial methodology and create new scholarly practices in the study of Shakespeare, vestiges of earlier biased editing practices persisted into the nineteenth century. The work of the Reverend Thomas Bowdler is a notable example. His *Family Shakespeare* (1815) excised everything that Bowdler considered unfit to be read by a gentleman in a company of ladies, contravening all of Malone's editorial practices; it led to the derogatory term “bowdlerization,” used generally in reference to an editor's decision to remove passages deemed indecent or indelicate, but more specifically used in reference to the misapplication of editorial license.

A large part of the biased editorial practices that governed the early years of Shakespeare in print reflected an anxiety about Shakespeare's vulgarity based on his association with the stage. In “The Base Shall to th' Legitimate: The Growth of an

Editorial Tradition” Steven Urkowitz makes an intriguing connection between Pope’s contempt for stage Shakespeare and the Shakespeare adaptations of the Restoration stage:

It may be that Pope’s feelings about theatrical degradation of a play come from the fluent changes and adaptations practiced by his contemporaries in their theatres. (25)

In any case, Pope’s sense that Shakespeare needed to be rescued from the stage is consistent with the growing rift between print and performance cultures – or “literary” and “popular” cultures – that flared up in the early Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

While Dobson suggests this split may have begun as early as the 1680s, it is clear that by the early eighteenth century a chasm had emerged between these two worlds. Increased literacy rates during the Interregnum had led to the emergence of a highly literate bourgeois class in the Restoration. This class turned increasingly to print culture to define itself, and specifically to Shakespeare as the mainstay of its moralizing, nation-building aspirations (Dobson *The Making* 100). By the early eighteenth century, Shakespeare acquired new dignity in print, and a new sanctity that was in sharp contrast to the popularization of his works on stage. Thus while “literary” Shakespeare was quickly becoming associated with bourgeois ideals of nationhood and morality (all that Pope had highlighted at the top of the page), “popular” Shakespeare was thriving in the

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<sup>4</sup> The split between print and performance cultures is not to be confused with the on-going moral polemic against acting that has raged in varying intensities throughout the history of the stage. This antitheatrical sentiment, discussed so thoroughly in Jonas Barish’s *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981), derives from a strong belief that dramatic arts are immoral, that they lead to or derive from perversion, and perpetuate sin. While I would not argue that this antitheatrical prejudice did not persist in the early Enlightenment, or that it did not influence the print / performance divide, I wish to distinguish it from the page versus stage debate that this chapter discusses; the distinction being that the print / performance divide reflects a preference for the print medium, not a condemnation of the stage; and that this preference is based on aesthetic and class concerns which privilege print as a vehicle for upper- or middle-class aesthetics. In contrast, the antitheatrical prejudice discussed by critics like Barish focuses primarily on a moral or religious repudiation of acting and stage arts, a repudiation that often intersected with aesthetic and class concerns, but was still distinct from them.

lewd and ephemeral underbelly of culture on stage (all that Pope left to the bottom of the page). The elasticity of Shakespeare's work, the vagaries of his biography, and the changing value of authorship in the early eighteenth century all facilitated this split. In print, where authorship became of increasing importance, his identity was shaped around the ideal of a national poet; on stage, where authorship was still largely irrelevant, his works continued to be altered to suit the whims of a capricious audience. This is not to suggest that there was not overlap – that printed versions of the stage plays did not exist, or that the collected works were not used as play texts – merely to suggest the impossibility of imagining a coherent Shakespearean identity in the early eighteenth century.

In practical terms, this bifurcation meant that the works being sold in Shakespeare's name in the booksellers bore less and less resemblance to what was actually being performed on stage. *King Lear* is the most obvious example of this incongruity. Since Tate's adaptation in 1681, the play continued in performance in various incarnations of Tate's tragicomedy throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, until it was "restored" by William Charles Macready in 1834. In contrast, the print history of *Lear* was almost wholly Shakespearean; *Lear* appeared in Rowe in 1709 as a collated version of quartos one and two (or of the 4<sup>th</sup> Folio as Cambridge suggests) and as an even more "authentically Shakespearean" version in Pope's "corrected" edition of 1725. From there, it enjoyed increasingly canonical status through the editions of Theobald (1733), William Warburton (1747), Samuel Johnson (1765), and George Steevens (1773), each editor basing his work on the last and so reinforcing the print tradition. Because of the print / performance divide, *King Lear*

simultaneously existed in two fundamentally different versions throughout the eighteenth century, each claiming to have a certain cultural authority.

Other intriguing anomalies emerge as playwrights and writers tried to reconcile the print / performance divide. One strategy was the closet drama. Henry James, writing in the late nineteenth century, articulates exactly the motivation behind closet dramas of the early eighteenth century. Suggesting that it is the connection between drama and the theatre that is so pernicious, he writes:

The one [drama] is admirable in its interest and difficulty, the other [theatre] loathsome in its conditions. If the drama could only be theoretically or hypothetically acted, the fascination resident in its all but unconquerable ...form would be unimpaired, and one would be able to have the exquisite exercise without the horrid sacrifice. (from *Henry James Letters*. Ed. by Leon Edel, 4 vols. London: Macmillan, 1974-84. III, 492. qtd. in Marshall, Introduction. 2.)

Enlightenment playwrights shared James' aversion to the theatre. In his closet drama adaptation of *As You Like It* (1739), John Carrington tried to maintain the "interest and difficulty" of Shakespeare without the "loathsome conditions" and "horrid sacrifice" inherent in the theatre. As Dobson points out, these closet dramas represent the *reductio ad absurdum* of the print / performance divide: where previously a printed version of Shakespeare would have been meant to recapture a stage performance, the closet drama now not only precedes the performance, but replaces it altogether (*The Making* 211). Works like Carrington's are symptomatic of the period's attempts to elevate Shakespeare into an icon: a process of sanctification that took not only the stage out of Shakespeare, but the Shakespeare out of Shakespeare as well.

Similar efforts to separate the "exquisite exercise" of Shakespeare from the "horrid sacrifice" of the stage continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries. Peter Holland's fascinating essay "Performing Shakespeare in Print: Narrative in Nineteenth-century Illustrated Shakespeares" (in *Victorian Shakespeares* vol.1) suggests that the illustrated editions of Shakespeare's plays, first published in the 1860s which show leading actors of the day performing Shakespeare's characters, represent another attempt to mediate between the page and the stage, the old print / performance divide.

While the print / performance debate continued to rage well into the twentieth century, it certainly made its mark on the process of Shakespeare adaptation in the mid-eighteenth century; adaptation changed as a direct result of the new materiality of Shakespeare's works. The endless process of collecting, collating, correcting, and editing Shakespeare's texts had created a new emphasis on the text itself. In print, Shakespeare's words acquired a material presence that put an immediate end to the protean and ephemeral quality they had enjoyed on stage. Taylor describes this change.

Shakespeare's plays had been, throughout the seventeenth century, actions. [...] In the eighteenth century they became things; they became, primarily, books. [...] Books abstract, impersonalize, idealize; what had been an interaction between a cast and an audience became instead a kind of message left by an unreachable author for any and all possible readers. The text became a thing, a perfect, timeless thing, and any attempt to transform it back into an action came to be regarded as a transgression; any actualization diminishes the ideal by confining it to a particular time and place and person. (*Reinventing* 108)

Steven Urkowitz distinguishes between text and performance even more succinctly: "A poem or a novel is an artifact, a play is not" (*Shakespeare's Revision* 17). Shakespeare's text, as an artifact, acquired a fixed-ness in print in the eighteenth century, a stability that arose out of its new physicality. Moreover, as each editor ventured to create a more correct text – the most faithful, faultless version of each play – the text coalesced into a

state of authenticity. Both of these conditions, the physicality of the text and the discourse around authenticity, precluded any casual alteration.<sup>5</sup>

Printed texts further impacted Shakespeare adaptations because they made this fixed authentic Shakespeare so familiar to such a broad audience. That is to say, a reader could experience almost identical forms of Shakespeare in almost every Shakespeare collection he or she could access. The ubiquity of this Shakespeare – the same-ness and the familiarity of these works – meant that the seamless, unselfconscious adaptation of the Restoration could no longer happen. Any alteration in print or on stage would immediately have been recognized by the audience. Shakespeare’s plays were no longer vague, raw material that could be broadly adapted and still passed off as the original. The texts had become unassailable.

In addition, Shakespeare himself had become a figure to be reckoned with. As a national poet, he had become more than an author, and his works more than mere works. Michael Dobson suggests that Shakespeare’s works had acquired a new sanctity as the property of the national poet. He writes: “as Shakespeare’s status as a British hero rose, so the practice of rewriting his plays came to be seen as positively treasonous” (“Improving” 64). Adapting the work of an icon, as Dobson suggests, is a vastly different and much more subversive undertaking than the simple act of stringing together scenes and characters created by an irrelevant author. It is an undertaking that challenges

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<sup>5</sup> Marsden, writing of a slightly later period says that “The study of Shakespeare’s texts became increasingly specialized, and bitter battles were fought over methods of approaching the established Shakespeare canon. This critical attention to detail effectively enshrined Shakespeare’s text, and rewriting of the plays ceased, although stage productions continued to reconstruct Shakespearean ideology.” (Marsden, Intro *TAS* 4). Marsden’s discussion, while ostensibly referring to nineteenth-century Shakespeare criticism, describes the state of Shakespeare publication in the mid-eighteenth century with an uncanny accuracy.

the sanctity of that icon as well as the sanctity of what that icon stands for. In this case, as Dobson implies with the word “treason,” adapting Shakespeare represented a challenge to Britain, morality, and bourgeois culture.

Obviously, the nature of adaptation had to change to accommodate Shakespeare’s new sanctity. As the eighteenth century progressed, a new era began in which adaptation was replaced by revival. The actor-managers of the next hundred years approached Shakespeare in a fundamentally different manner than the Restoration. They represent a new period in Shakespeare’s afterlife, one characterized by nostalgia, authenticity, and verisimilitude.

In 1741, David Garrick burst onto the London theatre scene with a production of *Richard III*, ushering in a dynasty of actor managers that dominated Shakespearean performances well into the next century. Garrick, a previously unknown actor and one-time student of Samuel Johnson, amazed audiences with his naturalistic style as Richard III. He became a legend overnight:

No actor or theatre manager had achieved such status in his lifetime or a grand funeral and burial at Westminster Abbey on his death. No other figure in the century, theatrical or regal, was so often painted. No other actor was so often written about or written to, described, and argued over. (Holland “The Age” 69)

Garrick’s career was spectacular, and it was a career founded almost entirely on Shakespeare. From his breakthrough roles as Shakespearean heroes like Lear, Macbeth, and Hamlet, to his Shakespeare revivals and his career-topping Stratford Jubilee Garrick’s success was inextricably and very deliberately linked to Shakespeare. As Holland writes, “Shakespeare figured in every aspect of his life” (“The Age” 71).

But Garrick was more than just an actor, he was a theatre entrepreneur and innovator. By 1747, he had raised enough funds to restore the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane and renew the patent rights to perform Shakespeare, as well as initiating plans that would transform the theatre from bankruptcy into astounding financial success. Garrick's reforms included plans to limit audience access to the stage and back-stage areas, curtail refunds for those who left early, bring the orchestra down from the balcony, and introduce new lighting techniques. Garrick also planned to produce more Shakespeare – or perhaps more specifically, to restore Shakespeare.

For audiences long accustomed to the radical changes of the Restoration, Garrick's work must have seemed restorative indeed. Taylor describes the felicity of the restorative gesture: "Garrick gave – and his audience welcomed – not much new but, rather, more and better of the old" (*Reinventing* 120). His *Romeo and Juliet* played as a tragedy again, liberated from the last minute happy ending that had played since Davenant's adaptation in the 1660s. In "The Age of Garrick," Peter Holland writes admiringly of Garrick's zeal in initiating a movement away from adaptation, of restoring speeches and scenes and of "refusing the by then habitual performance of Restoration adaptations" (71). But despite Garrick's, and even Holland's assertions, his work tended on the whole to uphold Restoration adaptations rather than reverse them. His 1756 *King Lear* was clearly more Tate's than Shakespeare's, with the lovers happily reunited in the end and the Fool still strangely absent. While Garrick did cut some 200 of Tate's lines, he restored only ten by Shakespeare; his *Lear* remained primarily an adaptation of Tate's adaptation. In fairness, Garrick's later work became more restorative. His 1773

production of *Lear* cut many of Tate's lines and restored much of Shakespeare's original in a more consistent attempt to recreate a Shakespearean performance.

What was perhaps most distinctive in Garrick's career was his emphasis on authenticity, a reflection perhaps in the performance world of the obsessive textual reclamation done by editors in the first half of the eighteenth century. In *Shakespeare Verbatim*, De Grazia identifies an increasing interest in authenticity – “[a]uthenticity, periodization, individuation, chronology” (1) – emerging in eighteenth-century Shakespeare studies, an interest she associates with increasingly sophisticated editorial practices (such as the compilation of documentary evidence, fact based biography, and scholarly examination of literary bibliographic principles), practices that culminate in the work of Malone in 1790. In many ways, Garrick's determination to restore Shakespeare on the stage was both a nod to contemporary editorial practices and a tacit acknowledgment of the perceived wrongs of the Restoration adaptors, playwrights who in Garrick's mind had taken something away from Shakespeare by re-writing his plays. Garrick felt that the only way to redress this slight against Shakespeare was to restore his authenticity, and that authenticity lay in the almost mythic purity of the original texts. To this end, he amassed a fine collection of early quartos, and left his massive library of Renaissance works to the British Museum on his death, a collection which, Holland notes, has subsequently formed the cornerstone of their Renaissance drama collection (“The Age” 71).

Garrick's efforts to restore Shakespeare were consistent not only with editorial practices in the mid-eighteenth century, but with the period's growing interest in

historical detail, materialism, and antiquity. Alfred Cobban identifies a particular zeal for history (105) and Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni date the birth of modern anthropology in the period. Denis Diderot's famous *Encyclopedia* was published in 1751 (Jacob 54), the same year that the Society of Antiquaries of London was established to promote the study of antiquities. In 1755, the art historian Johann Winckelman published a tract extolling the virtues of the Hellenistic sculpture, initiating a craze of Neoclassicism which saw sculptors and architects recreating with fastidious detail the work of the ancient Greeks (Janson and Janson 303). In *Shakespeare Verbatim* De Grazia examines a similar phenomenon in painting, exploring the term "artist-antiquarian" given to the school of mid- to late-eighteenth-century historical painters "who researched their subjects in order to paint them with exacting fidelity to minute historical details" (96). She relates this detailed examination of the past with the emerging sense of distinct historical periods crystallizing out of what had formerly been a more "uniform and generalized" sense of history (96).

The growing interest in antiquity and authenticity in the mid-eighteenth century had nationalist interests as well; the restoration of Shakespeare's texts was concomitant with the development of British national identity. De Grazia writes: "The process of establishing and evaluating Shakespeare served the broader cultural ambition of purifying English language, taste, and manners" (63), and Michael Dobson writes that "[t]he plays, now established as the productions and the property of the national poet, acquired a new sanctity" ("The Making" 185). Sanctity, the appearance of purity and authenticity, became instrumentally important in the construction and maintenance of Shakespeare's texts because those texts were foundational to the construction and maintenance of

British national identity. The phrase “written by Shakespeare” – absent in all but eight Restoration adaptations – took on a new importance in the mid-eighteenth century as a perceived guarantor of artistic and national value.

But as is often the case, the perception of authenticity was more important than the reality of authenticity. The interest in *real* Shakespeare extended only so far as the past was attractive or consistent with contemporary notions of decorum and aesthetics. Again, this practice was not unique to theatre; De Grazia notes the disjunction between authenticity and inauthenticity in the period’s editorial practices. She identifies Edward Capell’s 1768 edition of Shakespeare as one example of this disjunction. Despite Capell’s claims to have transcribed his edition from the earliest substantive quartos, De Grazia notes, his editorial practices were “strikingly at odds” with his purported authenticity. She notes in particular, his overriding concern with the appearance of the page which caused him to separate text and notes unnecessarily, “his idiosyncratic punctuation system that typographically distinguished ironic passages” (54), and his claim that Shakespeare had written 58 plays. “Each of these positions conflicts with the criterion of authenticity” De Grazia concludes: “by preferring aesthetic appearance to scholarly lemma, by adulterating the text with modern markings, by confusing the apocryphal and the canonical, by failing to distinguish his contributions from those of his predecessors, by appealing to universal taste rather than textual recension” (54-55). For Capell, she writes, “‘improving’ and ‘restoring’ the author were synonymous” (56).

Garrick was similarly indiscriminate when it came to issues of authenticity, proving that what was most important in the period was not authenticity itself, but the

*perception* of authenticity. His interest in stage verisimilitude and naturalistic acting, like Capell's return to Shakespeare's quartos, exemplifies the period's tendency to mis-apply the discourse of authenticity. In his Shakespeare productions, Garrick made every effort to recreate the exact settings and costumes of the play's milieu with painstaking detail, and encouraged his actors to feel the characters as real people, not just as melodramatic impersonations or caricatures. Garrick's contemporary, the novelist Fanny Burney, writes with great enthusiasm of his style:

Such ease! such vivacity in his manner! such grace in his motions! such fire and meaning in his eyes! -- I could hardly believe he had studied a written part, for every word seemed spoke from the impulse of the moment. . . . His action – at once so graceful and so free! – his voice – so clear, so melodious, yet so wonderfully various in its tones – such animation! -- every look *speaks!* (*Evelina* 26)

Garrick's stage realism was tremendously popular, and it encouraged the fantasy of an authentic recreation of history, but it was carried on despite any real knowledge or evidence of how the plays were performed. Garrick's verisimilitude satisfied the audience's desire for the *appearance* of authenticity without having to be remotely authentic. His discourse around authenticity, his forays into verisimilitude like his efforts to restore Shakespeare's texts, used the appearance of authenticity to gloss over the real novelty of his performances and the tremendous amount of rewriting that was needed to recreate Shakespeare in a contemporary mould.

But how do Garrick's works compare to the work of Tate and the Restoration playwrights, and how do they inform our discussion about later adaptations of Shakespeare? Garrick's works were different in form and motivation than Tate's. The motivation behind Garrick's work is clearly restorative – that is, he perceived a value in

Shakespeare's work and sought to purify and restore it. To that extent, Garrick's adaptations are more nostalgic than those of the Restoration, which were more interested in improving Shakespeare's texts than in restoring them. In each case, the fundamental relationship with the precursor text is different: for the Restoration, Shakespeare's texts were raw materials that needed to be improved upon to acquire any real value; for Garrick, Shakespeare's texts had value by virtue of being written by the national poet, they were fully formed in their original state, they represented the perfection of a past age that ought to be restored.

To return to Taylor and his twin imperatives, Garrick's work was motivated by a sense of authenticity, a motivation that I have described more accurately as a combination of deference, nostalgia, and a sense of cultural inferiority. This imperative for authenticity is new to this period and a direct result of the combined canonization of Shakespeare and a new interest in authorship that began in the first half of the eighteenth century. This sense of authenticity – or more particularly deference and nostalgia – both defines the treatment of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century and anticipates all subsequent interaction and adaptation of his work.

The restorative impulse demonstrated by Garrick continued in Shakespeare productions well into the nineteenth century. George Colman followed Garrick's *Lear* in 1768, with a *Lear* that ostensibly set out to “purge the tragedy of Lear of the alloy of Tate” (Smith *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* 22). Removing the love scenes and Cordelia's marriage to Edgar, Colman essentially maintained Shakespeare's first four acts and adapted Tate's final act for his fifth. His play was not particularly successful. In

1820, Edmund Kean performed Garrick's *Lear*, but he later opted to remove the happy ending in his own version in 1823. Despite Kean's claims to have restored the play in 1823, he retained Tate's love scenes and continued to omit the Fool. It was not until Charles Macready's landmark restoration of *King Lear* in 1834 that the Fool was fully restored, although even then, Macready cast a young actress in the role.

The difference between Garrick's interaction with Shakespeare and Tate's can be attributed in part to their different perceptions of Shakespeare's status. But how much had Shakespeare's status changed? The century that passed between Tate and Garrick is characterized by the emergence of bardolatry, a movement that saw a phenomenal rise in Shakespeare's status. "During the 1760s," Taylor writes, "writers fell over one another in proclaiming Shakespeare the world's greatest dramatist and poet" (*Reinventing* 121). But increasingly, Shakespeare's status became independent of his work as a dramatist and poet and affiliated more and more with burgeoning national identity. In *The Making of the National Poet*, Michael Dobson explains this transformation from playwright to national symbol:

By the 1760s Shakespeare is so firmly established as the morally uplifting master of English letters that his reputation no longer seems to depend on his specific achievements as a dramatist: a ubiquitous presence in British culture, his fame is so synonymous with the highest claims of contemporary nationalism that simply to be British is to inherit him, without needing to read or see his actual plays at all. (214)

Dobson is not being facetious when he says that an eighteenth-century audience did not need to read or see Shakespeare's plays to encounter Shakespeare; his reputation had by now far exceeded the texts from which it was derived.

Bardolatry began in earnest in the early half of the eighteenth century. It was bolstered by social committees such as the Ladies Shakespeare Club, established in 1736, and by cultural events such as the dedication of the Shakespeare bust in Westminster Abbey in 1741. By the 1750s, Shakespeare's place in academia was established firmly enough for William Hawkins to give regular lectures in Latin on Shakespeare at Oxford. Shakespeare was further memorialized in countless works of art: from souvenir buttons and pins, to Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery in Pall Mall, and the *Memories of the Shakespeare Head in Covent Garden*, an anonymous novel purportedly written by Shakespeare's ghost. In 1765, Samuel Johnson justly wrote in the preface to his collected works that Shakespeare "may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration" (qtd. in Bate *Shakespeare and the English* 8).

Just four years after Johnson's comment, Garrick tried to embody the spirit of bardolatry in his ill-fated Stratford Jubilee. After months of planning, the celebrations in Stratford were to last three days in September 1769, and were to include a masked ball, fireworks, concerts, a procession, and even a horse race; although, as Holland notes, "No one seems to have considered that a performance of a Shakespeare play might be appropriate" ("The Age" 73). The highlight of the Jubilee was to be an ode written and performed by Garrick himself. Unfortunately, the whole event turned into a debacle as it was cancelled on the second day due to torrential rainfall. Despite the weather, Garrick somehow managed to stage his ode, which met with tremendous critical and popular acclaim. His theatrical afterpiece, *The Jubilee*, premiered a month later in London with similar popular success.

Bardolatry affected the adaptation of Shakespeare in lasting and not altogether predictable ways. Dobson suggests that bardolatry curtailed adaptation; to adapt Shakespeare (that is, to rewrite his works) undermined the authenticity of a performance in a period when authenticity was valued. Playwrights like Garrick had to be careful to maintain the appearance of authenticity, but still make Shakespeare novel enough to hold an audience's attention. One strategy was to take Shakespeare's characters and give them life beyond Shakespeare. While Garrick began this process in his Jubilee, creating new roles and interactions for Shakespeare's characters, the process of taking Shakespeare's characters out of Shakespeare began more earnestly with Charles Lamb and the Romantics.

In *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, Jonathan Bate argues that the rise of bardolatry went hand in hand with the rise of Romanticism. In part, he suggests, this is because the critics of the last half of the eighteenth century laid the groundwork for Romanticism by exploring the power of imagination, and that these critics often turned to Shakespeare for example. Certainly, the power of imagination defined the Romantic treatment of Shakespeare, who was regarded as the "archetype of imaginative power" (Bate 5). Where Shakespeare's imagination had so often been held in contempt by earlier critics like Dryden and Johnson – remember that Dryden had remarked that the fury of Shakespeare's fancy often transported him beyond judgment – it was now held in the highest regard.

If we had to pick out a single premise at the core of English Romanticism, it would probably be the ascription of a central place to the power of the creative imagination, a belief that imagination, genius, and poetry are closely associated with each other. (Bate 6)

For the Romantics, Shakespeare was the embodiment of this all-important aesthetic triumvirate: imagination, genius, and poetry. But the Romantics adored Shakespeare as much for what he represented as for what he did not represent. They saw in him an ideal poet, Marsden writes, “unshackled by convention, the antithesis of everything they disliked in their predecessors” (*The Appropriation* 4). Bardolatry came into its own in the Romantic period with the shared desire to idealize Shakespeare and creative genius.

The most common interaction with Shakespeare in the Romantic period was through poetry, although it would be too generous to call every instance a poetic adaptation of Shakespeare. Allusions to Shakespeare and his works in Romantic poetry are too varied in nature, and often too vague, to characterize them as direct adaptations. The most famous example is Robert Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” written in January 1852, and based on a line in Edgar’s song in *King Lear*. Although it takes its inspiration from *Lear*, the poem makes no more direct reference to Shakespeare or his works. In *Victorian Appropriations of Shakespeare: George Eliot, A.C. Swinburne, Robert Browning, and Charles Dickens*, Robert Sawyer finds a connection to *Lear* in the subjective nature of the landscape in “Childe Roland;” he writes that both *Lear* and Roland “unwittingly shape the setting to reflect their own inner consciousness” (96). Browning’s work is typical of the thousands of poetic references and allusions, some direct and many less so, to Shakespeare in this period. Bate characterizes these references as a “network of quotations, allusions, and echoes” which “establishes Shakespeare’s presence in the major poems as well as the writings on poetry of the English Romantics” (*Shakespeare and the English* 3).

This emphasis on poetry, by far the greatest of all Romantic arts, might explain why Shakespeare was so much more popular in print than on stage in this period. Sawyer contends that the distinction between printed Shakespeare and performed Shakespeare “quicken[ed]” in the early nineteenth century, and that critics like Samuel Coleridge and Charles Lamb preferred their Shakespeare almost exclusively in print. Coleridge, he notes, suggested that plays like *The Tempest* addressed themselves entirely to the “imaginative faculty” and that the assistance provided by complicated scenery and costumes on stage does more to detract than to assist that faculty. In fact, Coleridge goes so far as to call the addition of scenery and costumes “dangerous” ( Sawyer *Victorian* 16).

Like Coleridge, Lamb expressed a preference for printed Shakespeare. In an essay dated 1811, he wrote that “the tragedies of Shakespeare are not fit for stage representation” (qtd. Bate *The Romantic* 32 ). Lamb went on to single out *Lear* saying that “the sublimity of *Lear* is within the mind, so how can some contemptible thunder-sheet rattling in the wings do justice to it?” (qtd. Bate 32). Advocating for the internalization of Shakespeare, Lamb expressed a desire to commune with Shakespeare in a more private, personal realm. Johann Goethe agreed. In “Shakespeare and no End” (1815), he wrote that “Shakespeare speaks always to our inner sense” (qtd. Bate *The Romantics* 31).

In contrast to Lamb’s complete disavowal of staged Shakespeare, his contemporary William Hazlitt continued to maintain the value of theatrical production. As one of the pioneers of the new character-based Shakespeare criticism, Hazlitt often

based his analysis of characters on theatrical representations of them. His analysis of Coriolanus, for example, is based on Kemble's famous portrayal. If poetry characterized the period's creative interaction with Shakespeare, character criticism was to become the hallmark of the period's critical interaction with Shakespeare. Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (1817) anticipates the more formal character criticism seen later in works such as A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904). It also normalizes the practice of character reification – that is, treating characters from a play as real people – which was to have such an impact on playwrights like Gordon Bottomley of the early twentieth century. Chapter two will explore the influence of character criticism more closely on the works of twentieth-century adaptors.

While the eighteenth century may have produced few adaptations of Shakespeare's plays into new dramatic works, it is nonetheless an important period of transition – both in terms of Shakespeare's reputation, and in terms of the role of authenticity and authorship in the adaptation of his works. In addition, a number of new genres have their roots in practices of this period: for example, the change in Shakespeare's status combined with the new practice of verisimilitude had a tremendous impact on the Shakespeare burlesques of the late nineteenth century. The eighteenth century was also a period in which Shakespeare's characters began to exceed the texts in which they were created – both in creative works like Garrick's *Jubilee* and in character based criticism of the Romantics – beginning a process of reification that anticipates the character based adaptations of the early twentieth century. Most significantly, the eighteenth century witnessed the new role that authenticity was to play in all subsequent adaptations of Shakespeare. While contemporary playwrights managed to

accommodate Shakespeare's status nostalgically, that is by restoring Shakespeare's works, later playwrights found themselves confronting Shakespeare's status in a much less conciliatory process of adaptation.

Although much attention has been paid to Shakespeare burlesques of the late nineteenth century as an autonomous genre, there has been little examination of burlesques in the broader context of adaptation, or on how burlesques act as a transition between traditional and modern adaptation. Where adaptations of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were based on a more or less collaborative relationship between texts, burlesques of the late nineteenth century reflect a more complex, even problematic relationship. In many ways, they anticipate the double gesture of modern adaptation by performing a double act of collaboration and rejection; but in contrast to twentieth-century adaptations, burlesques do not reject Shakespeare *per se*. Instead, they reject contemporary Shakespeare performances. The resulting work does not advocate for Shakespeare's replacement, but for his imaginative return. As such, burlesques occupy both a chronological and ideological middle ground between the work of Nahum Tate and twentieth-century playwrights.

Like twentieth-century adaptations, burlesques operate in a period after Shakespeare's apotheosis – that is, after his iconic status has been established and his texts made sacred. And like later adaptations, burlesques rely both on the audience's familiarity with these sacred texts and on their recognition of a divergence from these texts. But where burlesques differ from later adaptations is in their relationship to the original work; later adaptations seek to redress a lost or forgotten original by *replacing* it,

whereas burlesques seek the *return* and restoration of the original. To return to Taylor's twin imperatives: burlesques are motivated by a desire for authenticity, making the assumption that that the original work can and should be restored; in contrast, twentieth-century adaptations are motivated by the desire for *both* authenticity and novelty, suggesting that that original is irretrievably lost and forgotten while simultaneously desiring its return.

The word burlesque comes from a French term dating back to the late 1660s where it referred to derisive imitation or grotesque parody. In *Nineteenth-Century Shakespeare Burlesques*, Stanley Wells suggests the genre debuted as a theatrical movement in England in 1810 with John Poole's *Hamlet Travestie*, a play as popular onstage as it was in print, succeeding through six editions in seven years, further editions later in the century, as well as countless performances and revivals (xx-xxi). Gaining in popularity as the century progressed, burlesque hit its stride between 1840 and 1870. In *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry, and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century*, Richard Schoch remarks that at the height of their popularity in 1853, six burlesques were performed in the springtime alone, prompting *The Spectator* to remark: "we have been done to death by burlesques" (qtd. Schoch 5) – and that was only in April. As with most Shakespeare plays, *King Lear* was a popular subject of burlesque. Bate identifies two *Lear* burlesques performed early on: *King Lear and his Three Daughters*, performed at the Royalty Theatre in 1812, and *The Lear of Private Life! Or, Father and Daugther*, performed at the Coburg in 1820. It is interesting to note that these burlesques avoided the performance ban placed on *King Lear* between 1812 and 1820 due to the madness of King George. Unfortunately, despite their popularity and abundance in the nineteenth

century, these plays were highly ephemeral and rarely survived in print form, a circumstance that has necessarily precluded any close study of Lear burlesques here.

One reason for the mid-century boom of Shakespeare burlesques is the eradication of patent monopolies by the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843. Before 1843, Shakespeare could only be performed inside one of three patent theatres – the Theatres Royal at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, and the Haymarket in summertime – theatres that could trace their patent rights back one hundred and fifty years to Killigrew and Davenant. Other theatres, referred to as “minor” theatres, were licensed by local magistrates to perform singing, dancing, and burletta, but not spoken drama. In *Victorian Shakespeare*, Wells suggests that burlesques often developed in minor theatres as a way of evading theatre monopolies on Shakespeare. By performing burlesque Shakespeare, instead of Shakespeare verbatim, managers could effectively evade the ban on spoken drama, bringing Shakespeare out of patent theatres and into minor theatres like the Surrey and the Coburg.

Early burlesques often alluded to the limitations placed on them by patent regulations. Plays such as *Othello, according to Act of Parliament* by Maurice Dowling (1834) and *Romeo and Juliet, as the Law Directs* (1837) voiced their opposition to the Shakespeare monopolies. In *The History, Murders, Life, and Death of Macbeth*, performed at the Surrey on August 30, 1809, the theatre’s manager, Robert Elliston, delivered a pointed prologue alluding to the problem:

Though not indulg’d with fullest pow’rs of speech  
The poet’s object we aspire to reach;  
The emphatic gesture, eloquence of eye,  
Scenes, music, every energy we try,

To make your hearts for murder'd Banquo melt;  
 And feel for Duncan as brave Malcolm felt;  
 To prove we keep our duties full in view,  
 And what we must not *say*, resolve to *do*;  
 Convinc'd that you will deem our zeal sincere,  
 Since more by *deeds* than *words* it will appear. (qtd. Bate *Illustrated* 105.)

Commenting on the resistive nature of burlesques, Bate takes Wells' argument one step further; in his introduction to *Shakespeare: an Illustrated Stage History*, he suggests that these illegitimate Shakespeare performances not only resisted patent monopolies but effectively contributed to their collapse:

And when the licensing system collapsed, it was largely because the 'illegitimate' theatres had found ways round it by performing Shakespeare in adapted form, mimed, sung, or danced. (4)

Whether or not the patent monopolies were brought down entirely by Shakespeare burlesques, when the bans did eventually expire in 1843, the London stage saw a resurgence of both legitimate and illegitimate Shakespeare performances.

In the legitimate theatres, actor-managers like Samuel Phelps and Edmund Kean scrambled to produce Shakespeare plays that had long been owned by other companies. Like Garrick before them, these actor-managers strove for authenticity and verisimilitude, often subordinating the play to lavish displays of costume and scenery thought to evoke the play's milieu. The German writer Theodor Fontane wrote in the 1850s that

Kean has brought this very principle of over-elaborate historical accuracy to plays which, to put it mildly, it does not really suit and which have thus been turned from delicacy and fantasy into something more or less Philistine, transforming the essential into the superficial. (Fontane 32)

It was this fussy attention to historical mis-en-scene and the pomposity of performance that inspired the burlesque counter-movement. In "Shakespeare Mad" Richard Schoch writes succinctly: "The eminent tragedians were nothing if not earnest. And they were

simply begging to be ridiculed” (73). By mid-century, this burlesque backlash, as Schoch calls it, had become big business and a fixed tradition on the London stage.

Burlesque functions by a process of incongruous imitation. As M.H. Abrams defines it, burlesque is any new work that imitates the form or subject matter of a serious literary work, in which the imitation is made amusing by the ridiculous disparity between the form and the subject matter (17-19). Schoch calls these “comic misquotations of Shakespeare” (*Not Shakespeare* 18), suggesting a form of low burlesque in which the subject matter is elevated but the style is low or undignified. The opposite treatment would be high burlesque, in which a low or trivial subject matter is treated in an elevated style (*The Rape of the Lock*, 1714, for example). The distinction between low burlesque (primarily travesty) and high-burlesques (mock-heroic and parody) is only useful to a certain extent when considering works of the nineteenth-century stage, a period that tended to use these terms interchangeably. Thus we see Maurice Dowling’s *Othello Travestie, An Operatic Burlesque Burletta* (1834), a title that evokes both high and low burlesque simultaneously.

To understand how exactly burlesques differ from the double gesture of later adaptations, we need first to consider how burlesques work. Burlesques take familiar material and make it strange in order to make an audience see that material again with fresh eyes or a new perspective. This may mean showing Shakespeare in a new light, or showing Shakespeare performance in a new light, to make audiences see it again for the first time. Nineteenth-century burlesques focus on Shakespeare performance, to show audiences how poorly Shakespeare was presented in contemporary productions. Despite

describing these as “comic misquotations of Shakespeare,” Schoch clarifies that these burlesques were not lampooning Shakespeare, but contemporary Shakespeare production; as such, he argues, these works perform not the debasement of Shakespeare but “the ironic restoration of his compromised authority” (*Not Shakespeare* 28). In “The Romantic Stage” Bate corroborates Schoch’s argument, writing that “the object of travesty in the illegitimate versions is not so much Shakespeare as the presumptuous claim of the legitimate houses to exclusive possession of Shakespeare” (106). More accurately, then, these burlesques are comic misquotations of contemporary Shakespearean performance.

What this latter phrase identifies is how tremendously complicated the process of burlesque is. Where normal adaptation relies on the audience’s ability to differentiate the new work from an old work, burlesques ask audiences to differentiate on still another layer yet again. For a burlesque performance to succeed, an audience must be familiar with Shakespeare’s original work *and* with contemporary performances of Shakespeare, and be able to differentiate both of these from each other and from the new burlesque performance. The new performance must reveal both how it is different from contemporary performances and how those performances are different from Shakespeare’s intended works. In short, burlesques rely on:

1. the audience’s familiarity with Shakespeare’s original work
2. the audience’s familiarity with contemporary Shakespeare performance
3. the audience’s ability not only to distinguish between these two, but to value the original work over contemporary production
4. the audience’s ability to distinguish both original work and contemporary production from the burlesque performance.

These four conditions must be met for Shakespeare burlesques to work. If any fail – if an audience is not familiar with Shakespeare’s original work, or the contemporary productions of that work, or if the audience is not able to value the former over the latter or distinguish either from the burlesque itself – the burlesque fails to communicate.

Despite these rather complicated pre-conditions, burlesque scripts tended to follow fairly conventional patterns. In “Shakespeare Mad” Schoch identifies seven mainstays for burlesque performance as:

1. rhymed couplets in paraphrase or parody of Shakespeare’s original
2. the transposition of characters from high to low, and past to present
3. the ludicrous re-enactment of classic scenes
4. a pronounced theatrical bias, manifesting itself in sight gags and special effects
5. puns
6. topical references to life in London
7. soliloquies turned into popular or operatic songs (73-74)

Schoch’s analysis emphasizes the fact that burlesques responded most to what was immediately topical. They parodied what was up to the minute, current, local – that is to say contemporary performances – rather than established, canonical texts. “Written practically overnight, rehearsed in a week, and performed for a month or two,” he writes, “they were attractive only as long as they remained novel” (*Victorian Theatrical* xxii). Careful to distinguish between classic texts and the improper performance of those texts, burlesques styled themselves as constructive criticism for transgressive theatrical practices.

In matters of form, burlesques have much in common with modern Shakespeare adaptations. Both adaptations and burlesques rely on the audience’s familiarity with the text, and both count on the audience’s ability to identify literary dissonance – those

instances in the performance where the work diverges from the original. As such, both strive to evoke an original and then set it aside, often as jarringly as possible to heighten the ironic contrast between the original and the new work. This process is markedly different from Restoration adaptations, which strove to efface their differences, to make transitions as seamless as possible, and even to conceal adaptation from the audience. In contrast, both burlesques and modern adaptations tend to focus on gaps, differences, disparities and the cacophonous effect of muddling genres and expectations.

To help an audience recognize these sites of dissonance, burlesques and modern adaptations incorporate common techniques of dissociation, techniques that anticipate postmodern literary strategies. Among these are decentring techniques and efforts to draw attention to the *illusion* of performance. In particular, burlesque strove to acknowledge the artifice of the theatre. Schoch writes:

At a time when legitimate theatre realized with studied perfection every last image in Shakespeare's plays, the burlesque stage restored performance to its self-consciously illusionistic origins by displaying not an actual dog... but an imitation one. Showing that theatrical presentments are not real – and need not be imagined as real – the burlesque echoes the opinion of *Blackwood Magazine* that 'real things interfere essentially with the truthfulness of the scene. A great distinction should always be taken between mere representation and identity.'  
(*Not Shakespeare* 90)

Yet burlesques did not simply *employ* postmodern strategies to identify dissonance, they *were* constantly changing sites of dissonance within themselves. "Burlesque texts offered themselves not as inviolate scripts meant to be spoken upon the stage, but as opportunities for endless revisions, deletions, substitutions, and additions"(Schoch *Not Shakespeare* 49). Always already adapted, each performance differed from the last, and

each performance differed from the play script in its never-ending quest for topicality and newness.

But while burlesques and modern adaptations share much in common *formally*, they differ radically over motivation. Schoch specifically differentiates between burlesques and adaptations, saying rather obliquely that while “an adaptation *is* the play it adapts; a burlesque *represents* the play it burlesques” (*Victorian Theatrical* xx). While Schoch fails to elaborate on this distinction, his comment suggests a difference in motivation which is pertinent to modern adaptations: where modern adaptations seek to replace Shakespeare – that is to say, they *become* a new version of the play that they adapt – burlesques work more like earlier adaptations in their desire to help restore Shakespeare. Like Garrick, nineteenth-century burlesque writers worked nostalgically, trying to revive a mythically pure original Shakespeare.

This desire to restore, so lacking in iconoclastic modern adaptors, identifies something of value in the original, something pertinent and enduring, whose loss must not be endured. It expresses loyalty to the idea of Shakespeare and a belief that he *can and should* be restored, at least in the imagination. Schoch writes: “the burlesque claimed to perform not Shakespeare’s debasement, but the ironic restoration of his compromised authority” (*Not Shakespeare* 28). Schoch’s use of the word “ironic” here is astute. Irony is a condition in which the apparent meaning is different than the intended meaning. Schoch writes that burlesques perform an ironic restoration of Shakespeare, suggesting that their *apparent* delight in debased Shakespeare performance is at odds with their *intention* to advocate for the restoration of a lost state of purity in performance.

To clarify this argument, Schoch writes that the virtue of the burlesque was that in performing *not* Shakespeare it drew attention to just what performing Shakespeare actually meant (*Not Shakespeare* 102). Like adaptations before them, these nineteenth-century burlesques are fundamentally conciliatory and nostalgic, expressing a desire both to rehabilitate degraded Shakespearean performance and reestablish Shakespeare's degraded status.

Though radically different in form from early adaptations, burlesques are motivated in a way consistent with their early predecessors. But unlike the work of Garrick and Tate, burlesques comprise a complex double gesture – on the one hand, collaboration with Shakespeare, and on the other hand, rejection of contemporary Shakespearean performance. While different in motivation than later adaptations, burlesques share this common double gesture with later works. They also employ formal techniques of dissociation that anticipate both postmodern literary strategies and camp. Subsequently, burlesques represent an intriguing middle ground between eighteenth-century and twentieth-century Shakespeare adaptations, looking back in time for motivation while simultaneously anticipating the formal innovations of the next century.

## Chapter Two

### “...other accents borrow”: Bottomley, Baring, and a new approach to adaptation

In 1597, the Burbage family lost its lease on the land that The Theatre was standing on in the north end of London. They lost the land, but still owned the building. Their solution was to take the building apart, beam by beam, and move it piecemeal across the river to a new location. Once there, they rebuilt the theatre, beam for beam, and re-named it the Globe (Gurr 46, Hartnoll 818-819, Shapiro 2-7). Despite its new name, it was the same theatre, albeit in a new setting. Consider this as an analogy for adaptation before the twentieth century. The theatre represents Shakespeare's *King Lear*. For years, playwrights like Davenant and Tate simply took apart Shakespeare's play, line by line, and rebuilt it after the same fashion, in a slightly different setting. The setting may have changed, and perhaps some of the details, but the play still remained fundamentally the same.

But what if the Burbages had changed their minds? What if, instead of rebuilding the theatre, they used those beams for another purpose, perhaps to build something entirely different? What if the Burbages had taken only some of the original beams to use in their reconstruction? Or what if there had been a fire, a calamity that destroyed much of the original structure so that the only materials left were fragments of the original? These more confounding reconstructions represent twentieth-century adaptation, a new and more complicated process than any we have seen before, and one that entails a much more problematic relationship with Shakespeare's texts. Inherent in this process is both a figurative collaboration with the source and a summary rejection of

that source, as well as a fundamental understanding that the source can never be wholly reconstituted.

The purpose of this chapter is to show the innovative nature of early twentieth-century Shakespeare adaptations, to examine their difference in kind and motivation from earlier works, as well as to understand the methodological debt they owe to Shakespeare criticism from the late nineteenth century. Using works by Gordon Bottomley, Maurice Baring, and Tom Stoppard, I will show how the double gesture of modern adaptation emerges in this period as playwrights simultaneously collaborate with and reject Shakespeare's precursor texts.

Each of these adaptations shares a common methodological approach: each treats Shakespeare's characters as if they were real people, real enough to exist *outside* of Shakespeare's text. Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife* (1913) portrays Lear, Goneril, and Cordelia in a time before Shakespeare's play; Baring's *Dead Letters* (1910) includes a letter written from Goneril to her sister; and Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966) dramatizes characters from *Hamlet* in their off-stage lives. In each adaptation, characters escape their dramatic contexts and are given new life outside of Shakespeare's text. This methodology owes a considerable debt to the work of character critics. Tracing the development of character criticism from its roots in the eighteenth century, I will begin the chapter by examining how this methodology developed and the impact it had on later adaptations of Shakespeare. By the twentieth century, the critical habit of treating Shakespeare's characters as real people had so permeated the collective imagination that it began to appear in adaptations. Beginning with Bottomley's play, I

will follow this creative articulation of character criticism as it moves from sincerity into satire.

At the same time, I will demonstrate how adaptation techniques changed and how the adaptive gesture itself evolved as it moved into the twentieth century. In Bottomley we begin to see techniques used in later adaptations of Shakespeare, in particular, the use of character to act as a bridge between the adapted text and the source work. In *King Lear's Wife*, Bottomley uses the characters of Goneril and Lear to evoke Shakespeare's play, so that while an audience is aware of the real narrative they are watching on stage, they are invited to recall the remembered or imagined narrative of *King Lear*. Characters bridge the two stories, bringing new meaning to each. In *King Lear's Wife*, these two narratives happen to be consistent – their language, themes, and settings merging without dissonance – so that meaning can flow easily back and forth between the two. As a result, Shakespeare's work enhances Bottomley's and Bottomley's work enhances Shakespeare; it is an unproblematic gesture that celebrates Shakespeare, and reinforces the canonical status quo.

In contrast, later adaptors offer a more challenging relationship. Using Bottomley's bridging technique, playwrights use characters to transmit meaning back and forth between the adapted and source texts, but they play up the dissonance between the real narrative and the remembered Shakespearean narrative. This process, more complicated than Bottomley's, constitutes an ironic double gesture that both evokes Shakespeare and rejects him at the same time. To differentiate this double gesture from other adaptive practices, this chapter will briefly consider the work of Bottomley's

contemporary, Maurice Baring. While Baring's essay adaptation, *Dead Letters*, is not a theatrical adaptation of Shakespeare – and thus not suitable for primary consideration in this study – it serves as a good foil for Bottomley, illustrating the role of irony and dissonance that characterizes the more complex double gesture of modern adaptation. Using Baring's gesture as a model, the chapter will conclude with the work of Tom Stoppard whose adaptation both mimics the methodology of character critics and incorporates the more complicated double gesture of adaptation which is typical of the twentieth century.

Most critics trace character criticism to its roots in the late eighteenth century and the works of Maurice Morgann, Thomas Whately, and William Richardson. In *Shakespearean Constitutions* Jonathan Bate identifies these three as the founding fathers of character criticism, as does David Nicol Smith in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, and Brian Vickers in "The Emergence of Character Criticism." But Vickers also writes that

The writers of this period, in which character criticism began to exist as a critical method, certainly demonstrate some of its weaknesses: some neglect the experience of drama; Morgann is hyper-ingenious; Richardson too heavy-handed and dismissive in his moral judgments. (21)

While Vickers does acknowledge that the examination of individual characters did lead to a better understanding of Shakespeare, his dismissive attitude towards character critics is typical of many twentieth-century critics, critics who hold Morgann, Whately, and Richardson responsible for a type of criticism that is often branded as naive and unsophisticated.

This section will take issue with two of the assumptions cited above by suggesting that character criticism has deeper roots than is generally acknowledged, in the creative character work of David Garrick, and that the weaknesses so frequently ascribed to early character critics like Morgann, Whately, and Richardson are less prevalent than is conventionally thought. By arguing against the critics of character criticism, my hope is to establish a more concise theory of influence than currently exists for this form of criticism, and a better understanding of the impact that this criticism had on adaptations of Shakespeare in the early twentieth century.

To begin, I will consider David Garrick's influence on the development of character criticism, in particular his deliberate and creative mis-use of character in the pageant he wrote for the Stratford Jubilee (1769). The critic Frank Halliday shares my opinion that character criticism was influenced by Garrick. In *Shakespeare and his Critics*, he makes a brief but significant reference to the link between character criticism and Garrick.

This interest in the characters may have been stimulated by Garrick, with whose productions of Shakespeare – he produced twenty-four of the plays at Drury Lane between 1747 and 1776 – the period coincided. Not only did he bring to the stage a new naturalism in place of the old declamatory style of acting, but he abandoned many of the Restoration versions of the plays and restored much of the original text, though he was guilty of an egotistic adaptation of *Hamlet* with rather more of the prince and none of the 'grossieretes abominables' of the grave-diggers, and he made new and pretty adaptations of three or four of the comedies. He did much to popularize Shakespeare. (14)

Halliday seems to attribute Garrick's influence on character criticism to his naturalistic style of acting and his restoration of Shakespeare's plays. This connection is not particularly obvious, nor does Halliday expand on it. The connection is there, if it is explored a little: Garrick's naturalism would have transformed any one of Shakespeare's

characters from a dramatic caricature into what would have seemed like a real person, living and moving on the stage. Once a character seems real, it is easier to imagine that character living independently of its dramatic context. It is easier, for example, to imagine Othello fretting about a handkerchief *off-stage* if he seems to be a real person fretting about it *on-stage*. Garrick's naturalism enabled a new understanding of characters as real people as opposed to dramatic figures. Likewise, Garrick's restoration of Shakespeare's plays, while not an immediately obvious influence on later character criticism, popularized Shakespeare and led to the familiarity with his characters that was foundational to character criticism.

Despite the connections Halliday makes between Garrick and character criticism, he makes no mention of Garrick's own writing. The character pageant that Garrick wrote for the Stratford Jubilee, later called *The Jubilee* (1769), is an obvious influence on later character criticism. More so than his naturalistic acting style or his restorative work on Shakespeare, Garrick's pageant reflects both an understanding of characters as real people and a desire to give life to them beyond their dramatic works or theatrical contexts.

Set in Stratford in September 1769, the Jubilee, or Shakspeare Commemoration Festival, was notable for many things, not least of which was the fact that no single Shakespeare play was performed. Instead, Garrick planned a pageant of characters, parading, declaiming, and mingling their way in a moving spectacle through Stratford. Desdemona paraded by the Jubilee crowds somewhere after Hamlet and before Prince Hal, perhaps waving her handkerchief and smiling up at Othello. For Garrick, these

characters had a life of their own; parading them through the streets of Stratford, outside of the theatre and outside of their Shakespearean sources, was not inconceivable. His pageant was a celebration of the fact that Shakespeare's characters could exist and be recognizable outside of their dramatic contexts. In the most rudimentary way, Garrick's pageant anticipated character criticism by reifying characters like Desdemona: that is to say, by scripting a life for her along the streets of Stratford-upon-Avon, and outside of her dramatic context in *Othello*. In doing so, Garrick hinted at a complete life for Desdemona outside of the play, a livelihood that entailed psychology, motivation, and personality independent of Shakespeare and the stage.

Unfortunately, the pageant was a notorious disaster, sidelined by the massive rain storms that flooded the streets of Stratford. Later, the ever enterprising Garrick remounted the pageant as *The Jubilee* (1769), a musical afterpiece at Drury Lane that wowed London audiences and ran a remarkable 152 times. In *Reinventing Shakespeare*, Taylor notes that the *Jubilee*'s run surpassed the runs of all but three Shakespeare plays performed at the same time (119), proving that Shakespeare's characters could indeed lead successful, lucrative stage lives outside of their Shakespearean contexts.

The connection between Garrick's pageant and character criticism, particularly the criticism of the Victorian period that so notoriously took Shakespeare's characters out of context, may seem indirect. By making this connection, I am not suggesting that Garrick's work was critical in any capacity; but his work does reflect a tendency to view characters as real people, a tendency that was later embraced by character critics in their attempts to explain personality and motivation in Shakespeare's plays. What

distinguishes Garrick from later character critics is that his tendency to reify characters manifested itself creatively, in an artistic representation of the lives that these characters lived outside of their plays. This same tendency, manifested critically not creatively, ultimately formed the methodological basis of character criticism. This distinction between the *creative* and the *critical* manifestations of an idea is important as it relates directly to the works of later playwrights such as Bottomley, Stoppard, and Ann-Marie MacDonald who transform the critical idea of characters-as-real-people back into creative practice, in a new age that transforms Shakespearean criticism into Shakespearean adaptation.

Seven years after the Jubilee, Garrick retired. The following year, 1777, Maurice Morgann published his *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*, the work that is widely regarded as the beginning of character criticism. Morgann's work coincides with a new critical approach to Shakespeare that blossomed in the late eighteenth century. In his introduction to *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, David Nichol Smith describes this shift as a transition from textual to character criticism:

The third quarter of the eighteenth century, and not the first quarter of the nineteenth, is the true period of transition in Shakespearian criticism. The dramatic rules had been finally deposed. The corrected plays were falling into disfavour, and though Shakespeare's dramas were not yet acted as they were written, more respect was being paid to the originals. [...] At the same time there is a far-reaching change in the literary appreciations of Shakespeare, which announces the school of Coleridge and Hazlitt: his *characters* now become the main topics of criticism. (xxxii)

In his essay on "The Emergence of Character Criticism, 1774-1800," Brian Vickers corroborates Smith's sense that a change occurred in the late eighteenth century. "The critics abandon discussion of plot or language," he writes of this period, "and write

simply about the people of Shakespeare's creation" (12). He goes on to write that the "best critical work of the period was produced in responding to Shakespeare's characters" (12). L.C. Knights, while similarly acknowledging a shift in focus in late eighteenth-century Shakespeare studies, was less sanguine than Vickers about the value of character criticism:

Since Shakespeare criticism began, people have praised Shakespeare for the lifelikeness of his characters. But it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that Shakespeare's remarkable power to make his men and women convincing led to a more and more exclusive concentration on those features of the *dramatis personae* that could be defined in terms appropriate to characters in real life. (*Further*187)

Knights' use of the term "characters in real life" addresses the substance of the quarrel that opponents of character criticism would later find with the genre.

The term "character criticism" seems broad and obvious enough; there are many critics who have discussed and continue to discuss character in Shakespeare. Yet more recently the term has been applied dismissively in reference to a specific type of criticism that treated Shakespeare's characters as if they were real people with complete psychologies and motivations, and with lives and personalities independent of their dramatic context. In *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille*, Benedetto Croce refers to the latter type of character criticism as "objectivist criticism," a practice he defines as detaching Shakespeare's characters from their plays and transferring them into a "pretended objective field, as though they were made of flesh and blood" (312-313). Adrian Poole describes the ideology behind objectivist character criticism and the problems that it leads to in *Shakespeare and the Victorians*:

the reader's and spectator's sense that they [characters] have, as we say, 'a life of their own' is reinforced by belief in the other worlds they inhabit off-stage – not

just an inner world of memory and desire but the real space and time that they share with others. These other worlds (past, future, elsewhere) create the sense that both characters and stories enjoy a certain 'freedom of movement', but we also recognize this liberty to be curtailed by something else called plot. (82)

In his biographical introduction to *Maurice Morgann: Shakespeare Criticism*, Daniel Fineman is even more explicit than Poole on the problems that objectivist criticism can cause. He uses the term "objectivist fallacy" to draw attention to the erroneousness of this critical practice, of "the over-refined psychologizing of dramatic characters" (29). The term "objectivist fallacy" will be helpful in distinguishing the character-as-person type of character criticism that developed in the late eighteenth century, and which will be the focus in this chapter, from more general and less errant discussions of character which persist in Shakespeare criticism to this day.

Writing at the end of the eighteenth century, Maurice Morgann is traditionally regarded as one of the first objectivist character critics, although the extent of his complicity in the objectivist fallacy has recently been brought into question. For years, critics from David Nichol Smith (1928) to Brian Vickers (1981) have regarded Morgann as the founding father of the erroneous critical practice of analyzing Shakespeare's characters as if they were real people. In his introduction to Morgann's *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777), Smith articulates the conventionally held belief that

[the essay] is the true forerunner of the romantic criticism of Shakespeare. Morgann's attitude to the characters is the same as Coleridge's and Hazlitt's; his criticism, neglecting all formal matters, resolves itself into a study of human nature. It was he who first said that Shakespeare's creations should be treated as historic rather than as dramatic beings. (xxxvii)

Despite Smith's claims, Morgann's essay gives only the initial impression that the author considers characters as living or "historic" persons. His defense of Falstaff hints at psychology and motivation in a way that could only loosely be interpreted as a belief that Falstaff was real. The passage that Smith and most other critics refer to when associating Morgann with objectivist criticism occurs in a note:

If the characters of *Shakespeare* are thus *whole*, and as it were original, while those of almost all other writers are mere imitation, it may be fit to consider them rather as Historic than Dramatic beings; and, when occasion requires, to account for their conduct from the *whole* of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed. (T62n)

Morgann's use of terms like "latent motives" and "policies not avowed" are what prove problematic. They suggest that Morgann felt there was more to the character of Falstaff than is provided by the text and that he was searching outside of the text for clues to this personality. But the more important phrase to note in this passage is "when occasion requires"; despite his assertion that it *may* be fit to consider characters as historic beings, Morgann does not do so in his analysis of Falstaff, an analysis that remains stringently textually based and utterly conscious of Falstaff's dramatic nature throughout.

A close reading of Morgann suggests that he has been misconstrued by critics. In *Maurice Morgann: Shakespearean Criticism*, Daniel Fineman makes the convincing argument that Morgann's work is less prone to objectivist fallacy than most critics think. Brushing aside the assumptions and generalizations of later critics like Smith, Fineman has revisited Morgann's essay and found little evidence to suggest that Morgann advocated any type of criticism that took a dramatic character out of context. Instead, Fineman writes that

[...] in proving Falstaff no coward [Morgann] is not as is often alleged the trail-blazer for objectivism in Shakespeare criticism, that is to say for the system that extracts a character from its dramatic context and treats it as an independent human being. On the contrary it is precisely in his dramatic context that he studies Falstaff in working out the case for his courage: he seeks constantly to pin down the impressions he conveys or those other characters convey about him. (80)

Fineman is right to note that Morgann bases his analysis of Falstaff's character on actual textual clues, not on any invented ideas about Falstaff's personality. Morgann does not, then, analyze Falstaff as a *real person*, but as a *whole character* created solely by the words and actions of the play: as a dramatic character. Fineman goes on to point out that those sections so commonly quoted as the genesis of objectivist character criticism in Morgann are few and far between and often, in fact, taken out of context.

Although Morgann is often identified as the first critic to write about a character as a living person, and subsequently regarded as a precursor to the Romantics, Fineman dispels these notions. He writes that Morgann is "not clearly proto-Romantic or anything else" but a unique critic writing in a consistently textually-based way about character in Shakespeare. Fineman's distinction is important because it clears Morgann of much disrespect with regard to his criticism, and because it facilitates a clearer understanding of the genealogy of objectivist character criticism. In the context of this chapter, then, which tries to uncover a critical genealogy of the objectivist fallacy and its influence on later playwrights, Morgann must be regarded as peripheral and valued more for his influence on later critics. It remains undeniable that while Morgann himself was not prone to the objectivist fallacy of mistaking a character for a real person, his simple act of focusing meticulously on one character influenced a generation of later critics such as Lamb, Hazlitt, and Bradley who were prone to this style.

Fineman's careful analysis of the *Essay* clears Morgann's work of the objectivist fallacy; the work of Thomas Whately is not as easily dismissed. Best known for his *Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakespeare* (posthumously 1785), Whately's work is fractured and sporadic. He wrote widely on a number of subjects, and broke off what promised to be a useful series on Shakespeare's characters to finish a book on gardening. In *Remarks*, the only book of this series published, he compares the characters of Richard III and Macbeth. Whately makes it clear at the outset that he is describing dramatic characters. "The characters therefore which [Shakespeare] has drawn, are masterly copies from nature," he writes, "differing each from the other, and animated as the originals, though correct to a scrupulous precision" (23); however, he does lapse into the habit of considering these characters as real people. His writing on Richard is particularly prone to the objectivist fallacy, suggesting that he understands Richard to have a fully-formed personality preceding the play. He writes, for example, that "Richard is able to put on a general character, directly the reverse of his disposition; and it is ready to him upon every occasion" (94). Whately's use of the word "disposition" suggests that Richard has an innate character independent of the play that determines his actions and interactions. It reflects Whately's sense that character exists autonomously of the play. Comments such as this have led critics from Smith to Bate and Vickers to identify Whately as one of the founding fathers of objectivist character criticism.

Despite the claims of Smith, Bate, and Vickers, Whately's reputation as an originator of objectivist character criticism must be mitigated by the fact that Whately

regarded Richard III and Macbeth as historic personages. Writing about a historical character as a real person is less of a troublesome critical leap than writing about a purely fictional character as real person, although arguably both historical and fictional characters boil down to dramatic strategies in the context of a play. Regardless, Whately's detractors tend to overlook the fact that the character criticism in *Remarks* concerns figures that he viewed as historical. This complicates any charges against Whately that he treated characters as if they were real people.

In the following passage, for example, Whately does incline towards objectivist criticism in suggesting that that Richard and Macbeth have dispositions independent of the play, but his objectivism is clouded by the fact that he understands the characters to be historically based:

But Shakespere, in conformity to the truth of history, as far as it led him, and by improving upon the fables which have been blended with it, has ascribed opposite principles and motives to the same designs and actions, and various effects to the operation of the same events upon different tempers. [...] From these fables, Shakespere [...] seems to have taken the hint of their several characters; and he has adapted their dispositions so as to give to such fictions, in the days he wrote, a show of probability. (28-29)

It is impossible to know how Whately's understanding of the historical Richard and Macbeth would have influenced his analysis, or how he would have evaluated a character without a historic basis (such as Prospero or Othello). Would Whately have treated these characters as real people if he did not regard them first as historic people? Unfortunately, Whately left his series on Shakespeare's characters unfinished, and gave no clues as to the direction his analysis would have taken when applied to purely dramatic characters.

Despite the gaps in his body of work, and the oversights in the criticism on him, Whately is still regarded as one of the founding fathers of character criticism. Whether or not this appellation is accurate, his influence on later critics is undeniable. Horace Walpole remarked that it was Whately who gave the best comment on Shakespeare's power of characterization, and Edmund Malone included a long excerpt from Whately in his 1790 edition of Shakespeare (Vickers "Emergence" 22, 18).

While Morgann's role in the development of character criticism has been called into question, and Whately's role must be tempered by his understanding of characters as historic personages, the work of William Richardson is less equivocal. Richardson is rightly and universally acknowledged as one of the founding fathers of character criticism (Smith, Vickers, Bate). Of the three early character critics, Richardson was certainly the most prolific, writing *A philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters* in 1774, *Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters of Richard the Third, King Lear, and Timon of Athens* in 1784 to which was added "An Essay on the Faults of Shakespeare" and "Additional Observations on the Character of Hamlet." Soon after, Richardson published *Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff and Imitation of Female Characters* to which were added some general observations on the chief objects of criticism in the works of Shakespeare. Of these works, the most illustrative of Richardson's contribution to character criticism were the 1784 *Essays*.

Richardson designed his *Essays* as a study of human nature. "We must," he wrote, "be attentive to the state and constitution of our own minds; we must discover to what

habits we are most addicted, and of what propensities we ought chiefly to beware [...]"

(4). Beginning with the Delphic prescription to "know thyself," Richardson writes at length about the qualities of the human mind; he acknowledges our difficulty trying to analyze these qualities and our tendency towards partial and inaccurate observations and theories. After conceding that we are liable to err when reflecting on our own minds, he writes that we would benefit from examining those portraits and copies of our minds provided by poets like Shakespeare.

But, by considering the copy and portrait of minds different from our own, and by reflecting on these latent and unexerted principles, augmented and promoted by imagination, we may discover many new tints, and uncommon features. Now, that class of poetical writers that excel by imitating the passions, might contribute in this respect to rectify and enlarge the sentiments of the philosopher: and, if so, they would have the additional merit of conducting us to the temple of truth, by an easier and more agreeable path than of mere metaphysics. (20)

Although Richardson's use of the terms "copies," "portraits," and "imitation" suggests that he understands the purely fictional nature of character, his subsequent examination of Lear, Richard III, and Timon reflects an altogether different understanding. It would be more accurate to consider Richardson's use of the term "minds different from our own" to assess his understanding of characters not as fictional devices but as people.

The sense that characters are real people permeates Richardson's analysis. His description of King Lear, for instance, suggests that he considers the character as a real father. In the passage below, he suggests that Lear is motivated by beliefs and sentiments based on an imagined history for which there is no textual evidence:

Lear, an utter stranger to adverse fortune, and under the power of excessive affection, believed that his children were in every respect deserving. During this ardent and inconsiderate mood, he ascribed to them such corresponding sentiments as justified his extravagant fondness. He saw his children as the gentlest and most affectionate of the human race [...]. (293-294)

Nothing in this passage has any textual basis in Shakespeare. Richardson has extrapolated these ideas from what he *imagined* Lear's character to be; that is, he imagined Lear to be a real enough person to have a full and independent system of beliefs, desires, moods and affections, regardless of the fact that none of these are mentioned in the text.

For Richardson, Lear was more than a dramatic device or a combination of words on a page; he was a person whose actions and reactions were motivated like those of any other person, so much so that Lear could be used as an example of human nature. Like Whately, and to some extent Morgann, Richardson normalized the idea that characters could be analyzed as real people. Their work popularized a methodology that would dominate criticism for the next hundred and fifty years, and set the stage for the Romantic obsession with character that exploded as the century turned.

The Romantic period saw the true birth of objectivist character criticism in the works of Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Samuel Coleridge. Much of the Romantic obsession with character was interwoven into other preoccupations of the period, particularly an interest in making Shakespeare personal, in taking him off the stage and into the reader's imagination. In *Romantic Shakespeare: From Stage to Page*, Younglim Han writes that this desire for a more personal interaction with Shakespeare's characters constituted a marked departure from earlier critical approaches: "The Romantic concept of the reader's empathy with the tragic characters' mental processes was opposed to the neoclassical idea of aesthetic distance advanced by David Hume and Samuel Johnson" (17). Empathy became the mark of the reader's interaction with Shakespeare; empathy

gained through a highly personalized and interactive *reading* experience in which the imagination of the reader commingled with and was heightened by the language of the poet. In *Charles Lamb on Shakespeare* Joan Coldwell ascribes an almost cult-like quality to this interaction: “One feature of the Romantic absorption in Shakespeare was a feeling of personal involvement with him, the belief in an initiate’s intuitive grasp of his meaning”(11-12). She writes that critics like Lamb were by no means alone in their sense of almost mythical identification with Shakespeare. Her terms, “initiation,” “intuition,” and “mythical identification” suggest both the intimacy and the subjectivity of reader / critic’s interaction with Shakespeare in this period.

The desire for a more personal interaction with Shakespeare was partly the result of ambivalence about the public performance of his plays. The early nineteenth century ushered in a new critical age that questioned whether or not the stage could do justice to Shakespeare’s works. In particular, Shakespeare’s tragedies and magical plays were thought to require too much of audiences’ imaginations (Bate *Shakespeare Constitutions* 129). Charles Lamb disparaged Shakespeare on stage, and what he saw as the gross, inept stagecraft that stood in the way of a true understanding of his works. His famous essay “On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation” (1811) suggested that Shakespeare’s plays were best appreciated in the reader’s own imagination and would only suffer diminution on the stage. “It may seem a paradox,” he writes, “but I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakspeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever” (115).

In *Shakespearean Constitutions*, Bate acknowledges Lamb's skepticism about Shakespeare on stage, but argues that Lamb was attacking more the specific conditions of early nineteenth-century stagecraft than the unfitness of Shakespeare for the stage (129-130). Reading Lamb closely, Bate points out that his primary complaints are against the rhetorical excesses of actors like Garrick, their appropriative attitudes towards Shakespeare's plays, and their sense of ownership over certain characters, like Lear (129). Coldwell corroborates Bate's analysis:

[Lamb] knew that his views were shaped in part by the far from ideal conditions of the early nineteenth century theatre, where Shakespeare's own texts were seldom if ever used, where costumes and settings either lacked design or strove too hard for 'realism' and where oratorical method emphasized the artificiality of such conventions as the soliloquy and the aside. (13)

While I agree with Bate and Coldwell that much of Lamb's essay is directed at the specific conditions of early nineteenth-century theatre and that Lamb does a convincing job of explaining why plays like *Lear* were so unperformable in these conditions, both critics overlook the nuances in Lamb's language. For example, Lamb's famous comment (quoted above) is that the plays of Shakespeare are less *calculated* for performance on stage than those of almost any other dramatist (my italics). If Lamb had used a word like "fit" – that the plays of Shakespeare are less *fit* for performance – or "suitable," his comment *would* suggest more that Shakespeare's works were not amenable to modern staging. But Lamb uses the word "calculated," a term that suggests some implied intention on the part of the playwright for the play not to be performed, *not* a deficiency in the capacities of modern staging to perform the play. The choice of words is crucial, and it must draw attention away from Bate's argument that Lamb is really

addressing modern stagecraft and back to the fact that Lamb really did feel that Shakespeare was inherently not intended for the stage.

The quality that struck Lamb as so unsuited to performance in Shakespeare's plays is related to Shakespeare's characterization. For Lamb, there was an interiority, or a psychological inner-ness, to Shakespeare's characters that could only be understood through the intimate concourse of reading, in the privacy of the imagination. In a notable example, Lamb identified the impossibility of acting Lear. "Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on a stage," he wrote ("On the tragedies" 37). On stage, an actor could only hope to convey Lear's physical distress, but this outward show was only a fraction of the profound torment of Lear's inner self. Lamb writes:

So to see Lear acted, -- to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakspeare cannot be acted. [...] The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: [...] It is his mind which is laid bare. [...] On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear, -- we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. ("On the tragedies" 36-37)

Only the mind of the reader and the privacy of the individual imagination could conceive of Lear's psychological distress and the depth of his mental anguish. "What we see upon a stage is body and bodily action," he wrote, "what we are conscious of in reading is almost exclusively the mind, and its movements" ("On the tragedies" 38). Where the stage could only distract the audience from Lear's real despair, Lamb felt that reading alone could unlock Shakespeare's characters and unfold their true natures properly. His

sense that Lear's "mind, and its movements" existed somewhere within and beyond the text reflects his sense that each character had an identity independent of the written word. The ideas hinted at by Morgann, Whately, and Richardson had become the defining features of Lamb's writing and much Romantic thought.

As characters migrated from stage to page in the Romantic period, and into the imaginations of individual readers, they became *more* real and the objects of an unprecedented level of identification among readers. As Lamb said, when we read *Lear*, we enter into the character's "mind, and its movements" (38). But does a character *have* a mind? Isn't a character simply a combination of lines and phrases laid down on paper? At best a dramatic tool? At what point do these devices become a real person? Does it follow that that person has a personality, complete with psychology and motivation, desire and despair? Can this person be evaluated as we would evaluate a real person? Such an analysis, of the "mind, and its movements" of King Lear, would require a type of criticism that treated a character as a real person.

For many Romantic critics, characters must be evaluated as real people in order for them to be understood properly in all their complexity. In "The Question of Character in Shakespeare," in *Further Explorations*, L.C. Knights describes this shift in perception of character in the Romantic period.

It seems true to say that in the nineteenth century Shakespeare's characters became 'real people', and – with varying degrees of relevance – the plays were discussed in terms of the interaction of real people for whom sympathy or antipathy was enlisted. (188-9)

Critics in this period began to imagine personalities, histories, hidden memories and even more hidden desires all in the service of explaining who Shakespeare's characters really

were and why they acted the way they did. In *Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art*, R. A. Foakes describes this process in terms of the emancipation of character. He writes that "the Romantics freed Hamlet the character from the play into an independent existence" (43-44), a comment that aptly sums up the Romantic sense that a character in a Shakespeare play was a real person just waiting to be liberated.

The notion of freeing a character like Hamlet from a play and bringing him into independent existence was not exclusive to criticism. Garrick had initiated the idea of taking characters out of their dramatic contexts in a creative impulse that culminated in his Jubilee. This creative impulse was transformed into critical practice in Whately and Richardson, and into more concrete critical methodology in Lamb. As the nineteenth century progressed, the critical impulse was brought back into creative practice by writers such as Anna Murphy Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke who wrote fanciful narratives around the extra-textual lives of Shakespeare's characters. Both critical and creative, these stories bridge the gap between the critical reification of character in the Romantic period and the creative reification of character in early twentieth-century adaptations.

Jameson's work *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical* is one of the best examples in the Romantic period of the creative impulse to give added dimension to Shakespeare's characters. Published in 1832, it became known more popularly as *Shakespeare's Heroines* and was published under that name in the many subsequent editions issued after Jameson's death in 1860. Read purely as criticism, the work is well-researched; Jameson maintains a strong textual basis for each of her character portraits, references contemporary Shakespearean criticism, and holds on to the

consistency of her argument throughout. As a creative work, *Shakespeare's Heroines* is engaging and unique, colourfully expanding on the personalities of each of Shakespeare's female characters as a way of demonstrating exemplary female behaviour.

Yet when the work is read as a hybrid of both criticism and creativity, it reveals itself as a unique transitional work, uniting the critical practice of character criticism with the creative works it would later influence. In her introduction to *Shakespeare's Heroines*, Cheri Larson Hoeckley identifies the importance of reading Jameson's text as a hybrid, although she sees it less as a hybrid between criticism and creativity than as a hybrid of criticism and conduct manual. She suggests it was the dual nature of the text that allowed Jameson's work to succeed:

Because of its peculiar status as both conduct manual and literary criticism, *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical* or *Shakespeare's Heroines*, allowed Jameson to explore, and ultimately to demonstrate, how Victorian women might creatively and properly move from the household and enter the public sphere [...]. (9)

Hoeckley's analysis of this much-overlooked text is valuable, but her focus on the role of the text in the development of women's subjectivity distracts her from a discussion of Jameson's intriguing place in the history of character criticism. It is as a transition between the work of character critics and later adaptors of Shakespeare that Jameson's work shines.

Like critics before her, Jameson begins her analysis of each character with cues taken from Shakespeare's text; but her analysis quickly becomes more creative than critical as she imagines fully articulated personalities above and beyond what Shakespeare has provided. "[W]e have a perception of innate character apart from all

accidental circumstance” she writes of Cordelia (241). Where Shakespeare only hinted, Jameson has elaborated and refined the idea of “innate character,” creating fully realized women with complex sentiments and motivations.

Although Jameson devotes equal time to all of Shakespeare’s heroines, it is her description of Portia that shows best the leap from textual criticism to creative speculation. Her initial description of Portia does not extrapolate beyond the text.

Portia is endued with her own share of those delightful qualities, which Shakespeare has lavished on many of his female characters; but besides the dignity, the sweetness, and tenderness which should distinguish her sex generally, she is individualized by qualities peculiar to herself; by her high mental powers, her enthusiasm of temperament, her decision of purpose, and her buoyancy of spirit. These are innate. (43)

Jameson’s analysis of Portia as dignified, sweet, and tender is verified by the text.

Further, there is evidence in Shakespeare of Portia’s high mental powers, enthusiasm of temperament, decision of purpose, and buoyancy of spirit. But the term “innate” suggests that Jameson understands Portia’s qualities, not as textual suggestions, but as extensions of the interior life of a real person. The term “innate” prompts a change in Jameson’s description of Portia:

[...] she is the heiress of a princely name and countless wealth; a train of obedient pleasures have ever waited round her; and from infancy she has breathed an atmosphere redolent of perfume and blandishment. Accordingly, there is a commanding grace, a high-bred, airy elegance, a spirit of magnificence in all that she does and says, as one to whom splendour had been familiar from her very birth. She treads as though her footsteps had been among marble palaces, beneath roofs of fretted fold, o’er cedar floors and pavements of jasper and porphyry – amid gardens full of statues, and flowers, and fountains, and haunting music. She is full of penetrative wisdom, and genuine tenderness, and lively wit; but as she has never known want, or grief, or fear, or disappointment, her wisdom is without a touch of the somber or the sad; her affections are all mixed up with faith, hope, and joy; and her wit has not a particle of malevolence or causticity. (43-44)

No amount of textual analysis will reveal a “train of obedient pleasures” or an “atmosphere redolent of perfume and blandishment” surrounding Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. Here, Jameson’s representation of Portia takes leave of its textual basis and becomes a product of the imagination, an imagination deeply influenced by early Victorian notions of class and femininity (Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House* was published shortly afterwards 1854). Envisaging all manner of extra-textual realities from Portia’s upbringing to her deportment, even speculating on the impact that household environment might play upon her temperament, Jameson’s work shows objectivist character criticism at its height. Like character critics before her, Jameson’s sense of Portia as a real person leads to an analysis of character that goes beyond the text.

Despite its dismissal by many twentieth-century critics as fiction rather than criticism, Jameson’s work is important and not simply as an example of the type of “bad” character criticism that speculates needlessly on a character’s lifestyle. Combining the critical methodology of character critics like Lamb and Hazlitt with a unique creative vision, Jameson’s work shows a transition between pure character criticism and the creative work it would later influence. Playwrights like Gordon Bottomley and Tom Stoppard, and the satirist Maurice Baring, whose works operate entirely as creative responses to character criticism, owe an unconscious debt to Jameson for her ability to transcend critical and creative boundaries, and expand character criticism into the creative field.

Like Jameson’s work, Mary Cowden Clarke’s *Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines* (1850-52) shows a unique and highly creative way of engaging with character

criticism. Like Jameson, Cowden Clarke makes Shakespeare's characters seem more real by writing about them beyond their dramatic contexts. Where Jameson exceeded dramatic context was by speculating on a character's past, and imagining emotions and motivations that had no basis in Shakespeare's text. Cowden Clarke exceeds dramatic contexts by making these speculations literal, by writing fictionalized accounts of the lives of Shakespeare's characters outside of his plays. In moving beyond the text, Cowden Clarke, like Jameson, reifies character: that is, she attributes life-like qualities to something that is not inherently alive. In her preface, she states explicitly that her purpose is to provide explanations and motivations to account for the lives of Shakespeare's heroines.

The aim has been to invent such adventures as might be supposed to colour the future lives; to place the heroines in such situations as should naturally lead up to, and account for, the known conclusion of their subsequent confirmed character and after-fate; in short, to invest each story with consistent and *appropriate* interest. (xi)

Cowden Clarke's use of the term "confirmed character" reflects a very specific understanding of character as something that is fixed *beyond or before* its dramatic context; like Jameson's use of the term "innate," it suggests that she sees these characters as real people whose private histories have influenced their personalities independent of – or before – their Shakespearean incarnations.

The first tale in Cowden Clarke's long, five-volume work tells the story of Count Guido di Belmonte who falls in love with Portia, the sister of his good friend Bellario. Portia dies in childbirth, and Guido absconds in despair to leave his young daughter Portia raised by the goodly Bellario, by now a lawyer. The story describes Portia's upbringing, her first meeting with Bassanio, and her father's misplaced attempts to unite

her with an inappropriate suitor, an experience that leads him to establish the adventure of the caskets. Cowden Clarke details the bourgeoning of Portia's beauty and good sense, her love of reading, and outlines the development of her strong moral character. Each small incident in Portia's story is deliberately fabricated in an attempt to explain the character we meet in Shakespeare much in the same way that critics like Richardson and Whately imagined histories and psychologies as part of their critical methodology. Like Jameson, Cowden Clarke articulates in a creative way this critical practice of imagining characters as real people.

It is significant that both *Shakespeare's Heroines* and *Girlhood Lives*, which try to reconcile character criticism with creative work, are written by women and for women. Gender has been a defining feature in the creation of this unique methodology. To some extent, these works were written to accommodate the fact that women readers, particularly young women readers, were not considered up to the task of Shakespeare criticism. They set out to take the edge off Shakespeare by approaching his works creatively, not critically, and by placing his works more directly into the context of women's experiences in the mid-nineteenth century. Writing as women and for women meant that Jameson and Cowden Clarke were writing from positions and for audiences outside of academia. This allowed them certain liberties; their works were neither expected nor intended to adhere to the same formats and standards; and their audiences were more comfortable reading fiction than criticism. These factors all contributed to the creation of a unique genre. But gender has also played a role in the critical reception of these works. *Shakespeare's Heroines* and *Girlhood Lives* have been dismissed because of their female authorship and audience, and because of the hard-to-define nature of the

genre. Unlike other nineteenth-century Shakespeare critics, like William Hazlitt or A.C. Bradley who were men writing *within* clearly defined disciplines, Jameson and Cowden Clarke are rarely mentioned in the canon of Shakespeare criticism. They have slipped through the cracks of literary criticism with the result that their unique contribution to the history of character criticism has been overlooked.

The impulse to soften Shakespeare was not unique to Jameson or Cowden Clarke. Their work is typical of a trend in the nineteenth century that began with the work of Mary and Charles Lamb in 1807. Their *Tales from Shakespeare*, like Henrietta Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare* (1807) and Caroline Maxwell's *Juvenile Edition of Shakespeare* (1828) aimed to make Shakespeare more accessible and appropriate for younger readers. These were followed up with Elizabeth Macauley's *Tales for the Drama* (1833), Amelia E. Barr's *The Young People of Shakespeare's Dramas: for Youthful Readers* (1882), Helen Faucit's *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (1885), and Mary Macleod's *The Shakespeare Story-Book* (1902). These works are fascinating intersections of Shakespeare criticism and societal strictures and worthy of study in their own right, but their tendency is simply to transcribe Shakespeare's plays into prose fiction rather than to engage creatively with his characters in the manner of Jameson or Cowden Clarke. Consequently these works do not have the same transitional qualities that Jameson and Cowden Clarke's work show between character criticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and creative character adaptation of the early twentieth century.

*Shakespeare's Heroines* and *Girlhood Lives* acted as transitional works between the critical methodology of Richardson and Lamb and the creative character-based adaptations of the early twentieth century; however, it would be wrong to think that they signaled the end of character criticism. As a critical practice, character criticism did not reach its height until the end of the nineteenth century with the work of its most acclaimed proponent, Andrew Cecil (A. C.) Bradley. Bradley is widely regarded as the culmination of character criticism, and in the context of this study, the critic most responsible for setting the stage for the creative adaptations of character that would follow almost immediately upon his writing.

In her definitive book, *A.C. Bradley and His Influence in Twentieth-Century Shakespeare Criticism*, Katherine Cooke writes that Bradley is important if for nothing else than the fact that he exhausted character criticism. P.N. Siegel similarly writes:

Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* came after nearly a century of analysis of Shakespeare's characters and of attempts to extract aesthetic and ethical systems from his plays. Although much of this is worthless romantic impressionism, German pedantry, and Victorian moralizing, the work of such men as Coleridge, Hazlitt, Schlegel and Dowden furnished valuable critical insights that Bradley used in his book, which culminates the tradition. (*Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise*, New York, 1957, viii-ix. Qtd. in Cooke 64).

Bradley excelled at the type of character criticism that analyzed characters as real people. To use Fineman's term, he embraced the objectivist fallacy, and he did so with an unself-conscious exuberance rarely seen in criticism before. Famous for his elaborate notes, with titles like "Where was Hamlet at the time of his father's death?", "Did Emilia suspect Iago?", and "When was the murder of Duncan first plotted?" Bradley questioned, imagined, and extrapolated the lives of Shakespeare's characters well beyond their texts.

In *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth* (1904) Bradley shows his particular tendency to go beyond the text to explain what characters think and feel. Examples of this type of character reification in Bradley's work are too numerous to cover; his description of Cordelia from *King Lear* is typical.

Bradley writes:

Of all Shakespeare's heroines she knew the least of joy. She grew up with Goneril and Regan for sisters. Even her love for her father must have been mingled with pain and anxiety. She must early have learned to school and repress emotion. She never knew the bliss of young love: there is no trace of such love for the King of France. She had knowingly to wound most deeply the being dearest to her. He cast her off; and, after suffering an agony for him, and before she could see him safe in death, she was brutally murdered. (265)

Some of Bradley's description is textually verifiable – Cordelia does suffer an agony for Lear and she is brutally murdered – but much of it is derived from an imaginative extrapolation of the character beyond her text. Bradley cannot know anything about the quality of Cordelia's love for her father, whether it is mingled with pain and anxiety, nor that she had to learn early on to repress emotion. These sentiments are not mentioned in the text, the only verifiable source of evidence for Cordelia's character, but derive solely from Bradley's imaginative exercise.

Another example from *King Lear* shows the consistency of Bradley's representation and analysis of Shakespeare's characters as real people, which often strains logic. In his description of Kent, he writes:

One fact about Kent is often overlooked. He is an old man. He tells Lear that he is eight and forty, but it is clear that he is much older; [...] If his age is not remembered, we fail to realize the full beauty of his thoughtlessness of himself, his incessant care of the King, his light-hearted indifference to fortune or fate. (256)

Here Bradley's character criticism succumbs to the objectivist fallacy; he goes so far in his belief that Kent is an old man that he denies the evidence of the text. Shakespeare is explicit in identifying Kent's age: "I have years on my back forty-eight," he says (1.4.39). Yet Bradley dismisses this reference, this strong and undeniable textual evidence, because it undermines his own argument about Kent's character, an argument that was based on a speculation to begin with.

Bradley's work is detailed and exhaustive and, despite its tendency to subordinate Shakespeare's work to his own, rightly culminates the tradition of character criticism. His influence was vast, as Guy Boas' satirical rhyme published in 1926 in the *Lays of Learning* suggests:

I dreamt last night that Shakespeare's ghost  
 Sat for a Civil Service post;  
 The English paper for the year  
 Had several questions on *King Lear*  
 Which Shakespeare answered very badly  
 Because he had not read his Bradley.

What is often overlooked is Bradley's role as a transitional figure. Although positioned chronologically between the Victorian and Edwardian periods, he is often described as "the last of the Romantic critics" (Cooke 65), ideologically bridging the gap between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Methodologically, Bradley represents yet another type of transition. His analysis, while based on close reading, is more creative than critical; like the work of Jameson and Cowden Clarke it unites the creative impulse begun by Garrick with the critical methodology of Richardson and Lamb, and anticipates the creative character-based adaptations of Shakespeare that emerge in the early twentieth century.

This analysis of character criticism, from Garrick to Bradley, may seem tangential to a discussion of Shakespeare adaptations, but it is my contention that adaptations of the early twentieth century borrowed heavily on the work of character critics. Unlike the adaptations of Tate and Garrick which revolved primarily around plot and aesthetics, early twentieth-century adaptations took an interest in character, in psychology and motivation, and in the life-like-ness of character that was new and altogether different than their predecessors. Writing in sympathy with character criticism, or ironically against it, adaptations of the early twentieth century revealed the extent to which Shakespeare criticism informed Shakespeare adaptations.

In *Reinventing Shakespeare*, Gary Taylor quotes Virginia Woolf's comment that "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" (231). He also identifies 1910 as the year that the International Psycho-Analytical Association was founded, a movement that would forever change our understanding of personality, motivation, desire, and consequently character. Taylor's essay is about the end of character criticism. He uses Woolf's comment and the development of psychoanalysis to mark the end of an outdated understanding of character and theatre. But Taylor's analysis fails to convey the more nuanced way that character criticism survived. In many ways, psychoanalysis was an institutionalized manifestation of the same impulse that motivated character criticism. It gave the world a pseudo-scientific discourse with which to discuss the impulses – desire, fear, anxiety, resentment – that motivated human beings and which character critics had used to analyze dramatic characters. Psychoanalysis does not signal the end of

character criticism, as Taylor would suggest, but rather a more complicated transformation of the methodology from literary criticism into pseudo-scientific practice.

As the methodology of character criticism began to escape the boundaries of literary criticism, it impacted more than the scientific arts. Taylor may be right in suggesting that character criticism had expired as an academic exercise, but his analysis overlooks the way in which character criticism persisted in dramatic and literary arts, not critically but *creatively*. Transforming the critical methodology of Richardson and Bradley into purely creative impulses, novelists and playwrights of the early twentieth century incorporated character criticism into their works.

Cooke ends her analysis of Bradley by saying that he affected Shakespeare studies if for nothing else than the fact that he exhausted character criticism, forcing every subsequent critic to explore new ways of analyzing Shakespeare. Like Taylor, Cooke argues that character criticism had been done to death by the twentieth century as a *critical methodology*, but she overlooks the impact that the criticism had on the creative work of the period. In the early twentieth century character criticism migrated back into the theatre. Gordon Bottomley's play *King Lear's Wife* is the first and most obvious example of a play that articulates the critical methodology of character criticism into creative practice.

Written in 1913, *King Lear's Wife* was first performed at Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Theatre on September 25, 1915, and at His Majesty's Theatre in London in May 1916. The London production, directed by John Drinkwater, featured Lady Beerbohm Tree as Hygd and Viola Tree as Goneril (Cohn 250). In his introduction

to Bottomley's *Poems and Plays*, Claude Colleer Abbott writes that the play "was received with acclamation as a masterpiece and performed with success" (16). In one of the few recent articles on Bottomley, "'How fine a play was Mrs. Lear': The case for Gordon Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*," Richard Foulkes describes the positive reception the play received. He cites a telegram from Edward Marsh, the general editor of a series of poetry anthologies called *Georgian Poetry*, proclaiming the play "a masterpiece" (129). Marsh later wrote:

I expected a great deal – but it has surpassed all that I had hoped or imagined – it is one of the great things . . . It seemed hardly possible beforehand that a play about Lear should not find itself in a slightly false position! But yours can hold up its head against any such thought. (qtd. Foulkes 129)

Foulkes also notes contemporary reviews of *King Lear's Wife* that were not positive. An unsigned review in the *Times Literary Supplement* on December 9, 1915 criticized Bottomley's indulgence in ugliness "for the sake of ugliness, as if it were interesting in itself" (qtd. Foulkes 129), and on December 15, 1915 the *New Statesman* identified the recurrence of horror as particularly unsettling. "The unenthusiastic reception in Birmingham," Foulkes writes, "was partly because [the play] was inadequately acted, but mainly because of the play itself." He admits: "One critic found it utterly ill-suited to the time" (135).

Little else is known about the performance history of *King Lear's Wife* after the 1915 season. The London costuming firm B. J. Simmons & Co. record a production of *King Lear's Wife* in 1922 but they do not provide a venue, and Leslie Lee Francis records that the play toured briefly in the United States with Ellen Van Volkenburg in conjunction with the Chicago Little Theatre sometime around 1918. In 1936, Australian

composer Horace Keats set a section of Bottomley's play to music. The short piece composed for voice and piano was called *Goneril's Lullaby* (Publications by Wirripang). Perhaps drawing on the relative success of *King Lear's Wife*, Bottomley later wrote a similar prequel to *Macbeth*. Published in 1921, *Gruach* tells the story of Macbeth's wife before the events of Shakespeare's play. Despite the early popularity of Bottomley's adaptations, his work has since been overlooked by critics and is rarely performed today.

Bottomley was only thirty-nine in 1913 when he wrote *King Lear's Wife*, but by all reports his dramatic vision tended to look back to the aesthetics of the previous century rather than forward towards the styles and ideologies of the new. In particular, he identified himself with the Arts and Crafts movement of the 1890s and the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Rossetti (Causey xii). In *Poet and Painter*, Andrew Causey writes: "at the onset of modernism Bottomley, who reached intellectual maturity in the 1890s, was committed to themes and styles of expression that soon began to look old-fashioned" (xii).

Bottomley's identification with the "old-fashioned" criticism and aesthetics of the nineteenth century is particularly evident in the staging of his work. His interest in a more private and personal *King Lear*, reflected in the intimacy of the play's setting and narrative, is almost Romantic. Capitalizing on the notable absence in *King Lear* of references to Lear's wife – there is only one brief mention of her in 2.4.130 – Bottomley uses the opportunity of dramatizing this character, named Hygd, to imagine a younger, more domesticated Lear. Although the play is intended as a prequel to *King Lear*, it tends to shun the broad scope of Shakespeare's tragedy to focus instead on the last few

hours of Hygd's life as she dies, neglected and bitter, from a lingering illness in bed. Like the time-frame, the cast is small; to Lear and Goneril, Bottomley adds Hygd and her serving women, Merryn and Gormflaith. The only references to *King Lear* are the play's title and character names, and except for the similarity in language and meter, and the occasional prescient image, Bottomley makes no allusions to any Shakespearean aftermath.

Bottomley's decision to set the play within the close confines of a domestic space is significant, reflecting as it does the intimacy of the action. In contrast to Shakespeare's play, which covers a broad range of settings – from Lear's palace, to the houses of Goneril and Regan, the heath, and finally to France and the cliffs of Dover – Bottomley's setting is whittled down to claustrophobic proportions: a single bedchamber, with a bed, and a chair. A crown hangs from a peg in the wall. The intimacy of the setting reflects the intimacy of the action. Where Shakespeare's play spanned a series of interconnected familial, political, and psychological themes, Bottomley's focus is exclusively domestic. Like his contraction of space and time around the bedchamber, he pares *King Lear* down to a single narrative thread. Eliminating all references to the Gloucester narrative, and to the civil war or war with France, Bottomley focuses on Lear's private life, going so far as to condense Lear's personal troubles to his relationship with his wife and Goneril. As Hygd slowly perishes on stage, Lear and Goneril struggle to come to terms with her death. They also struggle over Lear's unconcealed infidelity and massive narcissism, Goneril's indignant rage, and Cordelia's selfish petulance. The play's emphasis is entirely on character within a domesticated space, trying to discover what about a character's personal history makes him act the way he does.

Bottomley's examination of motive in *Lear* harkens back to one of the foundational principles of character criticism. *King Lear* posed a particular challenge for character critics because Shakespeare had excised so much of the motive from his plot. Critics were left wondering: why is Lear so belligerent? Why is Cordelia his favourite? Why is Goneril so angry towards her father and Cordelia? Character critics sought explanations for these problems in the imagined psyches of Lear, Cordelia, and Goneril, psyches they fabricated from faint textual clues which they elaborated on and then dissected. Bradley attributed Lear's belligerence to

a long life of absolute power, in which he has been flattered to the top of his bent, [which] has produced in him that blindness to human limitations, and that presumptuous self-will, which in Greek tragedy we have so often seen stumbling against the altar of Nemesis. (232)

Bradley's analysis of *Lear* is typical of objectivist character criticism in that it imagines that each character has a complete and independent personality, above and beyond – or in this case, before – Shakespeare's play.

Bottomley's play takes a similar approach, but rather than simply imagining Lear's "long life of absolute power" as Bradley does, Bottomley brings that fantasy to life: transforming Bradley's critical methodology into creative practice. Bottomley's play is packed with these dramatic realizations of personality and motive. His prequel establishes motivation for much of Shakespeare's drama. Portrayed as a "great, golden-bearded man in the full maturity of life" (6), Lear is arrogant, narcissistic, and cruel. He flaunts his barely-concealed affair with the young maid Gormflaith in front of his wife, Hygd, who lies on her death bed for the duration of the play. Cordeil is described as an evil child, conceived in desperation to keep Lear from straying. Hygd says:

Because a woman gives herself for ever  
 Cordeil the useless had to be conceived  
 (Like an after-thought that deceives nobody)  
 To keep her father from another woman. (18)

Selfish and spoiled by her father, Cordeil is scorned and ignored by Goneril, who in turn hates her father for his abuse of her mother. Goneril finds her own anger at Lear disquieting, and is driven to violence. She tells her mother about trapping a rabbit:

I hunted it, I caught it up to me  
 As I outsprang it, and with this thin knife  
 Pierced it from eye to eye; and it was dead,  
 Untorn, unsullied, and with flawless fur.  
 Then my untroubled mind came back to me. (15)

Goneril's resentment towards Cordeil and Lear is justifiable in Bottomley's context of family dysfunction. Her violent outbursts are portrayed as the only way she can control her rage and regain her mental equilibrium, anticipating her violence against Gloucester in Shakespeare's play. When Goneril's anger finally explodes and she kills Gormflaith, she commits an act that forever costs her the affection of her father while simultaneously binding her to Lear in mutual vice. Lear says:

While your blind virgin power still stood apart  
 In an unused, unviolated life,  
 You judged me in my weakness, and because  
 I felt you unflawed I could not answer you;  
 But you have mingled in mortality  
 And violently begun the common life  
 By fault against your fellows; and the state  
 The state of Britain that inheres in me  
 Not touched by my humanity or sin,  
 Passions or privy acts, shall be as hard  
 And savage to you as to a murderess. (46)

As the play closes, Goneril, Lear, and Cordeil are poised to enact *King Lear*.

*King Lear's Wife* makes every effort to explain what is left unexplained in Shakespeare's play. One contemporary reviewer, S.P.B. Mais, remarked in *Nineteenth Century* (November 1916) that Bottomley neatly supplies everything that is lacking in Shakespeare:

In point of fact, anyone who has for years been troubled by the earlier play will recognize at once how much the new one clears up the ground. It is impossible to re-read "King Lear" after finishing "King Lear's Wife" without noticing again and again points that used to puzzle the imagination, now made perfectly plain. (qtd. Foulkes 130)

Why is Lear so lukewarm towards Goneril in *King Lear*? She killed his mistress in *King Lear's Wife*. Why is Goneril so angry towards her father and Cordelia? Bottomley suggests that Lear slowly killed her mother with cruelty and contempt; her mother hated having to conceive Cordelia to keep Lear's interest. Like character critics from the previous century, Bottomley imagines Shakespeare's characters as real people, and so he imagines that they must have motivation. His play brings this motivation to life in moments of jealousy, resentment, and revenge, moments that justify later actions in Shakespeare's play.

The character of the physician, in particular, draws our attention to the deeper, psychological issues that motivate the action in Bottomley's play. The character is more psychologist than doctor. "Doctors are ever itching to be priests," Lear says. "Meddling in conduct, natures, life's privacies" (9). It is the physician who suggests that Hygd's illness is psychological; he implies that she is dying because of despair caused by Lear's infidelity with her serving woman Gormflaith. He says:

I have seen women creep into their beds  
And sink with this blind pain because they nursed  
Some bitterness or burden in the mind

That drew the life, sucklings too long at breast.  
Do you know such a cause in this poor lady? (8-9).

It is no coincidence that the burden on Hygd's mind that drew her life is associated with a suckling child. Bottomley's use of metaphors and motivations is pointedly psychoanalytical. The passage, quoted earlier, in which Lear charges Goneril with murder displays complicated feelings about sexuality, violence, and family, conflating Goneril's mortal sin with Lear's sexual sinning. Gormflaith becomes the link that binds the two characters, one through violence, the other through sex, in a weird, pseudo-incestuous relationship that hints at Freud's theories of father / daughter love. As Taylor noted, the International Psycho-Analytical Foundation was newly founded in 1910, and the first book on psychoanalysis was published in English in 1912, popularizing many of Freud's theories and influencing a generation of artists. Not surprisingly, psychoanalysis permeated Shakespeare studies. In *Shakespeare and his Critics*, Frank Ernest Halliday writes that 1910 saw "the first application of the new science to the study of Shakespeare's characters with Dr. Ernest Jones's *The Oedipus Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery*" (33). Rather than replacing character criticism, psychoanalysis lent authority and science to the idea that a character could have complex emotional and behavioural patterns. "Even more thoroughly than Bradley," Halliday writes, "Dr. Jones was treating Hamlet as though he were a real person, a patient in his consulting-room" (33).

In light of the new pseudo-science of psychoanalysis, Bottomley could not have chosen a better play to adapt than *King Lear*. Madness, father / daughter love, latent sexuality, murder, and the absent-dead mother at the heart of it all: all of these have

profound relevance in Freud's writing. Bottomley incorporates each of these elements into his own play, using the prequel as a vehicle for dramatizing Freud's theories about motivation and desire. Borrowing, then, from the period's most popular critical approaches to Shakespeare – character criticism and psychoanalysis – Bottomley's representation of King Lear's early life turns criticism into practice with great success.

To write such a prelude to *Lear* was a bold stroke, to avoid being smothered by Shakespeare's mantle was a triumph. *King Lear's Wife* is a drama in its own right, powerful, swift, compact and sure, calling out for performance, so individual, musical and dramatically skilful is the blank verse. (Colleer Abbott 16)

Bottomley's adaptation of *King Lear* was, to use Colleer Abbott's words, a bold stroke, commendable not only for tackling the behemoth legend of Lear but for the creative mis-use of critical methodologies, as well.

Part of Bottomley's success lay in his ability to create an autonomous work of art, one that could operate both dependently and independently of Shakespeare's text. To create the distance needed to operate independently, Bottomley set his play *before* Shakespeare's, giving him the illusion of dramatic precedence over Shakespeare's play. Provided that Bottomley got his characters where they needed to be by the end of his play, this illusion of dramatic precedence gave him the freedom to explore character and motivation to his heart's desire. But this illusion of dramatic precedence also creates a misleading sense of cause and effect. An audience's tendency would be to read a prequel *causally*, that is to say, an audience would look to the prequel to provide the causes for all subsequent actions and reactions. Knowing it is intended as a prequel an audience might bring certain expectations to Bottomley's play, anticipating that it would reveal the roots and causes of *King Lear*, or at least suggest that *King Lear* was triggered by what

happened first and foremost in *King Lear's Wife*. Bottomley's prequel is a tightly-knit domestic narrative, due in part to his extreme condensation of time, space, and action around the domestic troubles of Lear. His play does not allow – as Shakespeare's does – for political issues or the scheming interference of other families and factions, or even fate, to influence Lear's fall. The effect of this extreme condensation of action around the domestic sphere, combined with the illusion of cause and effect is the creation of a misleading and oversimplified causality. As the audience imaginatively projects forward in time from Bottomley's play, it would read Lear's anger, his madness, and ultimately his death as the direct results of the domestic drama begun in the prequel. Recall S.P.B. Mais's comment that "anyone who has for years been troubled by the earlier play will recognize at once how much the new one clears up the ground" (qtd. Foulkes 130). An audience could re-read, and in this case, mis-read *King Lear* because of Bottomley's adaptation. While the distortion of cause and effect promotes a reductionist reading of Shakespeare's text, it is not inconsistent with ideas fostered by character criticism and psychology in the early twentieth century.

Despite its misleading causality, the relationship between Bottomley's text and Shakespeare's tells us a lot about how an adapted text interacts with its source. Except for its title and character names, *King Lear's Wife* makes no reference to Shakespeare's play. Without these signifiers, an audience would have no reason to suspect that the events in Bottomley's play prefigure tragedy: that the father is a figure synonymous with madness and pride, or that the daughter will turn her resentment into civil war and murder. But *because* the title and character names reference *King Lear* the audience is encouraged to identify the characters on stage with the characters in

Shakespeare's play, understanding the events in the one to lead to events in the other.

The connection, then, between the play and its source must be made imaginatively through the characters by the audience, who must always already know what will happen to the characters they are watching. Two things are happening here that emerge as key features in modern adaptations of Shakespeare: characters are being used as bridges to connect an adapted text back to its source text, and playwrights are relying on audience familiarity with these characters to create new meaning in their own work and in the source text.

Oftentimes, when setting, action, and language have changed, character alone relates the adapted text back to Shakespeare. Characters become the channel through which meaning is passed from the original text into the adaptation. An audience watching an adaptation is thus potentially conscious of both the real narrative they are watching and the remembered, or imagined narrative that the character evokes. So the Goneril it encounters in *King Lear's Wife* is not only everything she appears to be on-stage (a young girl, Hygd's daughter and slayer of rabbits) but also everything that the audience knows her to be from *King Lear* (Albany's wife, Edmund's lover, and her sister's murderer). Bottomley's Goneril thus acquires more meaning because of everything the audience knows about her from Shakespeare; but the audience may also in turn imaginatively return to Shakespeare and understand his Goneril differently because of Bottomley's representation.

In Bottomley's play, this process by which meaning is shared and characters act as bridges between the source and the adaptation happens fairly unproblematically. That

is to say, there is enough consistency between the adaptation and the source that the two merge fairly seamlessly. The language, setting, and themes are not dissimilar. It is not inconceivable for audiences to imagine Shakespeare's Goneril as a young girl killing rabbits, nor is it a stretch to imagine his Lear as a problematic father. Neither narrative challenges the other; rather, they enhance and build upon each other to create meaning. The adaptive gesture is celebratory and constructive; in Bennett and Erickson's terms it is nostalgic, intended to enhance Shakespeare's narrative, to validate his work, and to reinforce his status.

In contrast to Bottomley, later adapters eschew this purely nostalgic interaction. They deliberately create dissonance between the adaptation and the source, so that the imagined narrative evoked by a character is at odds with the real narrative the audience is watching. For example in Edward Bond's *Lear*, discussed in chapter three, the character Lear evokes *King Lear*, but it does so within the context of a twentieth-century dystopian revolutionary narrative: the imagined or remembered narrative is at odds with the real, adapted narrative. In Bond's *Lear*, this dissonance is reinforced by language, themes, and imagery which are harshly antithetical to Shakespeare. Here, the adapter evokes Shakespeare only to reject him, in a complex double gesture that is more destructive than constructive, more renunciative than nostalgic.

The key to this later double gesture is ironic dissonance. To explore the role of ironic dissonance in modern adaptations, I would briefly like to consider Maurice Baring's satirical letter series, *Dead Letters* (1910). While I would like to keep the focus of this study on theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare, Baring's deliberately farcical essay

adaptation of *King Lear* provides a useful example of the double gesture of later twentieth-century adaptations. In “Letter from Goneril,” he uses character the same way that Bottomley does to evoke an imaginary narrative alongside his adaptation, but Baring’s use of character highlights the disparity between the two narratives, creating an ironic dissonance that challenges the audience to choose the adapted narrative over the Shakespearean original.

Written as a series of letters from Shakespeare’s characters to their sisters, brothers, and friends, each essay in *Dead Letters* (1910) takes as its starting point a line in Shakespeare. “King Lear’s Daughter: Letter from Goneril, Daughter of King Lear, to her sister Regan” is a satirical elaboration on Goneril’s line in *King Lear*, I.iv “I have writ my sister.” The letter is set immediately after Goneril has chided Lear for the boorish behaviour of his retinue; he has left her house in an outrage intending to move his party to Regan’s house. The letter begins:

Dearest Regan,

I am sending you this letter by Oswald. We have been having the most trying time lately with Papa, and it ended to-day in one of those scenes which are so painful to people like you and me, who *hate* scenes. I am writing now to tell you all about it, so that you may be prepared. This is what has happened. (113)

Baring’s letter is farcical and intentionally absurd. It proceeds to tell Goneril’s version of the events leading up to Act I.iv in *King Lear*: how the disorderly conduct of Lear’s ever-drunken knights has forced her chief steward, her housekeeper, and both her maids to quit; how Lear’s increasing delusions have led to irrational ranting and alarming behaviour; and how the Fool persists in pulling idiotic and humiliating practical jokes. Goneril is particularly scathing about the Fool: “You know, darling, that I have always

hated that kind of humour,” she writes. “He comes in just as one is sitting down to dinner, and beats one on the head with a hard, empty bladder, and sings utterly idiotic songs, which make me feel inclined to cry” (117). The details of Goneril’s letter are taken from cues in Shakespeare’s text, cues that Baring has read into and elaborated on in an unconventional and satirical way.

Like Bottomley, Baring unconsciously mimics the work of character critics by imagining Shakespeare’s characters as real people with extra-textual lives, in contexts outside of the dramatic parameters established by Shakespeare. But where Bottomley used the methodology of character critics in a sincere attempt to establish motive, Baring uses it satirically to reveal its absurdity and expose it to ridicule. Instead of depicting Goneril in a manner consistent with her character in *King Lear*, or contextualizing her in similar setting or genre as character critics often did, Baring portrays Goneril as a frivolous socialite in modern London. There is little correlation in this Goneril to the character we know from Shakespeare, and the satirical context does nothing to enhance our understanding of Goneril as a character in Shakespeare. Both the methodology and the motivation of character critics are emptied of sense. Baring’s letter reveals how the practice of character criticism can lead to absurdly un-Shakespearean ends.

While Baring’s work shares with Bottomley’s an awareness of the methodologies of character critics, his deliberate use of irony and dissonant narrative contexts leads to a much more complicated adaptive gesture. Initially, like Bottomley, Baring uses the character of Goneril as a bridge to evoke *King Lear*. On reading the title, “Goneril’s Letter,” the reader imaginatively recalls Shakespeare’s play, a recollection that at first

enhances the meaning of Goneril's character in her letter: the reader may recollect, for example, Goneril's relationship with her sister and father, understand the circumstances that brought about Lear's visit, and remember Goneril's impatience with the Fool, all of which adds depth and colour to her narrative. In turn, the character bridge adds another dimension of meaning to *King Lear*; despite the obvious satire, the reader is encouraged to relate to the difficult family interaction and to sympathize with Goneril, and he or she begins to understand how Lear's over-bearing presence in her household could be antagonistic. Baring uses character as Bottomley does, as a bridge so that his narrative exists simultaneously in the reader's mind with the remembered narrative from *King Lear*. In this sense, Baring's adaptation is nostalgic. But his nostalgic gesture does not go untempered.

In Bottomley, the adaptation's interaction with Shakespeare's source was unproblematic: the real and the remembered narratives were consistent; they could exist together seamlessly, and mutually lend and enhance meaning. In contrast, Baring's real and remembered narratives are not consistent. Despite the character bridge, the context of "Goneril's Letter" is ironically incongruous with *King Lear*. There is a disparity between the narrative that we expect from Goneril and the reality of the narrative that ensues. This irony is reinforced by the unexpected generic switch as Baring evokes tragedy but delivers farce. The imagined and the real narratives cannot co-exist. The ensuing dissonance, created when these narratives interact but fail to accord, challenges the reader to choose one narrative over the other. By virtue of its immediate presence, the adapted text has precedence over the original. In proffering an alternative to *King Lear*, Baring's letter challenges Shakespeare's narrative, effacing it, rewriting it,

replacing it, however temporarily or imaginatively, with the adapted text. Nostalgia is tempered with opposition, and the adaptive gesture becomes more problematic.

Despite the fact that it is not a theatrical adaptation of Shakespeare, Baring's letter illustrates how the double gesture of modern adaptation emerges from methodologies developed by character critics and psychologists and by playwrights like Bottomley. The character critics and psychologists brought the focus back to character and motivation, critically allowing characters to have a life outside of their dramatic contexts. Bottomley elaborated on this practice, articulating the critical methodology in a creative way and using character as a bridge between the original text and the adaptation. But Bottomley's gesture was conciliatory, relying on his adaptation's consistency with its source to enhance and create meaning in each text. In contrast, Baring takes adaptation to a new level. While continuing to use character as a bridge, Baring heightens the disparity between his text and the source, creating an ironic dissonance which disallows meaning to co-exist between texts. Challenging the reader to accept his adaptation over the original, Baring proposes the imaginative replacement of Shakespeare.

To conclude my exploration of the impact of character critics on modern adaptations, I would briefly like to consider the decline of character criticism, and the way that later playwrights begin to re-articulate this methodology *satirically* on stage. Written in 1966, Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* could well be considered the *reductio ad absurdum* of character criticism, a meta-critical fantasy that dramatizes audiences' proclivity to think of characters as real people. While Stoppard was writing fifty years later than Bottomley and Baring, and while his

adaptation of *Hamlet* has tenuous connections to the adaptation of *King Lear*, his creative mis-use of character criticism as part of the double gesture of modern adaptation warrants inclusion with the authors in this chapter.

By the time Stoppard turned his hand to adapting Shakespeare in the 1960s, character criticism had all but disappeared as a reputable methodology in the study of literature. The ironic character-based satire of Baring in the early twentieth century was indicative of a turning tide in Shakespeare studies that saw much of work of the past century derided. Cooke writes that much of early twentieth-century criticism defined itself by its position for or against Bradley, which is to say, for or against character criticism. Increasingly the trend was against it. Criticism against Bradley ranged from gently chiding –“Bradley often overlooked the essential difference between persons existing in real life and those existing only in a play” (F.R. Johnson 112) – to the emphatically negative. F. R. Leavis wrote that Bradley’s account of *Othello* was “as extraordinary a history of triumphant sentimental perversity as literary history can show” (qtd. in Cooke 123).

The most famous anti-character critic was Lionel Charles Knights. His essay “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?” (1933) is a clear satire on Bradley’s famous notes, and outlines in no uncertain terms the problems with Bradley’s type of character criticism. “The habit of regarding Shakespeare’s persons as ‘friends for life’ or may be ‘deceased acquaintances’,” he wrote, “is responsible for most of the vagaries that serve as criticism” (qtd. Kantak 43). Knights felt that critics were wrong to focus on Shakespeare’s characters, his love of Nature, or his philosophy. The only profitable way

to approach Shakespeare, he concluded, was to consider his plays as dramatic poems, and to examine the way that Shakespeare used language to obtain a complex emotional response (*Explorations* 6).

Knights' analysis of Shakespeare treated character in a new and distinctly unsentimental light. Instead of imagining characters like Lear and Hamlet as real people, with personalities, histories, and complex psychologies, he understood characters as abstract theatrical tools or dramatic functions. Knights' analysis came to define the literary critical approach to character that prevailed in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1962, Leo Kirschbaum wrote in *Character and Characterization in Shakespeare*: "The character is no more 'real' when he is before us than when he is away from us. To deny this is to confuse life and art" (6). Similarly, Steven Orgel echoes Knights in *The Authentic Shakespeare* in 2002. "Characters are not people," he writes, "they are elements of a linguistic structure, lines in a drama, and more basically, words on a paper" (8). Knights' writing influenced a generation of scholars who opposed character criticism, who refused to look for psychology, motivation, consistency or credibility in a character beyond what was written in the text.

By mid-century, character criticism began to look unsophisticated and outdated, and critics moved on. So, too, did playwrights. Where Bottomley's re-casting of character criticism at the beginning of the century was not intended to be ironic, the later part of the century saw a host of playwrights use the methodology of character critics in ironic and meta-critical ways. Reacting perhaps to the debunking of character criticism by academics such as Knights, playwrights like Tom Stoppard wrote playful, ironic

works that criticized character criticism, showing both the futility of examining characters for psychological realism, and the absurdity of taking a character out of its dramatic context.

Stoppard's most famous work is *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1965), but he has written a number of other plays and a screenplay that adapt Shakespeare's work. In 1979, he wrote the double play *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* which features a group of school children performing a fifteen-minute *Hamlet* as a second-language play, and a shortened adaptation of *Macbeth* intended to be performed as a demonstration against Communist-style censorship. His screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) co-written with Marc Norman, also borrows from Shakespeare, adapting *Romeo and Juliet* and referencing *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Among Stoppard's work, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is unique for the extent to which it mimics the methodology of character critics. Writing more than half a century after A.C. Bradley, it is unlikely that Stoppard is deliberately incorporating Bradley's critical practices, yet his work does suggest the extent to which Bradley's notions of character have infiltrated not only western literary culture, but artistic representation within that culture. Like *King Lear's Wife*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* takes characters outside of their dramatic contexts and suggests that characters have lives independent of their Shakespearean textualities; but unlike Bottomley, who validated this process by enhancing meaning and expanding character in *King Lear*, Stoppard questions the process, fracturing Shakespeare's text even while he borrows from it, undermining meaning even while he creates it. His work shows characters out of their texts and out of

control, exposing the methodology of character critics to ridicule and offering up a new text that challenges Shakespeare's privileged position within the canon.

Stoppard's original idea for a Shakespeare adaptation was not as far removed from *King Lear* as we might think. He credits his agent with the idea for his first draft, called *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear*:

My agent picked up on my interest in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and suggested a comedy about what happened to them in England. For good measure, he added that the king of England might be Lear. The possibility appealed to me and I began working on a burlesque Shakespeare farce. (qtd. in Brassell 35).

Originally written as a one-act comedy in verse, this "burlesque" was begun during Stoppard's summer spent at the Ford Foundation forum for promising playwrights held in Berlin in 1964 (Rosinko 29). In this early draft, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern begin the play on a boat, already en route to England with the Player dressed as Hamlet. Hamlet arrives, changes places with the Player, and goes on to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. After a brief encounter with mad King Lear – in which Lear delivers his "When we are born speech" from 4.6.184-189 – Hamlet witnesses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's executions. He returns to Elsinore just as *Hamlet* is concluding, but not in time to interfere or participate in the action which is now centered on the Player-dressed-as-Hamlet. In *Tom Stoppard's Theatre*, John Fleming describes this early play as being more focused on the boat journey and on Hamlet than any subsequent versions. Stoppard himself admits that the early play was "a bad one," but credits it with getting him interested in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "as existential immortals." "I scrapped the play," he writes, "and in October 1964 started *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, set not in England but within the framework of *Hamlet*" (qtd. in Brassell 35).

After a series of additions and revisions – Stoppard is known for rewriting his work *in situ* during rehearsals – the play was optioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1965 but never performed. In 1966, it was staged at the Edinburgh Festival where it received a warm, but polite reception. “The initial reviews ranged from mixed to less than flattering,” writes Fleming (43). The *Glasgow Herald* called it “as off-putting a piece of non-theatre as has been presented at the Festival for many a year” (qtd. Fleming 43). Stoppard’s lucky break came at the National Theatre in the spring of 1967 when a last-minute cancellation of *As You Like It* left a gap in the theatre’s program. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* filled in and the play was a brilliant success. Stoppard’s reputation was made. Fleming writes:

In the end *Rosguil* proved to be one of the National’s greatest successes as it stayed in their repertory for almost four years and was their first production to transfer to Broadway, where it ran for over a year. In 1967-68 *Rosguil* was staged in twenty-three countries, and within a decade it had more than 250 professional productions in twenty languages. (Fleming 48)

Once staged, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* elicited much popular praise. When it opened in New York in October 1967, Clive Barnes wrote in the *New York Times* that it was “very funny, very brilliant, very chilling; it has the dust of thought about it and the particles glitter excitingly in the theatrical air” (qtd. Rosinko36). Despite Barnes’s claims that the play had the “dust of thought” about it, some critics worried that there was little of substance behind the clever word games. Robert Brustein wrote in the *New Republic*:

As a dramatist, Stoppard is a dandy. His plays toy with difficult subjects, but they are essentially not very serious. They are pirouettes by a rather vain dancer who knows he can leap higher than anyone else but seems to have forgotten why. (qtd. Brassell 1)

Martin Gottfried similarly offered scant praise for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*. In October 1967, he wrote in *Women's Wear Daily* that the “philosophical point of view [...] is never developed beyond the basic statement. Its existentialism is shallow.” He concludes: “Mr. Stoppard is clever but his play is not profound” (qtd. Rosinko 36).

Brustein and Gottfried's reviews identify some of Stoppard's most defining yet problematic features: his disavowal of metaphysical concerns, his repeated dismissal of academic interpretation of his work, and his deliberate, almost calculated uncertainty. In response to critics of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, Stoppard wrote, “I would absolutely deny that an intellectual or philosophical motive was in my mind when I wrote it” (qtd. Delaney 15). Similarly, in *The New British Drama: Fourteen Playwrights since Osborne and Pinter*, he tells Oleg Kerensky:

The play had no substance beyond its own terms, beyond its apparent situation. It was about two courtiers in a Danish castle. Two nonentities surrounded by intrigue, given very little information and much of that false. It had nothing to do with the condition of modern man or the decline of metaphysics. One wasn't thinking, 'Life is an anteroom in which one has to kill time'. Or I wasn't, at any rate. (qtd. Delaney 15)

Using such characteristic disclaimers to group Stoppard among modernist writers like Joyce, Eliot, and Wilde, Fleming suggests that Stoppard downplays the social function of art in order to pursue aesthetic effect and innovation more fully (2). Other critics use this emphasis on form to categorize Stoppard as a post-modernist, arguing that his evasion of meaning draws attention to “the unknowability of the world, the elusiveness of true knowledge, the fallibility of human memory, and the relativity of almost all aspects of life” (Fleming 3). Certainly, Stoppard's work has proved difficult to categorize and interpret, but this evasiveness is deliberate. The playwright's preference is clearly against

labeling and knowing: “What I think of as being my distinguishing mark is an absolute lack of certainty about almost everything” he writes (qtd. Andretta 43). This paradox, the “absolute lack of certainty” that characterizes Stoppard’s writing, poses a particular challenge to any critic who hopes to find a meaning – any *one* meaning – in his work. Together with his disavowal of serious intent, it is a quality that distinguishes Stoppard from later Shakespearean adaptors like Edward Bond or the Women’s Theatre Group, who adapt Shakespeare with a specific political or ideological function in mind.

What is common among critical responses to Stoppard (Delaney, Brassell, Fleming) is the idea that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern represent an existential human conundrum. Yet this interpretation flies in the face of Stoppard’s repeated avowals to the contrary. Granted, Stoppard’s protestations may be disingenuous, but it seems that critics would benefit from reading less into the metaphorical potential of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and consider them for what they are: characters. Consequently, and in the context of my broader discussion about character-based adaptations of Shakespeare, my analysis of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* will focus on characters and their contexts. In its playful examination of the real-ness of character, the play continues the dialogue about the nature of character begun by the character critics in the nineteenth century and re-articulated in a creative way by Bottomley and Baring in the first half of the twentieth. Stoppard engages this dialogue by putting familiar characters in new settings to examine the boundaries we put, or fail to put, around character.

When *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* opened in London in 1967, it was hailed by many critics for its originality. Irving Wardle wrote in *The Times*, “I know of no

theatrical precedent for it” (qtd Brassell 35). Stoppard’s particular genius for language is unique, and his re-positioning of marginal characters from *Hamlet* as bewildered anti-heroes is original, but the play does have precedents in other adaptations of Shakespeare. In particular, the play’s exploration of the off-stage life of characters recalls both Bottomley and Baring, as well as the work of character critics like Bradley. While critics often note Stoppard’s debt to Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1952), and Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), which Stoppard acknowledges and dismisses respectively (Gordon 21, Funke 227), they have studiously failed to acknowledge Stoppard’s debt to those playwrights, critics, and writers who have adapted Shakespeare by re-positioning his characters into new dramatic settings.

This is not to say that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a deliberate or even a conscious reflection of any of these writers. In interviews, Stoppard has made no direct references to any previous works that are adaptations of Shakespeare, and despite his clear familiarity with Shakespeare criticism, there is little reason to think that he deliberately set out to dramatize issues raised by nineteenth-century character critics. But Stoppard’s play does draw attention to the extent to which western literary culture’s collective understanding of character has been influenced by a particular type of character criticism that encourages readers and audiences to understand characters as real people. Stoppard’s play articulates the fairly common understanding – or misapprehension – that characters are just like real people. When they exit the stage, they enter a real life somewhere else. But unlike Bottomley, who used these assumptions about the real-ness of character in a fairly straightforward way, Stoppard plays with these assumptions, pushing the methodology of character critics to its most absurd conclusions.

Despite the myriad, contradictory interpretations of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* the simplest interpretation remains unequivocal: Stoppard's emphasis throughout is on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as characters. The title identifies the two men as very specific characters from a very specific dramatic work. Unlike Vladimir and Estragon, say, from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, who can easily be mistaken for Everyman or for generic representations of humanity, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are specifically *characters*. They are identifiably from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Like Bottomley's Lear and Baring's Goneril, these characters evoke one specific dramatic context, a context that the audience will likely be familiar with when encountering these characters in the adaptation. As if to emphasize their specific role as characters, Stoppard makes frequent references to the character-ness of their characters. "We are entitled to some direction . . . I would have thought" (16), says Guildenstern; and after meeting Gertrude and Claudius, he says, "They've got us placed now" (31) referring to the fact that the king and queen have recalled who they are, but also potentially to the fact that the audiences can now place them as characters in the dramatic context of *Hamlet*.

As if to prove that characterization is not a simple matter, Stoppard challenges audiences with three different levels of characterization in his play. Hamlet, the Player, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern each typify a different level of what could be called character reality. Hamlet is a character peacefully inhabiting his dramatic context. His identity is fixed, meaning that it does not change, and his context is stable, that is, he appears almost exclusively in a dramatic context that was originally written for him. He doesn't know about anything else. In contrast to Hamlet (the character at home in his

dramatic context) Stoppard presents the Player. As an actor, the Player represents an opposite type of character reality to Hamlet: the character with no fixed identity or context. Unlike Hamlet, the Player can change his identity – the very vague-ness of his name attests to the unfixed-ness of his character – and unlike Hamlet, he can escape from his dramatic context simply by divesting himself of one character and adopting another. As a character, the Player is unique in that his identity is not related to his dramatic context.

The third and most problematic type of characterization in Stoppard's play belongs to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, characters who are neither entirely integrated into their dramatic context, like Hamlet, nor capable of entirely escaping their dramatic context like the Player. Like Hamlet, their identities are fixed, meaning that they can not change identities as the Player does. But unlike Hamlet, their context is not stable; it flickers between *Hamlet*, the text that they were originally written into and an alternate textuality that is different from, or outside of *Hamlet*. What their situation suggests is that their identities *presuppose* or *supercede* their contexts; they are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern within *Hamlet*, but also outside of *Hamlet*, before *Hamlet*, even regardless of *Hamlet*. This privileging of the pair's identities over their contexts has the effect of reinforcing whatever tendency an audience might have to think of characters as real people with lives beyond their texts. This tendency is further reinforced by the fact that Stoppard's play opens some time considerably before Shakespeare introduces Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in II.ii of *Hamlet*, in a time before the characters have even arrived at Elsinore. Like Bottomley, Stoppard makes his characters seem more real by dramatizing their lives before their Shakespearean contexts.

If Stoppard had left it at that – two fully realized characters demonstrating their viable and independent lives in the off-stage moments of *Hamlet* – he would have had a nice play that validated a collectively sustained fantasy that characters are just like real people, rather like what Bottomley was doing; but, as Jonathan Bennett points out, “what Stoppard does is brilliantly different” (78). Bennett goes on to write:

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern turn out, when seen in the round, to be flatter than ever; even they are not sure which is which; and the entire play consists in their desperate attempts to cling to their few shreds of reality. (78)

Rather than delivering a straightforward validation of the assumption that characters are real people, Stoppard delivers on this assumption then proceeds to undermine it. And he undermines it in a spectacular fashion, showing characters-as-real-people who cannot function as real people. Instead of filling the pair’s “off-stage” lives with enough clues and psychology to make more sense of their “on-stage” presence in *Hamlet* – as character critics tried to do – Stoppard deliberately leaves that off-stage life barren, bewildering, and alien. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s memory of life before *Hamlet* proves strangely empty: a single, vague recollection of being summoned at dawn by a man standing in his saddle. The rest of their memories are inferred directly from speeches in *Hamlet*. “What have we got to go on?” asks Rosencrantz (30). Their subsequent conversation, in which they effectively parrot the directives from Gertrude and Claudius in *Hamlet* 2.2.1-39, shows how reliant they are on the Shakespearean text:

Guil: We have been briefed. Hamlet’s transformation. What do you recollect?

Ros: Well, he’s changed, hasn’t he? The exterior and inward man fails to resemble –

Guil: Draw him on to pleasures – glean what afflicts him.

Ros: Something more than his father’s death –

Guil: He’s always talking about us – there aren’t two people living whom he dotes on more than us.

Ros: We cheer him up – find out what’s the matter –

Guil: Exactly, it’s a matter of asking the right questions and giving away as little as we can. It’s a game.

Ros: And then we can go?

Guil: And receive such thanks as fits a king’s remembrance. (30-31)

As Brassell notes, the confusion and repetition in this scene reinforces the extent to which Rosencrantz’s and Guildenstern’s lives are “wholly circumscribed by the fact that they are characters in a play” (Brassell 49). Shakespeare’s text continues to be the sole determining influence behind their reality. As Guildenstern says, “Words, words. They’re all we have to go on” (31), a phrase which itself echoes Hamlet’s own “Words, words, words” (2.2.192).

As Stoppard continues to dramatize the lives of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern outside of their text, he shows the audience paradoxically how unviable and inadequate these lives are. Lost and confused, Guildenstern says, “We don’t know what’s going on, or what to do with ourselves. We don’t know how to *act*” (49). As characters, Stoppard shows, they only really belong *within* their texts. June Schlueter writes,

These dramatic presentations [...] are invariably inadequate, for while they characterize the dramatic quality of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s lives, they are only a prelude to the more fulfilling roles for which the Shakespeare play predestines them. It is only when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern step fully into the *Hamlet* play and resume their roles without resistance that they realize their sole *raison d’être* is those roles. (Schlueter 83)

Schlueter concludes, as indeed an audience must conclude, with the realization that “there is no other life for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern outside of the Shakespeare play, outside of their roles” (84).

Making use, then, of his preference for an “absolute lack of certainty,” Stoppard both affirms and subverts any audience inclination to think of characters as real people.

He *is* showing characters living outside of their dramatic contexts, which suggests an affirmation of the notion in character criticism that characters should be regarded as real people with real lives, but the *inadequacy* of their lives outside of their plays and their inability to make sense of these lives undermines that affirmation. What emerges from the play is a much more complicated portrayal of characters and reality than audiences have seen before, one in which characters are given the appearance of autonomy, without actually being given any autonomy at all, inside or outside of the text. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern put it best:

Guil: ... We can do what we like and say what we like to whomever we like,  
without restriction.

Ros: Within limits of course.

Guil: Certainly within limits. (85)

This passage perfectly describes the complexity of Stoppard's representation of character, and acts as a warning against any misguided tendencies to extend characters beyond their contextual limits. Stoppard's play identifies the fallacy of character critics whose methodologies give the illusion that characters are real without acknowledging the limiting factors (the reality of the texts and their dramatic contexts) that made that reality un-real. As Guildenstern says "At least we are presented with alternatives [...] But not choice" (30).

In making this argument, I do not intend to suggest that Stoppard's play is a deliberate critique of character criticism, but the play does have the effect of undermining the expectation, established by character critics, that characters ought to be seen as real people with conceivable lives outside of their dramatic contexts. Stoppard plays with this expectation, challenges it, and in turn encourages audiences to challenge it.

By questioning the boundaries audiences put, or fail to put, on character, Stoppard is engaging with the same dialogue that Bottomley and Baring tackled in their own adaptations of Shakespeare. These adaptors also share a common technique. Like Bottomley and Baring, Stoppard uses characters to evoke parallel narratives, but where Bottomley and Baring evoked their Shakespearean originals imaginatively, or in the recollection of their audience, Stoppard maintains the Shakespearean narrative on stage simultaneously with his new narrative. Despite this difference, the effect of Stoppard's parallel narratives is similar: the audience is compelled to compare the two narratives, and evaluate the new narrative for consistency with the Shakespearean original. But unlike *King Lear's Wife*, where the new narrative was consistent with *King Lear* and meaning flowed seamlessly back and forth between the two, Stoppard's adaptation is deliberately at odds with *Hamlet*. More like Baring's letter, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* plays up the disparity in language, plot, and style between the two narratives. And like Baring's letter, Stoppard's play presents a generic dissonance: a comedy or tragi-comedy confronting a tragedy. Brassell calls the juxtaposition of narratives "dovetailing" between "two levels of dramatic reality" (42); he identifies the deliberate incongruity between the narratives as a means of "intensifying the bewilderment of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern which is Stoppard's central theme" (43). Stoppard's deliberate incongruity serves a further purpose: it alerts the audience to a disparity with the Shakespearean original. "We must wince at the jolt," William Gruber writes, "whenever the play shifts from one mode to another, from one cast and its story to its alternate, and back again" (105). This shifting back and forth challenges the audience to evaluate each narrative against the other. "Iambics and prose, vigor and lassitude,

seriousness and silliness, skill and ineptitude, all coexist, alternately and repeatedly testing the efficacy and theatrical appeal of each” (Gruber 105). Within this shifting dramatic structure, the audience is encouraged to compare, evaluate, and ultimately to choose one narrative over the other. Stoppard helps this choice along by giving his adaptation precedence over the original on stage, allowing for the temporary, imaginative replacement of Shakespeare.

Not surprisingly, Stoppard’s play has often baffled literary critics, not least because it represents an utterly new genre. In “Artistic Design in ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead’” William Gruber expresses his difficulty trying to categorize the play:

To call the play a burlesque or a parody betrays one’s insensitivity to its rich and manifold significances; and ‘tragicomedy’ is a term grown so vague as to be almost without meaning. [...] There is a small measure of truth in Brustein’s term for the play – ‘theatrical parasite’ – for it is obvious that Stoppard needs *Hamlet* if his play is to exist at all. Stoppard’s play seems to vibrate because of the older classic, as a second tuning fork resonates by means of one already in motion. (110)

Burlesque, parody, tragicomedy, theatrical parasite: Gruber goes on to try out “play within a play,” and “colloidal suspension” before finally settling on the complicated metaphor of two heavenly bodies impinging upon each other because of their respective gravitational fields (110). Richard Allan Cave fares no better in “An Art of Literary Travesty: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Jumpers*.” Having identified the play as a travesty, Cave finds that he can only define Stoppard in the negative. In the end, he simply redefines travesty to fit Stoppard:

[Travesty] is not with Stoppard simply a matter of destructive burlesque, a debunking [...] of a form of theatre he finds morally questionable; nor is it a self-conscious exploration [...] of a particular genre in order to reach some

psychological understanding of its nature and its relation to an audience's needs. [...] Travesty in Stoppard enriches rather than questions one's appreciation of the play that acts as his prototype; travesty becomes itself a creative act of the imagination. (Cave 63)

What Gruber and Cave's difficulties suggest is the lack of proper critical investigation into the area of modern adaptation. Traditional terms like travesty and pastiche lack the semantic scope to describe with any accuracy the complicated interplay of texts in an adaptation like Stoppard's. These terms tend to simplify the gesture, rather than engaging with its multiple, often contradictory, impulses.

What Baring and Stoppard highlight is that modern adaptations of Shakespeare are marked by irony, which is always a double gesture, and a sense of the irreconcilable distance between the original text and the adaptation. Even while the texts collaborate, their irreconcilability forces a choice between the two, amounting to the (temporary, imaginative) replacement of the original in favour of the new (present, pertinent) adaptation. This type of adaptation, then, is always a double gesture, one of collaboration and rejection, which simultaneously validates Shakespeare and dismisses him at the same time. The terms traditionally used to describe these plays, terms like travesty and pastiche, are perhaps appropriate to a work like *King Lear's Wife* but fail to encompass the complexity of the adaptive gesture in works like "Goneril's Letter" and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*; a semantic shortcoming and critical oversight that unfortunately reduces both the gesture and the works to simplistic terms.

The focus of this chapter has been character-based adaptations of Shakespeare, tracing the evolution of a methodology borrowed from character criticism and the innovative use of characters as bridges to evoke parallel narratives. Bottomley's play,

*King Lear's Wife*, provided an example of a simple adaptive gesture, in which the adaptation interacts consistently with the evoked Shakespearean narrative, taking meaning from and returning meaning to Shakespeare's original. In contrast, "Goneril's Letter" by Baring and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* by Stoppard both suggested more complicated adaptive gestures in which adaptation is not consistent with the original narrative. The ironic dissonance created when Shakespeare's narrative is evoked alongside Baring's and Stoppard's adaptations leads to a gesture that both collaborates with and repudiates Shakespeare at the same time.

The next chapter will look at adaptations that are less character-based, but which still incorporate strategies that emerged in Bottomley's and Baring's work. Writing in the mid to late twentieth century, Edward Bond and Howard Barker both use characters to connect real and imagined narratives, and both rely on the dissonance between these two narratives to challenge Shakespeare. Like Baring and Stoppard, Bond and Barker both want to alert audiences to the disparity between Shakespeare's narrative and their own adaptations. But unlike the authors examined in this chapter who used satire to jar audiences, Bond and Barker use violence and alienation. Their focus is more on the lost nature of the original and the violence that is an inevitable part of its replacement. How can we interact with Shakespeare (taking meaning from him and returning meaning to him) and replace him at the same time? To what extent does any interaction with a text destroy that text or alter it irreparably? Howard Barker asks:

By inflicting altogether different moral perspectives on texts such as (*Uncle Vanya* or *King Lear*), does a modern author change the character of the original? Can an intervention by one artist in the territory of another be anything but a raid, an assault, a seizure of aspects of one cultural moment by the temper of another? (*Arguments for a Theatre* 157)

While still incorporating the double gesture used by Baring and Stoppard, the adaptations considered in the next chapter use new techniques that challenge audiences to reflect more critically on the lost nature of the original.

**Chapter Three**  
**“Only we shall retain the name”: Bond’s *Lear* and Barker’s *Seven Lears***

Chapter two explored how writers such as Gordon Bottomley, Maurice Baring, and Tom Stoppard use characters to link their adaptations back to their Shakespearean originals. In their works, characters like Lear and Goneril function both independently as characters and as a means of evoking the remembered or imagined Shakespearean *King Lear*. The effect of these character bridges is that two narratives end up running simultaneously: one existing in the present (the on-stage adaptation) and the other existing in the mind of the audience (the remembered original), two narratives that interact in compatible (Bottomley) or dissonant (Baring and Stoppard) ways. In the case of dissonant interactions, the audience is challenged to re-evaluate these narratives, and encouraged to choose the adaptation over the original, effecting the (temporary, imaginative) replacement of Shakespeare. It is in such dissonant interactions that the complicated double gesture of modern adaptation emerges – a gesture that both relies on Shakespeare and repudiates him at the same time.

In the plays of Edward Bond we see a similar methodology at work, although Bond’s double gesture is neither character-based nor intended as a model for adapting Shakespeare. Bond’s methodology, a dual process involving deconstruction and cathexis, is specifically *not* focused on the characters in his plays. Instead, he uses objects, as deliberately banal as a wall or a sheet of paper, to evoke parallel narratives on-stage and in the minds of his audiences. Playing up the disjunction between these two narratives (centred now on an object rather than a character), Bond achieves a similar

effect to Stoppard and Baring: the dissonance in the narratives challenges the audience to reflect and re-evaluate.

Methodological similarities aside, Bond's deconstructed cathexis is a dramaturgical tool, not a model for adaptation because it is centred on an object, not on a Shakespearean character or narrative. But if we consider in Bond's play *Lear* (1971) that he uses the Shakespearean narrative *as an object*, his deconstructed cathexis comes remarkably close to the double gesture adaptive strategies we see in Stoppard and Baring. While it would be wrong to suggest that Bond deliberately applies his methodology to the Shakespearean narrative *as an object*, a consideration of the narrative in this context (as something that is both deconstructed and cathexed) helps to shed some light on the different ways in which a Shakespearean narrative can be adapted. Looking more closely at what Bond does to *King Lear* will help develop a better understanding of the techniques used by other adaptors and the strategies that make up this unique modern gesture.

Edward Bond was born on July 18, 1934 in North London to a working-class family and evacuated north during the Second World War to Ely. At fifteen he left school and at seventeen joined the British Army. War – that is, violence and politics – marked Bond from an early age. His experiences in the army were concomitant with and, in his own words, responsible for his early interest in writing:

What really started me writing seriously was being in the army [...]. The army's a sort of parodied version of civil society – it's without all the face-saving rituals and without all the social excuses and just the naked barbarism. It's a very corrupt form of society and a very foolish and vicious form which is an amalgam of sentimental sloppy relevance [sic] for dead idols combined with real viciousness. (qtd. Hay and Roberts15)

Bond concludes: “that was certainly why I became the sort of dramatist I became.” The viciousness and naked barbarism Bond noted in the army would become inseparable for him from the politics of corruption, and the fatuousness of civility and justice, themes that recur almost obsessively in his dramatic writing. His sense of the army as a parodied version of society is particularly prevalent in plays like *Lear*, an adaptation that ironically criticizes the “sentimental sloppy relevance for dead idols” in more ways than one.

Inspired by his experiences and rooted in the real world, Bond’s plays seek to be relevant. “It is necessary to show people the faults and the dangers of the present set-up,” he writes. “Unless a correct analysis is made, and is then widely understood, there won’t be any change” (“Revolution” 27 October 1969). In *Bond: A Study of His Plays*, Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts argue that this desire for relevance is the foundation of all of Bond’s work. His plays are expressly didactic, accompanied by strongly worded prefaces: prefaces that often fail to reference the play, but which direct the reader to the underlying problems the play addresses. This misdirection is calculated.

I would like the reader of the prefaces to get involved in problems about the world and then, by a sudden reference, to transfer his roused interest to the play. In this way he stops thinking of the play as a fantasy . . . and sees (I hope) that it is really about aspects of his own life . . . (qtd. Hay and Roberts 22)

Bond uses this combination of misdirection and transference, fantasy and reality to circle around and re-visit his foundational principle that the problems in modern society need first to be analyzed and then understood before they can be changed.

These problems have their roots in violence and injustice, and Bond is often criticized for bringing too much of each to the stage (Foakes 88). Yet rather than

glorifying violence, or advocating injustice – that is, taking violence and injustice to a level that is surreal – Bond sees himself simply as presenting on stage a reality his audiences do not like. In his preface to *Lear*, he famously states:

Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence. (lvii)

In his refusal to shy away from the violence of his world, Bond has often been categorized alongside the Theatre of Cruelty. In *Edward Bond: A Study of His Plays* Delia Donahue notes that, in some ways, this is an apt classification. The Theatre of Cruelty, a term developed by Antonin Artaud in *Theatre and its Double*, advocates the shattering of false perceptions of reality, the cruelty of which lies not in the physical manifestation of violence, but in showing the audience a truth they do not want to see. Donahue argues that Bond’s work shares with Artaud an interest in this type of psychological disturbance, in finding self-awareness through catastrophe and extremes of sensation. But Bond denies any affinity with Artaud’s theoretics (Donahue 66), rejecting both the categorization and Artaud’s interest in spiritual and transcendental matters. Nonetheless, what is relevant in Bond’s comparison with the Theatre of Cruelty is the emphasis both would place on innovation: in moving beyond dead theatre into a theatre with contemporary relevance.

Nowhere is Bond’s interest in abandoning dead theatre more pronounced than in his adaptation of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, a play Alan Sinfield refers to as a “systematic and hostile critique of Shakespeare’s play” (“*King Lear*” 5). Pointedly eschewing that “sloppy sentimental relevance for dead idols,” Bond’s iconoclastic *Lear* drags

Shakespeare's masterpiece into the twentieth century and challenges audiences to see its relevance in the modern world. First performed at the Royal Court Theatre on September 29, 1971, *Lear* was the ninth play Bond had written. Writing the play coincided with translation work he was doing at the time on Bertolt Brecht's adaptation of *Measure for Measure* (a play called *Round Heads and Pointed Heads*). Bond was clearly interested in adaptation. His notes from the time, quoted in Hay and Roberts, reflect his constant engagement with questions about what an adaptation should do, how it ought to be structured, and how it should be both dependent on and independent of its source.

The reversal of the academic moral/artistic/theatrical myth isn't enough, the making *reality* of Lear mythology isn't enough, because the play isn't to get its life merely from being a commentary on [*King*] *Lear*, or an attack on it or correction of it. The play must have a structure rooted in itself, which then throws light across onto [*King*] *Lear* . ... The play must be its own dynamo and experience... (qtd. Hay and Roberts 108)

Structuring such an adaptation proved difficult for Bond. Originally, it was his intention to omit *Lear* altogether. "If you get rid of the King," he wrote, "the play becomes much more interesting" (*The Times*, 13 December 1968). Instead, he designed *Lear* as a modern story about the three daughters. "I'm very much drawn to the three women in the play," he said in an early interview in *Gambit* (24). He went on to say that he saw *Lear* as outdated, belonging more to the seventeenth than to the twentieth century, and consummately irrelevant: "He's a Renaissance figure and he doesn't impinge on our society as much as he should" (24). Despite these early assertions, by 1969 Bond had brought *Lear* back, realizing that it was not so much the character that was outdated, but the way that western literary culture has tended to use the character. "[As] a society we use the play in a wrong way," Bond wrote. "And it's for that reason I would like to

rewrite it so that we now have to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time, for our problems” (*Gambit* 24-25). Bond would make *Lear* relevant – an evolution that speaks both to his tremendous respect for Shakespeare and to his persistent belief that theatre must speak to modern life.

To make *Lear* relevant, Bond had to make *Lear* relevant, a transformation that becomes the central trajectory of the play. In his preface, Bond describes how the setting of the play evolves:

Act One shows a world dominated by myth. Act Two shows the clash between myth and reality, between superstitious men and the autonomous world. Act Three shows a resolution of this, in the world we prove real by dying in it. (lxvi)

As myth gives way to reality, and as Lear’s ability to interact in these worlds changes, he himself evolves from a mythic stereotype – one who has little interaction or accountability in his world – into a modern man, one, as Bond says, who “impinges on society” (*Selections* 9 December). In his notes on *Lear*, Bond likens Lear to a child, “exposed to the phenomena of his environment, to the experience of kindness and unkindness by his associates [. . .] and the biological facts of growing, birth, sex and death” (*Selections* 9 December). As Hay and Roberts write, this metaphorical rebirth transforms Lear from a Shakespearean into a modern archetype and allows him to become relevant to a modern world (118).

The play opens in the world of myth. The despotic Lear is overseeing the building of a wall, intended to keep his enemies out:

LEAR: I started this wall when I was young. I stopped my enemies in the field, but there were always more of them. How could we ever be free? So I built this wall to keep our enemies out. My people will live behind this wall when I’m dead. You may be governed by fools but you’ll always

live in peace. My wall will make you free. That's why the enemies on our borders – the Duke of Cornwall and the Duke of North – try to stop us building it. (3-4)

For Lear, the wall is a symbol of freedom and safety, but for his daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle, the wall is a manifestation of Lear's irrational and paranoid fears, the unnecessary enslavement of their people, and a barrier to their nuptials with the neighbouring dukes of Cornwall and North. In an act of defiance, they declare their marriages, Lear casts them out, and in turn, they declare war on him. The war does not go well for Lear; he is defeated and runs off into the countryside. As the daughters begin to assume power, they realize they must assume the responsibilities of power. They begin to plot against each other and their husbands. In an effort to punish and eradicate their opposition, they torture Lear's second-in-command, Warrington, and Bodice mutilates him with her knitting needles. Meanwhile, Lear assumes the role of mendicant traveler, wandering into the homestead of a young man and his wife, and inadvertently bringing danger into their lives. As the act closes, soldiers hunting for Lear brutally murder the young man, rape his wife, and cart Lear off as a prisoner. The world of myth that dominated the beginning of the play collapses as Lear is forced into accountability for his actions and an inescapable emotional interaction with the world around him.

The second act follows Lear's uneasy rebirth into the world around him and his attempts to reconcile past and future behaviour. It opens with Lear's trial, at which he refuses to recognize his daughters, and significantly, does not even recognize his own face when presented with a mirror. Bodice and Fontanelle declare Lear mad, and end the trial. "There's to be a death sentence," Bodice tells the judge, "but it's not yet planned" (36). There is talk of a civil war brewing, led by the wife of the young man killed at

Lear's arrest. The young wife is Cordelia. In prison, Lear is cared for by the young man's ghost, and begins to recognize his past behaviour for what it was. "I killed so many people and never looked at one of their faces," he says. "Wrong. Wrong. Wrong" (42).

With Lear in prison, Cordelia organizes a revolt against Bodice and Fontanelle, whose control is slipping. As she struggles under the weight of her own power, Bodice laments:

BODICE: War. Power. [...] They say decide this and that, but I don't decide anything. My decisions are forced on me. I change people's lives and things get done – it's like a mountain moving forward, but not because I tell it to. I started to pull the wall down, and I had to stop that – the men are needed here. [...] I'm trapped. [...] I made so many plans, one day I'd be my own master! Now I have all the power ... and I'm a slave. Worse! (48-49)

Quickly, Cordelia takes power, and imprisons her sisters with Lear, where Fontanelle is shot by a guard and Bodice stabbed by soldiers. Lear begins to understand his complicity in his own distress. He begs to be killed; instead, just as he utters the line "I must open my eyes and see" (60), he is blinded by a fellow prisoner. Cast out and wandering alone, he determines to write to Cordelia, now in charge of the state, and warn her of the folly of power. Lear's rebirth is complete; he has come face to face with his own failures and taken responsibility for them. What is left for him is to prove his engagement with the world by entering fully into it.

In act three, Lear engages in his reality by dying in it. The act opens sometime later, where Lear, blind now but sincerely gracious, lives with a new family in the young man's house from act one. Although the setting is familiar, Lear's interaction with the world around him is radically different: he preaches a message of tolerance and forgiveness, of peace and acceptance. In his blindness he has found insight, though he

humbly eschews stature and fame. Hunted by Cordelia's government for his anti-state rhetoric, he nonetheless continues to rail against the crime of power.

LEAR: Savages have taken my power. You commit crimes and call them the law! The giant must stand on his toes to prove he's tall! – [...] Think of the crimes you commit every day in your office, day after day till it's just routine, think of the waste and the misery of that! (78)

Lear finally recognizes the imprisoning effects of power; he laments the fact that his people are suffering and no one, not even he, can give them justice. Cordelia arrives, trying to convince her father to give up his protests. She calls him the voice of her conscience, but says: "if you listened to everything your conscience told you you'd go mad. You'd never get anything done – and there's a lot to do, some of it very hard" (83-84). She announces her intention to continue building the wall, a project Lear now fears and despises. In a final act of defiance, Lear begins digging up the wall. He is challenged by the Farmer's Son who points a pistol at Lear, who continues to dig. "I can still make my mark" (88) he says defiantly. The Son shoots and Lear dies, falling off the wall he had advocated so staunchly during his reign, and proving that he accepts his moral responsibility towards the world by dying for it.

Lear dies trying to change the world. In his notebooks from March 1971, Bond writes:

It's as if death was the only meaningful act he could make with his life. The actual digging in the wall is insignificant, the hole could be filled in in 30 seconds. But it would be difficult to ignore the fact that he *died* on the wall *while destroying it*. (*Selections* 31 March 1971, 121)

In attempting to undo some of the problems he created, Hay and Roberts note, Lear dies a markedly different death than Shakespeare's Lear (117). In Shakespeare, Lear kills the prison guard who hanged Cordelia, a *reactive* and defensive gesture, after which he dies

of a broken heart; in *Lear*, Lear dies taking proactive action against the state, he dies doing something. This action underscores Bond's insistence on social accountability and change. Bond does not merely theorize change, he advocates direct action and practical solutions within concrete social realities. In fact, Hay and Roberts suggest that "*Lear* is the first play in which Bond argues that direct action is imperative" (104). As Lear transforms from mythic archetype into modern man, he is forced to engage with the world around him, to recognize his complicity in its problems, and to effect whatever change he can. In a last-ditch effort to save the world, he picks up a shovel. The message in *Lear* is that change, though personal and difficult, is both necessary and possible.

What stands out in *Lear* is Lear's transformation, the way the character adapts from a mythic type into a socially relevant being. It is an adaptation about *personal* as well as dramatic adaptation: to make *King Lear* relevant to a modern audience, Bond had to make King Lear relevant by showing his ability to learn from his environment and to effect change upon it. The changes Bond made to *King Lear* reflect the complexity of his interaction with this source work. As he said, "the reversal of the academic moral / artistic / theatrical myth" was not enough; making *reality* of the Lear mythology was not enough; nor was it enough simply to attack or alter the original. The new work had to have a purpose of its own, from which it could then shed light back onto the original play. That purpose is to instruct and motivate modern audiences towards practical positive change, and the light that *Lear* sheds back onto *King Lear* illuminates the crucial difference between a mythic figure (one who has little interaction and accountability in his world, and who is therefore in Bond's mind morally incomplete) and a modern man

(who impinges on his society, who is changed by it and changes it in return.) “I wanted to explain that Lear was responsible,” he writes, “but that it was very important that he could not get out of his problems simply by suffering the consequences, or by endurance and resignation. He had to live through the consequences and struggle with them” (“Drama and the Dialectics of Violence” 8-9).

To understand how and why Bond interacts in this complex manner with Shakespeare, it will first help to understand some of Bond’s dramaturgy. Much of Bond’s dramatic technique is based on a process of simultaneous deconstruction and cathexis – an approach that unconsciously both echoes and informs similar techniques used by other adaptors of Shakespeare. While Bond has written extensively on this technique of deconstructed cathexis, he has never explicitly written of it as an approach to adaptation. Nonetheless, an examination of this methodology illuminates both Bond’s relationship to his source work, and helps to build an understanding of techniques used by other adaptors in their re-working of Shakespeare’s plays.

Much of Bond’s dramaturgy is based on a traditional understanding of the mind as a rational and imaginative holism. In *The Hidden Plot*, he writes: “Self-consciousness requires reason and imagination. Without them we would not be self-conscious” (13). Reason and imagination function effectively only when they function together: “They cannot be isolated from each other,” Bond writes (13). Reason governs our interaction with the real world, our sense of society and reality; imagination governs our existential world, our sense of self and story. In drama, reason and imagination must *both* be engaged in order for us to enter into the story on stage *and* apply it to our real lives;

drama “joins reason and imagination in value” (*Hidden Plot* 41). Bond writes: “Dramatic art relates imagination and reason not as abstractions but as two sources of knowledge, it relates the existing world and existential need” (*Hidden Plot* 144).

Bond’s interest in the relationship between reason and imagination in drama suggests affinities with Bertolt Brecht. Brecht’s work began appearing in London theatres in the 1950s and influenced a generation of playwrights despite the fact that it was often poorly performed and badly misinterpreted. Peter Holland describes the history of Brecht’s reception in Britain as “an embarrassing one,” riddled with half-formed ideas of Brecht’s methods and utter misconceptions about his politics (“Brecht, Bond, Gaskill” 24). The question of Brecht’s specific influence on Bond is widely debated. In *Theatre Quarterly*, Simon Trussler states, “Edward Bond has not been ‘influenced’ by Brecht” (3:30, 24); Peter Holland is less emphatic: “Bond himself is unsure about the influence of Brecht on his work” (“Brecht, Bond, Gaskill” 27). David L. Hirst evades the question of influence by claiming that Bond and Brecht *share* a political outlook and similar theatrical strategies (126-127). Bond himself has variously embraced and denied his connections to Brecht. In *The Hidden Plot*, he writes, “You know that I regard Brecht as an influence and of course I shall continue to be influenced by him” (171), an assertion that is undermined by the fact that he has also emphatically stated: “I don’t think I’m influenced by Brecht at all” (“A Discussion” 25). The debate over Bond’s Brechtian influences – which more often than not hinges on semantic arguments over the meaning of “influence” and theoretical arguments over the meaning of “Brechtian” – continues unabated, as unresolved perhaps in critics’ minds as it is in the playwright’s.

Whether he was writing *under* the influence or *against* the influence of Brecht, it is to Brecht that Bond most often turns in order to discriminate his own dramatic theories.

I am sometimes compared to Brecht. It is necessary for me to elucidate why I am not Brechtian – and cannot be: and that means not dismissing Brecht but arguing that he belongs to a now redundant paradigm of knowledge. (*Hidden Plot* 173)

Like Bond's, Brecht's dramaturgy is based on the perception of a duality between reason and imagination (emotion). Brecht recognized that audiences had both rational and emotional responses to dramatic events, and he worried that traditional Aristotelian (or more accurately Realist) drama placed too much emphasis on empathy, encouraging audiences to get caught up in the imaginative and emotional world of the story. In *Messingkauf Dialogues*, he clarified that drama should still represent emotion, but that it should eschew empathy:

Neither the public nor the actor must be stopped from taking part emotionally; the representation of emotions must not be hampered, nor must the actor's use of emotions be frustrated. Only one out of the many possible sources of emotion needs to be left unused, or at least treated as a subsidiary source – empathy. (qtd. Hirst 134)

Brecht felt that in empathizing too much with characters, audiences were in danger of losing sight of the important social analysis that drama could and should provide. "For Brecht, theatre was an occasion for rational thought, not emotional catharsis" (Martin and Bial 2); and as Brecht himself wrote, "Everything must be seen from the social standpoint" ("On Chinese Acting" 22). Borrowing techniques from the Formalists, Brecht created gaps in his dramatic form that allowed him to disrupt the audience's emotional response (their empathy with a character) and encourage instead their rational response (the exercise of making sense of the disrupted action). This process

continuously brought the audience's attention back to the real world and away from the on-stage fantasy. Describing the benefits of this approach, Brecht wrote:

Nothing permitted the audience any more to lose itself through simple empathy, uncritically (and practically without any consequences) in the experiences of the characters on the stage. The presentation exposed the subject matter and the happenings to a process of de-familiarization. De-familiarization was required to make things understood. ("Theatre for Learning" 24-25)

Brecht's process of de-familiarization (*entfremdung*) became known as the alienation effect (*verfremdungseffekte*): the fact that the audience's emotional response to a character was always curtailed and subordinated to rational social analysis and the re-consideration of its own ideological beliefs.

While Bond agreed with Brecht that an audience should be encouraged to reconsider its own beliefs, he felt that many of Brecht's methods belonged to a redundant paradigm of knowledge. "Brecht did not answer all our questions," he writes.

The time between his death and the present has given us more experience, more history, to draw on. [...Now] I think we have to develop our own theatre, which will be in some ways different – not because of an egotistical wish to be different but because the world has given us more to account for and the leap in scientific knowledge allows us to look even closer at the nature of men and society. We should begin with Brecht but we shouldn't end there. (Bond "On Brecht" 34)

Jenny S. Spencer and David L. Hirst corroborate this in Bond's writing, agreeing that while Brecht and Bond share similar dramaturgies, each is writing for a unique period in history and so their plays must be different. In *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of*

*Edward Bond* Spencer writes:

Like Brecht, Bond seeks to activate his audience and inspire social change. But Bond's post-war, post-68, postmodern generation not only lacks an identifiable proletariat but a strong political movement from which to write. The disturbing question that emerges is no longer 'how' change will occur (a question of tactics), but who will do the changing? In an affluent society, how might a radical subject be produced? (108)

Similarly, in *Edward Bond*, Hirst writes that Bond “has progressively come to realize that as particular dramatic genres are representative of ideas and ideals of their time, it is by coming to terms with them and adapting them that the responsible playwright can most effectively operate” (7). So Bond, the responsible playwright, was compelled to adapt Brecht’s theories to produce effective drama suitable to his own contemporary audience.

Bond’s greatest argument with Brecht is not with his epic theatre, but with his use of the alienation effect to isolate reason. When Brecht deliberately interrupted a story on stage – to show an actor taking off a character’s mask or a stage-hand moving a piece of scenery – he wanted to bring rational thought back into an imaginative space, to remind the audience of their social reality, of the world outside of the theatre. In this moment, reason (the real world) intrudes on imagination (the world of the story). In Brecht’s drama, imagination is always interrupted, curtailed, held in check by reason. For Bond, who equates imagination with our sense of self and “the basis of our humanness” (*Hidden Plot* 58), and reason with our sense of society and our instrumental value in the real world, Brecht’s alienation created a “dangerously wrong” situation (“Letter to David Allen” 197). By interrupting the story and privileging reason over imagination, Brecht forced the subordination of our sense of self (our humanness) below our sense of society (and our instrumental value within it). Remembering that Bond understands self-consciousness to be made up of equal parts reason and imagination, the subordination of imagination below reason is tantamount to the subordination of one half of the self to another, a self-alienating catastrophe:

Brecht's alienation is based on the idea that you isolate reason and appeal to it: that is if you alienate a thing it can be seen as what it rationally is. This is like asking a blind person to open their eyes. (Bond "Letter to David Allen" 197)

Or to put it more succinctly, Bond writes, alienation is like demanding "Do not feel when you think" (*Hidden Plot* 184). Pitiless rationality, the only result of what Bond calls theatre of the A-effect, is as useless to the modern world as irrational sentimentality:

To say that empathy is all [sic] is foolish, but it is as foolish to say that we need no empathy. The soldiers shot the Jews at Babi Yar – the Nazis gassed the Jews at Auschwitz – because they had no empathy with them. Auschwitz is The Theatre of the A-effect. (Bond *Hidden Plot* 169)

In her immensely useful study of Bond's technique, "Alienation is the 'Theatre of Auschwitz'," Kate Katafiasz explains that while Brecht's drama appears to offer audiences a choice between a rational or imaginative interpretation, the actual choice is illusory. "The rational discourse *is intended* to predominate over the imaginative one," she writes. "This is the only way Brecht can prise ideology away from story:"

Alienation exposes the ideology by interrupting the story and letting the world (actor) show the audience how it really is. Ideology is exposed but at the cost of devaluing the human. Though the two discourses have been shown together, and to some degree inform each other, logically the imaginative has been shown to be fallacious. (31)

Katafiasz also agrees with Bond that in being told which set of signs to identify with and which discourse to respond to, the audience was being told which part of themselves to identify with and which to deny. For Bond this forced choice leads to self-alienation:

If reason, represented by deconstruction and alienation [Brecht], predominates in the structure of the drama, the audience feels omniscient and lonely: we hate and try to kill off those emotional aspects of ourselves (of society) which we cannot rationalize. [...] If emotion predominates, the audience is emotionally connected but socially myopic; both eventualities generate unhappiness. (Katafiasz 47)

To engage with a character on a strictly emotional level was to be irrational and to deny social reality; to engage on a strictly rational level was to ignore the human condition and become psychopathically cold and unfeeling. Katafiasz calls this the double bind of alienation, the fact that there is no right choice when audiences have to engage *either* emotionally *or* rationally with a character because either choice entails sacrificing a part of themselves. When emotion and reason cannot be reconciled in a work of art, and when choosing between emotion and reason leads to self-denial, the work of art does not serve society or ourselves; alienation makes audiences ineffectual, which is a violation of Bond's foundational principle that art must be useful.

For Bond, then, the story must remain intact: alienation must not be allowed to disrupt the story to the extent that reason overcomes imagination. Reason and imagination must be allowed to interact *within* the story. In contrast to the alienation effect, Bond proposes "a sort of positive V-effect" ("On Brecht" 35): the Theatre Event. A Theatre Event (TE) is a moment or event during the play in which theatrical effect is consciously used to engage an audience imaginatively *and* rationally in order to enact or illustrate the play's central meaning (*Hidden Plot* 17). It is a moment in which the play's message is made visual on stage: "TE dramatizes the situation's meaning" (Bond *Hidden Plot* 40). Bond writes that Theatre Events are neither purely imaginative sensory experiences nor purely alienated rational reflections (*Hidden Plot* 17); instead they are moments that dramatize the interaction of imagination and reason, in which the audience is encouraged to see in a new way. Theatre Events allow an audience member to enter into a story imaginatively enough to empathize with a situation, and feel emotionally strongly enough about that situation to want to change it. At the same time, the audience

is still reminded of the world outside of the story, the real world beyond the theatre, and allowed rationally to reflect upon the ideological forces that created that situation, forces that need to be changed in order to ensure that that situation cannot happen again. In “Drama Devices,” Bond writes that Theatre Events are meant to be traumatic and determining; they are intended to push audiences into new cognitive spaces and involve them in the creation of new interpretations; they are designed to invalidate traditional meanings and establish new meanings in their place (84-85). “A stage event is chosen to question, confirm or change the values underlying social judgement” (Bond “Commentary” 300). For Bond, Theatre Events are more radical than the alienation effect.

Theatre Events occur around an object that has been represented both rationally and imaginatively to the audience. The Theatre Event occurs when the rational and imaginative discourses surrounding the object collide, forcing the audience to choose one interpretation or the other, or somehow by expanding their minds, to reconcile these disparate discourses and enter into a new understanding about themselves and society. When this happens, the object has entered into a new semantic space; it has become what Bond calls a site of radical innocence. For Bond, the term radical innocence refers to our “primary / almost-primal ability to judge and assess” (“Letter to Michael Fuller” 19); it is “the state in which infants discover and interpret the world” (“Commentary” 251), the place where questions originate and where we seek new meaning. Katafiasz describes this new state:

Here, language, all socially constructed meaning, is insufficient because culture / society cannot provide the answers. [...] The site of radical innocence is the place where an object is so dislocated from its usual, habitual place in the world (it is

usually so insignificant as to be invisible, like a crisp packet blowing down a street) that in its new position it is as if we ‘see’ it for the first time. Like a child having an elemental experience, we have to conceptualise and value it on our own terms because society, ideology, language cannot place it for us. (42)

In this state of radical innocence, the audience is encouraged, through the object, to reject old meanings and ideologies and explore new relationships with the world.

To create a Theatre Event around an object, Bond cathexes the object – that is, he presents it imaginatively and shows the audience its sentimental or emotional value – and then deconstructs the object, presenting it rationally and reminding the audience of its more instrumental or concrete value in the real world. For example, when Bond writes: “You can see the world in a grain of sand only when you know that the world is the world and a grain of sand is a grain of sand” (*Hidden Plot* 95), he illustrates the type of interaction between cathexis and deconstruction he uses in his plays. When Bond relates the grain of sand to the whole world, he is cathexing it; that is, he is imaginatively investing the grain of sand with symbolic or emotional significance. “Often this means treating the metaphor literally,” he writes (“Letter to Michael Fuller” 20). We see the grain of sand as the whole world. At the same time, Bond deconstructs the grain of sand, emptying it of imaginative meaning by reminding us of its concrete or instrumental value in the real world: a grain of sand is simply a grain of sand. Deconstruction, according to Bond’s use of the word, “exposes false meanings, the elisions and seemingly impenetrable gaps which hold things together” (*Hidden Plot* 38). In practical terms, he writes, this means portraying “factual matters,” showing

events and objects in terms of social realism: what does this character earn, how many people travel on this train, where did the bishop go to school, which companies own this town and who owns the companies etc. (“Letter to Michael Fuller” 22)

In Bond's sand metaphor, deconstruction and cathexis work together, allowing the object (the grain of sand) to exist on an imaginative level as the whole world as well as a rational level as a simple grain of sand at the same time. Neither discourse is privileged. The reader is free to choose either an imaginative or a rational view of the grain of sand, or to reevaluate the context and find a way to reconcile the two disparate interpretations. Perhaps the grain of sand can be both the whole world *and* a grain of sand? What limiting discourse or ideology prevents us from understanding this relationship?

It is this re-evaluation of context that is the central point of Bond's methodology, an injunction to reconsider our *own* world, to recognize the problems that emerge from it, and to understand the deadlocks these problems can lead to. As a result of this creative interrogation, the deconstructed cathexed object becomes what Bond has called a site of radical innocence. As it raises questions we cannot answer, the grain of sand takes on an unprecedented significance and enters into a radically different semantic space, which challenges the audience to think in new ways.

Within the context of a play, the deconstructed cathexed object, which now signifies one thing imaginatively and another thing rationally, becomes the basis of the Theatre Event. The object may be used sentimentally by one character and instrumentally by another, but it is ever-present on stage or visibly dominant, reminding the audience of its dual and conflicted role. At some point, the meanings of the object, or the uses of the object, collide in an event. In order to understand that event, audiences will potentially have to decide how they *themselves* relate to the object: emotionally, instrumentally, or in a new way that combines the two. The audience's sense of self thus

coalesces around how they see the object, whether they incline more towards an imaginative or a rational view of it, or whether they are able to see both and enter into a new relationship with the object, the radical innocence in which they can reevaluate themselves and the world. The argument between reason and imagination is thus literally objectified in front of them, and audiences are as implicated in the creation of meaning as they are in the creation of themselves:

The rationally deconstructed but imaginatively cathexed *object* sets up a balanced process in which we gain identity, we see ourselves in our society, *and* we gain potency: we can recreate human value in the face of its cultural absence.  
(Katafiasz 47)

Bond cautions that these Theatre Events cannot be prescriptive. “[The] TE cannot control the self’s [audience’s] subsequent, later reactions to it,” he writes. “One person may become more rational, closer to the real. Another – perhaps through fear – may affirm corruption and be forced into defending illusions and so become more corrupt” (*Hidden Plot* 15). The difference between Bond’s theatre and Brecht’s is that the audience is not *directed* to respond in one particular way; Bond’s theatre induces a more varied, less pre-determined response. Where Brecht mandated an audience’s rational and emotional interaction – “Only one out of the many possible sources of emotion needs to be left unused” – Bond opens up debate. With Bond, “Everyone in the audience must be free to choose what is significant for themselves” (“Commentary” 349); they can interpret events in various ways, there is no right or wrong interpretation, and they are encouraged to acknowledge that both (rational and imaginative) interpretations are valid. Bond’s Theatre Events present “different possibilities for value for the audience to piece together creatively,” Katafiasz writes:

The centre of the play is thus reiterated in different ways in every image concerning [the object]; when these Theatre Events occur, the play shifts from what Bond calls description to analysis, without compromising the story, without using signs from outside the play [in gaps or interruptions in which reality intrudes onto the story – a step that always privileges reality over the story] to reveal the hidden ideologies. (39)

By using objects in conflicting ways, Bond hopes to push his audience into a reexamination of their world, but he does not enforce any one interpretation over the other.

The dual process of deconstruction and cathexis that Bond uses to create the Theatre Event is best understood by example. In *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death* (1974) Bond portrays an aging William Shakespeare living out his retirement in Stratford, confronted by the question of land enclosure. Should he side with the wealthy landowners who want to enclose the town's common farmland, guaranteeing his own financial security but subsequently increasing the rent and taking the livelihood away from hundreds of poor farmers? Or should he side with the poor farmers, supporting them and the town council in their traditional but self-sustaining way of life, opposing his peers, the wealthy landowners, and jeopardizing the legacy he has to pass onto his family? In giving his tacit support to the landowners, Shakespeare votes against his own conscience, an act that unravels his sense of integrity and leads to his suicide. Throughout the play, Shakespeare is besieged by importuning forces around him – his resentful daughter Judith, whom he cannot love; Jonson, his friend and colleague from London, who needs money and validation; Combe the wealthy landowner, who pressures Shakespeare to side with his peers; and various townspeople – all of whom see Shakespeare from different perspectives, which makes it difficult for the audience to

know what to make of Shakespeare's character. In the end, as he lies dying from a self-inflicted dose of poison, the contradictions that surround his life and death leave the interpretation of his character up to the audience. Bond wrote: "I wrote *Bingo* because I think the contradictions in Shakespeare's life are similar to the contradictions in us" (Intro to *Bingo*. 6). He suggests that there is no right or wrong interpretation of Shakespeare; that the act of interpreting the character is an act of interpreting ourselves.

The play opens with emptiness and silence. "SHAKESPEARE *comes in. He carries a sheet of paper.*" This opening prompts a series of visual and associative cues in the audience. The audience recognizes the figure of Shakespeare, either because it knows from the billing that the play is about him, or because he is dressed to look like images of William Shakespeare in countless copies of the Droeshout and Chandos portraits or the Stratford bust. Because the audience recognizes the figure and identifies Shakespeare foremost as a writer, it may assume that the sheet of paper he is holding is a manuscript, perhaps a new play. The image of Shakespeare posed with a sheet of paper is so ubiquitous that the audience may consider the paper as a cue included by the playwright expressly to announce the figure as Shakespeare. Bond uses the familiarity of this image to cathex the sheet of paper, that is, he uses the audience's emotional response to a familiar image to invest the object (the paper) with sentimental value: the piece of paper imaginatively becomes a play or poem, the site of imagination and genius, of art and culture. By extension, the paper both recalls and embodies everything that made Shakespeare famous: the artistry of his language, the humanity of his characters, and his particularly popular appeal that seemed to transcend time, class, ethnicity or location – he was for all time.

As Combe enters the garden, the sheet of paper takes on a different significance. Shakespeare wants a written guarantee from Combe that he will not suffer financially from the proposed enclosure. He hands Combe the sheet of paper: "I want security. I can't provide for the future again" (21). The sheet of paper becomes a legal document. It represents a contractual relationship between two men bound by law and economics, recalling the source of Shakespeare's wealth is his land investments, investments that bring him money from the work of poor farmers. This sheet of paper redefines Shakespeare by portraying him in his socio-economic context as a self-interested, shrewd, and socially conservative businessman. It marks the end of Shakespeare's imaginative iteration in the mind of the audience at the same time that it marks the end of Shakespeare's imaginative life: "I can't provide for the future again." When the audience realizes that the sheet of paper is a legal document, Jenny S. Spencer suggests, they experience a sense of loss; "we are disappointed," she writes (50). Shakespeare is not who the audience imagined him to be. Yet history shows that Shakespeare was literate and had money, which aligned him to wealthy landowners who enforced enclosures, through which he made more money and gained more status, and through which the poor were further disenfranchised by a social and economic system they could not escape. In deconstructing the sheet of paper, Bond shows the society and social codes at work behind the myth of Shakespeare. The deconstructed sheet of paper shows a Shakespeare not for all time and all people, but for immediate profit and for himself.

In "Endings and Beginnings: Edward Bond and the Shock of Recognition," John Worthen describes this moment when the cathexed and deconstructed meanings of the

sheet of paper overlap. He describes the sense of shock (or worry) an audience may feel when the paper shows Shakespeare in a different light.

The piece of paper is particularly worrying; will he start writing *The Tempest*? The worry is important; the paper Shakespeare carries turns out not to be part of a play, but a financial agreement. This Shakespeare has stopped writing. [...] We are not being invited to look into the soul of genius [...]. Bond is [...] destroying our comfortable natural haziness about Shakespeare; he isn't a man with a serene final period, or the soul of genius, but a man with financial commitments and problems. The problems have nothing to do with being a genius, apart from his ability to perceive them; they have a good deal to do with being alive and secure in our kind of society. (476)

Worthen is right; the worry is important. The sheet of paper prompts anxiety because it has the potential to destroy not only an audience's comfortable natural haziness about Shakespeare, but their comfortable natural desire to have a unified interpretive experience. Imagination meets reality but it does not coincide. In "Brecht, Bond, Gaskill, and the Practice of Political Theatre," Peter Holland agrees that objects like the sheet of paper defy attempts at unified interpretation; they represent "the failure of the connection of the imagination with the real" (30). What he means is that an audience's imaginative interpretation of the sheet of paper ("will he start writing *The Tempest*") fails to coincide with the rational interpretation provided in the play ("This Shakespeare has stopped writing"). Spencer's sense of disappointment, Worthen's sense of worry, and Holland's sense of failure indicate the same: an audience becomes conscious of dissonance, and their discomfort with this dissonance prompts them to take a more active role in the interpretive process. Bond has made audiences uncomfortable by creating two discourses that cannot be reconciled in any traditional way. They must move beyond what is comfortable to find an interpretive solution.

The burden of interpretation is now on the audience. The irreconcilability of the imaginative and rational discourses surrounding the piece of paper leaves it up to them to decide which discourse they prefer, whether to see the paper as a work of art or a legal document. At the same time, the audience may be uncomfortably aware that the sheet of paper is nothing more than a blank sheet of paper. As Shakespeare hands the paper over to Combe to make a note, they may wonder if there is anything written on the paper at all. In this sense, the sheet of paper is literally a *tabula rasa*, an interpretive blank slate waved in front of the audience. The indeterminate nature of the sheet of paper foregrounds the particular interpretive challenge Bond presents: “The most important work in the theatre is always the work of the audience” (Bond “Letter to Michael Fuller” 19). If the audience chooses to see the piece of paper sentimentally, Shakespeare is still the great man of legend, the figure of myth and art, a cultural hero. If they choose to see the piece of paper rationally, Shakespeare becomes a little man, a figure of business and politics, an historic villain. Yet instead of providing cues towards one meaning or the other, Bond presents his audience with a blank slate on which to draw their own conclusions. Not even Shakespeare can help them interpret:

Without a cue from the central character whose presence so dominates the stage, the question of how to interpret events is kept constantly at issue. Shakespeare himself is worried about how others interpret him. (Spencer 49)

How audiences choose to interpret the sheet of paper – whether imaginatively or rationally – determines their understanding of Shakespeare and of the play. But by revealing their own interpretive biases, it also potentially reveals audiences’ sense of themselves and what they value.

In the final act of *Bingo*, the discordance surrounding the sheet of paper comes to a head in the Theatre Event, a moment where the audience is shocked by violence into seeing the object again for the first time. In an act of either despair or defiance, Shakespeare takes poison and dies. As he lies twitching on the floor, his daughter Judith enters, steps over his body, and ransacks the room for a copy of his last will. The image of the daughter stepping coldly around her dying father to find his will is shocking, and startles the audience into a moment of re-evaluation; the audience faces an interpretive crux. The papers Judith is searching through remind them of the deconstructed cathected sheet of paper from act one; perhaps they are the same. This challenges audiences to consider again what sheet of paper Shakespeare was holding and what type of man he was. Their reactions to Shakespeare's death will vary according to how they interpret his life, which varied according to how they interpreted the sheet of paper. Audiences are encouraged to ask *which* Shakespeare is dying on the floor, the sentimentally mythologized hero or the more realistically problematized anti-hero?

In the aftermath of the Theatre Event, audiences are potentially left with questions they cannot easily answer; but Bond refuses to provide interpretive solutions. Audiences are not *directed* to see the sheet of paper one way or another, or to interpret Shakespeare's death in any particular way. Instead, Bond encourages them to make their own interpretations by choosing either imaginative or rational explanations, or trying to understand both explanations together. He challenges them to see Shakespeare as both a hero and a villain at the same time, a man for all time and a man struggling with the concerns of contemporary life. Audiences are encouraged to see his death both as meaningless tragedy *and* as poetic justice. In doing so, they are asked to re-evaluate their

own notions of heroism and villainy, consider what hampers their understanding of Shakespeare as a mythic genius *and* as a real person, wonder why they expect him to be either or preclude him from being both. They may conclude that in light of his struggle to be human, Shakespeare's heroism becomes more significant. In examining the Theatre Event, audiences are encouraged to examine themselves, their biases and assumptions, and the ideologies that structure their daily lives. Bond calls this form of self-analysis the first step in creating change. As Hay and Roberts point out, analysis and change are the foundation of Bond's work: "Unless a correct analysis is made, and is then widely understood, there won't be any change" (Bond "Revolution" 27 October 1969, qtd. in Hay Roberts 106).

Like *Bingo*, much of Bond's theatre encourages change through analysis, but this analysis is not without its problems for the audience. A certain amount of disjunction must occur in any of Bond's productions between what the playwright *intends* and what the audience is able to understand. This disjunction may be the result of the production – Bond feels that his plays are often undermined by the problem of direction – or by the playwright's rigid reliance on his own theories. The necessity of keeping events open to interpretation means that Bond's plays must be acted and directed with what he regards as the utmost care; "Confusion may be made worse by the role of the director," Bond writes ("Commentary" 305). Yet even when acted according to Bond's own direction, his plays still cannot be fully understood unless an audience has some familiarity with his theoretical writing, writing which is often obscure and inconsistent, and which increasingly tends to reflect outdated conceptualizations of the world.

The problem of direction is uppermost; audience response to a Bond play is likely to be shaped primarily by the play itself, but it could also be shaped by the way the play is directed. “The director takes responsibility for ‘interpretation’,” Bond writes (“Commentary” 305), but it is possible that directing might encourage an audience to interpret a Theatre Event too rationally or too imaginatively, jeopardizing Bond’s sense of “correct analysis.” For example, if the Shakespeare character is played too sentimentally in *Bingo*, an audience may read his death as a simple tragedy without considering his own complicity in it; the emphasis on sentimentality may overshadow the audience’s ability to see the relevance of Shakespeare’s story to their own lives. Bond would regard this as an incorrect analysis:

Audiences cannot be coerced into understanding by an aggressive or emotionally domineering performance. [...] Emotional appeals achieve only token responses, we cry at the superficially moving. (Bond “Commentary” 331)

Token responses are not what Bond is looking for from his audience. Without the imaginative and rational interpretations of Shakespeare’s character colliding in an incompatible way, an audience is not challenged to see him as *both* a villain and a hero, to re-evaluate their own notions of heroism, or to question a world in which heroic virtues are not considered alongside real-life problems. Such direction would potentially have robbed the audience of Bond’s desired interpretive analysis by imposing an interpretation on them. Bond advocates freedom of interpretation and choice in the theatre, but his sense of democracy is undermined by his rigid insistence on “correct analysis.”

Another concern with the interpretation of Bond’s plays is their dependence on Bond’s own theories of theatre. Biased direction could be compensated for if an audience was familiar with the playwright’s theoretical writing, but who beyond an

academic audience would be this familiar with Bond's work? His theoretical writing is not accessible; it is prolific and obscure, riddled with jargon, and too reliant on undefined terms and phrases he has coined himself. How is an audience to interpret Bond's use of the term "deconstruction" which is highly specific; or his use of phrases like "Theatre Event," and "site of radical innocence"? Without a comprehensive study of Bond's theatre theories, it is unlikely that an audience would be familiar with these concepts much less recognize them in practice on stage. To some extent, Bond acknowledges this problem: "Things become divorced from their theories when the theories need to be written down" ("Letter to Michael Fuller" 13). If an audience cannot recognize Bond's strategies on stage, they are less likely to benefit from them and more likely to be left confused or unmoved.

The inaccessibility of Bond's theoretical writing is further exacerbated by its inconsistencies. As a writer who has evolved over almost fifty years, Bond has extended, retracted, and evolved many of his early ideas about drama. His contradictory statements about Brecht's influence, for example, or the evolution of his ideas about the Theatre Event (a concept that began as a sort of positive-alienation effect and morphed into something he called "aggro-effect" before crystallizing into the Theatre Event) reflect the changeability of his ideas. These inconsistencies are propounded in interviews where Bond is coy and defensive about his writing, in prefaces which fail to address the works they preface, and in theatre workshops where Bond is erratic with his teaching techniques. Critics have learned that Bond is least reliable when talking about his own work.

Finally, if an audience can come to terms with enough of Bond's theoretical writing to understand the mechanics of his plays, there is the problem of those theories themselves. "I try to establish a scheme for theatre practice based on an understanding of the way the mind works, knows, experiences and creates anything," he writes ("Letter to Michael Fuller" 20), but Bond's understanding of the human mind is of a rational / imaginative holism – "We can talk, in the theatre, of human activity under two aspects: the real and the imaginary" (21) – a conceptualization that now seems oversimplified and outdated. In the wake of Derridean post-structuralism, Bond's audience might shun the idea that the universe is governed by divided yet balanced oppositional forces. They may have been taught to be suspicious of dualities. Arbitrary categorizations like reason versus imagination, male versus female, good versus evil, even Bond's own sense of correct and incorrect analysis, entail a polarization (and hierarchization) of values that many audiences may no longer countenance. In a post-Einsteinian world, binary structures have been replaced with relativism and endless plays of signification. Granted, as a rhetorical tool, the reason / imagination dichotomy may be useful for Bond – he certainly aims to complicate an otherwise simple duality by encouraging audiences to see *both* imaginatively and rationally – but his theories of drama are still based on this outdated model. It is no longer guaranteed that such a model will be recognized or accepted by a modern audience. Ironically, in his criticisms of Brecht, Bond wrote: "There has been a radical change in the functioning of human consciousness since Brecht: the audience's minds work differently ("Letter to Adrian Noble" 137). Perhaps this same critique can now be leveled at Bond.

These problems may well account for the mixed reception Bond's work has received both critically and publicly. "I've read some of the critics," he writes, "Really they hate my guts with all their hearts" ("Letter to Adrian Noble" 135). Yet such criticisms should not detract from the important contribution Bond has made to modern theatre and to modern adaptations of Shakespeare. His dramatic theories, although problematic at times, have provided modern theatre with a way to move beyond Brecht, and his notes on dramatic technique around the writing of *Lear* offer a rare opportunity to consider the mechanics of adaptation. Despite the vagaries in Bond's writing, we can still analyze his use of deconstructed cathexed objects in *Lear*, and we can still carry this strategy over into a discussion of the techniques Bond uses to adapt Shakespeare.

To return to *Lear*, Bond uses his methodology of deconstructing and cathexing an object – here, the wall – to create a Theatre Event around Lear's death that challenges the audience to reconsider the relationship between war and peace, violence and justice. One of the most prominent symbols throughout the play is the wall. Introduced in the first scene of act one, it is a symbol of Lear's reign – "My wall will make you free" – and continues throughout the play as a symbolic reference to power. As Lear begins to recognize his complicity in the violence of the state, his sense of the wall changes:

What can I do? I left my prison, pulled it down, broke the key, and still I'm a prisoner. I hit my head against a wall all the time. There's a wall everywhere. I'm buried alive in a wall. Does this suffering and misery last forever? Do we work to build ruins, waste all these lives to make a desert no one could live in?  
(80)

The wall has become a symbol of imprisonment for Lear. Later, he tells Cordelia, "The wall will destroy you. It's already doing it. How can I make you see?" (84) The final image of the play is of Lear being shot down while straddling the wall, desperately trying

to undo the damage his reign has caused. Without understanding Bond's methodology, an audience might recognize that the wall is significant, but fail to understand what it is supposed to mean; the symbolic power of the wall is undeniable, but the *meaning* of the wall fluctuates throughout the play. Bond does not use the wall in a simple symbolic capacity, as a metaphor for power, but like the sheet of paper in *Bingo* he uses it within two different rhetorical contexts (deconstruction and cathexis) which create competing meanings for the wall that cannot easily be reconciled.

Consider the first exchange about the wall in the first scene of the play. Lear says:

I started this wall when I was young. I stopped my enemies in the field, but there were always more of them. How could we ever be free? So I built this wall to keep our enemies out. My people will live behind this wall when I'm dead. You may be governed by fools but you'll always live in peace. My wall will make you free. That's why the enemies on our borders – the Duke of Cornwall and the Duke of North – try to stop us building it. (3-4)

For Lear, the wall exists for the safety of his people, but it also represents the success of his governance, his legacy for the future, and the dream of freedom. Rhetorically, the wall is cathected, that is to say, it is invested with symbolic or emotional energy through which it takes on new meaning and greater significance. It evokes another, imaginary meaning. "My wall will make you free," says Lear.

At the same time, Bodice reminds him, "You don't have to make your people slaves to protect you from your sons-in-law" (5), identifying a different rhetorical context for the wall. For Bodice, the wall is a reality that confines and overworks the people. They must leave their families and farms to work on the wall; they are shot if they do not comply. She sees the wall not as a symbol of peace, but as an obstacle that could cause a

war and economic collapse. Rhetorically, the wall is deconstructed, that is, it is taken apart to reveal the conditions of oppression behind it. Bond's deconstruction grounds the object in the broader context of a rational world. For Bodice, the wall is enslaving her people, overtaxing the economy, tearing apart Lear's authority, and putting the country in danger of war with the neighbouring dukes. "This wall must be pulled down," she says (6).

Simultaneously the wall evokes an imaginary world of success, peace, and freedom, and a rational world of economic failure, war, and enslavement. These two sets of meanings interact, but they cannot be reconciled. The wall cannot simultaneously mean both the dream of freedom and the reality of enslavement. Moreover, the cathexed (imaginary) meaning begins to look questionable in light of the deconstructed (real) meaning: how can success, peace, and freedom exist in the presence of failure, war, and enslavement? The deconstructed meaning undermines the cathexed meaning for the wall. But at the same time, the deconstructed meaning is strangely dependent on the cathexed meaning: the wall – as prison and slavery – would never have been built if someone had not conceived of it as a sign of hope. Hence the deconstructed meaning for the wall both relies on and cancels out the cathexed meaning for the wall.

The effect of Bond's deconstructed cathexis in *Lear* begins to sound familiar. Two meanings are created around a single object – or two narratives, one imaginary and one real – which interact but cannot be reconciled by the audience. These conflicting representations of the wall lead up to the Theatre Event that is Lear's death. In an utterly futile attempt to destroy the wall in act three, Lear climbs the wall with a shovel and

begins to dig. The Farmer's Son challenges him, but Lear continues to dig: "I can still make my mark" (88). The Son aims his pistol at Lear, threatening. Still Lear digs. Finally, the boy fires; Lear dies instantly, falling off the wall. It is a senseless but enthralling act of violence that arrests the audience's attention. They try to make sense of the event, but are confronted by multiple meanings. *Which* wall was Lear trying to destroy: the freedom-wall or the slavery-wall? What does he mean about making his mark? His attempt to dig up the wall is an act of defiance, but against what exactly: the tyranny inflicted by the government, or his own naive dream of freedom? How should an audience react? Should they despair that Lear has given up his hope for freedom, or applaud him for tearing down injustice?

The Theatre Event of Lear's death is intended to invite various interpretations but to prescribe none. It challenges audiences to consider different interpretations together and question the context in which different meanings can or cannot exist at the same time. It is, after all, the same wall; perhaps naivety and tyranny are analogous. Perhaps the dream of freedom is not as independent from the reality of enslavement as an audience might think. Or perhaps peace and violence operate hand in hand. By suggesting a semantic interaction that audiences cannot easily reconcile and have not previously considered, the wall takes on new significance as a site of radical innocence that encourages audiences to reconsider themselves and their world.

Bond's methodology, this deconstructed cathexis, is intended as a way to engage his audience both rationally and emotionally in an ongoing examination of their own world. He has never discussed this methodology in the context of adaptation – that is, he

has never deliberately applied his approach of deconstructing and cathexing to a narrative rather than an object. Bond's methodology, however, has strong similarities to the double gesture seen in modern adaptors like Stoppard, and the effects on the audience are similar. It is worth considering whether or not deconstructed cathexis has informed Bond's approach to Shakespeare after all.

There are obvious differences in practice between deconstructing / cathexing an object and deconstructing / cathexing a story. A story has no physical presence onstage; it cannot be picked up, passed over, or broken the way a teacup or a tennis ball can. But objects and stories are not so dissimilar for Bond; they act in interdependent ways. Objects have meaning for Bond because of their stories, and stories have meaning because they are articulated through objects. Consider Bond's description of putting on his boots, a passage that shows how interrelated stories and objects are for him:

If I put on my boots that is a real activity. But it involves the imagined in various ways. If the boots are military I take on the ethos of the military. If they're farmer's boots I take on the mystique and legends of the soil and land. If they're factory workers boots – then I take on the conflict of cities, industrial relations, urban culture, supermarkets, etc. Each object becomes a reference point for the world in which it is. (“Letter to Michael Fuller” 21)

Objects have meaning because of their stories. The boots have meaning as military boots because they come from the army surplus store, lace-up like soldier's boots, will go on the feet of an officer; or as farm boots because they are covered in mud and flecks of hay, are made of heavy plastic for slopping out a sty, or belonged to his father who worked on a dairy. At the same time, stories come to have meaning when they are articulated through objects. Here, the boots tell us the story. We understand that the soldier is young, and fresh and frightened because his boots are new and shiny; or we see that the

soldier is broken, world-weary, and nearing the end of his last tour of duty because his boots are old and worn-through. Objects and stories are different, but in his theatre, Bond uses them *both* as reference points for the world in which they exist. Objects and stories communicate ideas about the world (about the military, about farm life), and both become vehicles for our efforts to find meaning in the world. But Bond also shows that the ideas these objects and stories communicate, and our ability to find meaning through them, are all dependent on the way that the object or story is portrayed (ironically, tragically, symbolically). By understanding how Bond portrays an object in different ways, through deconstruction or cathexis, and by understanding the affinities between objects and stories, we can begin to understand how he can deconstruct and cathex a story as well as an object.

When Bond cathexes the wall in *Lear*, he begins with an object that is semantically neutral. A wall has no particular significance. Over the course of the play, Bond uses words to invest the object with imaginative and sentimental value: Lear says the wall is freedom. In contrast, the *King Lear* story is not semantically neutral. Audiences are not indifferent to *King Lear* the way they are to a sheet of paper or a wall. As a foundational part of modern western culture, the *King Lear* story likely already has sentimental and imaginative meaning. It is already cathexed. And because this cathexis often pertains to the *story* of King Lear rather than to the text, these sentimental and imaginative associations will vary according to the nature of each audience member's previous interactions with the story. For some audiences, *King Lear* will evoke a fantasized world of early English mythology, or the fantasized history of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan stage, or a more contemporary fantasy associated with performances

by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Perhaps it carries recollections of high school English classes or black and white films. At the same time, *King Lear* may evoke less conscious but equally sentimental notions of Englishness, culture, language, and art. Some audiences will associate the story with filial disgrace and devotion, with old-age and madness, and with a tragedy so transcendent as to become a thing of beauty. The imaginative meanings associated with *King Lear*, then, do not come from Bond but from audiences themselves, and they are not imposed linguistically within the play by the playwright, but culturally *before* the play by the audience itself.

Bond is not *creating* an imaginative discourse around *King Lear*, the way he created a discourse around the wall, but capitalizing on a pre-existent culturally cathected discourse. As such, while the discourse is still powerful and evocative, Bond has less control over it. He cannot tell audiences what the *King Lear* story means the way he can tell them what the wall means. With another narrative, Bond's lack of control over the sentimental discourse could become a problem: with a less familiar Shakespearean play, *King John* for example, Bond could not count on the audience having a predictable sentimental reaction to it. But the *King Lear* story is so ubiquitous – Kiernan Ryan calls it the “keystone of the canon” and “the touchstone of literary value” (1) – that Bond is almost guaranteed a cathected response based on familiarity of some sort. As the play opens, then, the *King Lear* story, like the wall, stands imaginatively for something greater than itself.

Bond relies on *King Lear*'s pre-existent imaginative value to provide a contrast to the deconstructed *King Lear* he presents onstage. Like the wall, the story is not allowed

to occupy a simple rhetorical space, but the process of deconstructing the story is not the same as deconstructing the wall. Again, the story is not a semantically neutral object Bond can imprint with his own meanings. With the wall, Bond uses language to reveal the hidden system of beliefs behind the object, presenting this rational interpretation of the wall as a direct and immediate contrast to the wall's imaginative meaning; Bodice refers to the wall as a form of enslavement, which conflicts with Lear's articulation of the wall as a symbol of freedom. The cathexis and deconstruction of the wall both happen side by side, within the play and within language.

The deconstruction of the *King Lear* story is different and more complex. Since the story is culturally cathexed before the play begins, Bond's deconstruction happens immediately as soon as the play opens; deconstruction is not developed side by side with cathexis because the cathexis precedes the play. What this means is that audiences do not see these dual processes taking place within the play at the same time, as they saw with the wall. They witness only the deconstruction. With another play, again *King John*, this would not work. Because *King John* lacks the strong cultural cathexis of *King Lear*, audiences would not have a predetermined set of values attached to it. They would not bring these values into the play with them, and might not then recognize how discordant their values are with the values Bond presents. Without a cathexed value, they would see only the deconstruction; they would have no conflicting meanings and make no attempts at creative interrogation or self-analysis.

Because *King Lear* is so strongly culturally cathexed, Bond relies on the fact that audiences will immediately recognize that his play presents the story in a way that

conflicts with their expectations. Whatever audiences imagined *King Lear* to be, it is probably not what Bond presents them with in act one. The play opens with

*A stack of building materials – shovels, picks, posts and a tarpaulin. Silence. Then (offstage) a sudden indistinct shout, a crash, shouts. A FOREMAN and TWO WORKERS carry on a DEAD WORKER and put him down. They are followed by a SOLDIER.*

FIRST WORKER: Get some water! He needs water.

FOREMAN: He's dead.

SOLDIER: Move 'im then!

FOREMAN: Get his legs.

[...]

THIRD WORKER: (*coming on*). I shouted to him to run.

FOREMAN: (*coming downstage*). Go back, go back! Work!

[...]

THIRD WORKER: You heard me shout!

FIRST WORKER: He says he's dead.

FOREMAN: Work! (1)

The play opens with violence and death, already challenging any sentimental expectations for *King Lear*. If the cathexed values audiences associate with the story and bring with them into the play are strong, they will immediately recognize difference; they may even understand that they are entering into the story *as it is being deconstructed*. Bond wrote that deconstruction “exposes false meanings, the elisions and seemingly impenetrable gaps which hold things together” (*Hidden Plot* 38). Here Bond is challenging the “false meanings” audiences might bring with them from *King Lear* into *Lear*. He shows them the story removed from its cathexed context, the imaginative world of myth and culture, and grounded instead in the broader, more realistic context of the real world.

In this first scene, Bond uses not only language (modern slang and idiom), but setting (a work camp) and action (the careless disposal of a dead body) to reveal the societal structures and the unspoken systems of belief that underlie the story. Shovels,

picks, and tarpaulins place audiences within a modern, working-class world of manual labour, suggestive of an economic system in which a person is valued only for his or her ability to work. It also indicates a class system in which a large group of workers, disenfranchised by poverty, is held in check by a small ruling class who maintain their power by military right and police surveillance, as indicated by the soldier's presence. The state exercises its power by making people work; cessation of work is an act of treason against the state. Men are afraid to stop working – “It's a flogging crime to delay work” (2) – because it removes their value in the eyes of the state. When they die, they cannot work and are disposed of as devalued objects: “Move 'im then!” The repetition of words like “dead” and “work” in conjunction with each other in this first scene emphasize the violence and fear that lie behind the government façade of social justice. With a few sentences, Bond has re-contextualized the *King Lear* story from whatever imaginatively (culturally) cathected discourse audiences might have anticipated into a rationally deconstructed counter-story. This *Lear* is a story about labour within a military state, the economic costs of slavery, and the injustice of political authority.

*Lear* is also a story about Englishness. The dropped “h's” and slang recall a lower-class English vernacular, while the knitting needles Bodice carries evoke the domestic fantasy of the English housewife. Again, Bond is contrasting any fantasies of Englishness evoked by the *King Lear* story with the anti-fantasy of modern England. In scene four, these discourses collide. Fontanelle tortures Warrington while Bodice sits by and knits:

FONTANELLE: O yes, tears and blood. I wish my father was here. I wish he could see him. Look at his hands! Look at them going! What's he praying or clutching? Smash his hands!

(SOLDIER A *and* FONTANELLE *jump on* WARRINGTON's hands.)  
 Kill his hands! Kill his feet! Jump on it – all of it! He can't hit us now.  
 Look at his hands like boiling crabs! Kill it! Kill all of it! Kill him  
 inside! Make him dead! Father! Father! I want to sit on his lungs.  
 BODICE: (*knits*). Plain, pearl, plain. She was just the same at school. (14)

The contrast between the fantasy of Englishness, evoked by Bodice's knitting and her recollections of school, and the gruesome violence of modern warfare portrayed in Warrington's torture, shows how vastly discordant the imaginative and rational narratives surrounding *King Lear* can be. Behind English culture there is labour and war, behind domesticity there is violence and death, and behind the fantasy of nationhood is a reality of Englishness that is shockingly inhuman.

Two Lear stories vie for space: one sentimentally and culturally cathexed and brought to the play by the audience, the other rationally deconstructed by the playwright within the first few scenes. These stories are inconsistent; they collide when the first dead worker's body is dragged on stage. Using the violence of this first scene to aggravate an audience's sense of shock and disorientation, Bond emphasizes the incongruity between their Lear fantasy and his Lear reality. He continues throughout the play to circle back to the *King Lear* story, reminding audiences again and again of the difference between a sentimentally cathexed version and the harshly deconstructed version on stage. Using shadow-events that recall Shakespeare's play, Bond re-contextualizes images in ways that confuse an audience's expected reaction. When Warrington is tortured by Bodice, the play makes reference to Gloucester's blinding. Audiences ought to be horrified, as they are in *King Lear*. Yet the scene is portrayed almost comically, with Bodice maniacally knitting and giggling her way through most of it. This could suggest parody, but audience reaction to parody is too simple: it laughs.

Here audiences will laugh *and* recoil, a more complicated response that leaves them confused. Is this funny or is this horrifying? Their expectations for *King Lear* are in no way compatible with the King Lear story they see onstage.

In *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond*, Jenny Spencer corroborates this use of double narratives as an adaptive technique of Bond's. "Bond's 'adaptations' usually work on at least two levels," she writes, "restoring a social function to the source text by a version that critically 'rereads' it, and offering a new narrative with strictly contemporary relevance" (82). Spencer is one of the few critics who have tried to examine Bond's adaptive strategies in a fruitful way, convincingly arguing that Bond creates narratives on "at least two levels." But Spencer oversimplifies Bond's strategies by glossing over the irreconcilability of these different narrative levels. Moreover, she fails to consider the conflicting response these narratives could generate from the audience.

This conflicting response is the point of Bond's dramaturgy, the "correct analysis" he is looking for. In his play, audiences are confronted with a King Lear story that signifies in two different directions, and little sense of how to reconcile the two meanings. One story may evoke Englishness, culture, myth, art; the other violence, injustice, war. These seem disparate, but Bond's play provides the space to consider things in new relationships with each other; it allows audiences to pursue various interpretive options within his controlled framework:

- i) It can retain a culturally cathexed version of the Lear story as a mythic narrative about Englishness, or art, or culture

Or

ii) It can accept Bond's deconstructed version of the Lear story as a modern narrative about violence, injustice, and war

Or

iii) In an attempt to reconcile the two narratives, audiences can accept that both stories are the Lear story; that the narrative of Englishness, art, or culture is also the narrative of violence, injustice, and war.

Like the wall, the story has become a site of radical innocence. By raising questions an audience cannot answer, the story takes on a new significance; in the creative interrogation that follows, it pushes audiences into a new semantic space where they can begin to consider how mutually exclusive concepts coexist. Perhaps the story of Englishness, art, and culture *is* a story of violence, injustice, and war. As a result, audiences can not only see the story with fresh eyes and re-evaluate its significance, but begin to see their world with fresh eyes, and re-evaluate that as well. This reevaluation is consistent with Bond's sense of the story's purpose. "The whole purpose of story [is] to enable humans to use fiction to reason imaginatively and imagine reasonably," Katafiasz summarizes. "Story gives us novelty and depth that might be lacking, or might be too familiar or too dangerous to our psyche, for us to 'see' in real life" (36).

In the end, the deconstructed cathexed King Lear story has a remarkably similar effect as the double-gesture modern adaptations explored in chapter two. Both approaches create simultaneous narratives with dissonant meanings, and both push audiences into new semantic spaces where they are challenged either to re-evaluate the

narratives or themselves. Baring's audiences were challenged to reconcile the tone of Goneril's letter with *King Lear*, and failing that, to choose one over the other; similarly, Stoppard's audiences were challenged to fit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's disparate version of events into *Hamlet*, or to give equal or more credence to the newer narrative. Bond's *Lear* presents audiences with two radically different meanings of King Lear, the one imaginatively cathexed and the other rationally deconstructed, which cannot sensibly coexist, and encourages them to reflect on this coexistence. While Bond's deconstructed cathexis methodology has never ostensibly been intended as an approach to adaptation, it provides insight into how opposite discourses can be created simultaneously, and the potential effect this can have on the audience, which in turn can lead to a better understanding of the double gesture of modern adaptations.

The result of both Stoppard and Bond's double-gesture methodologies are works that rely on their Shakespearean originals and repudiate them simultaneously, while at the same time operating as independent and original works of theatre. For John Barth, literary parasitism of this kind is characteristic of much postmodern writing. In "The Literature of Replenishment" he anticipates the complex new relationships developing between authors and their predecessors: "artistic conventions are likely to be re-tried, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work" (qtd. in Brassell 34). Barth identifies parody and travesty as examples of original works that recycle their predecessors. It would be worth including adaptation in this list. Certainly Shakespeare adaptation is as indicative of persistent literary recycling as either parody or travesty, and certainly as unique. Both Stoppard and Bond embrace this approach in their adaptations. In "Something of Myself," Bond writes

“We are the first society not to have created a culture, we are parasitic on other cultures”  
(5).

The adaptations of Bond and Stoppard share an interest in literary recycling and ironic dissonance, and in each, these approaches combine to draw the audiences’ attention to the theatricality of the theatre. Pilfering from an obvious dramatic source like Shakespeare, and creating a parallel narrative that deliberately undermines Shakespeare, both playwrights implicate the audience in the process of making theatre. With each step, the audience is encouraged to recognize the original within the adaptation, to evaluate the differences between what they know of the original and what they see onstage, and to participate in the reconciliation or discrimination of the two versions. As such, the audience becomes as much a part of the theatre of Stoppard and Bond as the playwrights and the actors. But here, a crucial difference emerges between Stoppard and Bond: despite the similarities in their adaptive gestures, and despite their common interest in implicating the audience in their work, Stoppard is steadfastly apolitical, and Bond is not.

Stoppard was frequently criticized for his lack of political commitment. Rusinko writes that “the dazzling displays of ideas, language, and inventive parodic style of Stoppard’s dramas have drawn criticism, almost from the start, about the absence of social or political conscience in those dramas” (Preface). Martin Gottfried says that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is clever, but not profound (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 17 Oct. 1967), and Robert Brustein writes that Stoppard manipulates the premise of adaptation without exploring it, resulting merely in “an immensely shrewd exercise enlivened more by cunning than by conviction” (*The Third Theatre* 1969, both qtd. in

Rusinko, Preface). Stoppard himself seems comfortable with this criticism: “there is very often *no* single, clear statement in my plays,” he says in an interview with *Theatre Quarterly*. “What there is, is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters, and they tend to play a sort of infinite leap-frog” (qtd. Rosinko 8).

Stoppard’s apolitical approach to the adaptation of Shakespeare is radically at odds with Bond’s. In Bond, we see a new type of adaptation emerge, where Shakespeare is used as a tool to comment on and effect change in a modern society. Bond’s awareness of the political relevance of Shakespeare is evident early on. He records as a child first encountering Shakespeare in a performance of *Macbeth* at the Bedford theatre in Camden:

[For] the first time in my life – I remember this quite distinctly – I met somebody who was actually talking about my problems, about the life I’d been living, the political society around me. Nobody else had said anything about my life to me at all, ever . . . I *knew* all these people, they were there in the street or in the newspapers – this in fact was my world. (qtd. in Hay and Roberts 15)

What stands out in this recollection is not only Bond’s recognition of Shakespeare’s modernity, but his awareness of the power of Shakespeare to operate as a tool for ideological change. Shakespeare could speak to Bond about his own problems, his own life, his own political society. But Bond is not naive in assuming that Shakespeare unalloyed could reach modern audiences with enough clarity and consistency to effect the type of change he wants to see. Stressing the utility of Shakespeare as his motivating force, Bond explains why plays like *King Lear* must be adapted:

I’m not criticizing *King Lear* in any way. It’s a play for which (it’s a stupid thing to say) . . . I have enormous admiration, and I’ve learnt more from it than from any other play. But . . . as a society we use the play in a wrong way. And it’s for that reason I would like to rewrite it so that we now have to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time, for our problems. (“A Discussion” 24-25)

In *Bond*, we see new motivation emerging around the adaptation of Shakespeare; adaptation becomes a strategy to make Shakespeare more relevant, to use him in a way that is more useful, so that his plays can be more effective in changing audiences' perceptions about themselves and their world.

Adaptation is similarly catalytic for Howard Barker. In *Seven Lears* (1989) he uses what is becoming a familiar adaptive methodology to effect change. Like Bond and Stoppard, Barker juxtaposes a Shakespearean narrative alongside a radically dissonant modern narrative. This dissonance challenges audiences to question what has changed in the narrative and implicates them in the creation of new meaning. In *Bond*, this process is intended to shed light on the audience's own biases and ideologies and encourages them to form new ones. Barker, like Bond, uses Shakespeare as a tool to challenge the social status quo and question contemporary political ideologies. But by reconciling the dissonance between the Shakespearean original and the adaptation in its sites of radical innocence, Bond's play seeks to resolve ideological dissonance and create new meaning, what Bond calls "correct analysis." In Barker's work, the Shakespearean narrative is shattered past hope; audiences cannot reconcile the original with the adaptation; there is no correct analysis. Unlike Bond, Barker offers no sites of radical innocence, no new semantic spaces, in which to reconcile dissonant narratives and create new meanings. Barker rejects reconciliation and shuns meaning altogether.

Despite sharing a similar adaptive methodology, Barker's work reflects a more postmodern ethos than Bond's and shows a less accommodating relationship to Shakespeare. Where Stoppard's and Bond's adaptations take for granted Shakespeare's

universal and enduring value, Barker's questions this value by shattering *King Lear* almost beyond recognition. In the wake of this catastrophe, audiences are left asking: what makes Shakespeare Shakespeare, and is any of it still relevant at all?

Barker's career as a dramatist began in 1970, with a production of *Cheek* produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, followed by productions of *Claw* at the Open Space Theatre in January 1975, and *Stripwell* and *Fair Slaughter* at the Royal Court in 1977. In the 1980s, Barker's style and focus changed as he developed his theories for the Theatre of Catastrophe. His catastrophic works include *The Bite of the Night* and *Seven Lears*. Since the early 1980s, Barker has written over twenty new plays, several volumes of poetry, an opera, and two collections on theatre theory, *Arguments for a Theatre* (1989) and *Death, The One and the Art of Theatre* (2005). His most recent work, *A Style and Its Origins* (2007), written about himself in the third person and the past tense under the pseudonym Eduardo Houth, discusses Barker's theories for a new theatre.

Barker's early work is expressly political. In an unpublished interview with Catherine Itzin in 1980, he says that class and class conflict are integral to his work. "I believe conflict is the most powerful element in theatre," Barker comments, "And class conflict is the essential truth of English society" (250). The ferocity of Barker's political ideas and his unconventional style often led to poor reception of his plays. In *Howard Barker: Modern Allegorist*, Alan Thomas notes that "While there has been much positive response, the plays do not fit readily into accustomed modes of political drama and have given their author a reputation as difficult, idiosyncratic and perhaps too intense for his

own good” (434). Audiences and theatre critics were not the only people alienated by Barker’s work. Charles Lamb writes that Barker’s manuscripts were consistently rejected, often by the very institutions that had commissioned them (15). In 1982, the Royal Shakespeare Company commissioned a play for production at their main London house, but then rejected *Crimes in Hot Countries* once Barker had completed it. And in *Arguments for a Theatre* Barker notes sardonically that the National Theatre “has been offered every play of mine in the last ten years and ignored every one” (4). Barker’s supporters attribute this rejection to his style of writing, a style that “created an inevitable degree of ambiguity in the content” which prevented his plays from being fully appreciated (Itzin 250). The editors of the *New Theatre Quarterly* writing in 1991 were less equivocal: “The plays of Howard Barker are probably more fervently admired and resolutely disliked than those of any other British dramatist of his generation” (Vol. 7. no 25 [February] 1991. 20). A *Gambit* editorial is similarly blunt:

The outstanding talent of this generation is, however, Howard Barker. For continuous inventiveness of language and plot, for humour of the grotesque, for above all a scabrous undermining of idyll and reconciliation, Barker is unequalled. And unloved. (*Gambit* vol. 11. no. 41. 3)

Barker, it seems, is equally adored and despised; he rarely elicits indifference.

Despite the poor reception of his early work, Barker continued to innovate as a playwright. In the early 1980s, his style underwent a radical change as he shifted his attention from class conflicts to the broader problem of totalizing ideologies. This change in focus went hand in hand with a change in theatrical form. “I’m determined not to write any more linear-epic plays,” he said in an interview with Finlay Donesky in July

1985 (337), but Barker was still uncertain what form his new, non-linear theatre would take:

I can't really say what it's going to be, because I haven't actually worked on it to discover *what* it is, but it involves my sense that plays don't need to keep changing location in any practical way, and also a feeling that I want to be much looser in character – for example in the ability of characters to change almost arbitrarily. We'll see what comes of that. (Donesky 337)

What came of that was *The Bite of the Night* (1988), a play that Amanda Price identifies in her introduction to the second edition of *Arguments for a Theatre*, as a turning point in Barker's methodology. *Bite of the Night*, she writes, and the plays that follow represent a radical new conceptualization of theatre and audience, a drama that “involves no less than the shattering of theatre as an institutional edifice and the emergence from its ruins of a new theatre and a new spectator” (Price 7). Barker called this new theatre, fittingly, the Theatre of Catastrophe. In *Women Beware Women* (1989), he writes: “Catastrophe is also birth. Out of the ruins crawls the bloody thing, unrecognizable in the ripped rags of former life” (61).

Theatre of Catastrophe is based both on and *against* the theatre of Barker's contemporaries. Stylistically, it has much in common with the work of Edward Bond. In an interview with Tony Dunn, Barker talks about his natural instincts as a writer, which are towards “the qualities of cruelty, the extreme power of language, the taking of human relations to the edge of experience” (Barker and Dunn 43), qualities which could all be said to apply to Bond. Like Bond, Barker uses these qualities – cruelty, language, extremity – to challenge his audiences into analysis. David Edgar notes the similarities between Bond and Barker:

As in Brecht, the aim is to force the audience to respond analytically; but instead of distancing the audience from the occurrences, these writers involve the audience, provoking them into thought by the very surprise and shock of the images. (Edgar 31)

Surprise and shock are used constructively by both Bond and Barker. Bond uses violence to create the Theatre Event, intended to shock audiences into a reconsideration of the play and themselves, and implicate them in the creation of meaning. Barker creates a similar experience to the Theatre Event by portraying highly dramatized moments of “wrongness” where violence imprints the action on the audience’s mind and conventional meaning comes into question. In *Arguments for a Theatre*, he describes the effect of such a moment:

It is precisely its ‘wrongness’ that is the source of its disturbance. The anxiety that is experienced as a social faux pas is here enlarged into a dramatic form, but the initially offensive nature of the action is rapidly revealed to have its own justifications in the struggle of the character to achieve some self-identification: the mother wrongly trying to suffocate her child, the tramp wrongly attacking the poet, the willful obscenity of giving birth in the gutter. The audience, forced to re-view, re-feel, a ‘wrong’ action, is provoked and alerted, and launched unwillingly into consideration of morality, rather than subdued by the false solidarities of critical realism. (59-60)

Both Bond and Barker use methodologies of disturbance, relying on the audience’s recognition of the wrongness of the action portrayed to motivate them into a state of analysis. For Barker, as for Bond, it is this analysis that is the point of theatre.

Yet it is also at this point that the theatres of Barker and Bond diverge. Despite their shared interests in shocking audiences into a state of analysis, the nature of that analysis is radically different in Barker than it is in Bond. Bond’s is a theatre of education, of creating new meaning, of accepting new ideologies. His Theatre Events use violence to push audiences into new semantic spaces – sites of radical innocence – in

which they can begin to consider objects, society, and themselves along new relationary lines. “A stage event is chosen to question, confirm or change the values underlying social judgement,” he wrote (“Commentary” 300). As Kate Katafiasz suggests, this process is *constructive*; it is a process through which “we gain identity, we see ourselves in our society, *and* we gain potency: we can recreate human value in the face of its cultural absence” (47).

For Barker, this affirmation of meaning in a collective environment is offensively paternalistic. He calls this theatre derogatively the Theatre of Clarity, The Theatre of Conscience, the Critical Theatre:

There is a type of theatre which has dominated us for the last two or three decades which takes as its starting point, its inspiration even, the apparently selfless desire to make people better. (Barker *Arguments* 72)

He contends that this theatre is based on the assumption of certain shared principles – of morality, of religion, of politics, science, and language – which it seeks to reinforce among its audience. It is fundamentally a theatre of clear objectives, he argues, which is predicated on the idea of saying: “In the Critical Theatre the play ‘says’ something to the audience,” he writes, “and the elucidation of this ‘saying’ is the function of the production, the aim of the director and actors alike” (*Arguments* 119). In Bond, he argues, there is always a message, a “correct analysis”: *Bingo* suggests that notions of heroism and villainy are intrinsically connected; *Lear* suggests that notions of peace and war are inseparable. Bond’s point is to make audiences reassess their world, to consider new relationships and conclusions. But they are conclusions that *he* provides. For Barker, this idea of conveying a message or teaching an audience is paternalistic: “This is the social hygiene of the gifted aching to illuminate the ungifted, the above-prejudice

correcting the prejudiced, and the artist instructing the herd” (*Arguments* 72). In *The Theatre of Howard Barker* Charles Lamb elaborates on Barker’s argument by suggesting that the theatre of Bond aims at *closure*. “The purpose of the play,” he writes of Bond, “is to convey a pre-determined set of fixed ideas – and so the process of meaning is arrested” (Lamb 37). In contrast, Lamb writes that the theatre of Barker aims at *disclosure*, that it represents “an opening, an expression that assumes a continuation of dialogue and likewise a continuation of the process of meaning” (Lamb 37). Lamb’s terms are useful in distinguishing Barker’s theatre from Bond’s, and in understanding why Barker felt so strongly compelled to move away from the theatre of his contemporaries.

Barker’s assessment of Bond’s conservatism is perhaps apt. While Bond’s aim is to encourage audiences to reconsider ideology, he still writes *within* traditional ideological structures: there are right and wrong actions in Bond’s plays, there is good government and bad, there is a balanced understanding of reason and imagination, there is coherent language, there are recognizable dramatic forms. Above all, there is correct analysis. Bond never abandons morality, politics, or our traditional conceptions of humanness, language and drama. But Barker’s argument is that a playwright cannot challenge ideology without abandoning it altogether. This means abandoning shared assumptions (of morality, politics, and language), abandoning correct analyses (who is to say what is correct?) and abandoning the idea of widely recognized truths. Where Bond’s foundational directive is towards collective social change – “Unless a correct analysis is made, and is then widely understood, there won’t be any change” (“Revolution” 27 October 1969) – Barker argues that Bond is only reproducing the

ideology he seeks to challenge and is therefore not changing anything. In contradistinction, Barker's directive eschews collectivity and change: "The task of theatre is not to produce cohesion or the myth of solidarity but to return the individual to himself. Not 'We must act!' but 'Are we thus?'" (*Arguments* 23).

The differences between the drama of Bond and Barker highlight the differences between two systems of knowledge: modern and postmodern. In its assertion of universal truths, reliance on traditional abstract antitheses (like reason / imagination), and its re-inscription of dramatic and linguistic forms, Bond's drama is modern. Charles Lamb writes that Bond's theatre, like Brecht's, belongs to a specific time in history:

both Brecht's and Bond's supposedly 'scientific' thinking belongs essentially to the nineteenth century, their 'reason' being grounded in a Newtonian universe of absolute space and absolute time regulated by absolute mechanical 'laws' of cause and effect. 'Rational Theatre' is a stranger not only to contemporary chaos theory but also to quantum theory and even to Einstein's theory of relativity evolved almost a century ago. (Lamb 23)

In contrast to Bond's modernism which maintains structure, coherence, and ideology, Barker's drama responds to postmodern theories of deconstruction and relativism. "The play for an age of fracture is itself fractured," he writes (*Arguments* 38). Barker eschews structure of any kind, disintegrating narrative, character, setting, and language along with larger ideologies like morality and politics. This deconstruction of ideology suggests that meaning cannot be conveyed by the playwright – there is, deliberately, no message – but instead is created by each individual audience member in his or her own way in response to their specific interaction with what they witness on stage. Barker writes that the "powers of reconciliation or resolution are abolished in favour of a passionate assertion

of human complexity which cannot be distorted by ideology or shaped by the goodwill of humanist collectivity” (*Arguments* 82).

This dismissal of collective response in Barker places unique demands upon his audience, and is another feature that distinguishes his writing from Bond’s. “We must overcome the urge to do things in unison,” he writes. “The baying of an audience in pursuit of unity is a sound of despair” (*Arguments* 17). Too often audiences are told what to think and how to react, and their response *en masse* is a sign that they have not considered the play as individuals. Individuals will react to the same event differently from one another. Barker feels that theatre must return the possibility of individual interpretation to its audiences. “The theatre must start to take its audience seriously. It must stop telling them stories they can understand.” He continues: “It is not to insult an audience to offer it ambiguity” (*Arguments* 18-19). Ambiguity, the inspiration of individual meaning in individual audience members, is the goal of Barker’s theatre. And to achieve ambiguity, Barker has to delve into uncomfortable places, places where ideology breaks down, where normal conditioned responses are curtailed: places that make audiences angry or frightened, ashamed or disgusted. “An honoured audience will quarrel with what it has seen,” Barker writes, “it will go home in a state of anger, not because it disapproves, but because it has been taken where it was reluctant to go” (*Arguments* 47).

To create ambiguity, Barker has developed a new theatre, what he calls the Theatre of Catastrophe, the purpose of which is to reject ideology, dismantle linear narratives and traditional dramatic forms, and return authority to the audience. The plays

Barker refers to as experiments in the Theatre of Catastrophe are *The Bite of the Night* (first staged in August 1988), *The Europeans* and *The Last Supper* (published 1988), *The Possibilities* (staged 1988), *Seven Years* (staged 1989) and *Golgo* (staged 1989). He describes these plays as experiments in both form and content:

Sympathy, and the sudden liquidation of sympathy, the permanent disruption of character, the instability of motive, are some of the means available to this project. The abolition of routine distinctions between good and bad actions, the sense that good and evil co-exist within the same psyche, that freedom and kindness may not be compatible, that pity is both a poison and an erotic stimulant, that laughter might be as often oppressive as it is rarely liberating, all these constitute the territory of a new theatrical practice, which lends its audience the potential of a personal re-assessment in the light of dramatic action. The consequence of this is a modern form of tragedy which I would call Catastrophism. (*Arguments* 52)

Catastrophe refers to the fact that Barker's plays are set within or immediately after catastrophic situations, what Alan Thomas refers to as "the disastrous extremes of experience" (434). In his first Catastrophic play, *The Bite of the Night*, Barker sets the story of Dr. Savage amid the ruins of a present-day university and the ruins of various layers of post-war Troy. To compound this Catastrophic setting, Barker's story follows Savage's love for Helen of Troy and his attempts to discover her essential nature by systematically cutting off her arms and legs. It is only in such moments of catastrophe, Barker argues, that we are most ourselves; in such moments we abandon those external, authoritative discourses (religion, morality, etc.) that govern our behaviour at normal times. In an unpublished interview with Charles Lamb (23 April 1987), Barker describes the effects of catastrophe:

Under ordinary circumstances character remains unexplored, unexposed; the nerves are quite concealed. But in order to force that exposure on the characters, I always set them within catastrophic situations. The characters on stage are not simply in unlikely situations but usually disastrous ones . . . I'm attracted to those circumstances because at times like that people are disorderly. They cease to be

the predictable product of social forces – not simply workers or bourgeois or rentiers; they are dislocated from those classic roles by the social struggle. (qtd. Lamb 13)

Catastrophe opens up a new range of possible interactions, decisions, and events that characters and audiences would not normally experience, like witnessing a women's dismemberment. By exposing audiences to these uncomfortable new situations, but refusing to tell them how to react to them, Barker hopes to encourage audiences to react immediately, in a genuine and individual way, rather than through dramatically predetermined or socially condoned pathways.

To convey catastrophic content, Barker creates catastrophic form. He disintegrates those traditional dramatic devices audiences normally use to make sense of what they see: plot, setting, character, language are systematically dismantled to prevent audiences from reacting in predetermined ways. In contrast to Bond, who maintained the integrity of the story throughout, Barker sees story as a vehicle for ideology that must be disrupted in order to break audiences out of normal dramatic patterns. "Narrative is itself the first element in the construction of moral meaning," he writes. "What occurs in the form of consecutive scenes, or in real time played on the stage, inevitably implies a moral perspective." He concludes, "In later works of Catastrophic Theatre, I have attempted to deny narrative its authority by resorting to digression" (*Arguments* 121). Barker's digressions take the form of parables, or interludes; often the plot itself is replaced by what seems like a random series of incidents, episodes, and pictures. Act one of *The Bite of the Night* has two prologues, seven scenes and one interlude. The story is further broken up around the twelve different "layers" of Troy, temporal / spatial dimensions with names First Troy, Paper Troy, Laughing Troy, Mum's Troy, Poet's Troy and

Fragrant Troy. These layers change almost randomly. “First Troy is under ashes,” Helen says, “Second Troy now.” Gummery replies, “Second Troy? Of what, lady? Paper?” “Paper, yes,” Fladder concludes, “Paper Troy now!” (16) In “Howard Barker: Paradigm of Postmodernism,” Gunther Klotz emphasizes the deliberate arbitrariness of these episodes:

They are not dramatized similes, they don't mean something which is expressed in terms of something else. They are nothing but pictures. What happens in the parables is not linked to traditional 'universal values', neither those of the middle-class moral code or of any social or spiritual ideal extant during the period of modernity. Instead, they challenge the audience to discard the conventional standards of evaluation and the usual prescribed patterns of thinking. (Klotz 22)

This is not to say that audiences are not encouraged to find meaning in these events, but the meaning must come from the *individual* interaction of each audience member to the events he or she witnesses. As Barker writes, “If it is prepared, the audience will not struggle for permanent coherence, which is associated with the narrative of naturalism, but experience the play moment by moment, truth by truth, contradiction by contradiction.” He concludes, “The breaking of false dramatic disciplines frees people into imagination.” (*Arguments* 38)

The same impulse that motivates Barker to disintegrate narrative in his plays motivates him to disintegrate setting by distorting time and space. In *The Bite of the Night*, he portrays the ruins of a present day university coexisting both temporally and geographically with various periods of ancient Troy, from the Trojan War to Homer to Schliemann. Dr. Savage from the university interacts with his student, Hogbin, in the same context that he interacts with Helen, Homer, and Schliemann. “The ahistoricity of this journey is obvious,” Barker writes, “the collapsing of time and narrative signaling to

the audience that it must forsake its conventional expectations of meaning” (*Arguments* 83-84). Rather than using setting as a contextual tool to help understand the play, the audience is encouraged “to suspend its urge to organize the material until the conclusion of the performance” (*Arguments* 83-84). As in his disruption of narrative, Barker dislocates the normal criteria audiences use for evaluating their experiences, forcing them to suspend their interpretive impulses and experience the play moment by moment. Klotz argues that Barker’s chaotic settings reflect a “specifically postmodernist concept of the spatial dimension” (33). Lamb similarly suggests that Barker’s conceptualization of space and time is particular to the late twentieth century; he speaks of Barker’s settings in the context of non-Newtonian principles of space and time, of chaos theory and Einsteinian relativity (23), an analysis that locates Barker within a different epistemology than Bond or Brecht. For Barker, time and space do not exist in stable or linear ways, but are elastic and fluid, and entirely subjective. Newtonian physics, like religion and politics, are only another set of normalizing ideologies that we use to make sense of our world. “The drama which I practice creates its own world,” he writes, “it does not require validation from external sources” (*Arguments* 29).

Having deconstructed setting and narrative, Barker delivers an equally complicated representation of character. In his early considerations for *Theatre of Catastrophe*, Barker said that he wanted to be “much looser in character – for example in the ability of characters to change almost arbitrarily” (Donesky 337). This looseness manifests itself in Barker’s characters as inconsistency and an almost agonizing self-consciousness about performance. “[The] character gives a performance that he then proceeds to subvert,” Barker writes. “You see the performance attempt and the failure”

(from unpublished interview with Charles Lamb, 23 April 1987. qtd. in Lamb 73). For example, in *The Bite of the Night*, Barker introduces Asafir and Yorakim, two Muslim cartographers, who come across a skull fragment while eating lunch. In their subsequent dialogue, they both perform and comment on their performances at the same time:

ASAFIR: Thank you, now dish away, I famish, I absolutely famish, oh, look, a skull.

YORAKIM: Trojan.

ASAFIR: Greek.

YORAKIM: The unmistakable long jaw of all –

ASAFIR: The instantly recognizable short forehead of the –

TOGETHER: **We joke like this to keep the horror down.** (36)

Moving seamlessly in their dialogue from talking about the skull with each other to addressing the audience in a self-aware narrative, the characters show multiple levels of consciousness: they are aware *within* their roles, but they are also aware *of* their roles and of the fact that they are being observed. Their statement to the audience, made in unison, subverts any traditional or naturalistic conventions of characterization their dialogue might have established.

In his argument that Barker's works are more pictures than plays, Gunther Klotz suggests that Barker's characters are so far dissociated from any discernable identity or motivation that there are more aptly called figures. "They have become unindividualized elements of the pictures, delivering disjointed lines," he writes (22).

And so, in the place of flesh-and-blood characters with a mental, moral, or social profile, or at least some hints of identity however precarious or alienated, we have a number of outline drawings with balloons. (Klotz 23)

Klotz's assessment of Barker's characters as unindividualized elements of a picture, or as outline drawings with no identity, emphasizes the extent to which Barker transgresses traditional notions of dramatic characterization. Barker's characters are not realistic or

natural, they do not have recognizable or consistent identities, nor do they interact or communicate with each other in predictable ways. Yet Barker's characters are not random or meaningless, as Klotz suggests. Instead, they struggle throughout to find meaning and identity. They may be said to "try on" different types of self-hood, every moment interacting with each other and the world around them in new ways in attempt to find an identity that makes sense to them in that moment. As such, their performances are not random, but directed and deeply meaningful. "Barker's work is frequently a performance of the self," writes David Ian Rabey.

[The characters'] central activity is that of talking about themselves, expanding, redefining and altering themselves with the words they utter. They deny incorporation. They are self-consciously performing characters who overshoot and undercut themselves, and therefore expose themselves, often quite vulnerably, to the interceptions of other characters. (Rabey 2-3)

If the play for an age of fracture is itself fractured, as Barker says, then the characters in these plays are fractured, as well. One of the most poignant aspects of Barker's work is the struggle his characters face to find identity despite the breakdown of ideology and the fracturation of their world.

To convey fracturation – of character, of setting, of narrative – to the audience, Barker uses a highly stylized form of language: a language that is itself fractured. Lamb writes, "If language is the fundamental structuring process of human experience, then any fundamental reorganization of that experience must occur at the linguistic level" (38). Language is certainly the fundamental structuring process for Barker; it is essential to our interaction with others and our world, and therefore fundamental to our development of ourselves. But language is overused, ignored, and taken for granted, Barker believes, particularly in naturalistic theatre where the reproduction of authentic speech patterns

encourages audiences *not* to pay attention to language. Instead of such apathy, Barker argues, language should be used instrumentally, with calculated attention, to alert and challenge audiences, to seduce, confuse, and abuse:

I am a writer who has made and still does make conscious use of words conventionally described as obscene. I use them with calculation and discrimination for their dramatic effect. I place the words in the mouths of certain characters sometimes abusively, sometimes erotically, and sometimes with calculated excess, and always with the deliberate intention of creating the unease in the audience which is for me the condition of experiencing tragedy, an unease which is at the opposite pole from the apathy an audience feels in a state of entertainment. (*Arguments* 30)

To encourage unease, Barker uses speech that is often not only obscene but difficult, disorientating, and filled with internal contradictions. It is speech “as contrived as poetry,” he writes (*Arguments* 81); sentences run together seamlessly or break off without warning, words are omitted or used obsessively. In “Howard Barker, the Wrestling School, and the Cult of the Author,” Robert Shaughnessy describes Barker’s style as linguistically self-conscious:

The short, staccato sentences, the repetition, the ostentatious alliteration, the metonymy, the inversion of conventional syntax, the juxtaposition of ‘heightened’ and idiomatic speech: all these techniques generate an intense linguistic self-consciousness. (266)

As part of this self-consciousness, Barker’s language always comments on itself.

Characters question the words they use, how their language affects each other, what words mean, and when they fall apart. Sometimes they are eloquent. In *The Bite of the Night*, Savage tells a parable of sorts:

SAVAGE: So Alexander the Great came to the barrel where Diogenes was living **Fuck knows why he lived in a barrel the poseur** and said I am the most powerful man in the world, come to listen to you, the wisest man in the world, speak. And the job waited. The job waited for the poseur. And Diogenes said, timing this exquisitely, and **with all the calculation of a**

**man who knew no autocrat would stoop to tear his bowels out**, the poseur said, **believing himself secure in his reputation as five Persian armies behind their stakes**, said, **You have to admire the predictability, you really do**, you are standing in my sunlight. (*Pause.*) **Do you call that wit! Do you call that insolence?** [...] (56)

Sometimes coherent, Barker's dialogue can convey humour and linguistic virtuosity, yet more often, he shows language breaking down altogether. Later in that same scene, Hogbin struggles to exculpate himself:

HOGBIN: Helen did it. (*They stop.*)  
 I mean.  
 I mean, the misery that woman's.  
 I mean, her life continues in the same old.  
 I mean, the very sight of her.  
 I ask you. (*Pause.*) (58)

Barker uses language to convey the setting, narrative, and emotional states of his characters, but he also uses language to convey the breakdown of these forms. As such, he uses language not only to convey the fundamental reorganizing of human experience, as Lamb suggested, but to convey his fundamental reorganization of *dramatic* experience.

The cumulative effect of Barker's systematic deconstruction of dramatic principles is the breakdown of coherent or unified meaning. Meaning still exists in Barker's drama – it is present in the interaction between each individual audience member and what he or she witnesses on stage – but it is not stable, consistent, or collectively understood. In contrast to Bond, who had hoped that a unified response to his drama would promote social change, Barker disparages of the idea of genuine unified response. He believes that collective response preempts the knowledge an individual would gain from reacting to the theatre in an individual way based on their own

experience, and replaces it with the playwright's own knowledge and experience. His theatre aims at dismantling this predetermined and coherent type of meaning in favour of knowledge gained by the experience of ambiguity:

A new theatre will put its faith in the will to knowledge, not knowledge given by the knowing, but the individual will to knowledge which is elicited by the experience of contradiction in the theatre. (*Arguments* 46)

To ensure that audiences do not react along predetermined lines, Barker is committed to abolishing anything on stage that may make predetermined sense. Catastrophe disrupts narrative with digression, setting with distortions of space and time, character with loss of identity, and language with the breakdown of syntax and semantics, all in an effort to disrupt those normal patterns of reaction in the audience. Yet Barker goes even further by abandoning clarity, lucidity, and coherence as well.

The Theatre of Catastrophe refuses to endorse clarity as a principle of production in art. [...] In its place, we aim for a multiplicity of effects and a different form of theatrical experience. [...] A new relation is forged between the audience and the stage which abolishes the idea of entertainment and the oppressive intellectual practices that this concept entails. (*Arguments* 79)

The new relation Barker forges between the audience and the stage is itself contingent. He expects audiences to return again and again to his plays, reacting differently from one visit to the next. "One of the most gratifying, positive things about this apparent mayhem," he writes, "is that people come back, wanting to follow different things" (Interview with Dunn 38).

In Barker's theoretical model for the Theatre of Catastrophe, the playwright is able to forge a new relationship with audiences, and audiences return again and again for the opportunity of interacting in new ways with the play. In this model, Barker's audiences understand his experiments in theatre and relish the hard work of trying to

generate some kind of personal meaning from all the pain and discomfort he provides. In reality, however, Barker's plays present a number of problems: they are difficult to perform, costly to present, and burdensome on theatrical space; moreover, they are alienating to an unprepared audience. Worst of all, Barker's ideology can be dogmatic and hypocritical.

Barker is conscious of the theatrical unfeasibility of much of his work, but he remains unapologetic. *The Bite of the Night*, for example, runs a staggering five hours – *The Ecstatic Bible* is even more problematic at eight hours – yet Barker is not prepared to compromise the play in any way for production in popular theatres. In *Arguments for a Theatre*, he writes critically of the way the Royal Shakespeare Company tried to prepare audiences for both the length and obscenity of *Bite of the Night*:

At five hours in length, this was deemed such an affront to human tolerance that the RSC box office were given instructions to dissuade potential customers by prefacing all ticket sales with details of its length and obscenity. (101)

Barker is equally uncompromising when it comes to production values. His assertions that new theatre must be grand are incongruous in a time when most arts institutions are suffering financially and inclining towards cut-backs. He writes:

A new theatre will be over-ambitious. It will not settle for anything less than a full company of actors. The stage should swarm with life. No new writer should be taught economy, no matter what the economy demands. The new writer should be shown that the stage is a relentless space and never a room. If the new writer is taught economy the theatre will itself shrink to the size of an attic. It is probably time to shut the studio theatres in the interests of theatre. (*Arguments* 47)

A full company of actors and a stage swarming with life – *The Ecstatic Bible* has a hundred-character cast – are unfeasible in all but the most commercial of theatre companies; but the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company have again and

again shown ambivalence about Barker's drama. Both have rejected many of Barker's manuscripts in the past. In March 1988, a solution presented itself in the form of The Wrestling School, a theatre company established by actors and devoted entirely to the performance of Barker's works. Ironically, however, the Wrestling School is a "buildingless" company, working primarily in borrowed studio theatres, and very much at the mercy of the Arts Council of England for its financial support. Barker's theatre may be visionary, it may eschew economy, but it is not currently financially viable.

If Barker's drama is problematic for theatre producers, it is equally problematic for theatre audiences. In *Arguments for a Theatre* Barker concedes that "the conflict experienced between the audience and what it witnesses, its exposure to the unbidden thought, creates pain and even resentment." He continues:

It is distinctly not an experience associated with entertainment, and consequently an audience needs to be both prepared and, as is the case with all new theatre, educated in its own freedom. (*Arguments* 53)

Barker's admission that his audience needs to be "educated in its own freedom" strikes a bad chord. He seems to be suggesting both that his audience needs to be prepared for his plays prior to entering the theatre, and that the play itself will educate its audience. The first suggestion is problematic because of the way it predisposes an audience towards Barker's theatre: by preparing itself (by which Barker presumably means reading his theories on theatre), an audience prepares itself to react to the theatre along predetermined lines (those laid out by Barker's theoretics) instead of reacting immediately, impulsively, or genuinely to the theatrical event itself. Since predetermined reactions are antithetical to the new theatre, a prepared audience will always already be excluded from a genuine participation in Barker's theatre. But, by Barker's own

admission, an unprepared audience is not equipped to deal with these encounters. In trying to forge a new relationship with audiences, the playwright has created a dilemma.

Barker's second suggestion that an audience needs to be "educated in its own freedom" is equally problematic. In a theatre that eschews "saying" and abandons messaging of any kind, the idea of educating an audience – even educating them to forsake education – comes dangerously close to hypocrisy. We may recall his scathing criticism that the theatre of Edward Bond was "the social hygiene of the gifted aching to illuminate the ungifted, the above-prejudice correcting the prejudiced, and the artist instructing the herd" (*Arguments* 72). While Barker's experiments in *Catastrophe* raise compelling promises about liberating audiences, his proscription against ideology is ultimately one more type of ideology itself. In the end, Catastrophism becomes another hermeneutic approach, one more lens through which audiences interpret their experiences.

Barker's plays may present problems in production, and the ideology behind them may seem spurious at times, but they do offer fascinating insights into the nature of late twentieth-century adaptation. Much of Barker's work is adaptation. (*Uncle*) *Vanya*, *Women Beware Women*, *Gertrude – the Cry* and *Seven Lears* all obviously adapt literary works. *The Bite of the Night* and *Last Supper* are also adaptive in the way they treat literary myths like the Trojan War and the story of the Jesus. Like Bond and Stoppard, Barker uses a double gesture that simultaneously collaborates with Shakespeare while suggesting his (imaginative, temporary) replacement. Yet Stoppard's adaptation was deliberately apolitical, creating art for the sake of art. And Bond, while politically

motivated like Barker, advocated for the shared creation of new meaning towards the education of his audience, an ideology that Barker despises as an outdated, paternalistic way of thinking. In contrast to Stoppard and Bond, Barker's adaptation shows a uniquely postmodern ethos and reflects a radically different understanding of the role of Shakespeare in western culture.

*Seven Lears*, Barker's adaptation of *King Lear*, was first performed by The Wrestling School at the Sheffield Crucible Theatre in October 1989. Alan Thomas suggests that the play's structure is based on Jacques' Seven Ages of Man speech from *As You Like It*, roughly tracing the life of Lear from childhood to king-hood and old age. The similarities may be coincidental – there is little in the play that suggests any affinity with this reference – but it would not be unlike Barker to evoke a reference and then ignore it altogether. For example, his introduction to the play suggests that the play is motivated by the missing mother figure. “Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a family tragedy with a significant absence,” he writes. “The Mother is denied existence in *King Lear*.” Although she is ostensibly the play's impetus, *Seven Lears* remains steadfastly about Lear. Barker traces Lear from infancy where his father dies, through youth where he takes the much older Prudentia as a lover, adolescence where he marries Prudentia's daughter Clarissa, and goes to war, through the birth of his daughters Goneril and Regan, through self-imposed imprisonment and his attempts to drown his infant daughter Cordelia, and into senility and old age. Despite the promise Barker made in his introduction, the character of the absent mother, Clarissa, is peripheral to Lear and largely unexplored.

Throughout the play, Barker makes occasional references to *King Lear*, mostly through character names. What makes the adaptation striking, however, is not its collaboration with Shakespeare's story but its *intentional destruction* of the story. As in Barker's other Catastrophic plays, narrative, setting, character, and language are all disintegrated in *Seven Lears* until the original is unrecognizable. In failing to recognize *King Lear* in Barker's play, or even in failing to find the promised mother's story, the audience's expected response to the play is thwarted. In *Arguments for a Theatre*, Barker describes the response he hopes his new theatre will elicit:

In failing to recognize and, consequently, being unable to predict [the outcome of the play], elements of the unconscious are stimulated which are denied in humanist drama, elements of primitive and pre-social fear, choices of the instinctive and even self-destructive kind, the very sorts of behaviours which constitute the *unrealistic*. (11)

In contrast to Bond's adaptation, which relies on audience recognition of the Shakespearean original to help create new meaning, Barker's play thwarts the audience's recognition of the original to curtail conventional responses which would simply re-iterate traditional meaning. In its failure to recognize the original and its inability to predict what will happen, the audience is allowed a more impulsive and genuine reaction to the events on stage: it reacts after the fact, not before the fact. By fracturing *King Lear* almost beyond recognition, Barker allows audiences to experience the story for the first time all over again.

The play opens in darkness in a pit in the kingdom of Lear's father. This is the "First Lear," in which Lear is portrayed as a boy, playing with his brothers. He encounters The Gaol, a group of prisoners who act as a Chorus throughout the play. Their unjust treatment inspires sympathy in Lear, who begins to question morality and

government. But his thoughts are unfinished, his opinions as yet unformed: “If people were good, punishment would be unnecessary, therefore –” he begins. And “The function of all government must be –” (2). He struggles to find the answers, but cannot: “What you need to do –.” The Bishop enters to help Lear complete his sentences. He is to be Lear’s education. “I will educate you by showing you how bad I am,” he begins, “Because I am a bad man you will learn much from me” (3). The ensuing speech emphasizes both the Bishop’s linguistic control and his multiple layers of consciousness: consciousness of his role as educator, of his role as narrator, of Lear’s role as student and Lear’s reaction to him. Lamb writes that Barker often shows these multiple levels of awareness in speeches that double back to comment on themselves (71). Here, the Bishop comments as a character, and then comments on that character; he enacts the performance and then the subversion of the performance.

In the “Second Lear,” Lear is a youth, overcome with ecstasy for Prudentia, a woman of distinction, a lawyer. She is both domineering and needy. Lear is uncertain how to deal with her, which is reflected in his linguistic confusion:

**LEAR: Next meeting? No sooner has she. No sooner have we than. What other meetings? [...] Memorize me. Store my touch. [...] She wants a meeting? [...] Please come back.”** (4)

Prudentia’s daughter Clarissa enters looking for her mother. Lear immediately falls in love with her, and tells the Bishop he wants her. The Bishop tells Lear he is changing, which Lear acknowledges. “I do! I do change! Hourly!” (6). Like the Bishop, Lear articulates his identity and then subverts it.

**LEAR: I think I am the most melancholy and degenerate character, so sunk in contemplation of myself I walk with stooping shoulders and lids half-draped over my never-sparkling eyes, white-skinned with horror of the**

sunshine and prematurely bald, incapable of friendship and though wealthy, inclined to theft. I steal the clothes of women and insinuate myself in wardrobes listening to their acts of love. Poverty disgusts me, but equally does wealth. I listen to men, at least for seven sentences and go early to bed [...] (5)

Over and over, Lear tries to define himself through words, but the performance of his self is constantly subverted. Again, the voices of The Gaol remind Lear of their wrongful imprisonment. Lear and the Bishop argue over whether or not such imprisonment is good or bad. “They are all guilty of something, even if it is not the cause of their punishment,” the Bishop argues (7). Lear asks if this is not injustice. The Bishop counsels him to ignore The Gaol, while admitting at the same time that his counsel is untrustworthy. Horbling, a counselor, warns Lear that his father is dying, just as the father is brought in on a funeral bier. Lear’s first act as king is to make Horbling his fool and to try to seduce Clarissa.

The “Third Lear” opens on a battlefield. Lear’s army has been defeated and has fled towards home. Lear, Horbling, Kent, and Oswald have fled in the wrong direction. Lear is torn between a rationalized response to killing – “As for the dead, they would have died in any case, complaining, sick and senile, which is a burden on the state” (14) – and deep emotional trauma, “Eyes hopped! Eyes wriggled! **Bang!** And out came eyes!” (14). He admits that his bad governance would justify any of his soldiers killing him immediately. Kent and Oswald consider this, while Horbling screams for regicide in the background. Clarissa arrives with new troops to escort Lear home. She is rational and calms Lear, counseling him as a mother would a child. He admits that war has changed him, but that she is more herself than ever. He tries to address his troops, but fails to find the eloquence Clarissa has displayed. A soldier challenges Lear to a fight (offstage) and

Lear kills the man. In a new scene, Lear returns from the war to Prudentia. Clarissa, now pregnant, goes into labour and gives birth to Goneril, while grown-up versions of Goneril and Regan cheer her on. Watching her own birth, Goneril says, “I was reluctant. No, that’s understatement. I was recalcitrant. Even that won’t do! **I fixed my heels in her belly and stuck!**” (22).

In the “Fourth Lear,” The Gaol remind Lear of their constant existence, even while he sleeps. A white plane descends onstage, and Lear discusses science with his Inventor. He questions whether science is God’s will: “Is this with God’s permission? Or is it against God?” (25), he asks. Lear embraces science – “Here’s peace! Here’s goodness, surely? Here’s truth without contradiction?” (25) – but it is to the detriment of his kingdom, which is falling apart from neglect. Lear tries to philosophize with a Beggar, whom he has to pay to stay with him. Suddenly, he says, “A duke has died without an heir. Of some place known as Gloucester” (27); he asks the Beggar if he knows the area. “Good. You are his successor,” he declares (27). Again, The Gaol speak up to remind Lear of their presence, but he defers liberating them. Instead, he tries to fly the Inventor’s plane. He is too heavy, and sends a boy up in his place. The plane crashes, killing the boy. Lear imprisons the Inventor.

What follows is an Interlude. The Bishop, paddling along the seashore, is threatened at knifepoint by Kent. Kent wants to kill the Bishop because he is widely recognized as a bad influence on Lear. The Bishop tries to use the child Regan to shield his body. She runs off, leaving the Bishop exposed. Kent kills him and his body sinks into the water. Clarissa enters and comments,

CLARISSA: I never thought I would give thanks for murder, but I must not hide behind the fiction that all life is good. How simple that would be. How simple and intransigent. Such absolute moralities are frequently the refuge of misanthropy... (33)

She leaves Kent to deal with the body, but the tide is rising and Kent is quickly stranded. He climbs atop the floating body to avoid being drowned. He talks of the long time he spent stranded on the body of the Bishop, thinking only of his love for Clarissa. The dead Bishop engages him in conversation and laughs at his dilemma.

The “Fifth Lear” shows a bearded Lear six years later, having locked himself in a tower so that the dying groans of The Gaol cannot reach him. Horbling visits as well as Prudentia. Goneril and Regan arrive to try to tease Lear out of his confinement. Outside Clarissa must use a loudspeaker to entreat Lear to see her, as she has done every day of his confinement with no effect. Goneril and Regan tell her that they have seen Lear, that he lives with Prudentia, that he has changed. Clarissa orders her mother brought to her hooded. She accuses Prudentia of sleeping with Lear, of obsessing over Lear. Encouraged by the voices of The Gaol, Clarissa has her mother murdered. Lear leaves the tower, looking for Prudentia, and is devastated when he hears she has been murdered. Kent enters, finally having found a way off his stranded rock after six years. He and Lear are both changed.

**KENT: The things we quarreled over now seem  
The things we stabbed for suddenly aren't  
The books we carried high  
Are only  
Fit for arse paper (41)**

The “Sixth Lear” opens on a domestic scene: Lear, Clarissa, Goneril, and Regan seated around a table. Lear, in decline, admits that he is “Nearly stupid. But not quite”

(41). Kent enters and admits his love for Clarissa. Lear encourages Kent, and suggests that he take Clarissa, Goneril, and Regan on a picnic. He talks with The Gaol, who complain that he was much kinder as a boy. Clarissa returns to announce that she is pregnant, but not by Lear. The scene changes as Lear drags onstage a large barrel filled with gin. Gloucester arrives with the newborn Cordelia and they drown her in the barrel. Lear greets the Emperor of Endlessly Expanding Territory (E of EET), a sort of evangelist, and tells him of his domestic problems. The E of EET offers faith as a solution. Clarissa, Goneril, and Regan enter, looking for Cordelia. Lear rushes to the barrel and pulls out the dripping baby. The scene changes again. Cordelia, now older, talks with Kent. Goneril and Regan arrive to play with Cordelia, and Clarissa shows them the gaol. The scene is reminiscent of “First Lear” when Lear played with his brothers in the gaol. Clarissa orders Lear to free The Gaol. He complies, saying:

LEAR: I said to the inmates of the gaol, when I have done a crime sufficient to dwarf not only what you did, but what you have imagined, then daylight's yours. The gaoled are only in the gaol by being worse than their gaolers. How else? (48)

Cordelia says she realizes that her mother never did a bad thing in her life, but she hates her nonetheless. She goes off with Gloucester.

The “Seventh Lear” opens with the bodies of The Gaol, lying heaped in a pile, dead. Lear and Kent play chess in front of the pile. Lear's language has all but broken down completely:

LEAR: Erm! (KENT *stops in mid-movement. Pause. He continues to move.*)  
 Erm! (*He stops again.*)  
 If I may say so.  
 Begging your.  
 Etcetera but. (KENT *finishes the move.*)  
 Erm! (49)

Lear tells Kent that he knows he is cheating at chess, and has known for eight years. Kent asks why he brings this up today, if he has known all along. Lear says he merely wished to acquaint Kent with the fact that he knew. The voices of The Gaol say that they knew, and knowing that, they were not allowed to live. Lear and Kent continue to play chess as the scene closes.

As an outline of *Seven Lears*, this description is both incomplete and over-complete. Ultimately, it fails to convey the complexity and nuance of Barker's play, while at the same time over-filling those gaps and elisions Barker writes into his play text. It is difficult to describe a narrative that has no coherence without trying to lend it some consistency and sense; it is equally difficult to convey character and setting that have few stable qualities, or language like Barker's which is fractured and distorted but makes sense nonetheless. Any description must resist the urge to create coherence and consistency, or to wring any kind of message from this play. *Seven Lears* is not about anything in the conventional sense, and as Barker predicted, each reading of the text generates different meanings.

What does stand out in each reading of *Seven Lears* is the scarcity of references to *King Lear*. Beyond the title and character names, and the reference to Gloucester in the Fourth Lear, Barker's play bears almost no resemblance to its original. Having seen how Barker made traditional dramatic conventions like narrative, setting, character, and language seem strange in his Theatre of Catastrophe, we can now consider how Barker subjects *King Lear* to a similar process of catastrophisation. By taking everything that might be familiar from *King Lear* – the story, setting, characters, and language – and

deconstructing it, Barker makes *King Lear* strange so that an audience can no longer react to it along predictable or predetermined lines. As a result, Barker deconstructs narrative, character, setting, and language on two levels: he deconstructs them as dramatic conventions, as in *The Bite of the Night*, and he deconstructs them as elements of *King Lear*. The first level of deconstruction potentially frustrates the audience's desire to make sense of what they are seeing as theatre; the second level potentially frustrates the audience's desire to relate what they are seeing back to *King Lear*. The disorienting effect of the first level is compounded by the disorienting effect of the second. Adaptation, then, allows Barker to intensify the disorienting aspects of his theatre – preventing his audience from reacting in predetermined ways either to traditional dramatic conventions or to the story itself.

The point of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe is to show people operating outside of the normal order of things, operating outside of ideology. In a moment of catastrophe, Barker feels, the shared principles that structure people's lives – morality, religion, science, language – cease to apply and begin to break down. Characters react in unpredictable ways: Dr. Savage cuts off Helen's arms and legs, Lear drowns a baby in a barrel of gin. Yet, Barker contends, the action, which at first seems inordinately wrong, is "rapidly revealed to have its own justifications in the struggle of the character to achieve some self-identification" (*Arguments* 59-60). Dr. Savage is trying to pare Helen down to her essence, to understand what it is about her that constitutes her limitless appeal and his own attraction to her. Lear is trying to define the parameters of good and bad government by enacting justice arbitrarily. If an audience reacts along conventional lines, these catastrophic actions will make no sense to them, but if they can forsake their

own ideological assumptions (about the moral wrongness of these actions, or the medical implausibility of surviving dismemberment or suffocation in gin), they may begin to find some meaning. To do that, they must respond to the events onstage immediately and in an unmediated way without bringing any preconceived notions into their response.

Barker applies the same principles in his adaptation of *King Lear*. For Barker, *King Lear* represents a massive accretion of ideology, both as a canonical text and as the product of a cultural icon. Everything about the play precludes the type of independent response Barker promotes in his theatre. Even before an audience enters the theatre, their expectations of the play will have potentially determined the play's meaning and their response to it. Such learned responses are anathema to the Theatre of Catastrophe. For Barker, meaning should result from the immediate, individual interaction of each audience member to what it witnesses onstage – it should result from the passionate assertion of human complexity. Shakespeare's play, and an audience's familiarity with it, represents everything that Barker considers dangerous in theatre. But *King Lear* has another strike against it. As a metonymic function for Shakespeare, *King Lear* communicates specific ideologies of culture and nationhood. Instead of questioning notions of English culture, it affirms them. Shakespeare is as English as a cup of tea, and his plays promote the assumption of certain shared principles of morality, religion, politics, and language. For Barker, who advocates the total abandonment of shared assumptions and who views ideology as dangerously blinding, Shakespeare is a threat to forward-moving free-thinking. As an extension both of the canon and of Shakespeare, then, *King Lear* represents for Barker a return to the imprisonment of conventional thinking and the constraints of culturally (paternalistically) reiterated values.

To emancipate audiences from their predetermined response to *King Lear*, Barker puts Shakespeare's story into a state of catastrophe in which those things which traditionally give it meaning (both as a theatrical event and as *King Lear*) break down. Narrative, character, setting, and language, the principles through which an audience normally makes sense of a play and through which they relate an adaptation back to its source, no longer guide them toward meaning. If an audience tries to adhere to these structures, Barker's play cannot make sense; if they can abandon them and react immediately and individually, they may begin to find some personal meaning in the play. By advocating this new, personalized hermeneutic interaction, Barker challenges assumptions about dramatic texts (how do we find meaning in a text?) and about Shakespeare (when does a Shakespearean text cease to be Shakespearean? If the Shakespearean value is removed from a text, does that text still have value? If so, what is that new value and how is it constructed?) In raising questions about meaning and value in Shakespeare, Barker's adaptation suggests that canonicity, like culture, is just one more set of ideological assumptions that must be questioned.

The following section will look more closely at how Barker uses adaptation to intensify the effects of his Theatre of Catastrophe. By examining how Barker deconstructs narrative, character, setting, and language on two levels, we can begin to understand how he prohibits his audience from making sense of his play in relation to theatrical conventions and in relation to its source work. Moreover, in understanding the mechanics of Barker's adaptation, we can begin to see how it differs dramatically from

the work of Bond and Stoppard by calling into question Shakespeare's continued value in a postmodern age.

Very little in the narrative of *Seven Lears* complies with traditional narrative form, and almost nothing in that narrative complies with the story of *King Lear*. By doubly disintegrating narrative in his adaptation, Barker prevents his audience from identifying with the play either as a traditional theatre event or as a Shakespearean play; a double process of distortion that ensures the disorientation of his audience. Like other Catastrophic plays, *Seven Lears* is based on a series of episodes or events, roughly joined by common themes. While the events within each section develop a type of narrative around themselves, they have little relevance or bearing on the events of the next section. It could be argued that each section communicates an idea. In the "Fourth Lear," for example, Lear examines science: he discusses the mechanics of flight with his inventor, he questions the relationship between science and religion, he recommends that a model be turned into a working prototype and tries the prototype himself. He embraces science as a truthful and good guiding philosophy. When the model plane fails, Lear perseveres:

LEAR: Correct its faults. (*The INVENTOR bows.*)  
 Then make a full-sized version. (*He bows again.*)  
 I'll fly myself. (*He goes out. LEAR seizes the BOY in an embrace.*)  
 Here's peace! Here's goodness, surely? Here's truth without  
 contradiction? (25)

Lear sees science as a route to truth and transcendence, but he fails to recognize how his single-minded obsession with science is ruining his kingdom. "Everything is neglected," Kent tells him. "To take a single example, the roads are pits" (26). Lear's exploration of science as a guiding principle has blinded him to reality and social responsibility. Yet still he continues to experiment. When his first attempt at flight fails, he suggests further

experimentation with adjusted variables. It is only when this final experiment fails and the young boy dies in the plane crash that Lear dismisses science altogether. In this sense, Barker provides a type of narrative that has a consistent trajectory within “Fourth Lear:” Lear is trying to find some principle to make sense of his world. But even this trajectory fails to be consistent from one section to the next. “Fourth Lear” is followed by the Interlude in which Kent kills the Bishop. The relevance of this scene to Lear’s struggle for self-definition is weak, as is the following “Fifth Lear” in which Lear has locked himself in a tower. While the Interlude and “Fifth Lear” have the same type of internal narrative coherence that “Fourth Lear” had, they fail to forward the plot of the whole or maintain any narrative consistency with other scenes.

Barker similarly precludes his audience from developing any narrative coherence by frustrating narrative expectations. His introduction establishes the importance of the mother figure missing from *King Lear*.

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

This passage introduces a new idea: that the mother’s absence in *King Lear* is a deliberate and necessary form of repression. Comprising as it does the whole introduction to Barker’s play, the passage implies that the subsequent narrative will explain this absence and account for the necessity of repression. Although Barker establishes the expectation for a narrative trajectory around Clarissa, he fails to deliver it.

*Seven Lears* includes a mother figure, but the play does not centre on her, it does not explain her absence, or whether or not she was the subject of an unjust hatred or why. Clarissa's actions in the play – particularly the murder of her mother and infidelity with Kent – may account for hatred and dismissal, but these actions are given no weight. Instead, they are subsumed into a narrative dominated entirely by Lear. Establishing the audience's expectation for one type of narrative and then frustrating those expectations by delivering another is one more way that Barker precludes his audience from using narrative to make sense of his play.

While Barker's narrative makes little sense as a dramatic device, it makes even less sense as a Shakespearean analog. Nothing in the narrative of *Seven Lears* complies with the story of King Lear. Even Lear's reference to Gloucester in the "Fourth Lear" – the only reference the narrative makes to Shakespeare's play – breaks down: "A duke has died without an heir," Lear says. "Of some place known as Gloucester" (27). An audience may recognize the name Gloucester, and may expect some recognizable narrative detail in reference to *King Lear*: will there be an allusion to Edmund or Edgar? Will the Gloucester subplot appear as part of Barker's story? Perhaps they anticipate that this fragment from Shakespeare's play will help orient them within Barker's play, providing some stable or fixed point of meaning from which they can interpret the events around it. They may begin to feel for a split second that they are on familiar ground. Yet Barker's dramaturgical strategy is not to provide meaning, familiarity, or points of reference, but to provide their *absence*. The reference he makes to Gloucester has no recognizable connection to *King Lear* and this disappoints any desire on the part of the audience to find familiar meaning. The audience is thus potentially doubly disoriented by

Barker's use of narrative in *Seven Lears*: first by the lack of conventional narrative structure that allows them to "read" the play in a traditional fashion, and secondly, by the absence of narrative association with Shakespeare's original, which prevents finding fixed or familiar points of reference and meaning within the adaptation.

Like narrative, time is doubly disrupted in *Seven Lears*, further inhibiting the audience's ability to make sense of the play in traditional dramatic terms or in reference to *King Lear*. While parts of Barker's story follow a linear chronology – a fact that prompted Alan Thomas to suggest that the play refers to the Seven Ages of Man speech from *As You Like It* – there is a distortion of time that wreaks havoc with an audience's desire to comprehend a linear narrative. Sometimes this distortion is an atypical acceleration of time. In the "Second Lear," Lear finds out that his father is dying. "My father takes a long time dying," he says. "He's dying, but so slowly. So laboured his departure it is miserable to watch" (8). Almost immediately, the body of the dead king is carried onstage on a bier, in contradiction either to Lear's statement or to the audience's sense of the consistent passage of time. At other times, the distortion of time is more obvious. When Goneril is being born in the "Third Lear," an adult version of the character appears even before her mother Clarissa goes into labour.

GONERIL: My birth! My birth was far from easy!

CLARISSA *enters, holding her belly.*

CLARISSA: My child comes! (*A pandemonium of doctors and midwives. A couch.*)

GONERIL: I was reluctant. No, that's understatement. I was recalcitrant. Even that won't do! **I fixed my heels in her belly and stuck!** (22)

Goneril proceeds to narrate her own birth, watching while her mother gives birth to her infant self. Time, then, is both linear and non-linear in *Seven Lears*, a fact that makes it

difficult for the audience to make sense of what they are seeing and to connect cause and effect.

The distortion of time similarly prevents an audience from making sense of *Seven Lears* in any relation to *King Lear*. Barker's story begins in Lear's infancy, which suggests a narrative of Lear's life up until *King Lear* begins. Like Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*, the beginning of Barker's play implies the narration of a back-story, or prequel, leading up to and explaining the familiar events in Shakespeare. Audiences might even feel encouraged by Barker's Introduction to believe that the play fills-in the necessary characters and events that led up to Shakespeare's story.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a family tragedy with a significant absence.  
The Mother is denied existence in *King Lear*.

[...]

This extinction can only be interpreted as repression.

By identifying this repressed experience, the introduction suggests that the play will provide those missing events in King Lear's life surrounding this missing mother figure, events that lead up to and end with *King Lear*. But as Lear progresses in the play from infancy into old age and eventual senility, the audience begins to sense that the time frame of *Seven Lears* does not lead up to *King Lear*; it replaces it. Near death by the end of the "Seventh Lear," and well past language and action, Barker's Lear seems to have skipped entirely those events which characterized his life in *King Lear*. Barker's play, then, creates the motivational back story behind *King Lear*, but subsequently proceeds to replace the events of Shakespeare's play altogether. By disrupting time, Barker not only prevents his audiences from understanding the play as a linear narrative, he prevents them from understanding it in any relation to *King Lear*.

The only element in Barker's play that corresponds directly to *King Lear* are the character names, but here, again, Barker subverts expectations that characters will adhere to dramatic conventions or bear any resemblance to characters from Shakespeare's play. Gunther Klotz describes Barker's characters as unindividualized elements of a picture, or outline drawings, a description that aptly identifies the un-naturalistic quality of Barker's characters, but which fails to present their complexity and self-consciousness. In *Seven Lears*, characters are not consistent or traditional, but they are far from meaningless or unidentified. Instead, they seek out identity by experiencing change. Often they comment on themselves and their own performance, undermining themselves even as they define themselves. Throughout, characters show what Barker calls the performance attempt and then the failure. For example, in "First Lear," Lear meets his tutor, the Bishop. In the dialogue that follows, Lear and the Bishop show multiple levels of consciousness: they interact as characters and then comment on their characters' interactions.

BISHOP: I am your education.

LEAR: I am hard to educate because I was born wise.

BISHOP: That's something everybody knows.

LEAR: I will be relentlessly critical and nothing you say will I take on trust.  
Why should I?

[...]

BISHOP: I know your brothers killed themselves. I know you think of death yourself. I know you cry for animals but harbour hatreds you yourself do not yet understand.

LEAR: Yes. How will you educate me?

BISHOP: I will educate you by showing you how bad I am. Because I am a bad man you will learn much from me. I will tell you nothing but what accords with my experience, which is not a happy one. Hope, for example, I have dispensed with entirely. There will be no books because you know the books and have digested them. I detest all untruths, but especially those which are sentimental, and I will beat you sometimes, for which I have authority. Almost certainly, these beating will appear to you

unjustified. I will explode in rages and then fawn on you. I may kiss your body and then ignore you for days on end. You will detest me and your innate sense of justice will cry out for satisfaction. When one day, that cry ceases, your education will be over. God alone know why your father appointed me. (2-3)

Like Asafir and Yorakim's dialogue from *The Bite of the Night*, the dialogue between Lear and the Bishop shows various levels of awareness as each moves from speech within his role to speech *about* his role. This second level of consciousness subverts any naturalistic conventions of characterization; it prevents the audience from reading Lear and the Bishop strictly as characters, and encourages it to see them as dramatic devices or to recognize them as actors. As a result of this disruption, audiences see Lear and the Bishop as characters and not-as-characters at the same time, a phenomenon that prevents them from empathizing, certainly, but also from reacting to characters in predictable ways.

Because these characters are so inconsistent, an audience cannot predict their interactions or its own reactions to them. It must react to each character immediately and individually in each moment of the play, and accept the fact that its reactions to these characters will change from one moment to the next. Some audiences may, for example, react sympathetically to Clarissa in "Second Lear" where she is portrayed as a child rejecting the unwanted sexual advances of her mother's lover. They may recognize in this moment that she acts with integrity and honesty – "**This is fatuous,**" "**If you love me say so**" (12) – qualities that they may personally value or to which they react positively. Another audience may read her actions in this moment as prudish or indicative of sexual dysfunction – "What do you want to do? Handle me down below?" (12) – and react unsympathetically. The point is that audience reaction to Clarissa is individual and

specific to that particular moment in the play. In any other moment, their reaction to her may be radically different: in “Fifth Lear” for example, they may be horrified when she is goaded by the voices of the Gaol into having her mother murdered, although, here again, their reaction to her character will be individual and unique.

In trying to get audiences to react to characters in individual and unmediated ways, Barker faces a fundamental problem in writing an adaptation: audiences are likely already familiar with the characters in *King Lear*. They know who King Lear is before they enter the theatre. Their familiarity with Lear may incline them to make assumptions or jump to conclusions about his character. They may believe, for example, that Lear’s relationship to Goneril is different than his relationship to Cordelia, or that he inclines towards madness. Even the fact that they know *King Lear* is a tragedy may predispose them to think of Lear in a certain way. These assumptions lead audiences to react in well-established, culturally predetermined ways in regard to Lear; they elicit the type of preconditioned responses that are exactly what Barker wants to avoid. To break audiences out of this pattern of familiar response, Barker’s strategy is to co-opt familiarity, to *not* provide meaning or points of reference, but to provide their *absence*. Barker has to make Lear unfamiliar, so that audiences cannot relate him back to *King Lear*. Where they expect a senile old king, Barker delivers a precociously intelligent child, third in line to the throne and utterly unprepared for monarchy. As Lear progresses, audiences do not see him developing into Shakespeare’s Lear, but into a new character who acts and reacts in ways that they cannot anticipate. In “Sixth Lear,” Lear tries to drown the baby Cordelia in a barrel of gin, an action so entirely unpredictable and so thoroughly divorced from the actions of his Shakespearean counterpart that audiences

must concede any connection between the two. In this moment, they react to Lear not *as Lear*, but as a new and autonomous character on stage. This character has no precedent in their imagination. It is in Lear's *difference*, in the expectation of familiarity and the subsequent failure of recognition, that Barker creates a space for his audience to react in a way that is genuine and immediate. Character is thus doubly disintegrated in *Seven Lears* so that it no longer becomes a predictable dramatic device or a recognizable referent to *King Lear*.

To emphasize the lack of coherence and consistency in narrative, setting, and character, Barker communicates his play in a language that is equally incoherent and inconsistent. Sentences break off, words are left out. Sometimes this reflects the incompleteness of a character's thought-process, as in First Lear's attempts to articulate his nascent political consciousness: "If people were good, punishment would be unnecessary, therefore –", "The function of all government must be –", "the correct approach to punishment would be –" (2). Here, lack of language seems to reflect the lack of developed thought. At other times, lack of language reflects the inadequacy of words to convey emotion. In "Second Lear," Lear is overcome by his feelings for Prudentia:

LEAR: I'm in such  
 I'm in such  
**I won't say ecstasy**  
**I won't say**  
*(He shudders with emotion.)* (3)

Initially, Lear cannot find words to convey his emotion; language is inadequate. But as is often the case in Barker, language circles back to comment on itself: "**I won't say ecstasy / I won't say.**" The act of speaking becomes something that needs to be spoken about. This happens almost obsessively. In our first encounter with Clarissa, she comes

onstage to tell her mother that she has found her missing bird, a message she then decides not to tell:

CLARISSA: [...] I came to tell you what no longer seems significant.

PRUDENTIA: Why? Tell me.

CLARISSA: I can't. It no longer seems – it has no –

PRUDENTIA: But all the same.

CLARISSA: I would feel humiliated, since it so obviously lacks significance. (5)

Again and again, language circles back to comment on itself. “That’s understatement,” Goneril says (22). As narrative breaks down, language fills in the place of plot by becoming what the story is about. Characters talk about language, they worry about language, they define themselves through language. In “Third Lear,” Lear tries to address his soldiers:

LEAR: Was going to say –  
 But won't now.  
 Was going to exaggerate –  
 But not now.  
 Had planned such a speech but now won't give it.  
 Plaster you with gratitude and effusiveness ...  
 But who requires it? (*Pause. They look at him.*)  
 Or do you ... ?  
 When I see a crowd I think –  
**Oh, horror, they expect banality!** (18-19)

Language and the breakdown of language become what the play is about. “**We harp on justice here / Until the word / Eats tunnels through our brain,**” shouts The Gaol (43). Following from Charles Lamb’s suggestion that language is the most basic structuring process of human experience, Barker’s disintegration of language shows his interest in reorganizing human experience on its most fundamental level.

Language is also the fundamental organizing structure of *King Lear*; in taking apart language, Barker reorganizes Shakespeare’s play on its most fundamental level.

There is much about the language of *Seven Lears* that evokes *King Lear*, but in breaking that language down until it ceases to be recognizable or comprehensible, Barker delivers the final blow in his disintegration of Shakespeare's play. Barker has always maintained his distance from conventions of naturalistic speech in drama: "I have never been interested in reported speech or the reproduction of authentic voices," he wrote in *Arguments for a Theatre* (29). Instead, he advocates for a return to poetry in drama, and for a crafting of language that is metered, textured, sometimes lyrical but always deliberate and contrived. In "Howard Barker: A Personal View," the actor Ian McDiarmid describes Barker's meticulous use of language:

Every syllable, every punctuation point counts, so precise is its rhythmic composition, and sloppy elisions will obscure structure and meaning. It is no surprise that actors who are used to performing classical texts are particularly attracted to his plays. Barker may not write in strict verse, but the demands are not dissimilar. (95)

McDiarmid's identification of Barker's language with that of classical performance texts is important. In the adaptation of *King Lear*, Barker's rhythmic and stylized language evokes Shakespeare's language at the same time that it disintegrates it. Consider Barker's use of The Gaol as a chorus figure. They introduce "Fourth Lear" in verse:

THE GAOL: **Lear**

**We are familiar with the lies of politicians  
Their grins and handshakes we despise  
And the freedom fighters  
Who trusts their passionate embraces?  
Their clenched fists which don't unclench  
Look out Freedom's fist in you eyes!  
Lear  
Our calls must reach your bedroom  
On still nights when you sleep alone  
The locks locked  
The bolts bolted  
And the shutters tight  
The moon is walking in the gardens**

**And we say  
Lear is thinking of our pain tonight!  
Lear (24-25)**

As McDiarmid says, this is not strict verse, but Barker's rhythmic and poetic style recalls Shakespeare's. The line "Their grins and handshakes we despise" is iambic and only one foot short of iambic pentameter. It evokes the regular meter of most Shakespearean verse. Again, however, Barker's strategy for adaptation is not to provide familiarity or points of reference, but to provide their *absence*. Whatever references to Shakespeare Barker's language makes are undermined as that language breaks down. Eventually, even The Gaol – linguistically the most Shakespearean of Barker's characters – lose their language:

**THE GAOL: Lear...!  
Oh, Lear...!  
May we disturb you?  
So many problems but we have suffered beyond  
Measured. (43)**

In conclusion, audiences are potentially doubly disoriented by Barker's use of language in *Seven Lears*: first by the lack of conventional linguistic structure that allows them to use language to find meaning in the play, and secondly, by the breakdown of linguistic affinities with Shakespeare which prevents them from finding familiar points of reference or meaning within the adaptation.

In his Theatre of Catastrophe Barker seeks to make what is familiar in drama – narrative, setting, character, language – unfamiliar. In attempting to make *King Lear* unfamiliar, Barker has a further challenge to overcome because his source work is likely already known to the audience. An audience may search for familiar signs of *King Lear* in *Seven Lears* as a way to help them find meaning or make sense of the adaptation. Any

recognizable scrap of narrative, character, or language from *King Lear* would put the audience back into a familiar pattern of response, which is exactly what the Theatre of Catastrophe hopes to avoid. To generate a genuinely new reaction, then, Barker's adaptation has to deconstruct *King Lear* not only as a theatrical event but as a referent to Shakespeare's original as well. In contrast to other adaptors who rely on the recognition of the original within the adaptation, Barker eradicates familiar references and precludes recognition. It is in this anticipation and refusal of familiarity that *Seven Lears* distinguishes itself as an adaptation.

As a strategy for adaptation, Barker's approach shares with Bond and Stoppard the use of a double gesture, but the intended outcome of this approach is radically different. Bond and Stoppard both evoke the Shakespearean original by incorporating its characters and events in a parallel narrative which is deliberately different, and then encouraging audiences either to reconcile or to choose between the two. In each case, the playwright collaborates with Shakespeare and at the same time promotes his (imaginative) replacement in a more or less balanced gesture. In Barker, a double gesture is similarly at work, but with less balanced effect. Although Barker evokes Shakespeare's original with the title and character names of his play, this collaboration is subsequently eclipsed by Barker's all-encompassing destruction of Shakespeare's narrative, setting, and characters. He deconstructs Shakespeare until there is no Shakespeare left.

Like Bond and Stoppard, Barker is both reaffirming the tradition that Shakespeare represents and challenging it at the same time. Yet Barker's emphasis is more strongly

on the necessity of replacing Shakespeare, a position more consistent with his postmodern ethos than with Bond's modernism. Bond and Stoppard take for granted Shakespeare's universal value: they both rely on audience recognition of the original to establish the difference of their adaptations, and Bond in particular relies on Shakespeare's iconic value (as a symbol of nationhood, culture, etc.) to question the nature of those culturally shared beliefs. For both playwrights, Shakespeare's canonicity is as sacrosanct as a religion or a science. Barker, however, is defiant of ideologies like religion and science which mediate our reactions to the world around us. As a postmodern writer, he raises questions that challenge the way audiences interact with their world and their culture. In *Seven Lears* he challenges literary tradition: what makes Shakespeare Shakespeare? Is *King Lear* still *King Lear* if its narrative, setting, characters, and language are altered beyond recognition? By questioning the literary tradition of Shakespeare, Barker asks audiences to question whether canonicity is not just one more prescriptive ideology. The ramification of this line of questioning is that Shakespeare is not only temporarily or imaginatively replaced in Barker's adaptation; he is emphatically eradicated.

**Chapter Four**  
**“Re-vision” of the kingdom: feminist adaptations of *King Lear***

The discussion of Howard Barker that ended the previous chapter focused primarily on Barker’s postmodern ethos and the questions his adaptation raised for the continued study of Shakespeare in light of its concerted effort to eradicate him. Like most discussions of Barker, mine focused on violence. What I have not yet considered in relation to Barker is the rather glaring oversight his adaptation makes in regard to gender. *Seven Lears* begins with a false promise to reinstate the missing mother from *King Lear*. Yet where is the mother in Barker’s play? Certainly Clarissa appears, but the play can hardly be said to focus on her role or explain her absence; the play remains, as Susan Bennett writes, persistently about “the seven ages of the one man” (50). What are we to make of a play that promises to rewrite what is often regarded as a misogynistic story from a woman’s perspective which withholds on this promise and delivers only violence?

In *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past*, Bennett comments on this notable absence. *Seven Lears* does not, she argues, reorient the traditional perspective of Shakespeare’s play away from the dominating male figure as promised in the introduction.

Neither is Barker concerned to re-member the Mother; he wants only, but slightly differently, to insist on her discipline and punishment. The prequel *Lear* is, like so many Barker plays, a violent and uncompromising (and ultimately misogynist) text. (Bennett 50)

For Bennett, gender in Barker’s play is inseparable from violence: the missing mother figure is disciplined and punished, and the promised female perspective is replaced with a violent, uncompromising, and misogynistic text.

The correlation between gender and violence in adaptations of Shakespeare is not unique to Barker; it pervades discussions of Shakespeare adaptations in the 1980s.

Bennett reminds us of Charles Marowitz, a well-regarded and prolific adaptor of Shakespeare, whose most famous article on adaptation is titled “How to Rape Shakespeare.” This correlation between gender, sexuality, and violence overshadows much of Marowitz’s writing. Of adaptation, he says:

Although, without meaning to give offence, I should add that, on certain occasions, I have known classics to be raped to their everlasting benefit.  
(*Recycling* 14)

And of Shakespeare: “His greatness is nothing more than a sperm bank from which we must spawn present and future offspring” (31). Marowitz admits that much of his writing is influenced by the Shakespearean theorist Jan Kott, and Kott himself is guilty of misogynistic phraseology in regards to Shakespeare adaptation. In an interview with Marowitz, he admits: “We need to rape the classics without respect but with love and passion” (*Recycling* 109). It is worth pointing out that Kott’s discussion of Shakespearean adaptation is framed by Marowitz’s gleeful description of female mud-wrestling. The adaptation of Shakespeare, it would seem, goes hand in hand with the objectification of women and sexualization of violence.

The comments by Marowitz and Kott raise a number of questions concerning gender and adaptation. Is the violence inherent in these discussions of adaptation reflective of a more general cultural awareness (and perhaps anxiety?) about gender in the 1980s, or does it relate more specifically to Shakespeare and adaptation? Barker, Marowitz, and Kott are all men, as are all of the adaptors considered so far; do women

writers propose a different relationship between gender and adaptation, one that does not result in violence? If women read and react differently to Shakespeare, as critics such as Marianne Novy and writers such as Jane Smiley have suggested, does it follow that women adapt Shakespeare differently than men? Are there specific approaches that can be identified as feminist strategies for adapting Shakespeare? And does adaptation satisfy a different need for women writers than it does for men?

This chapter will consider these questions by examining feminist adaptation as a specific area of adaptation studies. To understand the roots of feminist adaptation, I will explore the impact of feminism on Shakespeare studies and on the theatre, and examine the particular problems that Shakespeare represents for women writers and women theatre workers. I will briefly consider Paula Vogel's *Desdemona* (1977) and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1988) as examples of feminist adaptation, and through a comparison begin to construct a tool-kit of strategies used commonly by feminist adaptors. These strategies include using revision in a double capacity, giving voice to silenced female characters, writing around the original story, challenging representations of gender identity and female sexuality, and using meta-narrative qualities to thematize the woman writer.

The primary text for consideration in this chapter is *Lear's Daughters* (1987), written by The Women's Theatre Group, a play that raises interesting questions about both feminist authorship and feminist adaptation of Shakespeare. Having outlined feminist strategies for adapting Shakespeare, I evaluate *Lear's Daughters* in relation to these strategies, and compare it to the works by Vogel and MacDonald. I also evaluate the play in relation to the works by male adaptors already discussed. In conclusion, I

consider the extent to which the double gesture of adaptation, outlined in previous chapters, offers women writers a unique opportunity – perhaps the only viable opportunity – to engage with a part of their literary heritage which often marginalizes them, without sacrificing their feminism.

Most critics agree that the 1980s mark a turning point in Shakespeare studies. Bennett identifies a radical shift (27), and Peter Erickson notes the “extraordinary ferment and upheaval” in this period (“Afterward” 251) as three new critical methodologies – feminist criticism, new historicism, and cultural materialism – emerged to challenge the long-dominant practices of New Criticism. Sarah Werner sees in these new critical practices a deliberate attempt to re-situate the text among social and historical factors that had long been dismissed by New Critics:

The move away from a New Critical interpretive practice, in which a text’s meaning is understood to be contained solely within the text itself, has led to a wide range of interpretive methods that see meaning located in the web of social relations between individual texts and cultural ideologies. (17)

These new methodologies each sought to challenge the idea that meaning could be found solely within the text, and uncovered instead a broad network of historical, economic, socio-political, and sexual contexts that worked alongside the text to generate meaning. On the heels of what Erickson calls these three “distinct critical constellations” (“Afterward” 251) came equally groundbreaking work in queer-, post-colonial-, psychoanalytic-, and performance-studies. As Bennett notes, critics like Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, and Williams were now impacting Shakespeare studies, regardless of the fact that they were not Renaissance scholars: “like it or not,” she writes in 1996, “the

stories that now get told by way of readings of Shakespeare's and others' texts, are different stories from those that were told in 1980" (27).

Feminist literary criticism in the 1980s emerged from the feminist movement sweeping Europe and North America in the 1960s and 1970s. Generally speaking, there were three distinct types of feminism that emerged from this movement: radical feminism argued that sexism predated all other forms of oppression and was therefore the single most important political struggle; socialist feminism argued that the class system oppressed both men and women, but that women experienced oppression beyond this in their own internalized feelings of inferiority and their lack of personal independence; and bourgeois feminism argued that women needed equality above all else, regardless of the roots of their oppression or the problems in the systems that oppressed them. Despite these differences, feminists found consensus around the need to organize and take charge of their own activities, around the need to challenge notions of male superiority in any context, and against the notion that the social / sexual division of labour was a natural or biological given (Wandor *Post-War* 118). An early precept of the feminist movement was the concept of herstory, writing against masculinist versions of the past and towards a better understanding of the role of women in these events. In their definition of the term, Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston explain how herstory expands on the concept of history to include a "mythological and literary heritage from which women have been excluded or within which they have been marginalized" (8). Herstory, they write, is "woman's version of events of the past both factual and mythological, a version in which what *women* did, and their perspectives on the past dominate" (7). This inclusion, indeed emphasis, on the importance of women in literary events has contributed to and informed

the way in which women have related to Shakespeare, and subsequently to the ways in which they have adapted his work.

Feminist criticism of Shakespeare emerged to fill a gaping void in the critical canon. Writing in 1990, Michael Bristol candidly affirms that “the institution of Shakespeare has been created largely by and for men” (*Shakespeare’s America, America’s Shakespeare* 5). For years, women writers have struggled to gain access to this institution, trying with varying degrees of success to cross the gender divide that excluded them from Shakespeare criticism. In *Engaging with Shakespeare*, Marianne Novy traces attempts by authors like George Eliot to articulate a gendered presence into Shakespeare studies. For centuries, she writes,

women have reached across that border to make space for themselves in that institution, have tried to move that border by appropriating some Shakespearean characters and some aspects of Shakespeare’s cultural image for women, or have commented on works from the other side of the border by rewriting them to make plots and characters develop quite differently. (*Engaging* 1)

What stands out in Novy’s description is how often women have, by necessity, resorted to un-critical methodologies (appropriation, re-writing) to claim a role for themselves in Shakespeare studies, women like Anna Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke as discussed in chapter two. It is telling that despite these efforts, women’s creative interactions with Shakespeare have not traditionally been seen as criticism, and that feminist criticism of Shakespeare is not generally thought to have begun in earnest before the 1980s. Its first text, Juliet Dusinberre’s *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, was published in 1975, although Peter Erickson identifies *The Woman’s Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, edited by Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (1980), as the seminal text. The works under discussion in this chapter address

and redress this sense that women's creative mis-appropriation of Shakespeare does not constitute criticism.

Feminist Shakespeare criticism quickly developed into a broad, diverse, and often conflicting set of approaches. In their introduction to *The Woman's Part*, Lenz, Greene, and Neely acknowledge this diversity, writing that it is "as difficult to define feminist criticism as it is to define feminism itself" (3). They do, however, identify four recurring agendas in early feminist approaches to Shakespeare: a desire to free Shakespeare's female characters from stereotypical representations and analyses, to examine women's relationships with each other, to understand the nature and effects of patriarchy, and to consider the role that genre plays in the representation of women (Lenz, et al. 4).

Many early feminist approaches to Shakespeare leaned heavily on psychoanalytic criticism. While acknowledging that Freud's models of female sexual and psychological development are not "entirely adequate," Lenz, Greene, and Neely write that feminist critics make use of psychoanalytic approaches to examine male and female relationships: "men's inability to reconcile tender affection with sexual desire" for example, "and their consequent vacillation between idealization and degradation of women" (Lenz, et al. 9). In "The Patriarchal Bard" (first published 1985), Kathleen McLuskie identifies the influence of psychoanalytic theory in the work of Janet Adelman, in "'Anger's my meat'" (in *Shakespeare's Pattern of Excelling Nature*, eds. David Bevington and J.L. Halio), and Coppelia Kahn, in *Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*; she is critical, however, of the ways in which psychoanalytic approaches tend to construct Shakespeare as an authoritative figure whose works could be "co-opted" (69) to support the critics' own

views about gender. She cites critics like Marilyn French, in *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (1980), and Linda Bamber, in *Comic Women, Tragic Men* (1982), who use Shakespeare's texts to reinforce essentialist arguments about gender, defining and discussing his characters in relation to qualities that the critics themselves regard as essentially masculine (such as the ability to kill) or essentially feminine (such as the ability to nurture and give birth) (90). In contrast, other psychoanalytic feminist critics like Juliet Dusinberre, in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), have written against essentialist views and contended that Shakespeare strove to dissolve differences between the sexes. McLuskie concludes her argument with a call for a more balanced feminist criticism, one that both concedes that "the issues of sex, sexuality, sexual relations and sexual division were areas of conflict" in Shakespeare's plays, and acknowledges that the contradictions inherent in his representations of women must be considered "alongside the complexity of legislation and other forms of social control of sex and the family" (91).

McLuskie's solution, to situate Shakespeare's representations of women within the socio-economic context of Renaissance England, reflects her own critical position as a cultural materialist / new historicist, a position that has met with its own opposition. In the late 1980s, a rift of sorts developed as feminist criticism either took up or dismissed the methodologies of cultural materialists and new historicists. Some feminists, like McLuskie, argued that Shakespeare existed in a period of patriarchal oppressiveness and that his work "gave voice to the social views of his age" (qtd. Dollimore "Intro" 11). Other critics, like Carol Thomas Neely in "Constructing the Subject" (1988), questioned the cultural materialist / new historicist methodologies of critics like McLuskie, arguing

that these approaches focused too much on the institutionalization of male power, that they tended to “oppress women, repress sexuality, and subordinate gender issues” (7). In “Are There any Women in *King Lear*?” (1991) the critic Ann Thompson tries to mediate this debate, wondering if “cult-historicists” (Neely’s term “Constructing” 6) actively conspired to erase women from Shakespeare’s plays or if they were simply, more accurately, detailing the extent to which Shakespeare has already done this (122). Thompson’s argument corroborates McLuskie’s contention that these methodologies can have broad value; in “The Patriarchal Bard” McLuskie argues that cultural materialist / new historicist criticism when combined with feminist criticism can go beyond considerations of character and into the social and historical conditions that created the text:

Feminist criticism need not restrict itself to privileging the woman’s part or to special pleading on behalf of female characters. It can be equally well served by making a text reveal the conditions in which a particular ideology of femininity functions and by both revealing and subverting the hold which such an ideology has for readers both female and male. (106)

In the 1990s, feminist criticism of Shakespeare moved away from the “cult-historicist” debate. Critics like Marianne Novy turned their attention toward postcolonial and queer theory to focus on differences within women’s responses to Shakespeare. Her anthology, *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women’s Re-Visions of Shakespeare* (1993), “collected in a time when feminist criticism is more conscious of historical, racial, class, and national differences among women” (2), is an attempt to understand the variety of feminist responses to Shakespeare.

Recently, feminist Shakespeare critics have begun to take a more meta-critical view of their project, scrutinizing their own assumptions about gender and interrogating

the extent to which these assumptions have informed their own analyses. In 2000, Dympna Callaghan writes in her introduction to *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* that the “reports of women’s victimization in an unrelentingly misogynist culture are everywhere not so much in Shakespeare’s England as in late twentieth-century cultural criticism” (xvi). Phyllis Rackin concurs. In “Misogyny is Everywhere” (2000) she details how feminist criticism of Shakespeare in the 1980s tended to reinscribe itself within what she calls a “patriarchal master narrative” (43): “With the turn to history in literary studies generally, and especially in the field of the Renaissance, feminist Shakespeare criticism has been almost completely shaped by the scholarly consensus about the pervasiveness of masculine anxiety and women’s disempowerment in Shakespeare’s world” (47). As a result, Rackin writes, “criticism designated as ‘feminist’ has provided arguments that can just as easily be used to naturalize women’s oppression as to oppose it” (47). Beginning with works like Amy Louise Erickson’s *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (1993), and Diana E. Henderson “The Theater and Domestic Culture” in *A New History of Early English Drama* (1997), feminist critics have started to view textual evidence of misogyny and inequality more critically, as much a result of the text and context as the critics’ own assumptions; they are acknowledging both the necessity and the difficulty of recognizing their own biases within their interpretations of Shakespeare. What this latest approach to Shakespeare studies particularly points out is how implicated feminist criticism is in its own cultural politics, how reactive it can be, and how constantly evolving its methodologies are. Despite their often unified goals, feminists have found little consensus in their interpretations of Shakespeare.

Where feminist critics have found consensus is in deconstructing the myth of Shakespeare's universality. For years critics such as Harold Bloom have lauded Shakespeare's ability to communicate universal values: "Shakespeare has taught us to understand human nature" (*Invention 2*). He argues that Shakespeare's values are universally applicable and his characterizations accessible regardless of race or gender. "Whether we are male or female, old or young," he writes, "Falstaff and Hamlet speak most urgently for us and to us" (745). In his most recent treatise, *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human*, Bloom goes so far in advocating Shakespeare's universality that he attributes to him the very creation of human nature.

Shakespeare, by inventing what has become the most accepted mode for representing character and personality in language, thereby invented the human as we know it. (714)

Bloom's claims for Shakespeare's universality are extravagant, but they are corroborated by critics like Raymond Williams, who writes that Shakespeare's plays, particularly his tragedies, convey our "essentially unchanging human nature" (qtd. McLuskie 98).

What Bloom and Williams disregard in these statements is the extent to which Shakespeare is writing from a specific gendered position. As McLuskie points out "the human nature implied in the moral and aesthetic satisfactions of tragedy is most often explicitly male."

The action of the play, the organization of its point of view and the theatrical dynamic of its central scenes all depend upon an audience accepting an equation between 'human nature' and male power. (McLuskie 98)

In deconstructing Shakespeare's universality, Peter Erickson is quick to qualify, feminists were not questioning Shakespeare's artistic greatness, only his position as the "ultimate,

inviolable arbiter of experience” (*Rewriting* 164). By returning Shakespeare to his specific historical, social, and gendered context, feminists, like new historicists and cultural materialists, began to recognize the specificity of Shakespeare and his work, and to measure their own distance from him.

Like a protective mantle shorn of its magical efficacy, the assertion of Shakespeare’s special universality, which seemed hitherto to exempt his works from critical questions concerning gender, class, race, and national identity, no longer convinces. The result is a complicated reassessment of Shakespeare that contributes to the larger projects of rewriting the Renaissance and of reevaluating the entire literary tradition. (Erickson *Rewriting* 5)

Like feminist critics, women writers responded in force to the deconstruction of the myth of Shakespeare’s universality. Novy remarks on the sheer numbers of women writers who engage with Shakespeare, a phenomenon that might once have spoken to Shakespeare’s universality, but in fact speaks to his limitations:

One of the main reasons that many women novelists in the English speaking world use Shakespeare today is to stress the limitations of his plots as well-known cultural myths about women’s possibilities. (*Engaging* 7)

Novy’s assertions are reiterated by author testimonials. In “Shakespeare in Iceland” (1999) the novelist Jane Smiley details her motivation for re-writing *King Lear*. She notes in particular her discovery that Shakespeare’s concerns were very different from her own. “As I followed him into the story,” she writes, “the Shakespeare that I thought I knew rapidly metamorphosed into a harsher, more alien, and more distant male figure. I felt very strongly our differences as a modern woman and a Renaissance man” (172).

The critic and poet Adrienne Rich similarly asserts her difference from Shakespeare. Her poem “After Dark” (1966), which makes explicit allusions to *King Lear*, rejects “The old

masters, the old sources,” who “haven’t a clue what we’re about” (qtd. Erickson *Rewriting* 163).

This re-consideration and rejection of Shakespeare’s universality are consistent with a foundational precept in feminist criticism: the idea of re-vision. Rich first introduced re-vision in her ground-breaking essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” (1971). This much quoted passage is worth repeating because of its particular relevance to feminist adaptations of Shakespeare.

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. (35)

Stressing the “vision” in re-vision, Rich’s process is about seeing our literary traditions in a new way. She goes on to emphasize the importance of understanding how thoroughly these literary traditions have informed how we live and think today:

A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name – and therefore live – afresh. (35)

For Rich, re-vision is an act of literary criticism, one specifically of re-viewing old texts to see how they have contributed to women’s lives and their assumptions. It is only after women have re-considered these assumptions that they can break with tradition and begin to change:

A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order reassert itself in every new revolution. We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (35)

It is important to note that Rich's concept of re-vision is a singular, critical gesture, based on looking back and re-considering the past from the perspective of a new critical awareness. It is fundamentally a passive gesture; it does not promote any active response beyond developing a new understanding of an old text. In her essay, Rich does not include the *other* meaning of revision: of writing over something in order to correct it, update it, or improve upon it. This revision is a creative gesture. Unlike critical re-vision, which is passive, creative revision appropriates the text and re-writes it; it is more active. Taken together, re-vision and revision combine into a more complex double gesture – one that is passive and active, critical and creative – which begins to look familiar in the context of adaptation.

The double gesture of critical re-vision and creative revision combine in women's adaptations of Shakespeare, which flourished in the 1980s. "The late twentieth century has seen an explosion of literature in which women rewrite Shakespeare," Novy writes (*Transforming* 1). She describes how these writers use "fiction as a form of criticism" (1), that is, they use creative revision to effect critical re-vision. Liz Goodman agrees that adaptation provides an almost unique opportunity for women to combine critical re-vision with creative revision:

Feminist interpretation of Shakespeare creates a space for a critical deconstruction and reevaluation of mainstream values, as well as a physical space appropriate to the feminist project of reshaping and re-viewing gender roles. (223)

This double use of revision occurs again and again as a strategy in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare, although it is not unique to these works. Both Bond and Barker identify the importance of critical re-vision, of seeing literary traditions in new ways. "Unless a

correct analysis is made, and is then widely understood,” Bond writes, “there won’t be any change.” (“Revolution” 27 October 1969). His deconstruction of *King Lear* is akin to Rich’s critical re-vision: it re-visits an old text from a new critical perspective in an effort to understand the assumptions behind that text and the ways it has informed people’s lives. Bond’s deconstruction, like Rich’s re-vision, raises questions about *King Lear* – what is the relationship between nationhood and war and peace in the original? – that encourage audiences to understand Shakespeare in a new light. But Bond, like feminist adaptors, moves beyond the simple, singular gesture of deconstruction / re-vision to write a corrective alternative to the original. In creative revision, Bond offers an alternative play that over-writes what he sees as a faulty or deficient original and replaces it with something more suitable. “And it’s for that reason I would like to rewrite [*King Lear*] so that we now have to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time, for our problems” (*Gambit* 24-25). Here Bond’s cathexis, like creative revision, re-imagines the play by investing it with new meaning.

The double gesture of deconstructed cathexis in *Lear* represents a similar methodology to the critical / creative double gesture of revision used in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare; however, the focus of these gestures is different. Bond’s double gesture is focused on the politics of power articulated through nationhood and war in Shakespeare, and on the importance of personal action in the face of opposition. For Bond, Shakespeare must be deconstructed and rebuilt as a symbol of political action. In contrast, the double gesture of revision in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare is focused on gender and sexuality, and the politics of power as an extension of these. For feminist writers, Shakespeare must be critically re-visited in order to understand his

representations of women in light of feminist theoretics, and then creatively reconstructed around new representations of women.

Traditionally, the novel has provided the most appropriate format for feminist revision. Novy writes that “the novel has long been the privileged place for women writers to rethink Shakespeare’s plays” (*Transforming* 7). She identifies Iris Murdoch’s *The Black Prince* (1973), Margaret Drabble’s *The Realms of Gold* (1975), Angela Carter’s *Wise Children* (1991), and Nadine Gordimer’s *My Son’s Story* (1991), among other works, as revisions of Shakespeare in novel form in the late twentieth century. In 1991 Jane Smiley adapted *King Lear* into her novel, *A Thousand Acres*. In “*King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres*: Gender, Genre and the Revisionary Impulse,” Iska Alter suggests that the process of adapting a play into a different medium creates a unique opportunity for the woman novelist to rethink Shakespeare. Having to re-present information in such a markedly different format (in terms of causality, chronology, character) encourages a writer to challenge the original narrative and explore new alternatives (Alter 146).

Smiley’s novel warrants close examination as it provides a good opportunity to explore the motivation behind feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. Deliberately written as a feminist adaptation, *A Thousand Acres* transforms *King Lear* into a modern story about family dysfunction set on an Iowa farm. Told from the perspective of Ginny, the oldest of Larry Cook’s three daughters, the novel relates the dark secrets of Larry’s sexual abuse of his daughters and the various degrees of victimization, resistance, and escape that Ginny, Rose, and Caroline each achieve. In “Shakespeare in Iceland,” Smiley describes her experiences writing the novel, and the process that led to her

adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. She relates specifically how her early experiences reading Shakespeare were quite alienating.

His view I read more and more as Machiavellian – cold, irreducible self-interest, unashamed, unsoftened by any sense of connection with others or of any common humanity. (172)

Smiley's reaction to this alienation was to assert her difference from Shakespeare:

Having to wrestle with his vision forced me to assert my own – not to knuckle under but to redouble my efforts to counter his characters' cold evil with my characters' hot passion, his characters' clear agenda of self-interest with my characters' ill-thought-out confusion. I could not allow his universality, but instead, as a rhetorical mode, had to counter it with assertions of the universality of my vision. (172)

Smiley's assertions are consistent with those of other feminist adapters in the extent to which she disavows Shakespeare's universality and has to wrestle with Shakespeare's vision while trying to assert her own.

Smiley's use of the term "vision" – as something that needs to be reconsidered *and* written over – suggests the double gesture inherent in her interaction with Shakespeare. *A Thousand Acres* is both re-vision, in Rich's sense of going back and wrestling with Shakespeare's text, and revision in the amendatory sense of writing over a text and asserting a new vision. In revisiting the play and finding it singularly unsympathetic to women's issues, dominated by an alienating male perspective, and rife with associations between female sexuality and evil, Smiley is critically re-visioning in the manner that Rich advocated: re-considering an old text from a new critical perspective. "I wanted to communicate the ways in which I found the conventional readings of *King Lear* frustrating and wrong," she writes (160). But Smiley expands on Rich's re-vision by actively revising the play. In re-writing the play to foreground

women's perspectives, consider women's issues, and redress the sexual-moral imbalance by associating masculine (not feminine) sexuality with abuse, she creatively effects the play's revision. Likening narrative perspectives to the differing accounts of events in an adversarial court system, she describes how she revised Shakespeare's account:

As the lawyer for Goneril and Regan, I proposed a different narrative of their motives and actions that cast doubts on the case Mr. Shakespeare was making for his client, *King Lear*. I made Goneril my star witness, and she told her story with care. I made sure that, insofar as I was able to swing it, she was an appealing witness as well – cautious, judicious, ambivalent, straightforward. (172)

Smiley's novel, then, engages doubly in revision as both a critical and a creative process. The novelist herself is conscious of this double gesture. "In one sense, *A Thousand Acres* is my academic paper on *King Lear*," she writes, "while in another sense, it is my production of the play" (159). She concludes: "I would not say that I won the wrestling match with Mr. Shakespeare by any means. [...] Even so, I felt that I had not given in to Mr. Shakespeare's alleged universality, but had, in fact, cut him down to size a little bit" (173).

Smiley's decision to cut Shakespeare down to size by using *King Lear* reflects a particular feminist interest in the play. In Novy's discussion of novel adaptations of Shakespeare in the 1980s and 1990s, she notes a particular affinity among feminists for *King Lear*. *The Tempest* and *The Taming of the Shrew* are also popular, as are those comedies featuring cross-dressing heroines such as *As You Like It* (Novy *Transforming* 4). In contrast, the histories have been the least appropriated, possibly because of the paucity of female roles or their perceived lack of relevance to what are traditionally considered women's issues. One reason for *King Lear*'s popularity, Novy speculates, is that the play's focus on father / daughter relationships facilitates criticism of patriarchal

traditions (*Transforming* 2). Moreover, Novy suggests that the father / daughter relationship may be of particular interest to women *writers*: “Perhaps partly because the relation of women writers to the past has often been thematized as a daughter-father issue, *King Lear* has been of increasing interest to women in recent years” (*Transforming* 5).

While *King Lear*’s strong male roles have facilitated discussions of patriarchy, the play’s misogynistic language has also drawn the attention of feminist critics and adapters. McLuskie locates the play’s misogyny within “an ascetic tradition which presents women as the source of the primal sin of lust,” a tradition propounded in *King Lear* by “concerns about the threat to family posed by female insubordination” (106). Smiley writes that she is conscious of this misogyny both within the play and in what she calls the “conventional wisdom” surrounding it. Her earliest recollections of *King Lear* entailed a warm sense of indignation for the way Goneril and Regan are treated, a “visceral response” she maintained even after learning that the sisters were “figures of pure evil according to conventional wisdom” (161):

They were women, and the play seemed to be condemning them morally for the exact ways in which they expressed womanhood that I recognized. I was offended. (161)

The misogyny that Smiley perceived in *King Lear* may have contributed to her decision to re-write the play, but something in the play’s iconic status also contributes to its appeal for feminist revisionists. In “*King Lear*: A Retrospect, 1980 – 2000,” Kiernan Ryan describes the play’s rise to prominence in the late twentieth century: “Since the 1960s, when it usurped the throne securely occupied till then by *Hamlet*, *King Lear* has reigned supreme as Shakespeare’s masterpiece and the keystone of the canon” (1). McLuskie

corroborates Ryan's sense of the play's status. "*King Lear*'s position at the centre of the Shakespeare canon is assured," she writes, "by its continual reproduction in education and the theatre" (102). Novy agrees that *King Lear*'s status is a factor in securing the attention of adaptors. "Shakespeare's tragedies have the most cultural force overall; accordingly, they have been most often rewritten by women as well as by men" (*Transforming* 5). These comments suggest that it is not only the play's foregrounding of father / daughter relationships, or any inherent misogyny, but its iconic status that makes it such welcome fodder for feminist revision.

Although feminist literary critics eventually established themselves in the academic world, feminism was slower to take off in the world of theatre. In her introduction to *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre* written in 1989, Lynda Hart maintains that the theatre is still the "last bastion of male hegemony in the literary arts" (1). Both Michelene Wandor and Liz Goodman corroborate the fact that the theatre has traditionally excluded women from positions of authority. Writing in 1986, Wandor asserts that "The theatre industry, like other cultural industries, operates through a hierarchical structure, in which artistic and administrative decisions are largely in the hands of men" (Wandor *Carry On* xix). Goodman also recognizes this inequality in theatres, writing in 1993: "the upper echelons of direction, production, and administration of the national subsidized [theatre] companies in Britain are, as they have always been, occupied almost exclusively by men" ("Women's" 207). Male hegemony in theatres was exacerbated by the fact that most of the plays performed were written by men. Such bias meant that women were more or less excluded from the list of *dramatis personae*, in addition to being excluded from the male perspective that so dominated dramatic action,

character development, and discourse. Wandor describes the extent to which women experienced this exclusion in male-authored playtexts:

The female characters in such plays – even when they appear to be ‘heroines’ – fit into the spectrum of male-gendered concerns, but rarely shifting the territory explored to that of female experience or female perspective. Women characters have thus been the adjuncts to the main action (often absolutely vital adjuncts, but nevertheless secondary) or have acted as ciphers, objects of displacement for the male protagonists. (*Carry On* 32)

The marginalized position most women found themselves in in theatre in the mid-twentieth century improved in 1968 when theater censorship was abolished in Britain by an Act of Parliament. British theatre underwent a sudden and radical change. Wandor writes:

After the abolition of censorship, British theatre not only came of age but literally came into its age. New theatres sprang up virtually overnight, in pub rooms, in tiny converted theatre spaces, and, with subject matter, language and form no longer liable to pre-production scrutiny and censorship, plays could be topical, improvised, and designed to shock. They were, and often they did. (*Post-War* 35)

Coincident with the abolition of censorship was the beginning of the Women’s Liberation Movement, where feminist activism took the form of consciousness-raising groups and political protests for women’s rights. This movement did much to change the place of women in theatre. In *Other Theatres*, Andrew Davies describes how theatres began to change in response to new political ideas:

The 1970s saw a determined effort on the part of many companies to address peoples and themes usually excluded from the boundaries of ‘legitimate’ theatre. One of the most significant was the women’s theatre movement. (175)

From these roots, feminist theatre in Britain flourished in the 1970s. More and more companies developed with the express purpose of producing work by women. This was

supported by increased research into lost / forgotten plays by women writers, and a wave of new plays being written by women playwrights.

Early women's theatre was characterized by a broad variety of events, from "happenings" and lunch-time theatre, to street-theatre and indoor agit-prop theatre. One particularly famous event was the street-theatre demonstration held outside of the Miss World pageant in London in 1970. "Theatre [was] used very much as a consciousness-raiser, with performance followed by discussion," Wandor writes in *Carry On, Understudies*, "much of its time [was spent] in rejecting the function of writer and director as part of the oppressive apparatus of conventional theatre" (33). From here, feminist theatre in Britain evolved into more organized and professional groups in the mid-1970s, often supported by state subsidy. Troops like The Women's Theatre Group (1973) and The Monstrous Regiment (1975-6) emerged and met with enduring success.

The Women's Theatre Group, to date the longest-running, full-time, all-women's group in Britain, is one of the best examples of an innovative and enduring feminist theatre group. The group formed in 1973 to produce a ten-week run of lunchtime plays for a theatre festival at the Almost Free venue in London. Initially established as a socialist-feminist collective, this all-women group sought to present on-stage the experiences of modern working-class women. In *Herstory*, Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston describe how The Women's Theatre Group (WTG) put its socialist consciousness into innovative practice:

Working as a collective, they sought to realize their explicit allegiances to socialism and feminism by, among other things, operating a democratic job-share system in which all members of the company were involved in all of the tasks that

are part and parcel of running a theatre company. This included the collective devising of their shows. (9)

After much experimentation, these socialist ideals proved better in theory than in practice; the WTG decided that job-sharing was more limiting than efficient, and found instead that specialization fostered a more stable and professional company. In the course of their experimentation, however, the group did develop specific policies that have since defined their political and artistic interests: a policy supportive of lesbian and multi-racial issues and a policy to encourage new writing by women. This last policy particularly distinguishes the WTG: “the active promotion of new writing is a concern most particularly of their own,” write Griffin and Aston, “It is also one of high risk in so far as it is much easier – because more predictable in terms of bookers’ and audience responses – to put on a play which is well-known as opposed to trying to confront an audience with an unknown piece by an unknown writer” (10). The risk factor of these ventures was exacerbated by the fact that the works the WTG performed could rarely be published afterwards, the marketplace being unfavorable to unknown pieces by unknown authors, particularly when the authors wrote as a collective (Griffin and Aston 9). To some extent, however, the group’s financial concerns were minimized when they secured funding from the Arts Council of Britain in 1975.

The WTG’s first production was a piece collectively devised by seven women called *Fantasia*, which performed at a number of London fringe venues. After this first success, the group established their policy of taking their work on-tour to teenagers in youth groups and community centres. Their first play for teens, called *My Mother Says*, about sex and contraception, was aimed at 15-18 year olds. “Punctuated with songs, it

was a simple, modern morality play, conveying factual information about contraception” (Wandor *Carry On* 52). The play toured in 1975. Their next piece, *Work to Role* (1976), followed the same characters as they leave school and try to find work. “[The] play put emphasis on the importance of communication and solidarity between women,” Wandor writes, “demonstrating a range of political positions” (*Carry On* 52). In 1977, the group’s third play, *Out! On the Costa del Trico*, was based on an industrial dispute about equal pay at a London firm making windshield wipers. Wandor identifies this year, 1977, as a turning point for the WTG, when they changed their “anyone-can-do-anything” policy and began to employ freelance women directors and designers. In 1978, the group employed writers for the first time (Eileen Fairweather and Melissa Murray for *Hot Spot*), maintaining their mandate of producing one adult and one youth show per year (Wandor *Carry On* 65-68). In 1992, The Women’s Theatre Group changed its name to The Sphinx.

Due in part to the pioneering work done by The Women’s Theatre Group, other feminist theatre groups developed and flourished in Britain the late 1970s. The Monstrous Regiment formed in 1975 as a co-ed feminist theatre troupe. In an early press release, the group stated their mandate:

We see ourselves as part of the growing and lively movement to improve the status of women. Our work explores the experience of women past and present, and we want to place that experience in the centre of the stage, instead of in the wings. (qtd. Wandor *Carry On* 58)

Unlike the WTG, the Monstrous Regiment quickly realized the benefit of engaging a full-time writer, and hired playwright Caryl Churchill with tremendous success. Other feminist groups established at this time were Clapperclaw (1977), Cunning Stunts (1977),

Bloomers (1978), Beryl and the Perils (1978), and Hormone Imbalance (1979). Despite the success of these groups, they remained steadfastly on the fringes of British theatre. The most significant mainstream project in this period was the Royal Shakespeare Company's Women's Project, formed in 1984. In "Punching Daddy, or the politics of company politics," Sarah Werner explores in detail the creation of this group, under the guidance of the RSC's Fiona Shaw and Juliet Stevenson, which began during a special weekend devoted to women's theatre work within the Fortnight fall festival. Objecting to the almost total absence of women directors in the RSC's twenty-three year history, the group wanted to examine ways for women to find voices within established theatre. *Heresies* (1986), the group's only production, was written by Deborah Levy and adapted by Susan Todd in a series of collective workshops. "The final production revolved around twelve characters and a plethora of themes about displacement, loss, refugees, business, art, politics and family" (Werner 65). The play was not well received, and the group disbanded shortly after.

The fate of the RSC Women's Project is not unique. Women's theatre groups face a barrage of difficulties. Griffin and Aston write:

For the work of women's theatre groups, existing on the fringes of mainstream culture and operating as an oppositional force in relation to a dominant male-centred ideology, has suffered the fate women seem always to have had in history: women's theatre groups' work disappears as it appears. (8-9)

Production texts have no value in the marketplace. Whether because they are written by unknown authors, women authors, or collectives, play-texts tend not to be published, which means that the important work done by women's theatre groups has no lasting physical record. Funding is an additional and ever-present problem for women's theatre

groups. In *Other Theatres*, Andrew Davies notes that the rates of subsidies to independent theatre groups were cut back in the 1980s (178), making life hard for almost all women's theatre companies. Touring, an option available to many companies, is more difficult for women, who may be less inclined to leave families or children for long periods of time. Despite these problems, women's theatre groups have survived, and they continue to challenge traditional notions of drama, performance, and Shakespeare.

Shakespeare has always presented problems for women in theatre. From their early exclusion onstage, to the scarcity of strong female figures in Shakespeare's plays and the alienating reality of playing breeches roles originally intended for boys, women actors have long struggled with Shakespeare in performance. Liz Goodman identifies two major practical problems for contemporary women associated with the continued popularity of Shakespeare in English theatres. The first of these is has to do with casting:

employment opportunities are obviously limited by the perpetuation of a canon built around Shakespeare, whose parts for women are comparatively few and composed largely of supporting rather than leading roles. ("Women's" 206)

The second problem has to do with Shakespeare's popularity overshadowing opportunities for new writing by women:

The tendency to re-produce the Shakespearean canon at the expense of new writing has obvious negative effects, such as relatively low levels of funding for young writers and new plays, and limited availability of space for these plays in the seasonal programs for the major subsidized national companies: the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. ("Women's" 206)

These problems for women working in theatre have resulted in a history of complex responses to Shakespeare's work, responses which include "accommodation, confrontation and appropriation, opposition to Shakespeare and oppositional use of him" (Novy *Cross-Cultural* 7). These responses are further complicated when religion, racial

background or sexual orientation distance a playwright or actor further from Shakespeare. Novy traces the diversity of these responses in *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*. By the end of the twentieth century, women in theatre were left with feelings of deep ambivalence towards Shakespeare. The profound sense of tradition that celebrates Shakespeare as the progenitor of the English stage was at war with his lack of universality, the scarcity of his roles for women, and the attention his work took away from women playwrights. Writing in 1993, Goodman raises the seminal issue of her age: "The question posed is not *how* to play Shakespeare but *whether* to play Shakespeare" ("Women's" 207).

One solution to the "problem" of Shakespeare for feminists in the late twentieth century is adaptation. Theatrical feminist adaptations of Shakespeare, like Paula Vogel's *Desdemona* and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, blossomed in the 1980s. Yet Novy is quick to point out that these adaptations are not all celebratory in tone. Rather than focusing on "the new possibilities for women to survive or escape tragedy and reimagine comedy," she writes, "the new visions into which women have transformed Shakespearean themes have been much more complex" (*Transforming* 8). As an articulation of contemporary feminist thought in response to Shakespeare, these plays both critique and reproduce stereotypical views of women's nature and sexuality.

Written and first staged in a reading in October 1977 at Cornell University, Vogel's *Desdemona* dramatizes the gaps between and behind the scenes of Shakespeare's *Othello*, bringing women's perspectives to the fore in the story. In a series of thirty short,

cinematic-take-style scenes, Vogel traces the interactions between Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca during their final week on Cyprus. In the early scenes, the temperamental and spoiled Desdemona searches frantically for the handkerchief Othello gave her. She scatters clothes and tears apart bedding in her search while Emilia works tirelessly away mending her mistress's clothes, washing her linen, and trying to ignore Desdemona's bawdy, inappropriate dialogue. Emilia, unhappily married to Iago, nonetheless pleads with Desdemona to ensure her husband's advancement, a bargaining chip Desdemona never fails to use to coerce Emilia into service and ensure her silence. It emerges that Desdemona has been working nights at the local brothel to help service her friend Bianca's clients. Bianca is a lower-class but self-employed and independent woman. She has met and fallen in love with Cassio, whom she hopes to marry. As the three women interact – bully, work, drink, tease, and argue with each other – the extent of their scheming emerges: Emilia, in a fit of resentment, has given Desdemona's handkerchief to Iago, who has given it to Cassio to enrage Othello's jealousy. Cassio has given it to Bianca as a token of love. When Bianca naively exhibits the handkerchief, the women, particularly Desdemona, begin to realize the consequences of their machinations. Emilia recognizes that by helping Iago scheme for advancement, she has given Othello the reason he needed to kill his wife, while Desdemona realizes that her double-dealing and promiscuity have sown the seeds of her own demise. Knowing that Othello is searching for her, the frightened Desdemona makes desperate plans to flee Cyprus the next morning. In a final act of reconciliation and comfort, Emilia offers to brush Desdemona's hair – one hundred strokes – before they go to bed. The play closes with Emilia slowly counting to one hundred.

Told from the women's perspectives, Vogel's account of *Othello* encourages audiences to consider the characters and their situations in a new light. But the feminist approach in Vogel's play is not concerned with rescuing the women from the misogynistic abuses of their husbands. Tragedy is not averted. Instead, her interpretation stresses returning agency to the female characters, an approach common in feminist interpretations of the play in the 1980s; *The Woman's Part*, for example, details critical interest in "how Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca significantly shape the plot, themes, conflicts, and movement in *Othello*" (4). Rather than portraying Desdemona and Emilia as passive victims of fate, Vogel shows the women actively contributing to their fate.

*Desdemona* suggests that Shakespeare's women are not quite the innocent victims of masculine desires they appear to be but active makers – and unmakers – of each others' destinies. (Savran x)

Vogel's work articulates a feminist position common in the 1980s; her work is devoted to showing the possibilities that women have to shape their own lives, as David Savran notes in his introduction to Vogel's collection of plays, "to contest, subvert and redefine the roles they have been assigned" (xi). These roles have been assigned to women *both* by Shakespeare and by a critical and performance tradition that has insisted on their compliance and passivity. In *Desdemona*, then, Vogel both corroborates with Shakespeare and challenges him at the same time, engaging with characters he first imagined but expanding on them to stress values that are important to her, in a double gesture that effectively criticizes assumptions she sees behind Shakespeare's representations of women *and* behind the traditional interpretations of those women that stress their lack of agency and the dangerousness of their desire. In the context of re-vision / revision, Vogel is willfully re-entering Shakespeare's text from a new critical

perspective (one that stresses women's agency and re-values the assumptions Shakespeare's text makes about women), and creatively re-writing that text to change those assumptions. Savran alludes to this dual process; he writes that Vogel's plays "are intent upon revisiting the past in order to take it apart, to analyze it, to undermine it, and so to wreak a truly creative revenge" (xv). In conclusion, Savran calls her work "an act of retaliation" (x).

Like Vogel's play, Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* similarly engages with contemporary feminist responses to Shakespeare. Commissioned and first produced by Nightwood Theatre at the Annex Theatre in Toronto in March 1988, *Goodnight Desdemona* met with tremendous success. It has since been produced often and in many locations across Canada. The play follows the hapless Constance Ledbelly, an assistant professor at Queen's, on her quest to find the author of the mysterious Gustav Manuscript, which she believes is the source for both *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Arguing that both tragedies are failed comedies, Constance is transported into the world of each play to discover the author, the missing fool, and her own identity. Entering *Othello*, she interrupts Iago just as he convinces Othello to murder Desdemona, derailing the action and irrevocably altering the course of the tragedy. "I've wrecked a masterpiece," she cries. "I've ruined the play, / I've turned Shakespeare's *Othello* into a farce" (25). Desperately trying to recover the play, Constance meets Desdemona, and is surprised to find that she is not the delicately passive Venetian lady she expected to find in Shakespeare, but a carousing, war-loving, dominatrix of a woman. As Constance begins to get further embroiled in life on Cyprus, she is reminded of her purpose and whisked away to Verona, where she arrives to

interrupt the duel between Mercutio and Tybalt. Disguising herself as a boy, Constance reveals Romeo's newly-formed family relationship to Tybalt and averts the duel. She also unwittingly earns Romeo's affections. As Constance continues her quest for the missing author and fool, she encounters Juliet, but finds instead of a paragon of love, a whining, sniveling girl who, like Romeo is bored with a new marriage and falls instantly in love with Constance. Dodging the amours of Romeo and Juliet, Constance somehow manages to bring the play to a climax. Uniting with Desdemona and Juliet, she discovers the tripartite nature of her identity as well as her own proper place as the missing fool and author.

As *Goodnight Desdemona* closes, the Chorus speaks an epilogue, suggesting that the archetypes Constance saw in Desdemona and Juliet are not realistic, but each aspects of the complex psyche of women. MacDonald's play, like Vogel's, participates in contemporary feminist discussions of Shakespeare's portrayal of women, and questions the extent to which he endows these characterizations with agency, complexity, and growth. Like Vogel, MacDonald engages with revision in both aspects; she uses Rich's critical re-visioning to re-read Shakespeare and question his representations of women, and she articulates this critical re-vision creatively by revising, or writing alternative representations.

The common use of re-vision / revision as a double gesture in *Desdemona* and *Goodnight Desdemona* suggest that there are strategies or characteristics used consistently in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. These qualities include giving voice to silenced female characters, writing around the original story, exploring gender identity

and female sexuality, and some meta-narrative qualities. The next section will explore each of these qualities and evaluate how they are used by Vogel and MacDonald in an attempt to construct a tool-kit of sorts for feminist adaptations that might then be used to examine The Women's Theatre Group's adaptation of *King Lear*.

The silencing of female figures is a common topic in feminist criticism of Shakespeare. In "*King Lear and A Thousand Acres*" Iska Alter identifies the numerous ways that Goneril and Regan are silenced in *King Lear*: "motiveless villainy, public humiliation, sororal jealousy, redeemed duty, filial love, and death" (145). In *A Thousand Acres*, Alter notes, Smiley redresses the silencing of women by giving voice and narrative perspective to Goneril, a tactic that emerges as a common feature in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare both novelistic and theatrical. In *Desdemona*, the story of *Othello* is re-focused around the three female characters. Vogel empowers Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca by giving them exclusive control of the dialogue and highly distinctive voices with which to express themselves. These characters use their voices to provide new motivation for actions in *Othello* or for actions that otherwise go unexplained, and commentary on events that change an audience's understanding. Desdemona's confession of infidelity radically undermines her assertions of innocence in *Othello* and may change the way an audience judges Othello's revenge; it may preclude audience sympathy for Desdemona by encouraging them to think of her less as a victim, or it may enhance their sympathy for her if they perceive her to be struggling within restrictive codes of femininity; either way, Desdemona's self-expression challenges the way she is represented in Shakespeare. Vogel's play gives female characters more

opportunities to express themselves, and opportunities to express themselves *differently* than Shakespeare does.

For all the ways that women are silenced in Shakespeare, they are also silenced by class. Many feminists in the 1980s saw in Shakespeare's work re-articulations of early modern notions of gender and class hierarchies. In terms of stereotyping women along class lines, Shakespeare was less at fault than many Renaissance writers. His plays resisted universalizing representations of femininity by showing women from a range of socio-economic backgrounds – Mistress Overdone in *Measure for Measure*, Juliet's nurse, Maria in *Twelfth Night*; he showed how different their lives and concerns can be. But despite the breadth of his representations, Shakespeare still tended to categorize women in ways consistent with Renaissance notions of sexuality and class. He tended to portray lower-class women as bawds or comic figures, primarily as marginal characters concerned with meeting the sexual or economic needs of men. In "Shakespeare understudies" Jonathan Dollimore points out that despite their presence in many of Shakespeare's plays, prostitutes are rarely given voice. He identifies the *literal* silencing of prostitutes in *Measure for Measure* as "one of the most revealing indications of their powerlessness and exploitation in a culture and a theatre which obsessively invokes them" (136). Lower class women are present in Shakespeare, but not empowered; rather, like the prostitutes, they are "invisibly representative of the broken, the powerless and the silenced" (Dollimore "Shakespeare" 137). Nowhere does Shakespeare portray the emancipated and independent working women, the blacksmiths and "bootmakers, printers, pewterers, goldsmiths, farriers, and so forth" that Stephen Orgel insists thrived in Renaissance England (qtd. Rackin 51). Instead, like Mistress Overdone in *Measure for*

*Measure*, lower-class women are most often comic, secondary characters, dismissed and dismissable because of their lewdly farcical names, interchangeability, or irrelevance to the plot. In contrast, upper-class women are portrayed heroically, as figures of the romantic or tragic world, of primary importance to dramatic action.

In “Women and Men in *Othello*: What Should Such a Fool Do With Such a Woman?” Carol Thomas Neely argues against this contention that Shakespeare categorized women along class lines, suggesting that these stereotypes are based in the criticism not the text of Shakespeare. She suggests that Emilia, in particular, transcends stereotypes by playing a central role in *Othello*. But Neely’s contention that Emilia “is dramatically and symbolically the play’s fulcrum” (213) re-focuses the play’s theme around love, distorting the play’s false-comic structure and Emilia’s own importance as a mediator between Othello and Desdemona. Neely’s argument is undermined by her own contention, in “Constructing the Subject,” that feminists need to “over-read, to read to excess,” in Shakespeare, “the possibility of human (especially female) gendered subjectivity, identity, and agency, the possibility of women’s resistance or even subversion” (15). While I do not disagree with Neely that many of the stereotypical interpretations of upper- and lower-class characters come from a long tradition of critical bias, or that Emilia complicates representations of class and gender typical in Shakespeare, there is still strong textual evidence to support the claim that dramatic importance in Shakespeare is related to class and gender. As Peter Erickson points out, the “[a]ttainment of a certain degree of complexity does not mean that Shakespeare thereby escapes from ideology into the nonideological” (*Rewriting* 23). It remains a fact that rarely in Shakespeare does a lower-class woman exhibit the subject-hood or the

dramatic importance of a heroine, and nowhere is there an upper-class heroine who behaves sexually or as a clown.

*Desdemona* challenges the silencing effects of this negative relationship between class, gender, and dramatic importance. While Vogel makes a point of differentiating the socio-economic backgrounds of her female characters she equalizes their importance on stage. The use of accents in particular locates each woman within a specific cultural / socio-economic context which distinguishes her from the other two characters:

DESDEMONA: Upperclass. Very.

EMILIA: Broad Irish brogue.

BIANCA: Stage cockney. (175)

Vogel's *dramatis personae* uses class as a way of differentiating each character, but not as a way of defining that character's personal qualities or sexual practices, nor as a measure of that character's dramatic importance. Bianca, the lower-class bawd, is not silenced, ridiculed, or marginalized, but portrayed as a figure of romance and tragedy rather than farce; she is made instrumental to the action of the play; her affair with Cassio is described in sweetly romantic terms, and its disappointed end portrayed as a poignant loss. Desdemona is similarly portrayed in a way that challenges narrow class stereotypes; her sexual infidelity and experimentation is at odds with her rank and her position as a heroine. Each woman has her own background, history, and politics which motivates and individuates her, but no one character is given dramatic precedence over the other – there is no hierarchy here of dramatic importance. Bawd and heroine *share* the stage.

In *Goodnight Desdemona*, MacDonald similarly counteracts the many forms of female silencing not only by giving female characters distinctive voices, but allowing them to cheat death. Where Vogel sought to distinguish her characters from their Shakespearean originals with strong voices that located each within a distinct yet equal socio-economic context, MacDonald distinguishes Desdemona and Juliet with voices that challenge their Shakespearean representations. In his introduction to the Arden *Othello* (1997), E. A. J. Honigmann describes Desdemona as childlike, emotionally dependent, bewildered, and out of her depth (41-43). He cites references to her in the text as a delicate creature (3.3.273), perfection (2.3.25) and “a maiden never bold” (1.3.95). MacDonald plays up the contrast between this common interpretation and her own representation of Desdemona as domineering, aggressive, and single-mindedly war-like:

DESDEMONA: Did I not flee my father, here to dwell  
 beneath the sword Hephaestus forged for Mars?  
 Will I not dive into Sargasso Sea,  
 to serve abreast the Amazons abroad?  
 Will I not butcher any cow that dares  
 low lies to call me tame, ay that I will!  
 So raise I now the battle cry, *Bullshit!!* (38)

Similarly, MacDonald represents Juliet, like Desdemona, in decidedly un-idealistic terms. Often characterized as “a girl too young to have thoughts of marriage” who transforms into a “mature and suffering woman” (Kermode 1057), Juliet is re-cast in MacDonald’s play as a whiney teen, bored with her new marriage, violent, narcissistic, and over-sexed. She saucily tells the audience:

JULIET: [...] But touched and whetted once before,  
 love’s first keen edge grows dull with use and craves  
 another grinding. (58)

To the extent that Desdemona and Juliet have become symbols of femininity, MacDonald writes against their symbolic value. Like the characters in Vogel's play, they not only speak, they speak *differently* than they do in Shakespeare; but unlike Vogel's characters (who are set to die regardless), their ability to speak differently contributes to their salvation. In speaking differently from Shakespeare, Desdemona and Juliet not only express different values and change the course of the play, but (importantly) they avoid dying and being murdered at the play's end. Their feminist values are thus implicated in their agency and their ability to save themselves. Instead of dying, the characters self-actualize: they merge at the conclusion of the play with Constance's character to create one, amalgamated super-character (Constance, Desdemona, Juliet, the Fool, and the Author): "Where two plus one adds up to one, not three" (88). In this final act of consolidation, the play overwrites the tradition in Shakespearean tragedy of silencing women, singling them out, and killing them off, and offers instead a message of solidarity and survival.

The flip side to giving voice to female characters is the silencing of male characters. Both Vogel and MacDonald emphatically curtail the voices of men in their plays. *Desdemona* in particular does not even represent Othello or Iago on stage; *Goodnight Desdemona* represents men on stage, but limits their dialogue. Here Romeo gets more attention than Othello or Iago, but his masculine authority is undermined in act three by his decision to "become" a woman. Giving voice to female figures operates in triplicate, then, to counteract the silencing traditionally associated with female characters in Shakespeare: it allows women to articulate hitherto unexpressed or marginalized positions, it challenges early modern stereotypes of femininity related to class and gender

by giving women equal yet distinct voices, and it gives precedence to women's concerns by curtailing / excluding male voices.

Another common feature in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare is the process of writing around the original story. This practice is not unique to feminist writers – Bottomley wrote around Shakespeare in *King Lear's Wife* in 1913 – but the particular emphasis placed on filling in the gaps *differently* is specific to feminist adaptations. Bottomley's prequel maintained consistency with *King Lear* and minimized any discrepancies between characters, setting, language, and plot; his play did not change the meaning of *King Lear*. Feminist adaptors, in contrast, write around Shakespeare to play up the differences between the original story and the story told in the gaps and elisions of the original. In their introduction to *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier explain the transformative power of this later type of re-writing:

Shakespearean adaptation in this mode is not about faithful adherence to the narrative or performance conventions of traditional Shakespeare, but about the degree to which the playwright can transform that material and reshape conventions in such a way as to expose the orthodoxies that support the tradition. When successful, such reshaping puts the enormous cultural power of Shakespeare to work in a way that undermines the way in which that power conventionally operates. (17)

Most often this type of adaptation dramatizes those scenes that are excluded from Shakespeare, scenes that focus on female characters or women's issues, or which allow female characters to challenge meaning in the original by telling the story from their own point of view. The effect of writing *differently* around the original story, as we saw in Stoppard, is dissonance: the original story is undermined by the presence of an alternative narrative which may criticize the original, posit different opinions or values, or even offer alternate resolutions.

In *Desdemona*, Vogel writes around Shakespeare by setting her play in a “back room of the palace on Cyprus” (175), literalizing the behind-the-scene approach. Each of her thirty scenes is intended to come between scenes in *Othello* so that each entrance is both literally and figuratively an exit from Shakespeare’s play. In showing what *Othello* does not show, Vogel encourages her audience in a number of critical steps that displace Shakespeare. Each scene in *Desdemona* opens up new possibilities that challenge or change the meaning of the original story:

What if Desdemona was not a guiltless victim, but responsible for her fate?  
 What if Emilia participated in Desdemona’s downfall?  
 What if Desdemona knew she was going to die, and took every means possible to avoid it?

These possibilities suggest to an audience that the story as they know it is incomplete. *Othello* focuses on the Moor’s susceptibility to deceit, his descent into jealousy and obsession, his mistaken and murderous anger, and finally his guilt and remorse. While Shakespeare’s play gives audiences clues to Desdemona’s state of mind, the “organization of its point of view” (McLuskie’s term, 98) encourages audiences to understand events from Othello’s perspective. The play is specifically not *Othello and Desdemona*. In contrast to *Othello*, the exclusive presence of female characters in *Desdemona* suggests a perspective that is different and decidedly women centred, which in turn challenges audiences to consider the extent to which Shakespeare’s play may privilege the masculine point of view. The realization that *Othello* may not fully represent the perspectives of its female characters potentially complicates every subsequent interaction an audience has with the play. An audience is thus encouraged to reflect back on the original play in a critical new way and recognize its lack of

universality. By writing around Shakespeare's play – in the gaps and elisions of *Othello* – Vogel shows the inadequacy of the original, and replaces it (temporarily, imaginatively) with a feminist story that demands equal time and validity.

Like Vogel, MacDonald writes around the original story by dramatizing scenes, or parts of scenes, that are left out of Shakespeare. In act three, scene two, for example, she portrays the morning after Romeo and Juliet's marriage, after they have both risen and discovered a whining, sniveling spouse:

JULIET: *Ay me. (Yawn.)*  
 ROMEO: *(Half-asleep) Was that the lark?*  
 JULIET: It was the luncheon bell.  
 ROMEO: Oh no! *(Leaps out of bed)*  
           Julie-e-et, where by my blue doublet?!  
 JULIET: Under the bed where thou didst leave it, dear. (54)

MacDonald's aim is clearly parody, but her scene nonetheless reminds the audience that the romantic tale told by Shakespeare skips over a great deal of the real-life relationships between men and women. It suggests that *Romeo and Juliet* offers a limited, if not overly idealized perspective on love, a suggestion that will potentially permanently alter the audience's opinion of the original play. Like Vogel, MacDonald writes around the original to (temporarily, imaginatively) replace Shakespeare with a story that pays more attention to those issues – sexuality, family violence, women's independence – that concern contemporary women.

This strategy is not unproblematic. In writing around the original story, in the gaps and elisions of the male story, women writers risk reinforcing traditional stereotypes that women exist in the margins. When Vogel situates her women's story in "a back room of the palace on Cyprus," her setting undermines her claims to be dramatizing a

narrative of independence. Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca may be re-articulating a male story from the female characters' point of view – claiming social, economic, and sexual autonomy – but they are doing so in a private, domestic, and marginal space: the kitchen, a space which traditionally reinforces women's dependence and lack of autonomy.

Vogel's play is clever in that by filling in the gaps in *Othello* it changes the meaning of the original without altering the text; but by “buying into” the idea that women's stories can *only* be told in gaps, it reinforces the idea that women belong in marginal spaces.

Throughout the play, there is a pervasive sense that the male story (unseen and unheard as it is) is nonetheless inescapable and inviolate, a sense that is reinforced as the play circles inevitably towards the deaths of Desdemona and Emilia.

In this sense, MacDonald's play – which not only writes in the gaps, but alters and re-writes the original as well – is formally more subversive. Constance is a literalization of the female writer stumbling into a story, coming out of the margins and backrooms, and substantially changing the story by virtue of her presence. Here the male story is not inescapable or inviolate, but only too susceptible to alteration. A woman's ability to re-write the story, and to challenge male authority, is reinforced when Constance saves Desdemona and Juliet from murder / suicide. Unfortunately, this segment is represented as a dream, which undermines the potentially empowering effects of the female writer's ability to change the story by suggesting her power is only effective within a fantasy space. When Constance wakes up at the end of the play, she feels personally empowered, but it is unclear whether or not her changes to *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* have survived the transition from dream to reality.

*When the warp is over, CONSTANCE is alone in her office at Queen's. Both she and the office are precisely as they were at the onset of the first warp at the end of Act I: the phone receiver dangles by its cord, and CONSTANCE is leaning over with just her – hatless – head in the wastebasket. She straightens up and looks about her, a little disoriented. She tentatively touches herself as if to confirm her reality, bringing one hand to her head. She feels her pen behind her ear, removes it, and looks at it. It has turned to solid gold, feather and all. (88)*

The transformation of Constance's pen suggests that some part of her fantasy has had a lasting, physical effect, and that the feminist writer can make an impact on *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The Chorus's epilogue corroborates this, suggesting that Constance's alterations to the plays have "manifested form" (89), but MacDonald is not clear on the extent of Constance's transformative powers. The feminist alterations to Shakespeare seem exclusively to take place in the character's unconscious mind, an academic exercise. In the end, although MacDonald's play is more subversive than Vogel's because it allows a woman to alter Shakespeare's text, the effect is tempered by the fact that the feminist alteration happens in a fantasy space with dubious permanence. Writing around the text, then, while a common feminist strategy and empowering in its own way, creates a complex response: it suggests both an alternative story (and the temporary, imaginative replacement of Shakespeare) and the limitations of alternative stories (and the limitations of the woman writer challenging Shakespeare). Again, these strategies, though common, are not without their problems.

The exploration of gender identity is of particular concern in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. In "Women's Alternative Shakespeares and Women's Alternatives to Shakespeare" Liz Goodman writes: "The woman performer in Shakespeare is intrinsically, radically, perhaps definitionally alternative to the boy-man for whom the parts were written" (223). Because of this alterneity, the subject of women's intrinsic

differences – their gender identity and sexuality – is often at the centre of their talking-back to Shakespeare. Vogel foregrounds Desdemona’s sexuality in her bawdy dialogue, her professed late-night prostituting, and her infidelity to Othello. In a highly sexualized moment in scene 22, Bianca pretends to beat Desdemona, to demonstrate the “I am ‘n brim” technique she uses with her johns (212). MacDonald’s representation of sexuality is perhaps even more typical of feminist re-writing of Shakespeare. Constance’s mistaken transformation into a boy, and the infatuation it triggers in both Romeo and Juliet, reflects an understanding of sexual orientation that transcends gender. The indifference Romeo and Juliet display towards Constance’s gender, and their determined pursuit of her – which transforms their own gender identities over and over again from “boy” to “girl” and back again – playfully engage the Shakespearean tradition of cross-dressing and same-sex love, while at the same time engaging with contemporary feminist critics such as Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva who question binary signifiers like male and female (Neely 7) and who challenge the view that sexuality is biologically determined (Jones 362). We are reminded of Rich’s challenge: “A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order reassert itself in every new revolution” (35). For Rich, sexual identity and political order go hand in hand; similarly, both Vogel and MacDonald articulate their challenges to the political order by encouraging audiences to reconsider sexual practices and gender identity in their plays.

The exploration of women’s sexual practices in *Desdemona* and the playfulness around gender identity in *Goodnight Desdemona* suggest positive alternatives (gay / lesbian, bisexual, androgynous, ambiguous) to male heterosexuality; the flip side of this

celebration of “alternative” sexuality, however, is that traditional representations of male desire tend to be cast in a negative light. *Desdemona* portrays Othello as sexually jealous and dangerously abusive. Iago is repeatedly referred to as sexually inadequate and highly manipulative. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, the predatory Dr. Claude Night, who regularly seduces and uses Constance, is heavily drawn as a villain; Tybalt, the only “straight” male portrayed in act three, is likewise portrayed as a villain. In fact, it is not until Tybalt unwittingly absconds with the cross-dressed Romeo at the end of the play – a moment that eradicates his male heterosexual desire – that he becomes a comic rather than villainous character. While the focus in these plays on female sexuality and gender identity does reflect feminist interests in deconstructing early modern tendencies to negatively associate women and their sexual natures, it is worth noting that they often do so at the expense of male heterosexuality.

The final strategy in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare, meta-narrative qualities, is less pronounced than the other characteristics but occurs commonly enough to include. Meta-narrative qualities are those that foreground the act of story-telling; they are stories about stories, and about story-telling. In feminist writing, meta-narratives are often used to thematize the position of the woman writer (Novy *Transforming* 7): to dramatize how story-telling contributes to the creation and understanding of the self, and of the self as a writer. These qualities are particularly evident in *Goodnight Desdemona*, a play that Novy calls “reflexive and metafictional” (*Transforming* 7), which foregrounds women reading, writing, and re-writing, and the importance of entering into a story with our own critical perspective. The play tells the story of Constance, who is transformed from a passive reader into an active re-writer as she enters into Shakespeare’s story to find the

author, in the course of which she writes her own destiny by helping Desdemona and Juliet re-write their destinies. In effect, *Goodnight Desdemona* is one woman's story (MacDonald's) of another woman's story (Constance's) of retelling the stories of other women (Desdemona and Juliet). Constance, then, becomes a metaphorical figure for the female author as Rich envisaged her, literally entering an old text from a new perspective, and seeing that text for the first time as it really is. It is in this light that Ric Knowles described the play as "an enactment of resisting reading" (qtd. Bennett 156). But like MacDonald and other feminist adaptors, Constance takes re-vision a step farther, putting her new critical perspective into practice by creatively altering or revising the text. The play thus enacts the woman writer's fantasies of re-vision / revision.

The meta-narrative qualities in *Goodnight Desdemona* also dramatize the extent to which we use stories to define ourselves. The play revolves around Constance's efforts to find and articulate her identity (the author / herself), which she does by acting out various roles in various stories. Throughout the play, she repeatedly describes and reinscribes herself in narrative. In act one, her description of herself is self-effacing: "I'm not the least bit special," she says (16). It turns out that Constance is not even sure she exists:

CONSTANCE: I'm just one flawed and isolated fragment of a perfect infinite mind like everybody else, I – I think that I exist in that you and I are here chatting with the sense evidence of each other, insofar as we're not over there not chatting, no I'm not special. (16)

Constance's inability to articulate her identity properly happens *before* she enters into the stories which will eventually define her. In act one, she has no identity; her story has not yet begun. But as she ventures forth into new narrative spaces, her description of herself

begins to change. To fit into the particular ethos of *Othello*, she refers to herself as a vestal virgin-scholar from Academe. In contrast to her self-definition in act one, her self-definition here is more active, but it confines her within the narrow definitions of womanhood Shakespeare represented in tragedy. In the context of *Othello*, the closest roles Constance can find to identify herself with are stereotypes of vestal-virgins and Amazons. Her problem is that she is defining herself within the parameters of one man's conceptions of femininity. While her attempts at self-definition have progressed, her discomfort in her new role reflects her sense that she has not so much defined herself as allowed herself to be defined by someone else's narrative.

By the time Constance enters the second narrative dimension, her description of herself has become even more active, yet it is still narrowly confined by Shakespearean stereotypes. Her self-identification in *Romeo and Juliet* as “a roving pedant lad to earn my bread / by wit and by this fountain pen, my sword” (50), is wildly inventive, yet precisely the way a Rosalind or Viola would act in a Shakespearean comedy. As in the *Othello* sections, Constance chafes within this identity, struggling even to find her name: “my name is Constan – tine” (50). Again, we see how she is defining herself differently and more actively in each story, but how neither story fits because each enforces a rigid conception of femininity that limits Constance's identity. In the end, it is not until Constance can consolidate these different stories – and bring together various versions of femininity – that her identity coalesces. As *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* begin to intersect, Constance literally “finds herself” when she realizes that she is the object of her own quest: “I'm it? . . . I'm it. *I'm the Fool!*” (87). But Constance is not only the object of her quest, she is the subject as well: “The Fool and the Author are one and the same”

(87). As she realizes that she is both the object of her own desire and the subject / author of her own destiny, Constance begins to understand the breadth and power of her identity. She realizes that she is Constance, Fool, Author plus Desdemona and Juliet, all in one: “Where two plus one adds up to one, not three” (88). The meta-narrative qualities through which Constance finds herself in *Goodnight Desdemona* allow MacDonald to dramatize the feminist practice of resistant reading and to articulate the self-fulfilling qualities writing has for women.

While these qualities cannot be said to define women’s adaptations of Shakespeare – the body of work is too broad and diverse to attempt a definition, and not all women’s adaptations can fairly be called “feminist” – they do suggest certain consistent strategies used by women in response to Shakespeare. As part of a tool kit, these strategies allow women to reflect critically on the Shakespeare they have inherited, to interact with him without compromising their feminism, to confront him without alienating themselves from their own literary heritage, and to replace him (imaginatively, temporarily) in a way that satisfies their often conflicting desires as women writers. In *Lear’s Daughter’s*, The Women’s Theatre Group employs each of these strategies to great effect both to challenge *King Lear* and to articulate the particular dilemma that women face in re-writing Shakespeare.

As with many collectively written and revised works, it is difficult to assign authorship to *Lear’s Daughters*. In 1987 The Women’s Theatre Group commissioned Elaine Feinstein to work with the company – which consisted of Adjoa Andoh, Janys Chambers, Gwenda Hughes, Polly Irvin, Hazel Maycock, Lizz Poulter and Sandra Yaw –

towards the creation of a working play-script for a feminist adaptation of Shakespeare (Goodman 220). In *Performing Nostalgia*, Bennett describes the play as a touring production that played mostly at small theaters and other community venues. She notes that *Lear's Daughters* did play in London, but dismisses these performances, saying they were “not at a subsidized or commercial theatre directed at a mainstream theatre-going public” (53). According to the company, the play met with great success, touring Britain again in 1988 “by popular demand” (Bennett 53). Critically, *Lear's Daughters* has been hailed as a “landmark” in feminist reinvention of Shakespeare (Goodman 220). It is often cited as indicative of the genre; Liz Goodman and Geraldine Cousin single the play out as an important adaptation of Shakespeare’s text, and Bennett writes that it “does more than provoke a doodle in the margins” (52). Considered in conjunction with *Desdemona* and *Goodnight Desdemona*, *Lear's Daughters* offers an ideal text in which to explore strategies for feminist adaptation of Shakespeare, and to consider the role of women writers in relation to the Shakespeare tradition.

Acting more or less as a prequel to the events in *King Lear*, *Lear's Daughters* dramatizes in fourteen scenes the relationship between Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, the Fool, and their Nurse as they come to terms with their mother’s death. The Fool, a character representing half man / half woman, delivers the opening monologue, a limerick about Lear, followed by a series of knock-knock jokes. S/he goes on to present the play as a number of different configurations, each of which prioritizes different relationships:

FOOL: Three princesses.  
 Two servants.  
 One king offstage.

One Queen dead. (21)

Or:

FOOL: Three daughters,  
Two mothers,  
One father,  
and the Fool. (22)

Or:

FOOL: Six parts,  
Four actors. (22).

Finally:

FOOL: One stage,  
One audience,  
One castle,  
One prop. (22)

Each of the daughters then delivers a monologue describing how she defines herself.

Cordelia loves words; she describes her desire to get them right, her pride in learning to read, how her sky is full of words. Regan speaks of her love for wood, how she delights in carving and bringing shapes out of wood, her hopes of one day being able to bring her own shape out of wood. Goneril talks of colour; she describes how her world is made up of colour, and how she tries to paint what is around her. The Fool, in turn, states, “I like money. And myself. And money.” S/he concludes the scene with another set of configurations, suggesting yet another context: “Three princesses, living in a castle, listening to fairy-tales in the nursery” (24).

In scene two, Nurse relates the story of each girl’s birth. During Goneril’s birth, the Queen’s crown fell off and circled the baby, and a comet blazed red against the black sky. Lear was in the library. Regan was born at midnight to the Queen sitting on her

throne. A volcano erupted; Lear was still in his library. Cordelia relates her own birth, when the Queen was outdoors; there was a hurricane. “And Lear was there,” she says (26). The Fool concludes: “Three daughters. With two mothers – one buying, one selling. One paying, one paid” (27). In the next scene, the children describe creeping downstairs for the first time and encountering their father; Cordelia is met joyfully and swung up into the air, Regan is frightened by seeing her father touch her mother’s breast, and Goneril angers her father by sitting on his throne. The Fool says “The first time I went downstairs I was pushed” (30). S/he concludes the scene with a description of his / her own birth:

When I was born, nothing happened. There was no bright star, no hurricane, no visitors came from afar. Obviously my parents hadn’t read the right books so my arrival was completely overlooked. (31)

In scene five, the Fool describes Lear’s triumphant return home from a sporting event and the girls give conflicting accounts of each other’s behaviour. Discrepancies are again evident when the event is taken up once more in scene seven. Nurse describes Lear’s return home: “It rained for forty days and nights before he came home and when he did, the sun came out. The king walked over the water to meet us” (41). She describes crossing the bridge to meet him. As the girls begin to recall this event differently, Nurse adapts her story to fit.

CORDELIA: Then did we cross over?

NURSE: I think so, yes.

[...]

REGAN: You were there.

NURSE: Was I? (*pause*) If you want me there.

GONERIL: No. (*slowly, concentrating. She moves to NANNY*)

Nanny stayed on this side of the bridge.

NURSE: That is my place. (*curtsies to GONERIL*) (41-43)

The daughters' problematic relationship with their father is exacerbated in scene eight, which opens on the day of the Queen's funeral. Regan and Goneril, looking out the window, are disgusted to see Lear fondling a strange woman.

GONERIL: How can he? Today.

REGAN: He's disgusting.

GONERIL: He's got his hand right up her skirt.

REGAN: Anyone can see him. Not just us? Doesn't he care? (44)

Goneril's dismay is compounded by her anxiety that if Lear remarries he might have a son, displacing her from succession to the throne.

In scene nine, Nurse tells the story of the Pied Piper. She tells of a beautiful kingdom in a beautiful land, which gradually becomes overrun with rats. The rats trample the crops and scavenge for food, causing a famine.

NURSE: But then one day there comes into the castle a strange figure who is called the

FOOL: Fool.

NURSE: No-one knows whether this

FOOL: Fool

NURSE: is a woman or a man, for it has a woman's voice, but walks with the carriage and stature of a man. The

FOOL: Fool

NURSE: announces itself as a rat-catcher (48)

The Nurse relates how the Fool / rat-catcher pipes the rats away into the river at which point the king and court repent of their bargain and withhold payment. That night, as the story goes, the Fool plays a different tune, drawing all the children into the palace and turning them into rats. Nurse concludes that the rats take over the castle, eat the king and queen, and then follow the Fool out of town. The Fool objects to Nurse's story on the grounds that the Fool never got paid.

Scene ten opens with the Fool checking his / her notes and summarizing the play so far. Cordelia re-enacts an encounter with Lear (played by the Fool) in which he tells her to dance. She spins and spins, and falls, and wants to stop: “I’m falling,” she cries. “No. I don’t want to. Cordelia not want to be Daddy’s girl. (CORDELIA *collapses on floor*)” (53). Nurse tells Regan about the night the Queen died. Regan accuses her of telling stories that are not true, of lying, but Nurse replies that her stories were intended to comfort. Regan insists on being told the truth. Nurse tells her that the Queen died in childbirth, that she had wanted to leave Lear and take the children with her, but could not. Regan admits that she is pregnant herself.

In scene eleven, the Fool announces that Albany and Cornwall will be brought in to stop the tide of unrest growing in the country. The next scene shows Goneril and Regan getting ready to be married. Goneril, busy with the account books, is too busy to get dressed. She feels nothing for her wedding and is indifferent about marriage. Regan is scared:

REGAN: When I lie in bed at night, I can feel my heart beating so fast, it’s like I’m living at twice the pace. I’m running out of life. How can you feel nothing about it?

GONERIL: It’s our job. It’s what we’re here for. To marry and breed.

REGAN: Like dogs?

GONERIL: Like doges. Valuable merchandise. I can show you the figures here if you like.

REGAN: I’m scared.

GONERIL: It’s what we’re here for. (59-60)

Regan announces that she is going to have a baby in seven months time. In response, Goneril produces the ledger to show Regan how much she is worth married to Cornwall, and how little she is worth if she has a bastard child. Nurse enters with a potion to drink

that will abort Regan's baby. Regan drinks, staggers in pain, and delivers the unborn child. Nurse tells her that it would have been a boy.

The Fool introduces the penultimate scene with a final configuration: "Two bridegrooms waiting downstairs. Two brides waiting to be swept off their feet" (62). Goneril and Regan kneel before the Fool, while Nurse and Cordelia watch the ceremony. Everyone speaks at once. Statements of blatant insincerity from Goneril and Regan ("I promise, I do, I will") overlap traumatic reflections from Cordelia ("Spin for Daddy") and the Nurse's dutiful mantra ("That is my place, that is my place"). More menacingly, Cordelia's sense of the bride, that "She means the world to him," is undercut by Nurse's avowal: "She brings a large dowry" (63). Suddenly, Goneril attacks the Fool / Lear with the cake knife, but the action freezes, and the happy wedding scene resumes. The Fool / Lear invites Goneril and Regan to live with him a while longer, he cannot part with them so soon. Goneril moves upstage as if to throw herself out of the window. Clawing at her face, she screams that she can no longer see; the lace from her wedding veil is scoring her eyes. Nurse catches her as she falls and the lights go out.

In the final scene, the Fool gives the Nurse her notice. Her services are no longer required. She is furious with Lear: "How many more of us will he throw away when we no longer suit? Goneril? Regan? Cordelia even?" (66) In her anger, she confesses:

NURSE: I had a baby once. Did you know? I had to give my baby away so that I had milk for his. Milk. When his Queen died I looked at my shrunken breasts in the bit of mirror I had and then I put it in the coffin. What to do? [...] Leave him a note, 'Cordelia's mine – I swapped her at birth for you son. Love Nanny.' That would rock his little world. But is it true? You'll never know. I do. (66)

Nurse packs her things and tells Cordelia she's leaving. Cordelia makes her own confession; she has two voices, she says. "Ever since going downstairs and Daddy lifting me onto the table, I've talked like a child, used the words of a child. No-one likes it but him." She continues: "But I do have another voice. In my head I have words I never say to anyone – never have said to anyone. Till now. I can do it, you see" (67). Cordelia concludes that she will speak to Lear as a woman from now on, as one adult to another. But Nurse tells her it does not matter.

Nurse leaves, and the Fool tries to comfort Cordelia. S/he sums up: "Two mothers, one dead or gone missing, the other leaving. Three daughters, paying the price" (68). As the scene concludes, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia reprise their monologues from scene one. The difference now is that Goneril cannot see colour for all the red in the sky and blood in her eyes, and Regan no longer carves wood, but is determined to carve out a destiny of revenge on Lear for her lost mother and lost children. Cordelia has only two words left, which she weighs, like stones, in her hands:

CORDELIA: 'Yes' to please, 'no', to please myself, 'yes', I shall and 'no', I will not. 'Yes' for you and 'no' for me. I love words. I like their roughness and their smoothness, and when I am silent I'm trying to get them right. I shall be silent now, weighing these words, and when I choose to speak, I shall choose the right one. (69)

The Fool bows to the audience; it is "An ending. A beginning" (69). S/he throws a crown into the air. The sisters reach up to grab it and the lights go out.

The Fool's final assessment, an ending / a beginning, is a reference to end of the *Lear's Daughters* and the beginning of *King Lear*. But the end of the play also signifies another ending / beginning. As one play ends, and another begins (even imaginatively),

audiences are reminded of the distance between the representations of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia they have just witnessed onstage and their representation in *King Lear*. How are they to reconcile the sympathetically portrayed women they see in *Lear's Daughters* with the monsters in *King Lear*? When the Fool heralds the ending of one play and the beginning of another, audiences potentially experience a Rich-esque moment of re-vision; as the two plays collide, they are able to reconsider the old text from a new critical perspective. Suddenly re-seeing *King Lear* from the perspective gained from *Lear's Daughters*, they become conscious of the first text's partiality (perhaps its misogyny?), its limitations (its exclusion of women?) and its lack of universality (its male-orientedness?). They re-see and re-evaluate Shakespeare. But like other feminist adaptations, *Lear's Daughters* uses re-vision / revision in the double sense. It moves on from Rich's critical re-evaluation and corrects with creative revision. By writing in a pro-feminist voice, the play overwrites any tendencies in *King Lear* towards misogyny, and by privileging stories that are both female-oriented and sexually and socially varied, the play counters *King Lear's* narrow gendered and classist orientation. As with *Desdemona* and *Goodnight Desdemona*, *Lear's Daughters'* double use of re-vision / revision to re-evaluate Shakespeare and creatively re-write him potentially has a lasting effect on the audience's perception of the original. The ending / beginning announced by the Fool marks the end of their Shakespearean conception of *King Lear*, and the beginning of potential new conceptions.

In addition to re-vision / revision, *Lear's Daughters* incorporates other characteristics that are beginning to appear as familiar strategies in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. Giving voice to silenced female characters, writing around the original,

playing with gender identity, and making use of meta-narratives to explore the role of the woman writer are all strategies that occur to various degrees in the play.

The most obvious difference between *Lear's Daughters* and *King Lear* is that the adaptation focuses exclusively on the women in Shakespeare's story, overwriting women's silence with women's voices. Iska Alter reminded us of the "motiveless villainy, public humiliation, sororal jealousy" and other ways that women are silenced in Shakespeare, particularly the older sisters in *King Lear* (145). Like Smiley, the WTG sets out to correct these forms of silencing by counterbalancing villainy with heroism, humiliation with dignity, jealousy with sorority, and death with survival. By telling the story of *King Lear* through the women's voices, the play encourages audiences to see characters like Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia in a more sympathetic light, and to understand that their concerns and motivations may be greater and more complicated than those portrayed by Shakespeare.

With the women centre stage, the play re-positions men as the marginal figures. Men become objects who are seen and commented on rather than being acting subjects. In scene eight, Goneril and Regan watch from the window as Lear makes sexual passes at a woman during his wife's funeral:

GONERIL: How can he? Today.

REGAN: He's disgusting. (44)

When Goneril and Regan comment on Lear's sexual impropriety, they are empowered in two ways, both by their subject-hood – the fact that they are the central subjects in the play – and by the control they exert over the audience's understanding of Lear. As the subjects of the play, they are empowered with exclusive control over the dialogue, and by

being allowed to articulate opinions, needs, and desires they do not articulate in Shakespeare. They give full and justifiable reasons for the strained relationship with their father; as the scene above suggests, for example, they are disgusted by Lear's sexual impropriety. This subject-hood makes Goneril and Regan seem more relatable and sympathetic. Audiences may begin to understand that their actions are not "motiveless villainy" but complex responses to family dysfunction.

The sisters are further empowered by controlling the audience's impression of Lear. With no direct exposure to Lear, the audience must base its opinion of him solely on the way he is described by the women in the play. Lear, and any understanding of Lear, is filtered through the female characters. The effect of this filtration is that audiences see his character in a new light; they see a Lear who does not accord with Shakespeare's representation. By shifting the focus of *King Lear* onto the female characters and filtering the story through their experiences, the play encourages audiences to consider alternatives which change the very nature of Shakespeare's story.

The WTG further challenges the way that women are traditionally silenced and marginalized by class. In *Desdemona*, Vogel used the distinctions between Desdemona's upper-class English accent, Emilia's Irish brogue, and Bianca's cockney slang to indicate differences in the characters' socio-economic backgrounds. Each accent situated the women in specific cultural and economic contexts, which in turn influenced their concerns, opinions, and motivation – Emilia was motivated to betray Desdemona in the interest of forwarding her husband at court and improving her social standing, Bianca hoped to marry Cassio in part to change her social status – but their status does not effect

their dramatic importance. Vogel's characterization of women complicates early modern tendencies to make assumptions about women's sexual morality on the basis of class background.

In *Lear's Daughters*, distinctions between race, class, and sexuality similarly begin to blur. Like Shakespeare, the WTG emphasizes class distinctions to differentiate the women from each other. Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia speak from a different socio-economic position than the Fool and Nurse. The Fool's obsession with money – "I like money. And myself. And money" (24) – emphasizes his / her place in the working class, while the daughters' interest in painting, writing, and carving position them as leisured upper-class. The repeated references to Nurse being the "paid" mother – as in scene two:

Three daughters. With two mothers – one buying, one selling. One paying, one paid (27)

emphasize the difference between her position as mother and the Queen's: class is important in *Lear's Daughters*. In contrast to Shakespeare, however, the WTG, like Vogel, does not allow class to determine a character's dramatic importance, her personal qualities or her sexuality. The women in the play share centre stage equally; they are not constrained by their socio-economic backgrounds into marginal or sexualized positions, nor by their status into idealized positions of chastity. By resisting what are often regarded as stereotyping representations of femininity in Shakespeare, the WTG portrays unique but equal female characters who share subject-hood and centre stage regardless of race or class, and whose independence of mind and opinion, agency and accountability challenge stereotyping.

Another strategy to add distinction to women's voices is to write specifically against Shakespeare's idealizing representations of women. MacDonald employed this strategy in *Goodnight Desdemona* by portraying Desdemona and Juliet differently than their Shakespearean personas, as disarmingly war-like and irritatingly selfish. The effect of these mis-representations was to encourage audiences to understand the limits of Shakespeare's representations of women, how reflective of male fantasies or anxieties they often are. Rather than a fantasy Desdemona, MacDonald showed us how a "real" woman might behave in her situation. Similarly, the WTG portrays Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia less as extremes of good and evil, and more believably as complex women and daughters. Where Shakespeare omitted sympathetic references to Goneril and Regan's motives, and left unchallenged Lear's assertions of their monstrous behaviour, the WTG gives their "unmotivated villainy" just cause and tempers their hatred with love: Goneril loves Lear, but has long been aware of his shortcomings as a monarch, having taken over the financial concerns of the kingdom and learned early on that Lear's gold has come from the abuse and incarceration of his subjects; Regan loves Lear, but is forced to abort her baby in order to maintain value as a marriageable woman and bolster his wealth. Cordelia's character is similarly complicated. Her affection for Lear is tempered when she explains how he has continuously infantilized her and prevented her from developing a voice as an adult woman, engendering a resentment in her that motivates her silence in *King Lear*. Instead of monsters and angels, the WTG gives nuanced representations of women who are conflicted, often confused by their roles, and struggling to balance duty with desire.

In order to show Shakespeare's characters in these new and different contexts, playwrights like the WTG must either re-write or write around the original story. Like many other feminist adaptations, Griffin and Aston suggest that *Lear's Daughters* "takes its shape from the 'gaps' in Shakespeare's *King Lear*" (11). Similarly, Bennett says the production "brings into the spotlight what Shakespeare's play ignores and refuses" (52). But *Lear's Daughters* does not fill in the gaps like *Desdemona* or *Goodnight Desdemona*; the action in the play does not happen concurrently with events in the original. As a prequel, the play does not interrupt the original text (as in Vogel) or alter it (as in MacDonald), yet it nonetheless functions to interrupt and alter *meaning* in the original. The effect is similar. In foregrounding Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia as protagonists, the play brings women's stories and concerns out of the margins and places them centre stage. The fact that *Lear's Daughters* is a prequel makes this act particularly effective; not only are women's stories placed centre stage, but by pre-dating the story in *King Lear* they are temporally privileged. Gordon Bottomley used a similar strategy in *King Lear's Wife*, but with a different effect. Although his play similarly gained authority by virtue of prequel-ing *King Lear*, it was written to enhance Shakespeare's story, not challenge it. In contrast to Bottomley, whose play sought consistency with Shakespeare and glossed over gaps, the WTG emphasizes difference and highlights gaps to foreground discrepancies.

The spatial / temporal privileging of *Lear's Daughters* gives weight to the alternative story which begins to redress the power imbalance created by the masculine "point of view" (McLuskie 98) in *King Lear*. This alternative story reminds audiences of the limitations in the original, how one-sided and how gendered its orientation was; how, McLuskie argues, the tragedy depends on the audience accepting an equation between

human nature and male power, “a position required and determined by the text” she writes, “in order for it to make sense” (98). The reorganization of *King Lear*’s point of view may qualify the development of sympathy audiences feel for King Lear, at the same time allowing them to develop more sympathy for characters like Goneril and Regan. In this, *Lear’s Daughters* is consistent with the aims of contemporary feminist critics. In “The Patriarchal Bard,” McLuskie calls for “A production of the text which would restore the element of dialectic, removing the privilege both from the character of Lear and from the ideological positions which he dramatizes” (106). This, she writes, “is crucial to a feminist critique” (106). While the play, as a prequel, cannot be said to replace *King Lear* – as *Desdemona* and *Goodnight Desdemona* could do in a temporary or imaginative way – *Lear’s Daughters* does create conflicting meaning that may challenge and (temporarily, imaginatively) replace the meaning of *King Lear*.

As in *Desdemona*, writing around the original story is not without problems. The feminist strategy of writing in the margins of a text risks re-inscribing traditional boundaries that relegate women and women’s issues to private, domestic, and marginal spaces. This problem is mitigated in *Lear’s Daughters* because the play does not technically write in the gaps of the original text, but *before* the original text. Nonetheless, there is a concern that such writing outside of the text, rather than confronting and altering the text itself, undermines its feminist agenda. There is a pervasive sense of confinement in *Lear’s Daughters* which, as in *Desdemona*, suggests as much the limitations of women’s narratives as their empowering effects. The play is set entirely in one room, the exclusion of men from the room / play reinforcing the sense of women’s space. Moreover, the play’s action consists almost exclusively of story-telling and

reminiscing, narratives which are told and re-told, embellished, changed, and fabricated. On the one hand, such story-telling is empowering; on the other, it suggests that women's alternative narratives can only happen within the fantasy space of story. Writing around the story can be an effective strategy, but it creates an often conflicting response. Here, the spatial / temporal privileging that the women's narrative gained by virtue of being a prequel to *King Lear* is undermined by the spatial / imaginative confinement of the narratives themselves. Like *Desdemona, Lear's Daughters* draws as much attention to the limits of feminist re-writing as to the potential of this discourse to challenge Shakespeare.

Another strategy the WTG uses to critique *King Lear* is its unconventional portrayal of gender and sexuality. Female sexuality in *King Lear* is most often characterized as monstrous. Paula S. Berggren writes that Goneril and Regan manifest a "depraved and nonprocreative lasciviousness"; indeed, she writes, "evil in Shakespearean women seems to grow from a sexuality so out of tune with its procreative potential that it breeds villainy rather than children" (24). McLuskie agrees that the play's representation of women's sexuality reflects "an ascetic tradition which presents women as the source of the primal sin of lust" (106). In Shakespeare's play, Lear inveighs against women, condemning their sexuality as monstrous, unnatural, and hellish:

LEAR: Behold yon simp'ring dame,  
 Whose face between her forks presages snow,  
 That minces virtue and does shake the head  
 To hear of pleasure's name –  
 The fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to't with a more  
 riotous appetite. Down from the waist they are centaurs,  
 though women all above. But to the girdle do the gods inherit,  
 beneath is all the fiend's: there's hell, there's darkness, there is the  
 sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption! (4.6.116-125)

In light of such misogynistic language, re-presenting women's sexuality in positive terms becomes an important part of feminist adaptations of Shakespeare, as does exposing the violence of restrictive gender roles enforced by men. The WTG critiques early modern representations of women's sexuality and femininity in two ways: first by showing that a biologically-based understanding of gender, in which a woman's value is tied to her body and reproductive capacity, negatively reinforces a woman's commodity value, that is, it reinforces her value in economic terms established by men; and secondly, by showing an alternative, more deconstructed understanding of gender, in which femininity and masculinity are not biologically determined qualities, but strategies that can be put on or taken off to negotiate an economy that tends to disenfranchise women.

Lear's speech is about femininity. To be a woman is to be enslaved by a body with monstrous sexual appetites. Femininity is mis-located in Lear's speech in the body, particularly the chilly "forks," the fiendishly equine lower-half, and the "riotous appetites" of a woman's sexual organs. In *Lear's Daughters* this biologically-based understanding of gender is reiterated when Goneril says that her role as a woman is to reproduce.

GONERIL: It's our job. It's what we're here for. To marry and breed.

REGAN: Like dogs?

GONERIL: Like dogs. Valuable merchandise. I can show you the figures here if you like.

REGAN: I'm scared.

GONERIL: It's what we're here for. (59-60)

For Goneril, as for Lear, being a woman is tied to the body and a biological reproductive capacity. Being a woman is about breeding – it's what she's there for – and this capacity forms the basis of woman's value in the economy. "It's our job." A woman's ability to

breed is what makes her “valuable merchandise,” a sentiment reinforced by Goneril’s lecture to Regan:

GONERIL: They say Regan, Second Daughter of Lear, is worth this much, and these figures here . . . (REGAN *tries to look away*) Look at them! These figures say My Lord Duke of Cornwall, owns this much. These figures say Regan will marry Cornwall and then Cornwall will own more and Lear will get a grandson, a legitimate heir and they will all be contented men. However, Regan, Second Daughter of Lear, with bastard child, is worth *this* much! (GONERIL *rips out page from ledger, crumbles it and throws it on floor. REGAN pulls away to mirror, staring hard into it*) Get rid of it! (60)

Locating Regan’s value as a woman in her body allows her to become a commodity, to become owned; it allows her to be measured by Lear and Cornwall in economic terms. But her economic value to Lear and Cornwall is compromised if her body (her reproductive function) cannot be controlled or if it passes to another man. If this happens, Regan becomes as value-less as a piece of paper. What this scene reveals is the danger of misidentifying gender as a biological function. If gender is tied to biology, (mislocated in the body) women risk being reduced to their bodies, which perpetuates a system in which women will be valued by men in economic terms as commodities (valuable merchandise).

The critique of this system is delivered in the abortion scene, a scene that drives home the violence inflicted on women when they are commodified. As Goneril pointed out, Regan’s value lies in her reproductive capacity; her body, in essence, is owned by Lear, an ownership he plans to transfer to Cornwall. When Regan tries to take ownership of her own body (when she gets pregnant by another man) and tries to remove herself as a commodity-value, she is told she will have no worth at all. Her *only* value is her commodity value, the value of her reproductive capacity in the Lear / Cornwall economy.

She must either submit to this commodification, or lose all value entirely. The abortion that Regan undergoes to regain her economic value is a startling and gruesome metaphor for the violence women experience when they are reduced to their bodies.

In contrast to this essentialist view that ties gender to a biological function, the WTG offers the fluid androgyny of the Fool as an alternative, a more deconstructed understanding of gender. In their introduction to the play, Griffin and Aston describe the emphasis placed on androgyny in actor Hazel Maycock's early portrayals of the Fool:

Hazel Maycock's costume as the fool foregrounded androgyny by attaching a grotesque set of false breasts to the front of a dark gown, while the back of the costume represented a man's dinner suit. (11)

The Fool is neither male nor female, and self-identifies neither as a man nor as a woman. This androgyny flies in the face of the type of biological-based system articulated by Shakespeare's *Lear* and by Goneril in scene eleven; but the Fool makes it clear that gender has nothing to do with biology.

CORDELIA: Are you a man or a woman?

FOOL: Depends who's asking.

REGAN: Well, which?

FOOL: Which would you rather? It's all the same to me.

GONERIL: How can you? (FOOL *looks at her*) How can you be so . . .  
accommodating?

FOOL: It's what I'm paid for. Time's up. (32-33)

Rather than getting caught up in a system in which gender is mistakenly fixed in biology, a system which reduces women to their bodies and reinforces their commodity roles in the economy, the Fool separates gender from biology, which emancipates him / her from a commodity role. This allows the Fool if not to benefit from the economy, than at least to function autonomously within it without suffering from the type of violence that Goneril and Regan are subject to.

As in *Goodnight Desdemona*, androgyny in *Lear's Daughters* represents a form of protection and a positive means of escape from the violence associated with certain conceptions of femininity. Constance feigned masculinity to navigate the rough streets of Verona in which her femininity would have attracted violence; the Fool uses androgyny to navigate the economic system of Lear's kingdom in which prevailing notions of femininity lead to commodification and violence against women. In each case, the character's strategic ability to "negotiate" her gender is emancipatory, and challenges audiences to reexamine their own understanding of gender identity. As Adrienne Rich suggested:

A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order reassert itself in every new revolution. (35)

Like Rich, the WTG advocates change. By exposing the violence behind essentializing, biology-based notions of gender they challenge the "old political order" that reduced women to their bodies and commodity values, and by advocating a more fluid, emancipating conception of gender as a role, they identify sites of resistance to this order.

Each of the strategies mentioned above – revision, giving voice to female characters, writing around the original, playing with gender – addresses a particular problem that feminist critics identify in the original play and re-writes it. The final strategy in feminist adaptations does not so much address a problem in Shakespeare, but the problems that a woman writer faces in adapting Shakespeare. The meta-narrative qualities that appear in women's adaptations of Shakespeare foreground the particular challenges women experience in articulating themselves against a literary tradition.

Storytelling abounds in *Lear's Daughters*. The Fool's opening monologue establishes the play in the context of a fairy tale, "Three princesses. / Two servants. / One king offstage. / One queen dead" (21), an atmosphere that is reinforced by his / her description at the end of scene one: "Three princesses, living in a castle, listening to fairy tales in the nursery" (24). Fairy tales in the nursery dominate the action and dialogue for the rest of the play. Nurse tells the story of each girl's birth, the sisters tell their stories about creeping downstairs to see their father, and the Fool tells the story of Lear's triumphant return home from a sporting event. "Tell us about when we were little," says Regan (40), and Nurse retells the Fool's story about Lear's return home. This same story is then told and retold as Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia recall a different version of the event. In scene nine, Nurse tells the story of the Pied Piper, and then re-tells her version of the Queen's death when Regan insists on hearing the truth. Goneril relates her trip to the cellars with Lear, and the Fool tells another story about Lear returning home. At the end of the play, in a final act of storytelling Nurse recounts how she switched her baby for the Queen's and raised Cordelia as Lear's. Like *Goodnight Desdemona, Lear's Daughters* draws our attention to storytelling, the ways in which we define or limit ourselves through stories, and the extent to which stories can be changed, re-written, and re-told.

Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, the Nurse, and the Fool all use stories to define themselves and one another. They use stories to understand the past, and these stories define and re-define who they have been. Regan says, "Tell us about when we were little" (40), and Nurse tells her a story that helps her make sense of her vague recollections of childhood and understand her relationship to her father and her sisters.

Nurse also tells stories of the girls' births, stories that shed light on the identity of the sisters. When Goneril was born, for example, Nurse describes how the Queen's crown fell off and circled the baby's body. The story suggests that Goneril is designed for kingship; it confirms her identity as a royal baby and contributes to her identity as a princess. While stories confirm and contribute to identity in the play, they can also limit identity. Following Nurse's stories, the Fool tells the story of its own birth.

When I was born, nothing happened. There was no bright star, no visitors came from afar. Obviously my parents hadn't read the right books so my arrival was completely overlooked. (31)

In some ways, the Fool's story contributes to its identity, much like Goneril's did: a story, told in the present about the past, sheds light on the present identity of the subject. Goneril's story confirms her rightful identity as a princess, just as the Fool's story confirms his / her rightful place as not-a-princess. But the Fool is making a further connection between stories and identity. It is not only the stories that we tell about the past that define us in the present, it is the literary heritage we are born into that also defines us. The Fool is not a Fool because a foolish story told about his / her birth confirms it; s/he is a Fool because s/he was born into a specific (foolish) context defined by the books his / her parents read or did not read. If the Fool's parents had read different books, the Fool might have been a princess, or a prophet, but they did not. In this case, the Fool's identity is limited by the literary traditions of his / her parents. Storytelling in *Lear's Daughters* suggests that literary traditions work in two ways: both to contribute to and to limit identity formation. This is significant for the woman writer. Like the Fool, she may view the literary traditions she inherits as limiting because they do not provide enough scope or context for her to fulfill her identity. She may find recourse to the

limiting effects of her literary heritage in telling new stories, or telling old stories in new ways, stories which can contribute to the creation of new identities.

While *Lear's Daughters* suggests that female authors may be limited by their literary heritage, it also suggests that they can change that inheritance. In re-writing stories they re-write their literary traditions, and since these literary traditions define them, in re-writing stories they re-write their identities. *Lear's Daughters* places a tremendous significance on the act of re-telling, re-writing, and subsequently on the difference between the identities we inherit and those we create for ourselves. Often the play gives differing accounts of the same event. In scene seven, the Fool begins telling the story of Lear's triumphant return home from a sporting event. As s/he narrates, the girls interrupt with their own recollections of the occasion. These recollections are different:

REGAN: It is drizzling.

GONERIL: It is November but it is mild. The sky is clear, crisp blue. No rain – all dry. (34)

The differences in the girls' accounts draw attention to the degree of difference and subjectivity in storytelling. Stories do not reflect *the* truth, but a truth; not the *right* perspective, but a perspective. Re-telling, or re-writing, becomes an empowering form of identity formation because it allows the author to articulate her subjectivity and acknowledge the difference between herself and others. An important part of this process is admitting the value of the author's own self-narrative, and limiting the power of other narratives that may constrain that definitive story.

This is a particularly pertinent process for the woman author or playwright adapting Shakespeare and re-writing her literary heritage. A woman writer reclaims some power when she acknowledges the limiting and subjective nature of a Shakespearean source-play, when she articulates her difference from it, and when she values that articulation of difference and the subsequent act of identity formation it allows her. Meta-narrative in *Lear's Daughters* is used to show both the extent to which the woman writer is defined by her literary tradition and the empowering effects of challenging that tradition. Like *Goodnight Desdemona*, the play enacts a fantasy of feminist adaptation in which challenging literary heritage leads to the individualization and autonomous creation of the self.

In *Rewriting Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves*, Peter Erickson suggests that the re-vision of Shakespeare can be conceived of in two different ways, as either a conciliatory or an oppositional mode. The conciliatory mode “urges moderation and balance,” he writes (167). These adaptations tend to mitigate difference and conflict with their Shakespearean predecessors:

Challenges are acknowledged and valued, but temporized: new departures are seen as modifications that confirm rather than disrupt the primary image of Shakespeare’s positive influence. (167)

Above all, conciliatory rewritings strive to maintain continuity with what Erickson calls Shakespeare’s “cultural role” (167). To extend Erickson’s argument, adaptation undertaken in the spirit of conciliation suggests a number of collaborative effects: fellowship with other authors, participation in the continuity of literary heritage, and involvement in a community based on shared practices.

In “Shakespeare in Iceland,” Jane Smiley articulates her motivation for rewriting Shakespeare in conciliatory terms. She writes of the inevitable fellowship every English speaker has with Shakespeare.

[E]very writer of English has a relationship to him, both direct and indirect. English cannot be written without Shakespeare, or, for that matter, read without Shakespeare. (165)

Smiley’s notion that every reader and every writer in English reads and writes in collaboration with Shakespeare stresses both the conciliatory nature of writing and the inevitability of a fellowship with Shakespeare. Novy and Werner corroborate this sense of inevitability, suggesting that Shakespeare is so central to a western writer’s “cultural system of reference” (Novy *Engaging* 3) that they *must* participate with him:

No matter how many forms he and his plays have taken over the centuries and across the globe, for Anglo-American populations in particular, Shakespeare appears as the founder of our culture and the carrier of our civilization. (Werner 2)

Every writer collaborates with Shakespeare. As Erickson predicted, adaptation as a conciliatory mode confirms rather than disrupts the primacy of Shakespeare’s cultural role.

As a conciliatory mode, adaptation also contributes to the continuity of literary heritage and to the development of literary communities built around shared practices. Again the emphasis is on construction and collaboration. Smiley describes adaptation as engaging in a reciprocal relationship with her literary heritage – engaging with works she has read as well as works she has not read – and carrying these works forward into the future:

A writer is first a reader, who enters the realm of literature and soon forms a reciprocal relationship with a work, and not only with works she has read, but also with works she has not read, but heard about or even just seen on the shelf. (166)

She goes on to describe the “emotional, intellectual, spiritual, physical baggage” (166) she carries with her from these books, baggage which subsequently informs her own writing and which gets passed forward directly and indirectly in her own work. In this process, Smiley sees herself participating in a community built on the shared practice of adaptation. She imagines Shakespeare as a writer like herself, collaborating with his own precursors. “I imagined him looking backward, as I looked backward to him,” she writes. “When I returned to *King Lear* later on, this sense of Shakespeare attending to the mysterious past was important in my inspiration” (166). As a collaborative process, adaptation allows Smiley to participate in the transmission of her literary heritage, and to create an imaginative literary community built on similar writing experiences. She concludes that the greatest joy of writing and reading, for her, is connecting: “this sense of connection through Shakespeare with the distant past has been the loveliest reward of writing *A Thousand Acres*” (173-174).

But Erickson described adaptation as *either* a conciliatory mode or an oppositional mode. Where adaptation in the conciliatory mode stressed fellowship, continuity, and community, adaptation in an oppositional mode encourages difference, disallows continuity, and emphasizes critical distance over community. The oppositional mode “insists on a more uncompromising critical perspective” Erickson writes (*Rewriting* 167).

[It] does not deny but qualifies Shakespeare’s greatness. Yet the qualification is so substantial as to reconstitute the tradition and to alter Shakespeare’s status as the dominant artistic force. The result is that Shakespeare can no longer be

conceived as defining and controlling the overall shape and direction of the literary canon. (167)

Oppositional aspects of adaptation dominate feminist revisions of Shakespeare. Women writers like Vogel, MacDonald, and the WTG have brought new critical perspectives to Shakespeare's work which focus on differences rather than shared values. In this context, Shakespeare is no longer a symbol of universality; he is a symbol of a misplaced notion of universality that effaced gender, race, and class. In *Lear's Daughters*, the WTG acknowledged that Shakespeare's text did not adequately represent the voices of female characters, it did not encompass the breadth of women's experiences, nor did it allow for representations of women as anything beyond manifestations of male fantasies or anxieties. Instead of collaborating with Shakespeare, the WTG replaces Shakespeare. Their acknowledgement of difference qualifies Shakespeare's universality and his primacy as a cultural force.

Despite her conciliatory approach to Shakespeare, Smiley, too, admits to a growing sense of opposition in her adaptation of *King Lear*:

As I followed him into the story, the Shakespeare that I thought I knew rapidly metamorphosed into a harsher, more alien, and more distant male figure. I felt very strongly our differences as a modern woman and a Renaissance man. (172)

In this mode, fellowship with Shakespeare is impossible, and the desire to perpetuate literary heritage is replaced with an interest in severing ties with past writers. Novy writes that more and more women writers are engaging with Shakespeare in this oppositional mode. "One of the main reasons that many women novelists in the English speaking world use Shakespeare today is to stress the limitations of his plots as well-known cultural myths about women's possibilities" (*Engaging* 7). Rich similarly

articulates the oppositional mode of adaptation in her poetic re-writing of *King Lear*, “After Dark”: “The old masters, the old sources, / haven’t a clue what we’re about” (in “In the Evening” in *Leaflets*).

In outlining the differences between conciliatory and oppositional modes of adaptation, Erickson suggests that modern writers tend to choose one approach or the other. But this either / or understanding of adaptation risks reducing the complex textual interplays that make up modern interactions with Shakespeare to a simple monovalent response. Erickson’s model needs to be extended to entertain the idea that modern adaptations can be both conciliatory and oppositional at the same time. Smiley’s reaction alone to Shakespeare suggests both conciliatory and oppositional responses in *A Thousand Acres*. Her comments reflect a more complex interaction with Shakespeare than Erickson anticipated. Shakespeare is both an integral part of who Smiley is as a writer, and yet fundamentally different to who she is as a modern woman. Any interactions Smiley has with Shakespeare must by necessity, be a double gesture in which she both collaborates with him (as a writer, as part of a literary tradition) and rejects him (as a woman). To do one or the other denies her entire personhood: to embrace Shakespeare fully is to alienate that part of herself that identifies as a modern woman; to reject him fully is to alienate that part of herself that identifies as a writer. Instead, her collaboration with him must be qualified with rejection, and her rejection tempered with collaboration.

Adaptation is one solution. It can accommodate conflicting responses to Shakespeare and allow for both collaboration and rejection at the same time. In a sense, adaptation may be the only way a modern woman writer *can* interact with Shakespeare. Rich corroborates this. She reinforces the importance of feminist adaptation acting in a double capacity to reconcile and replace old texts by writing of re-vision in life or death terms:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. (35)

Smiley agrees. She concludes her article on adaptation by reconciling her conciliatory and oppositional responses to Shakespeare.

I imagined Shakespeare wrestling with the ‘Leir’ story and coming away a little dissatisfied, a little defeated, but hugely stimulated, just as I was. As I imagined that, I felt that I received a gift, an image of literary history, two mirrors facing each other in the present moment, reflecting infinitely backward into the past and infinitely forward into the future. (173-174)

Smiley uses the image of two mirrors facing each other as a metaphor for literary history, but she does not articulate what constitutes the mirror in this metaphor: the mirror is adaptation, that process that allows us to see ourselves, and the past and future of our literary heritage together.

**Conclusion**  
**“...[t]he promised end?”**

Early in 1681, an actress playing Cordelia stepped out on a London stage to deliver a tour-de-force performance as the romantic lead in a new comedy, *The History of King Lear*. In 1987, a young black woman playing the Fool steps out on a small community stage outside of London to deliver the opening lines of the feminist adaptation *Lear's Daughters*. Much has changed in the intervening three hundred years; but what, exactly, and why?

I began my paper with a desire to contribute to the study of adaptation by examining the motivations and effects of the genre – why turn *Lear* into a romantic comedy? And what would audiences think of the Fool as the main character? – and with the vague hypothesis that twentieth-century adaptations of Shakespeare differed in kind and motivation from earlier adaptations of Shakespeare. The premise behind this study was that existing models of adaptation, models that regarded the process as singularly collaborative or repudiative, worked well for early adaptations of Shakespeare but failed to encompass the complexity of the more modern gesture. To evaluate this hypothesis and improve upon these models, my study moved from a historical survey of early adaptations of *King Lear* into more specific close-readings of adaptations in the twentieth century in order to examine how and when adaptation changed from a singular gesture into the more complicated double gesture, and to theorize this change as the basis for a new model of adaptation.

What I discovered was that early adaptations of Shakespeare are distinctly different than later adaptations, and that these works correspond well to prevailing theories of adaptation when these theories are deployed in a more accurate way that recognizes the uniqueness of historical and cultural contexts. Nahum Tate's adaptation of *King Lear* fits with an oppositional model of adaptation, and reflects and perpetuates notions of aesthetics, politics, and subjectivity particular to the Restoration period. As an oppositional adaptation, his romantic comedy halts the transmission of literary heritage by replacing the original tragedy with something new and different, exchanging a community based on shared cultural traditions for a community based on an assertion of difference. This mode of adaptation reflects the political and aesthetic climate of the Restoration, in which the cultural remnants of the Commonwealth and pre-Commonwealth periods were seen as raw material, pilfered in the haste to construct a new regime based on new values. Shakespeare, who had yet to acquire enough cultural capital to warrant nostalgia, was regarded as something to be replaced and reinvented. In the spirit of enterprise and innovation that dominated this period, Tate's adaptation was written to oppose everything that was old or traditional.

In contrast to Tate's work, the plays of David Garrick and the burlesques correspond more accurately to nostalgic modes of adaptation, reflecting the radically different historical and cultural contexts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These works collaborate with Shakespeare to enhance the value of their work and to reinforce the value of the original. They maintain consistency with the original as far as possible, strive for authenticity or criticize inconsistency in performances in other venues that stray from an imagined ideal. In doing so, they reinforce literary traditions and unite

the audience as a community of people with a shared cultural heritage. This mode of adaptation is specific to a period in Shakespeare's afterlife corresponding to the rise of bardolatry. As the greatest writer in English history, Shakespeare was the subject of endless nostalgic fetishization, universally acclaimed and exempt from criticism.

Adaptation in this period reflected these values.

These early adaptations all show how the genre responds to particular moments in Shakespeare's afterlife. The cultural and historical specificity of each precludes broad generalizations about theoretical models of adaptation, and suggests instead the importance of locating these theoretical models within the particular cultural and historical context of each work, so that oppositional adaptations are not random events but expressive reflections of the nadir point of Shakespeare's afterlife, and nostalgic adaptations characterize a particular period between Shakespeare's apotheosis and the postmodern rejection of authorship and narrative. Even when deployed with a greater awareness of these historical and cultural contexts, however, the critical models traditionally used for adaptation become limiting when the genre moves beyond a certain point. As perceptions of Shakespeare become less purely nostalgic or oppositional, or become complicated by positionalities that challenge or undermine them, adaptation evolves into a more self-contradictory gesture. This inherent dissonance aptly reflects the contradictory responses writers may have towards Shakespeare in the twentieth century, but it tends to elude traditional theoretical models for the genre. These plays require a more spacious theoretical model to accommodate this internalized dissonance, one that allows for the competing impulses of nostalgia and innovation to coexist within a work.

Throughout this paper, then, I have characterized twentieth-century adaptation as a unique double gesture, a sort of functioning dialectic, an ongoing but unresolved dialogue between the antinomous impulses of nostalgia and innovation. The nostalgic impulse celebrates Shakespeare, and binds the playwright and audience together in a community of people with a shared literary heritage. It is integral to the playwright's sense of self as a participant in a literary and cultural tradition. But the impulse to innovate is equally important: it marks a break from tradition. It identifies the unique values of the playwright and audience as different from Shakespeare's, and endows the playwright with the culturally-valued appearance of autonomy. Both impulses exist in every interaction the playwright has with Shakespeare, and both impulses are foundational to the playwright's sense of self as an artist, yet they cannot be homogenized or resolved. Twentieth-century adaptation, because it employs a unique double gesture that permits, even encourages, dissonance, allows for the exploration of contradictory impulses at the same time without the need to temper or mitigate either by resolving them or making them compatible with each other. Instead, each impulse is ratified separately, so that the clash of differences does not synthesize or diminish each, but emphasizes and perpetuates it.

As a result, twentieth-century adaptation allows for the articulation of multiple positions towards Shakespeare – Bond, Barker, and the WTG express contradictory feelings of homage and rejection at the same time – but it also allows for the articulation of multiple subject positions (that is, positions about ourselves): playwrights and audiences, then, can be part of a literary community that values the heritage tradition of Shakespeare, at the same time they can be part of a micropolitical group that disavows the

values that Shakespeare represents, or they can be independent of any group and an autonomous creator of meaning in and of themselves, and so on and so on endlessly as they exercise different positions with regard to Shakespeare and themselves. Because of adaptation's double gesture structure, which allows for dissonant narrations, these writers are able to express complex subject positions; moreover, because this structure is similar to the rhetorical devices used in discussions of aesthetics and postmodern subjectivity, adaptation encourages participation in broader debates about how art works and about how a writer can develop a sense of self in the late twentieth century.

In *Performing Nostalgia*, Susan Bennett wrote that adaptation is a fascinating object of study but the wider cultural effects of the genre need to be better understood:

It is not enough to acknowledge that a text can be and is rewritten, we must also explore how such rewritings function within the constructs that are culture. (22)

To evaluate adaptation within this broader role – mediating discussions on aesthetics and subjectivity, functioning within the constructs of western literary culture – requires an understanding first of how this culture is typically framed: what is meant by aesthetics and postmodern subjectivity? How are these discussed? What types of discourses are used to explain or mediate them? In *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*, Fredric Jameson provides a useful conceptualization of postmodern aesthetics and subjectivity as “channel-switching.” To what extent can twentieth-century adaptation, as a tangible form of Jamesonian channel-switching, be considered a strategy for navigating the complex feelings that postmodern writers must encounter about art and about themselves?

The use of coexisting-but-contradictory impulses as a rhetorical device is common in discussions of twentieth-century aesthetics. Frederic Jameson writes of the “not altogether coterminous” overlapping of the new fetish for Difference and the older fetish for the New in postmodern aesthetics (*Singular* 5), and Jean-Francois Lyotard bases his discussion of aesthetics on the “characterizing contradiction” between pleasure and pain in Kant’s theories of the sublime (“The Sublime” 204). For Lyotard, it is exactly this indeterminacy, the *lack* of resolution between competing impulses that distinguishes modern aesthetics: *novatio*, the super-human ability to conceive of an idea, confronts *melancholy*, the inadequacy of the faculty of imagination to find a correspondence in its experiences for that idea. This clash of impulses offers simultaneous feelings of pleasure, “in reason exceeding all presentation,” and pain, “in the imagination or sensibility proving inadequate to the concept” (“An Answer” 15).

Lyotard explains how this collision dislocates the faculties:

The aesthetics of the sublime is still more indeterminate: a pleasure mixed with pain, a pleasure that comes from pain. In the event of an absolutely large object – the desert, a mountain, a pyramid – or one that is absolutely powerful – a storm at sea, an erupting volcano – which like all absolutes can only be thought, without any sensible / sensory intuition, as an Idea of reason, the faculty of presentation, the imagination, fails to provide a representation corresponding to this Idea. This failure of expression gives rise to pain, a kind of cleavage within the subject between what can be conceived and what can be imagined or presented. (“The Sublime” 204)

Lyotard’s argument is based on the idea of an unresolved dialectic – pleasure and pain as contradictory impulses that are experienced simultaneously – a rhetorical device similar to the one I have used to characterize twentieth-century adaptation as the struggle between nostalgia and innovation. Recognizing these similar discursive patterns helps in the understanding of how and where a discussion on adaptation might intersect with a

broader discussion of aesthetics, and more generally how the reinterpretation of Shakespeare fits into art and culture in the late twentieth century.

The use of an unresolved rhetorical dialectic is not exclusive to discussions of twentieth-century aesthetics; Lyotard's phrase "cleavage within the subject" recalls that such dialectics are often woven into and around discussions of modern and postmodern subjectivity. Cultural theorists like Jameson make use of antinomous discourses to illustrate the extreme, schizophrenic fragmentation experienced as the sense of self in postmodern culture. He provides the most useful conceptualization of this schizophrenic subjectivity in his "channel-switching" analogy in which the subject navigates between multiple, contradictory genres as part of identity formation. Again, rhetorical similarities encourage a consideration of adaptation as part of a broader discussion of postmodern subjectivity.

Any discussion of postmodern subjectivity and the role of adaptation in regard to this concept must first negotiate some problematic definitions. The very term "postmodern subjectivity" falsely iterates itself as something that can be defined; it suggests a coherent, quantifiable quality (a specific sense of self in a particular historical period) which is misleading. Neither "postmodernism" nor "subjectivity" can be ascertained with any certainty; definitions will only ever be relative and so entirely contextual as to be useless in broader applications. I tend to agree with Jameson's description of "modern" and "postmodern" as shifter words that alter according to context (*Singular* 19) and with Lyotard's arguments against historicizing the modern and postmodern as periods, which makes a discussion of postmodern subjectivity difficult.

Nonetheless, there must be some attempt made at understanding “postmodern” before its impact on subjectivity can be discussed. Rather than define or historicize the postmodern I will identify the concept with a number of characteristics that accumulate around cultural expressions from the mid- to late twentieth century. These include an interest in the end of grand narratives, an awareness of boundless intertextuality, and the breaking down of aesthetic boundaries.

Lyotard was the first to herald the end of the grand narratives of modernity by diagnosing an incredulity towards such discourses as spirituality (religion), the privileging of reason (science), and the hermeneutics of meaning (literature). Lyotard’s claim is often wildly misinterpreted. In “Apostil on Narratives” he clarifies:

This is not to suggest that there are no longer any credible narratives at all. By metanarratives or grand narratives, I mean precisely narrations with a legitimating function. Their decline does not stop countless other stories (minor and not so minor) from continuing to weave the fabric of everyday life. (“Apostil” 19)

In the list of such legitimating narrations, we might include the ideas of progress, rationality, scientific objectivity, historiography, and culture, all which Simon During writes, “are no longer acceptable in large part because they take no account of cultural differences” (170). While Lyotard’s disavowal of metanarratives usefully identifies the radical provisionality of the late twentieth century, Jameson is quick to point out its inherent flaw: “Lyotard’s theory of the end of grand narratives is itself another grand narrative” (*Singular* 5). Without quite disposing of him, then, Jameson re-frames Lyotard’s argument so that grand narratives are not so much disposed of as reinvented in the form of “provisional and disposable canons, constellations of textual relationships subject to dissolution and replacement at one and the same time” (*Singular* 4).

Jameson's sense that the grand narratives of the past have been turned into "constellations of textual relationships" indicates an awareness of boundless intertextuality, another characteristic of what I am calling the postmodern. "Speaking about speech, writing about writing," Lyotard argues are all part of the endless "adlinguisticity" of intertextuality or metatextuality ("An Answer" 2). As different discourses begin to overlap and comment on each other, traditional categories of culture and high / low art break down. Jameson notes the fascination with the degraded world of schlock and kitsch, advertising, b-movies, pulp fiction, with "a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary 'theory' and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum" (*Postmodernism* 6).

What each of these characteristics – the end of grand narratives, intertextuality, the breakdown of cultural boundaries – shares is the idea of separation. Jameson diagnoses postmodernism by its defining interest in this quality:

psychic fragmentation and the resistance to totalities, interrelation by way of difference and the schizophrenic present, and above all the systematic delegitimation [of opposing ideologies and grand narratives] described here, all in one way or another exemplify the proteiform nature and effects of this particular disjunctive process (*Postmodernism* 399).

But as divisions are created, plurality emerges. Postmodernism is also characterized by a sense of multiplicity, what Jameson calls "absolute and absolutely random pluralism:"

the emergence of the multiple in new and unexpected ways, unrelated strings of events, types of discourse, modes of classification, and compartment of reality. (*Postmodernism* 372)

What I have been calling the postmodern in art and culture can more broadly speaking be characterized as a concurrent sense of division and multiplicity: in short, schizophrenia.

This cultural schizophrenia is often theorized in conjunction with a sense of personal schizophrenia, a division within ourselves. The idea that fracturation in art is bound up with fracturation of subjectivity is not uniquely postmodern – Paul de Man argued that the loss of a sense of self coincided with the loss of representational function in abstract art at the beginning of modernism – but what is unique, critics argue, is the extent of the fracturation we are experiencing. Jameson distinguishes the anxiety and alienation bound up in modernist art from the utter fragmentation of the self bound up in postmodern art. While eschewing the fashionable “death of the subject” terminology, he identifies postmodernism with “the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual” and with a subsequent emphasis “on the *decentring* of that formerly centred subject or psyche” (*Postmodernism* 15). He argues that an individual’s experience of the world has shrunk to a limited, localized area (a city, for example) whereas the causes and ripple effects of that individual’s experiences extend inconceivably outward (the farmer that grows her food in Chile, the neighbour of the person who buys her software product in Wisconsin, and so on), so that the factors that fundamentally determine the individual’s subjective life, these “new and enormous global realities” that shape her sense of self and determine her lifestyle, are inaccessible to any individual subject or consciousness, they are fundamentally unrepresentable (*Postmodernism* 411). Jameson writes that this new and historically unique position, in which the individual is adrift amid a “multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities,” is what leads to the “the fragmented and schizophrenic decentering and dispersion” of the subject (*Postmodernism* 413).

If Jameson's model is to be believed, the postmodern subject faces an impossible task of self-definition: as we struggle to navigate the sets of discontinuous realities that make up our perception of the world, we are utterly dependent for our sense of self on whatever context we happen to inhabit at any given moment.

'We' thus turn out to be whatever we are in, confront, inhabit, or habitually move through, provided it is understood that under current conditions we are obliged to renegotiate all those spaces or channels back and forth ceaselessly[...]. (Jameson *Postmodernism* 373)

Jameson calls this constant renegotiation "channel-switching," the radically discontinuous movement from one generic classification to another (*Postmodernism* 373). He uses channel-switching as both a description of the multiple subject positions a person may feel, and as a strategy for navigating that subjectivity. Like adaptation, channel-switching discursively embraces contradictory positions and offers a way to negotiate those positions without having to reconcile them. It is a useful tool for conceptualizing subjectivity, for understanding how a person may develop a sense of self in relation to the world (or worlds) around her. Despite the utility of this argument, however, channel-switching remains utterly theoretical. Jameson does not suggest any practical, "real-world" applications; he stops short of imagining what the artistic experience of postmodern subjectivity might look like, or how art might function like channel-switching to reflect or contribute to the exercise of subjectivity formation. It is here that adaptation, itself a schizophrenic gesture, becomes useful.

To understand how adaptation can both illuminate and help to navigate the multiple subject positions a person experiences as a postmodern, we need to understand how it functions like channel-switching. Jameson's model entailed the radically

discontinuous movement from one generic classification to another, a concept that presupposes two things:

- i) an acknowledgement of the simultaneous presence of discordant elements (or genres) existing side by side, but unresolved or unassimilated, what Jameson calls a “bizarre discursive separation” (*Postmodernism* 371), and
- ii) the understanding that there can be movement between these elements without the need to resolve, synthesize, or efface them.

These conditions look familiar in the context of adaptation. For an adaptation to work, audiences must be aware of the discordant elements involved, of the “bizarre discursive separation” between the Shakespearean original and the adapted narrative. They must be conscious of the presence of both stories, and conscious of the difference between them. In recognizing this difference, audiences must also accept that these two stories cannot be, and need not be, synthesized or resolved; they need to understand that they can navigate freely between them, comparing the adaptation to their recollections of the original, but they cannot synthesize them. This back and forth navigation allows writers and audiences to occupy contradictory positions towards Shakespeare almost simultaneously, homage or rejection or something in between; but each position they adopt towards Shakespeare also entails a different subject position: they are either part of a community of people with a shared literary heritage, or part of a micropolitical group that eschews that heritage, or independent of either as an autonomous interpretive unit.

Adaptation, then, encourages multiple positions towards Shakespeare and towards ourselves. Like channel-switching, it alerts us to the provisionality of our sense of self (“we” turn out to be whatever element we are in) and points us towards a strategy for

mediating this complex subjectivity, showing us the “ceaseless” negotiation it takes to occupy contradictory positions at once. By using similar discursive strategies, then, adaptation reflects broader discussions about the intersection of aesthetics and postmodern subjectivity, and by demonstrating strategies for negotiating self-contradictory positions it reiterates and reinforces those discussions. The particular value of modern adaptation, then, is that it *formalizes* these arguments; as an artistic experience, it provides tangible, visible form for abstract, theoretical ideas about aesthetics and subjectivity.

If we can understand twentieth-century Shakespeare adaptation within this broader context of an ongoing debate about the role of aesthetics in subjectivity formation, we can begin to understand the role it can play in helping us understand ourselves. But it is important not to overstate these conclusions or generalize too broadly about what essentially is a highly specific genre. The double gesture inherent in modern adaptations of Shakespeare is unique and not altogether certain to exist in other, non-Shakespearean adaptations. One of the preconditions for this double gesture was that the original work be familiar enough to elicit feelings of nostalgia and corresponding feelings of resentment. For a work to do that requires a certain iconic status. Adapting an unknown work or a lesser known play by Shakespeare (like *King John*) is not certain to satisfy this precondition; audiences could not be relied on to recognize the original, or to have nostalgic feelings for it, or to have sufficient feelings of resentment to demand its replacement. Such an adaptation might not be as “successful” or might not properly entail a double gesture. Cultural appropriation is so ubiquitous today that such a work might not even earn the label “adaptation”. For the double gesture to be really effective –

for an audience to recall the original and recognize their cultural nostalgia for it, at the same time identifying their difference from it and their desire to replace it – requires that the original be a masterpiece on the scale of *King Lear*.

Further study would be required to determine if a similar dialectic exists in adaptations in different cultural contexts, whether adapting comparably iconic works in English (the Bible, perhaps?) would have a similar structure, or whether iconic works in other language-cultures would elicit similarly ambivalent feelings of nostalgia and resentment. It would also be interesting to examine whether this gesture is unique to adaptations within the same medium, how and why the adaptive gesture might change if it entailed a change of medium, from stage to film, perhaps, or stage to hypertext. Is film too innovative or repudiative a medium to sustain the delicate balance of a double gesture? Would the nostalgic impulse – evident in stage adaptations in part because of the consistency of media – be undermined or lost amidst the novelty of translating Shakespeare into film? The tangents and implications of the study of Shakespeare adaptation are as endless as the questions it raises.

What I can conclude, however, within the framework of this study is this: when the young actress steps out on a small community stage outside of London to deliver the opening lines of a feminist adaptation of *King Lear*, she is participating in the expression of a unique and relevant genre. The adaptation of Shakespeare continues to thrive for a reason. It uniquely reflects the cultural and historical condition of Shakespeare in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with all the ambivalence that entails, and in doing so creates an opportunity to explore our own condition. It creates a form and forum for

discussions about aesthetics and subjectivity. It is an expression of identity, criticism, cultural tradition, and artistic independence; it represents a solution to an increasingly challenging relationship with a problematic cultural past and an opportunity to examine a problematic cultural present.

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