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Wheeling Strangers of Here and Everywhere. Present Issues of Integration and the Early Modern Crisis of Conversion

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In her monograph on religious conversion in the British empire and nation-state, Gauri Viswanathan claims that "by undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities, conversion unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community are defined, exposing these as permeable borders" (Viswanathan, 1998: 16). In this chapter I will argue that this observation can be seen as a key to understanding two interrelated developments in the history of the Western world: one that precedes Viswanathan's study and concerns the early modern period, the other that follows it, relating to present issues of integration. To begin with the latter, according to the SCP (*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau*), the Dutch government agency which conducts research into the social aspects of all areas of government policy, the theme of immigration and integration has over the past years consistently been ranked as one of the most pressing problems in Dutch society.[1] Many are of the opinion that people with minority backgrounds, including refugees and other (non-Western) immigrants ought to do more or should behave differently to become fully-fledged members of Dutch society. This is problematized, however, by the notion that the Dutch disagree on what it means to be Dutch and what "Dutchness" entails. Manifesting themselves in fierce debates, for instance, about the holiday tradition of *Sinterklaas* and its blackface character *Zwarte Piet*,[2] these issues are often described in terms of a national identity crisis and have parallels in several other nations, especially the ones with a colonialist past.[3] The recent developments of the refugee crisis, which concerns all European nations, and Brexit, which cannot be disentangled from the complexities of international migration flows, makes this issue more urgent.

The "crisis of religious conversion" that took place in early modern Europe, and how this manifested itself Shakespeare's comedy *The Merchant of Venice* and tragedy *Othello*, offers a thought-provoking historical perspective on current questions of immigration and integration, allowing us to better understand some of the persistent paradoxes that are part of the debate about immigrant integration and the position of minorities. In addition, I will show that Shakespeare's exploration of the theme of conversion is helpful, as this playwright was concerned not so much with the specifics of religious confessions as with societal and social implications of religious conversion. As such, his conversion plays present powerful narratives on what it means to be a minority or newcomer in a society that is anxious about the stability of its collective identity.

As a steady stream of recent publications and projects on the topic has shown, the early modern period was truly an age of religious conversion (Shoulson, 2013; Mazur, 2016; Ditchfield and Smith, 2017; Norton, 2017; and Shinn, 2018).[4] The Protestant Reformation, but also increased encounters between Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Mediterranean, and native pagan inhabitants of Asian and American territories opened up new possibilities for religious conversion and proselytization. Early modern English theatre testifies to the appeal conversion had on its creators and audiences, offering tragedies, comedies, and all genres in between, about converts, conversions and near conversions across every imaginable religion. However, in my recent book-length study of this topic, I argue that rather than simply celebrate conversion, as their medieval predecessors had done, playwrights were more interested in reassuring their audiences that new Christians would never be able to revert to their old faith, for instance by having these characters assassinated by evil former co-religionists immediately after their transformations (Stelling, 2019). Similarly, conversion comedies ridicule the potential Christianization of caricatural Jews, Muslims and Pagans. Playwrights adopted these

narrative strategies because conversion posed a quandary in two respects. Ostensibly desired, and, according to some, in the case of Jews even an essential foreboding of the Second Coming, the adoption of the true faith also implied that converts were capable of radical change and thus of relapse. It is for this reason that converts were looked upon with suspicion, regardless of the faith they embraced. In addition, the phenomenon of conversion rendered religions exchangeable, undermining the absolute value of true Christianity. This becomes apparent from the fact that many plays draw explicit parallels between religious conversion and commercial transaction.

Important about Viswanathan's observation is that religious conversion is inextricably associated with secular issues of citizenship, nationhood and community. Indeed, it was in the early modern period that religion came to be employed as an instrument to fashion national selves and barbarous others to an unprecedented extent (Stelling, 2019: 5). More so than before the Reformation, the exchange of one religion for another was perceived as a betrayal, or, depending on one's confessional outlook, embrace, of a nation. It is because of this early modern association – and often conflation – of religion with secular issues that many of the mechanisms underlying the treatment of converts by their new communities are still recognizable today and comparable to the ways in which today's societies deal with immigrants. Indeed, while the world is significantly more secular than it was in the early modern period, with some Western European countries having populations where more than half say they are not religious, immigration is the new conversion as regards social crises. What is more, religion has, of course, not disappeared from today's societies and continues to play a defining role in debates about immigration and integration. This is notably so with regard to Islam, whose compatibility with what are described as "Western" values is often called into question. In relation to this, (religious) extremism and radicalization are often inseparably

bound up with questions of integration. Religious conversion is, moreover, part of discussions about immigration, for instance when it is claimed that Muslim refugees convert to Christianity to increase their chances of being granted asylum.[5]

The Merchant of Venice

In fact, the notion that Christianization could facilitate a smooth integration into a new community is also found in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, when the Jewish Jessica announces that she intends to turn Christian so that she can escape her detested life that is governed by her strict father and marry the man she loves. *The Merchant of Venice* is the best known early modern English conversion play, offering, in addition to Jessica's, also the forced Christianization of her father Shylock. The play is furthermore interspersed with literal and metaphorical references to conversion, including the unwitting and derogatory allusions to Shylock's conversion, articulated by several Christian characters, and Portia's assertion, after Bassanio's success in the test of the caskets, that "myself, and what is mine, to you [Bassanio] and yours / Is now converted" (3.2.166-67). Nevertheless, the play, like other early modern English drama, steers clear of portraying any fully-fledged conversions, let alone exploring the meaning of a true and radical transformation of religious identity.

As regards the storylines of Shylock and Jessica, the comedy is one about outsiders and addresses the question as to whether they can truly become insiders in Venice. Shylock's very obvious status as an outsider is often explained with the example of the insults he receives at the hands of Antonio, Bassanio and Gratiano, or with Shylock's own claim that he refuses to "eat," "drink," or "pray" with Bassanio, but the most poignant and powerful illustration is when Shylock is convicted for the attempted murder of Antonio (1.3.33-34). Shylock faces a legal penalty in the form of the confiscation of possessions and house, not so much because of the

attempt itself, but because there is a specific law against "alien[s]" who "seek the life of any citizen," and Shylock is considered an alien (4.1.345, 347). There is no reason to assume that Shylock was not born and raised in Venice, so the only reason he is labelled as such is because he is a Jew. Thus, precisely by *not* problematizing Shylock's status as an alien, the play shows how in early modern England religious identity had started to merge with citizenship and social identity.

The branding of Shylock as a foreigner despite his likely Venetian origin is similar to the way in which present-day minorities are considered alien despite being native-born. In his 2017 analysis of Shakespeare's comedy in *The New Yorker*, Stephen Greenblatt recalls how as a student and prospective research assistant at Yale he was treated as a greedy "alien," trying to "wheedle money out of Yale University," simply because of his Jewish name and despite the fact that he was "born in this country, as [his] parents had been, and [he] donned [his] Yale sweatshirt without a sense of imposture" (Greenblatt, 2017, np). Greenblatt notes that he still feels "outrage" about this incident, and "wonder inflected by [his] recognition of the fact that African-American students have had it much worse, and that other ethnic groups and religions have now replaced Jews as the focus of the anxiety that afflicted my interlocutor" (*ibidem*). Indeed, a recent example exposing a similar treatment of minority citizens of a different ethnic background is the 2018 Windrush scandal, which concerned British subjects, born in the British colonies, in many cases people who had migrated to Great Britain as children.[6] They were faced with deportation and sometimes even lost their jobs and homes because they were no longer considered full British subjects after renewed immigration checks.

The implication of Shylock's conversion is, of course, that he exchanges his position as a Jewish outsider for that of a Christian insider. Yet, other than this very theoretical interpretation, there is nothing to suggest that Shylock actually becomes an insider, either from

his own perspective or from that of the Christians. To begin with, the play is strikingly evasive about Shylock's Christianization. Faced first with the death penalty, and later with the threat of having to surrender his house and possessions, Shylock is offered 'Christian mercy' and told to convert, or, "presently become a Christian" (4.1.383). This phrase betrays the utter implausibility of Shylock's true conversion to Christianity, as he is not given the time to prepare himself and study the Bible and is expected to instantly transform into a Christian. Instead of suggesting that Christianity is a belief and conviction that can be embraced, the phrase points to a social identity that is extremely difficult to shed or assume, perhaps only by a Pauline miracle of instantaneous conversion. Of course, Shylock's reluctant decision to accept the punishment and, more importantly, his permanent disappearance from the stage as well as from the narrative does not help in envisioning his true conversion and integration into the Christian community. What makes matters worse are the deeply ironic comments that unwittingly anticipate his conversion, including Antonio's: "the Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows kind" (1.3.174).

While also Jewish and a figure of conversion, Jessica seems to be Shylock's positive counterpart. She is repeatedly contrasted to her father and described as his opposite. The Clown, it is intimated, finds it difficult to believe that her father was not a "Christian" (2.3.11-12), and Salarino, for instance, asserts that there is "more difference between [Shylock's] flesh and [Jessica's] than between jet and ivory, more between [their] bloods than there is between red wine and Rhenish" (3.1.34-36). In addition, Jessica's conversion is voluntary, and the audience is allowed to see her in her post-conversion identity. However, a closer examination of her offstage conversion shows that this change, like her father's, has little if no substance. Other than the references to her being her Jewish father's daughter, there are no allusions to Jessica's

Jewish identity; her conversion is not religiously motivated, and after her baptism, Jessica does not talk about her Christian identity, or, say, the significance of the New Testament or Christ.

As a matter of fact, Jessica's conversion produces the opposite effect: it is precisely *after* her change that she is confronted with her status as an irreducible outsider. This happens when she and Lorenzo arrive at Portia's court in Belmont and she is ignored by Bassanio (3.2.219). Most conspicuously, the validity of Jessica's conversion is denied, and her status as a damned Jewish other is emphasized, first by Gratiano, when he welcomes "Lorenzo and his infidel" to Belmont, and second by Lancelot the Clown, who explains to her that she is damned because she is still her father's daughter and "the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children" (3.5.1-2).

Jessica's situation as an outsider who attempts to integrate into a society, only to find her "otherness" emphasized in doing so, is not unlike that of many current-day immigrants. Having obtained qualifications from institutions in their new countries of residence, they face great difficulty breaking into the job market, as potential employers are wary of hiring foreigners, or, indeed, minorities (Wechselbaumer, 2016; Wrench, Rea and Ouali, 1999).[7]

While Jessica insists that "her husband […] ha[s] made [her] a Christian," Lancelot's response betrays a deep early modern concern about the implications of religious conversion (3.5.17-18). He asserts that "this making of Christians will raise the price of hogs: if we grow all to be pork eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money," referring to the notion that Jews do not eat pork (3.5.21-23). Yet while Lancelot's remark concerns Venetian economy, the underlying issue is of the association of religious conversion with commercial transaction. The same analogy can be found in Portia's claim, mentioned above, in which she presents her own person as well as her possessions as items that can be "converted" to her husband. Likewise, and to the same effect, Jessica literally gilds herself with money when she

flees her parental home to convert and marry (2.6.49-50). Similar comparisons can be found in other early modern conversion drama (Stelling, 2019: 131-33). The point is that conversion renders religion exchangeable and turns it into a commodity; unsettlingly, it becomes something that can easily be donned or cast off for reasons of opportunity.

Othello

Othello, another conversion drama set in Venice, can be seen as a sequel to *The Merchant of Venice*, precisely from the point of view of conversion. While we are not given the opportunity to see Shylock after his Christianization, *Othello* is the only early modern English play entirely devoted to the fortunes of a convert in his post-conversion identity after a *radical* change of faith (unlike Jessica's). In my book I have described *Othello* as a conversion play and Othello's status as a convert (Stelling, 2019: ch. 7); in the present chapter, I would like to focus on a specific moment in the play that shows how Othello, despite his efforts at integrating as a Christian husband into his wife's community, is framed as an irreducible other, and I will compare the rhetorical strategy that is used with a current-day example.

The moment in question is when Othello is said to be an "extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (1.1.137-8), a comment made by Roderigo that is repeated by Iago, who turns it into a broad stereotype about all moors: "These Moors are changeable in their wills" (1.3.339-40). The gist of this argument is that some people have no or unclear roots, which makes them unreliable. This frame was used in 2008 by a Dutch pundit who was commenting on Barack Obama's suitability for the presidency a day before the election. "Obama's afkomst is al een raadsel [Obama's origin is already a mystery]," Bart Jan Spruyt wrote tellingly in the Dutch quality newspaper *NRC*, adding:

> Hij is de zoon van een studente uit Kansas en een buitenlandse student uit Kenia. Na de echtscheiding hertrouwde zijn moeder met een andere buitenlandse student, uit Indonesië. Obama ging naar school in Jakarta, en werd later in Hawaï door zijn grootouders opgevoed, voordat hij in 1979 op het Amerikaanse vasteland ging studeren.
> [He is the son of a student from Kansas and a foreign student from Kenya. After their divorce, his mother married another foreign student from Indonesia. Obama went to school in Jakarta, and was later raised by his grandparents in Hawaii, before he went on to do a degree on the American mainland in 1979]. (Spruyt, 2008)

Striking about this passage is the emphasis Spruyt places on Obama's alleged "foreignness." This is not only obvious from his repetition of the term itself, but also from the notion that he distinguishes between Hawaii, where Obama was raised from the age of ten, and the "American mainland," as if the latter place were somehow more "American" than the island state (*ibidem*). It is a contrast that echoes Spruyt's earlier juxtaposition between "het enigma [the enigma]", Obama, and the "all American hero" and "open boek [open book]", John McCain, the rival presidential candidate (*ibidem*). While Spruyt does mention specific nations, such as Indonesia and Kenya, the thrust of his words is that Obama's origin is a mishmash of "exotic" (a term literally used by Spruyt) cultures and influences (*ibidem*). It is the same type of reasoning used by the so-called "birthers," Obama's political opponents who question the fact that he was born in the United States, spearheaded by Donald Trump. Furthermore, and tellingly, the passage is peppered with allusions to what Spruyt wants to present as a disturbed and uprooted upbringing: a divorce and remarriage of Obama's mother and his being raised by his grandparents. Spruyt's insistence on Obama's confused otherness and ostensible lack of rootedness serves to suggest that Obama cannot be trusted, that there is no firm and solid basis to which Obama's ideas can be traced, and, by implication, that his ideas might change at will. This is more dangerous than claiming that Obama's political opinions are ill-advised, as it

undermines his every potential opinion. Spruyt's attempt at mitigating his attack on Obama's trustworthiness is hardly convincing: "die exotische afkomst is natuurlijk geen politiek probleem, maar wel de zoektocht naar zijn identiteit die hem in contact bracht met rare radicale denkers en activisten [that exotic origin is, of course, not a political problem, but his search for his identity that exposed him to queer, radical thinkers and activists was]" (*ibidem*).

Spruyt continues his argument by discussing some of the people that he sees as radical thinkers, asserting that Obama was "bekeerd en getrouwd [converted and married]" by Jeremiah Wright (*ibidem*). It is interesting that Spruyt should mention Obama's conversion. Ostensibly, this is an offhand remark, but one to which special meaning is attached by Spruyt's other main assertion, that Obama is a radical. Just as Iago obsessively employs the term "moor" throughout the play, so does Spruyt sprinkle his column with the word "radicaal [radical]" (*ibidem*). Spruyt associates what he sees as Obama's radicalism with a disparate range of figures and themes, including the "racistische dominee Jeremiah Wright, de man van God damn AmeriKKKa [racist reverend Jeremiah Wright, the man of God damn AmeriKKKa]" (*ibidem*). In addition, Obama is "geïndoctrineerd [indoctrinated]" by the Jewish activist Saul Alinksky "die zijn aanhang leerde hoe het system te infiltreren om de massa rijp te maken voor change [who taught his followers how to infiltrate the system to make them ripe for change]," and has connections to William Ayers, "lid van de terroristische organisatie Weather Underground [member of the terrorist organization Weather Underground]" (*ibidem*). Spruyt's point seems to be that Obama is a radical convert, easily indoctrinated, and therefore radically untrustworthy.

Othello and *The Merchant of Venice* thus show the reluctance of communities to accept as new members people they regard as other. Whether it is the convert who expresses this desire (Jessica and Othello) or the community itself (forcing Shylock to convert), conversion followed

by true assimilation and recognition is not possible on the stage. As we have seen, conversion can even bring about the reverse effect: Jessica's change is questioned and she is called an "infidel," Shylock's is steered clear of by the play and ridiculed by other characters in earlier mocking allusions, and Othello is framed as an unreliable and dangerous enemy. In this way, the two plays present conversion as a form of continuity or stability, rather than change, betraying an early modern anxiety over its unsettling effects that appears underneath an explicit desire of Christianization. The same paradox can be found in the context of current-day issues of integration: there is a desire that "aliens," whether they be minorities or immigrants, adapt themselves to the majority society, but in their attempts they often find themselves excluded and stigmatized, as, to use Viswanathan's words again, the change itself "unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community are defined."

In 2008, the Dutch theatre director Theu Boermans staged a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* in which Shylock gradually transforms from a liberal Jew into a bloodthirsty, orthodox Jew (Stelling, 2009).[8] It is a response to the way in which he is treated by the Christian community. After his offstage conversion, Shylock remains visible as a ghostlike figure at the back of the stage, standing in a pile of garbage. Boermans' Jessica responds to the unwillingness of her Christian environment to accept her as a new Christian by regretting her conversion. She concludes the play by lighting a menorah. Equally meaningful is her outfit when she escapes her father's house: a burqa. Of course, Boermans took great liberty in adding these elements to the narrative, but the purpose of his adaptation makes perfect sense and is close to the original, when we realize that the early modern crisis of conversion bears close resemblance to the modern paradox of immigrant integration and treatment of minorities. Boermans' most significant addition to the original is that he shows what happens to outsiders who are consistently excluded and branded as alien. Indeed, if, as Stephen

Greenblatt puts it, Shakespeare offers a "cure for Xenophobia," it is because of the ability of today's teachers, theatre-makers, and other interpreters to recognize the essence of his universal genius, but also the power of his narratives as products of his own age.

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[1] https://www.scp.nl/Nieuws/Zorgen_over_immigratie_nemen_weer_toe. See also their individual quarterly reports on the past years.

[2] https://www.economist.com/europe/2013/11/04/is-zwarte-piet-racism.

[3] See: https://www.trouw.nl/samenleving/de-nederlander-bestaat-niet-meer-of-toch-wel-~a10866c2/, http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/dieter-borchmeyers-was-ist-deutsch-eine-nation-sucht-sich-selbst-a-1143259.html; https://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/05/13/la-crise-identitaire-francaise_1308861; https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2018/04/why-britishness-identity-crisis.

[4] See also "Early Modern Conversions," http://earlymodernconversions.com, an interdisciplinary project, led by Paul Yachnin at McGill University, that ran from 2013-2018.

[5] See, for example: https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-41040163/iranian-refugees-turn-to-christianity-in-the-netherlands; https://www.npr.org/2018/12/14/669662264/iranians-are-converting-to-evangelical-christianity-in-turkey?t=1552338440750.

[6] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/windrush-scandal.

[7] See also https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/im_broken_depressed_foreigners_struggle_to_find_work_in_finland/10641139.

[8] *De Koopman van Venetië* was performed by De Theatercompagnie and premiered in Amsterdam on 13 November 2008.

Shakespeare and the Origins of European Culture Wars

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As both national and European politics have come under increasing criticism in the aftermath of the major 2008 financial crisis, which continues to affect most European economies, politicians have been tempted to divert their peoples' attention by focusing less on practical policy building and more on culture wars. Thus, issues such as sexual freedom, ethnic diversity, migrancy, or individuals' relationship to the state have come to the fore and are dividing Europe, as they become subjects of bitter wrangles, not only between politicians of various nations, but also between Europeans themselves.

The idea of culture wars in not new. In the late 1970s political expert Ronald Inglehart argued that in western societies what he called "postmaterialist" values were becoming more important than traditional "materialist values" (such as the state's role in a market economy) (Inglehart, 1977). In other words, and according to Inglehart, as differences between major parties were less marked, societies tended to be structured by cultural feuds and oppositions. More recently, political scholar and columnist Michael Behrent pointed out that public issues in Europe at the moment were shaped and influenced by culture war notions.[1] Sociologists, such as Irene Taviss Thomson, remarked, however, that "there is, of course, an intuitive appeal – a surface plausibility – to the culture war idea", but that cultural wars were more a means of diverting people's attention from unresolved economic and political problems (Thomson, 2012: 12). The cultural war idea has in fact been used in public debates although no serious study has proved its actual sociological reality.

Be that as it may, cultural wars have affected and are affecting every corner of society including literary studies. As the world's most popular playwright, Shakespeare and his works

have been the site of much cultural – and sometimes bitter – argument.[2] Shakespeare and literature in general may seem far remote from European cultural and political issues, but in fact, Shakespeare, like other authors with strong societal auras, can be seen as particularly useful cultural tools. As Douglas Lanier noted, Shakespeare is now "a resource for doing certain kinds of cultural work" (Lanier, 2002: 14).

This was not always the case. In what follows, I shall argue that – from a historical point of view – Shakespeare became engulfed in cultural wars in the eighteenth century, precisely at a time when the public sphere was expanding greatly. As we shall see, like other cultural figures, Shakespeare was used to express various agendas and as a means of broaching political and even European issues. By focusing on the beginning of Shakespearean culture wars in the eighteenth century between the two super-powers of the time (France and England), I hope to raise our awareness of how cultural forms, and literature in particular, can structure public and diplomatic discourse and be appropriated, manipulated, and become instruments in a covert and at times overt race for political hegemony.

So, let us first concentrate on where the story began: the first half of the eighteenth century, when the question of cultural and political dominance between European nations, and more specifically between England and France, really affirmed itself in the field of literature.

François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire, was a French eighteenth-century man of letters, philosopher and also, to some extent, cultural ambassador of neo-classical values. In exile in England for almost three years from 1726 to 1728, Voltaire went to the theatre at a time when England was gaining ground politically and internationally, but when Shakespeare was almost an unknown entity in France and on the continent. Voltaire, who was at times very critical of the political system in his own country saw England's constitutional monarchy as more progressive than France's absolutist system, but his views of the arts and of Shakespeare

in particular were more mitigated. Voltaire admired Shakespeare for being "natural and sublime", naturalness being a quality arguably lacking in French theatre of the period, but there was much in Shakespeare that disagreed with the neo-classical aesthetics which were dominating so much of Europe at the time, under the aegis of France. In his *Lettres philosophiques*, composed about 1729 and first printed in English in 1733 under the title *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, he wrote:

> The shining Monsters of *Shakespear,* give infinite more Delight than the judicious Images of the Moderns. Hitherto the poetical Genius of the *English* resembles a tufted Tree planted by the Hand of Nature, that throws out a thousand Branches at random, and spreads unequally, but with great Vigour. It dies if you attempt to force its Nature, and to lop and dress it in the same Manner as the Trees of the Garden of *Marli.* (Besterman (ed.), 1967: 50)

Marly was a castle built under the reign of Louis XIV whose gardens were famous for being pristine. While the description is a touch condescending, the horticultural metaphor also underlines in passing the potential for growth of the arts in England and perhaps already their potential for growing wildly and for invading other gardens and well-kept neo-classical territories such as France. During the first half of the eighteenth century, Voltaire continued nevertheless to see Britain as more advanced than France, politically speaking, and confessed his admiration for English philosophy and science to his friend, the British merchant and later diplomat Sir Everard Fawkener in the dedication of his play *Zaïre* in 1736:

> You have to submit yourselves to the rules of our theatre, as we have to embrace your philosophy. We have made as good investigations of the human heart as you have in physics. The art of giving pleasure seems to belong to the French, while yours appears to be the art of thinking.

[Vous devez vous soumettre au rêgles de notre théâtre, comme nous devons embrasser votre philosophie. Nous avons fait d'aussi bonnes experiences sur le coeur humain que vous sur la physique. L'art de plaire semble l'art des Français, et l'art de penser paraît le vôtre]· (Voltaire, 1877: vol. 2, 554)

Voltaire's attitude changed gradually during the second half of the eighteenth century, as both the cultural and political terrain shifted. The Seven Years' War, which was in effect a world war involving several European nations from 1756 to 1763, but which also set Great Britain against the Bourbon dynasty (France and Spain) over trade and colonial dominion, no doubt precipitated these changes. The cultural balance was also shifting – Shakespeare's fame began to grow in Europe as Britain sought to establish its cultural and political authority and the playwright was appropriated increasingly to serve English nationalist agendas.

On the cultural terrain, a few significant salvos were fired, as a couple of articles translated from the English and comparing Shakespeare to Corneille and Otway to Racine appeared respectively in October and November 1760 in the French *Journal encyclopédique.* Both articles underlined the English authors' superiority. Not long after, in December 1760, Voltaire shared his displeasure in a letter to Marie de Vichy de Chamrond. Interestingly, the letter refers simultaneously to the loss of the city of Pondicherry on the Indian subcontinent (one of France's colonial outposts besieged by the English in 1760) and to the claim of Shakespeare's alleged superiority:

(…) and, for that matter, I'm angry at the English. Not only is it my belief that they've taken our Pondicherry, but they've just printed that their Shakespeare is far superior to Corneille.

[(…) D'ailleurs je suis fâché contre les Anglais. Non seulement ils m'ont pris Pondicheri à ce que je crois, mais ils viennent d'imprimer que leur Shakespear est infiniment supérieur à Corneille] (Besterman (ed.), 1967: 62)

Voltaire also aired his views publicly in 1761 in his "Appeal to all nations of Europe regarding the judgement of an English writer" ("Appel à toutes les nations de l'Europe des jugements d'un écrivain anglais"). In this work, Voltaire pointed out that Shakespeare, unlike Racine for instance, was hardly known outside Britain and called upon all nations "from Saint Petersburg to Naples" to decide whether he was right and – implicitly – to support French cultural supremacy.[3] As the Seven Years' War was still not over, Voltaire began working on an edition of Corneille in 1762. That same year, Henry Home, Lord Kames, brought out his *Elements of Criticism*, in which he wrote rather disparaging words on Corneille and Racine – even ridiculing passages in some of their work – and sang the praises of Shakespeare. Voltaire reviewed Kames's book in the *Gazette Littéraire* in April 1764 in a tone that was part angry, part ironical, as Voltaire wondered obliquely how a Scottish judge like Kames who wrote on literature as well as gardening could pretend to become an arbiter of taste (Besterman (ed.), 1967: 88).

That same year, in a letter to the Count and Countess of Argental, Voltaire talked about his review of Kames's *Elements,* and made the following extraordinary statement:

> As long as the British have been content to take our vessels and seize Canada and Pondicherry, I have been content to maintain a noble silence. But now that they push barbarity to the point of finding Racine and Corneille ridiculous, I have to take up arms.
> [Tant que les Anglais se sont contentés de prendre nos vaisseaux et de s'emparer du Canada et de Pondicheri, j'ai gardé un noble silence. Mais à présent qu'ils poussent la barbarie jusqu'à trouver Racine et Corneille ridicules, je dois prendre les armes] (Voltaire, 1953-65, liv, 42).

Voltaire ceased to be diplomatic as soon as he perceived that literature, and Shakespeare in particular, was employed for nationalistic reasons by the British. This may

explain why he had chosen to treat warfare and literature separately until then, but now employed a military vocabulary as a form of resistance to what he considered as attempts on the part of the British to establish their cultural as well as military dominance. Of course, losing battles in the two main theatres of the Seven Years' War, North America and India, was no mere detail and while Voltaire could be intellectually dismissive about these losses, they would nonetheless lead ultimately to Britain's linguistic and cultural dominance in those parts of the world. In other words, French cultural dominance was on its way out.

More than a decade later, with the war of American independence serving as a backdrop this time, the cultural battle around Shakespeare continued to rage between the British and the French. In 1776, the first complete translation into French of Shakespeare's works by Pierre Le Tourneur was published. The twenty volumes, in which Le Tourneur praised Shakespeare with an enthusiasm that was also self-serving, were sold by subscription. Voltaire was horrified to discover that King Louis XVI was at the top of the list of subscribers, as well as other persons from all over Europe. The writer and philosopher Denis Diderot had also ordered six copies, which, for Voltaire, was the equivalent of high treason. What upset Voltaire particularly was that he himself had been partly responsible for this situation and had let the enemy inside the walls through his early-mitigated praise of Shakespeare at a time when hardly anyone had heard of him. Voltaire's words were blunt as he wrote again to the Count of Argental in 1776:

> It was I who was the first to speak of this Shakespeare at an earlier time; it was I who was the first to show the French people some pearls that I found in his huge heap of dung.
> [C'est moi qui autrefois parlai le premier de ce Shakespear; c'est moi qui le premier montrai au Français quelques perles que j'avais trouvées dans son énorme fumier] (Besterman (ed.), 1967: 175)

Voltaire was exaggerating his distaste for Shakespeare of course. What annoyed him most was the wave of Anglomania that was threatening to submerge France at a time when the British seemed still in a position to crush the hopes of the American revolutionaries whom Voltaire supported. To counter what he perceived as an assault also on French culture and values, he asked his friend Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, who was secretary of the *Académie française*, to read out a letter of protest. The letter, in which Voltaire underlined Shakespeare's shortcomings and criticized Kames's disrespectful treatment of Racine in his *Elements of Criticism*, was read out on 25 August 1776 at the *Académie* in the presence of the British ambassador and Elizabeth Montagu, who had specifically attacked Voltaire in her *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769). Revealingly, Voltaire's correspondence in those months is full of military vocabulary, as he saw himself waging war and conducting battles under "General" D'Alembert, as he calls him in one of his letters (Besterman (ed.), 1967, pp. 182-3).

D'Alembert himself had fully embraced Voltaire's project and delivering his friend's speech to the Académie was like accomplishing a warlike mission. In a letter written a few days before the speech was aired, D'Alembert hoped that French men of letters would accomplish a better mission on the terrain of cultural warfare than French generals and soldiers did on the battlefield. He also had vowed to punish all traitors:

> At last, my dear master, the battle has begun and the signal has been given. Either Shakespear or Racine will be left standing; we have to show these sad and insolent English that our men of letters can fight them better that our soldiers and our generals. Unfortunately, there are quite a few deserters and false brothers among those men of letters. But the deserters will be caught and hanged; what annoys me is that the fat of these hanged men will be good for nothing; for they are quite dry and lean. Adieu, my

dear and illustrious friend. As I mount the charge on Sunday, I shall cry 'Long live Saint Denis and Voltaire, and death to George Shakespear!'

[Enfin, mon cher maître, voilà la bataille engagée et le signal donné. Il faut que Shakespear ou Racine demeurent sur la place; il faut faire voir à ces tristes & insolens Anglois, que nos gens de lettres savent mieux se battre contre eux que nos soldats & nos généraux. Malheureusement il y a parmi ces gens de lettres bien des déserteurs et des faux frères. Mais les déserteurs seront pris & pendus; ce qui me fâche, c'est que la graisse de ces pendus ne sera bonne à rien; car ils sont bien secs et bien maigres. Adieu, mon cher et illustre ami. Je crierai dimanche en allant à la charge, Vive s^t Denis Voltaire & meure George Shakespear!][4]

Clearly, Shakespeare's reputation was at the centre of a war of words, but also of deeds. While, in the past, Voltaire had had a measure of admiration for some aspects of Shakespeare's works, as well as for the English constitutional system, he was now forced to fight against what he no doubt considered as a form of "regressive nationalism" (Prince, 2012: 282), which mobilized Shakespeare as an instrument in a war of propaganda.

The British had in fact also been using warlike language to defend Shakespeare against Voltaire's attacks for quite a while. In his review of Samuel Johnson's edition of Shakespeare in 1765, William Guthrie accused Johnson of pandering to French taste too much and of judging Shakespeare by "the rules of the French academy", whereas, according to Guthrie:

[Shakespeare] proceeds by storm. He knows nothing of regular approaches to the fort of the human heart. He effects his breach by the weight of his metal, and makes his lodgement though the enemy's artillery is thundering round him from every battery of criticism, learning, and even probability (*apud* Rhodes, 2004: 220)

Shakespeare had been used in England as a counter-establishment writer in the first half of the eighteenth century. Indeed, in the words of Michael Dobson, "Shakespeare became

national poet in the 1730s as an Opposition playwright rather than an Establishment one" (Dobson, 1992: 136). Shakespeare's defenders in those days were part of the Patriots, an anti-Walpole faction within the Whig party, which often used Shakespeare criticism and quotations to criticize the government, particularly in *The Craftsman*, a newspaper that was an important Patriot mouthpiece. Yet, in the second half of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare was appropriated by the agents of a more conservative British nationalism, to which progressive men like Voltaire could react violently.

In his correspondence with D'Alembert, Voltaire expressed his disappointment at seeing the American Revolution apparently failing. However, the former encouraged him to carry on the fight against bardolatry in France, because, as D'Alembert put it, "since philosophy and reason have been conquered in New York, they must at least prevail in their own small domain" (*apud* Prince, 2012: 288). That, in Voltaire's mind, Shakespeare's rise to prominence was allied with British imperialism, and its concurrent desire to crush American liberties, is made extremely evident in his letter of October 1776 to French statesman Jacques Necker:

> You are a great man, Sir, yourself, but I will never let Shakespeare become a fearful figure for France, one for whom Corneille and Racine could be burnt at the stake. I tend to be on the same side as those we call the American insurgents – I do not wish to be a slave to the English.
>
> [Grand homme vous même, Monsieur; mais je ne consentirai jamais que Shakespear en soit un si redoutable pour la France, et qu'on lui immole Corneille et Racine. Je suis assez comme ceux qu'on appelle les insurgens d'Amérique, je ne veux point être l'esclave des Anglais] (Besterman, 1967 : 215)

Conclusion

As we know, Voltaire was wrong about the fate of the American Revolution, but his nightmare of British cultural dominance through Shakespeare turned out to be true in some regards.

Shakespeare entered the sphere of respected printed literature first through his folios and in the ensuing series of eighteenth-century editions. Despite their still controversial nature and the multiple wrangles between editors, eighteenth-century textual studies made great strides thanks to Shakespeare and to the dual enterprise of establishing his text and developing reliable philological tools – Samuel Johnson's mutually dependent projects of a *Dictionary* (1755) and of an edition of Shakespeare's works (1765) being good examples.

While early eighteenth-century critics had sought excuses for what could be considered as wild extravagances in the works of Shakespeare, when compared to French neo-classical norms in particular, the various conflicts which set the British nation against its neighbours and particularly France changed the way the national corpus of literature came to be regarded by the end of the century. A number of Shakespearean plays, where the theme of international relations was prominent, and which lent themselves well to topical interpretations, were of course popular: *Henry V*, *Coriolanus* or *Cymbeline* especially, served such purposes (Prince, 2012: 277).

By the end of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare was on safer textual ground and was being exported to other lands and to the confines of the British colonial empire. This was partly the Shakespeare that Voltaire disliked so much – one whose works, especially after the French Revolution – ceased to be regarded as a disordered garden, but became synonymous with "notions of order, self-restraint and authority" (Prince, 2012: 291) and were in fact set against Republican disorder. Thus, Edmund Burke would use Shakespeare to try to "impose order on the chaos of the French Revolution" (*ibidem*). Yet Voltaire's pessimism was, of course, largely blind to the fact that Shakespeare would be repeatedly transformed, appropriated by other countries and could again become an instrument of cultural and political negotiation between nations other than the British and the French. As the British had liberated themselves from the

yoke of French neoclassicism, they themselves had to resist the rise of German Romanticism in the early nineteenth century, the German Romantics famously seeing Shakespeare as theirs: "ganz unser" (completely ours), as August Wilhelm Schlegel called him) (Paulin, 2012: 323), thus opening the way for further national appropriations of Shakespeare worldwide.

Shakespeare's works, like other important art forms, continue to be at the heart of culture wars today. That art forms are exploited in this way poses an important problem for any society. Crucial art will always be appropriated, and this is a normal process – it is its manipulation by political or market forces that threatens societies. Indeed, a society or a group of nations such as the European union suffers from those who claim that culture wars exist and that they are tied to that other great fantasy: the clash of civilizations. If this were true, as sociologist Irene Taviss Thomson points out again,

> A society experiencing a culture war would face grave difficulties. It would lack common standards and assumptions, and as a result, the ability to make public policy decisions would be severely compromised. Indeed, a society without such common ground could barely function. (Thomson, 2010: 12)

Fortunately, not everyone buys into the fantasy of the superiority of certain values in the current so-called culture war, in which famous European artists can be manipulated in order to stand for alleged decent values. Even a quick look at Shakespearean academic criticism or at current theatrical productions would be enough to dispel these illusions. However appealing and politically convenient the idea of culture wars in Europe might be, it relies on a misconception touching the notion of culture itself. Since the end of the twentieth century, the concept of culture has come under scrutiny in academic circles. How could culture wars be a social reality, when social reality itself is devoid of concrete structures, coherence and stability?

Those of us who study Shakespearean adaptation, for instance, know full well that culture is more akin to a "toolkit", or a "repertoire of skills and styles", with which artists create mediations and pastiches (Thomson, 2010, 13). It is my hope that this brief exploration of the origins of and reasons for the exploitation of Shakespeare's works for nationalistic and ideological reasons has gone some way towards throwing light on these issues.

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[1] For Behrent's views, see Dujin (2019: 3).

[2] For an example of these debates at the height of the influence of New Historicism in literary studies see Kamps, 1991.

[3] *Appel à toutes les nations de l'Europe des jugements d'un écrivain anglais,* in *Voltaire on Shakespeare,* in Besterman (ed.), 1967: pp. 63-80.

[4] D'Alembert, *Letter to Voltaire* (20 August 1776), in Besterman (ed.), 1967: note 6, pp. 180-182.

Educated Shrews: Shakespeare, Women's Education and Its Backlash

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Although *The Taming of the Shrew* and its many adaptations have been enjoying a ceaseless popularity on stage,[1] its critical reception has always been tinted with embarrassment if not outright condemnation. In his introduction to the Arden's edition Brian Morris reminds us that the play provoked an unprecedented response during Shakespeare's own lifetime. In Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize; or, The Tamer Tamed* (ca. 1611) the original plot is inverted and Petruchio, the male protagonist of Shakespeare's play, is widowed and tamed by his new wife Maria, perhaps offering a corrective[2] to what Pepys, writing of *The Shrew* in 1667, deemed "a mean play" (Morris 1981: 89). In her introduction to *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* edition Ann Thompson goes so far as to assume a "positive conspiracy of silence" of the critics between 1830s and 1950s (and beyond), who opted to censor the play "by omission", or, if forced to deal with the play, would admit the problem, "attempting to excuse the author" (Thompson, 2003: 25). It seems almost inevitable that the final critical blow to *The Shrew* should come from feminist readings, claiming it off and beyond redemption. As summarized by Paul Yachnin: "it can no longer be said to be a work of literature which might be saved in one way or another by virtue of the presence of a knowing author; instead it is of the nature of a joke whose spirit has long since vanished, the dead letter of an outmoded misogynist culture" (Yachnin, 1996: par. 23).

However, recent enquiries into various manifestations of shrew narratives, like the ones in *Gender and Power in Shrew-Taming Narratives, 1500-1700*, edited by David Wootton and Graham Holderness, are extending the semiotic and chronological range of the term *shrew* and its uses, arguing the insufficiency of attempts "to locate, within a single play-text, fixed

and consistent views on matters of gender and sexuality, when the reader is confronted by a much more diverse body of cultural production, often inter-related in conversational or dialogue form as are *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Tamer Tamed*" (Holderness 2010: 9). As such, they aim "to recuperate Shakespeare's play and its associates for new kinds of historically and politically-informed readings" (ibidem). Several of these studies, not just in the collection mentioned above, start by observing that the word *shrew* was initially a gender-neutral term, applicable to both men and women (e.g. Madelaine 2010: 71; Pikli 2010: 235; Kamaralli 2012: 3); and while they acknowledge Shakespeare's application of the term to Petruchio, some are quick to note how in Shakespeare's other plays the term is reserved to female characters only (Kamaralli 2012: 3, 3n8)[3] or how Shakespeare's plays, being "inalienable part of English Cultural memory, canonised and thus stabilised the first meaning of the 'shrew' as a forward woman or wife, up to our day" (Pikli 2010: 238).

My own attempt at broadening the scope of the play's historical and political reading will revisit the concept of shrewishness with a special focus on learning and education. As such, it will pay just a modicum attention to the doubtlessly most problematical issue of the play, namely, the interpretation of Katherina's final speech/sermon.[4] Instead, I will highlight a detail of the play related to the education of Bianca and Katherina, explore it within the broader context of early modern education of women, and its connection to shrew-narratives, arguing that the taming of the female shrew can be seen as a backlash response to her learning. Ultimately, I will pursue the lingering echoes of the taming topos in our contemporary concerns related to women's right and education, and their implication on contemporary attitudes toward otherness.

> Tranio: Faith, he is gone unto the taming-school.
>
> Bianca: The taming-school? What, is there such a place?

Tranio: Ay, mistress, and Petruchio is the master,

That teacheth tricks eleven and twenty long,

To tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue. (IV.ii.54-8)[5]

Although the above quotation and the preceding soliloquy of Petruchio articulating his taming *ars poetica* (with the famous falconry analogy) comes quite late in the play (IV.i.175-98), the audience and/or the reader is already groomed by the title to embrace it as the centrepiece of the play (cf. Morris 1981: 250). Not only does it provide a framework (besides the Induction) for much of the plot in the main part of the play, it also explains Petruchio's over the top insistence at the end of the play to "show more sign of her [Katherina's] obedience, / Her new-build virtue and obedience" (V.ii.118-9), although he has clearly already won the wager in that his wife was the only one of the three to heed her husband's call. The ostentatious display of Katherina's submissiveness, her rounding up of the absent wives and her public sermonizing to them – so galling to female audiences/readers/critics and uncomfortable to many male ones – is the very proof of Petruchio winning not just the bet but his self-proclaimed challenge at the end of his soliloquy: "He that knows better how to tame a shrew / Now let him speak: 'tis charity to show" (IV.i.197-8). The irony of his words evoking the solemnization of matrimony is that his taming intention, instead of providing a "iust cause, why they may not lawfully be ioned together" (cf. Morris 251n198), is perceived as a private matter, the grievance of which (particularly on the part of the wife) should be dealt with in private if not out of the public eye. The charity to show is therefore aimed at other husbands, seeking to tame their unruly wives, but more importantly, it is an ostentatious display of bragging rights for Petruchio, the master of his taming-school.

However, Petruchio's method is far from being unique, as it is both followed and preceded in contemporary writings on shrew-taming. While both authors I am about to

reference in the following sections (Taylor and Erasmus) use the term *shrew* in reference to men and women alike, there is a notable difference in the method applied in taming the former and the latter.

In John Taylor's *A iuniper lecture with… the authors advice how to tame a shrew, or vex her* (1639), the advice to husbands reads:

> If you perceive her to increase her language, be sure you give her not a word, good or bad, but rather seeme to slight her, buy doing some action or other, as singing, dancing, whistling, or clapping thy hands on thy sides; *for this will make her vex extremely, because you give her not word for word* (…) but if all will not serve that you can doe, to stop her rage, but she will thus every day claomour, then I wish you to buy a Drum into your house, and locke it up in some private roome or Study, that shee may not come at it, and when she doth begin to talke aloft, doe then begin to beate a loud, which shee hearing, will presently be amazed, hearing a louder voice than her owne, and make her forbeare scolding any more for that time.
>
> (Taylor, 2005: 226-9, *italics added*)

The principal aim described above is the vexation and unbalancing of the wife by "not giving her word for word," which Petruchio resolves to accomplish by subverting all of Katherina's claims (cf. II.i.168-180, the succeeding banter scene, and their subsequent interactions in Act IV). The effect is amply summarized by Curtis' words about Katherina: "she, poor soul, / Knows not which way to stand, to look, to speak, / And sits as one new risen from a dream" (IV.i.171-3) – or from a nightmare more likely. And while in *A iuniper lecture* there is no direct suggestion that physical violence should be used, the implications of beating a drum are quite clear, even without the accompaniment of one of the suggested ditties, "Dub a dub [the sound of the drum], kill her with a Club, / Be thy wives Master: / Each one can tame a shrew, but he that hath her" (Taylor, 2005: 230-1).[6]

A similar behaviour of a husband is described in Erasmus' marriage counsel, one of his most popular colloquies, translated into English and published in 1557 as *A Merry Dialogue Declaring the Properties of Shrewd Shrews and Honest Wives*.[7] The colloquy is a dialogue between two married women, Eulalia and Xanthippe, and although the latter's name is in reference to Socrates' notoriously querulous wife (and the epitome of shrewishness),[8] the principal shrew of the dialogue is Xanthippe's husband.[9] When Eulalia asks how Xanthippe's husband reacts to her brawls, her response describes a behaviour reminiscent of Petruchio's, albeit with dubious results:

> Eulalia: What does he do all this time?
>
> Xanthippe: Do? Sometimes he sleeps, the lazy lout. Occasionally he just laughs; and at other times grabs his guitar, which has hardly three strings, and plays it as loud as he can to drown out my screaming.
>
> Eulalia: That infuriates you?
>
> Xanthippe: More than I could say. At times I can hardly keep my hands off him.
>
> (Rummel, 1996: 133)

Here too, the husband does not respond to his wife's complaint (for according to the context her scolding is due to his lazy and drunken ways), disregarding it with a behaviour guaranteed to vex her and sometimes resulting in mutual blows. This short exchange between the women serves as an introduction to Eulalia's art of taming a shrewish husband which comprises the rest of the dialogue. The short excerpt I am to quote has two aspects that highlight the radical difference of man-shrew taming: first, the art of it should be kept secret, contrary to the women-shrew taming which, apparently, should be advertised and proclaimed far and wide; second, the animal imagery it employs reveals a hierarchical dynamic diametrically opposed to the falcon taming analogy used in Petruchio's speech.

Xanthippe: But tell me please, by what arts you drew your husband to your ways.

(…)

Eulalia: I'll tell you, then, but only if you'll keep it secret.

Xanthippe: Of course.

Eulalia: My first concern was to be agreeable to my husband in every respect, so as not to cause him any annoyance. I noted his mood and feeling; I noted the circumstances too, and what soothed and irritated him [made him a shrew],[10] as do those who tame elephants and lions or suchlike creatures that can't be forced.

Xanthippe: That's the sort of creature [beast] I have at home.

Eulalia: Those who approach elephants don't wear white, and those who approach bulls don't wear read, because these beasts are known to be enraged by such colours. Likewise tigers are driven so wild by the beating of drums that they tear their own flesh. And trainers of horses have calls, cluckings, pattings, and other means of soothing mettlesome animals. How much more fitting for us to use those arts on our husbands, with whom, whether we like or not, we share bed and board for our entire lives.

(Rummel, 1996: 134-5)

These two differences are substantial and could prove critical in our revaluation of Katherine's final speech. Secrecy and physical strength, conditioning the hierarchical dynamics between the sexes, are interrelated. Erasmus' marriage counselling colloquy makes it abundantly clear that the taming of man-shrews is done under the pretence of submission. Consequently, the taming "must" remain a secret, because it conceals the manipulative aspect of obedience and servitude, sustaining the appearance of male intellectual supremacy. But why is this perceived as a must? Frances Power Cobbe noted as early as 1878 that "the [verbal] sparring may be all very well for a time, and may be counted entirely satisfactory *if they get the better* [i.e. the men]. But then, if by any mischance the unaccountably sharp wits of the weaker creature should prove dangerous weapons, there is always the club of brute force ready to hand in the corner" (2004: 113). Cobbe wrote this when musing about the popular appeal of wife-

torturing narratives, *The Shrew* included (idem, 112), and perceived the amusement of (presumably male) listeners to steam from a secure knowledge that, should all else fail in a match of eloquence, the possessor of the superior physical strength can always resort to violence to win the argument. The taming of a man is therefore *plus ratio quam vis*, a fact that must be concealed to avoid the *ultima ratio* of clubbing. This is hardly a reassuring or empowering prospect, not just from a 21st-century perspective, but from a 16th-century one too, as evinced by Xanthippe's exclamations in response to Eulalia's advices: "I had leuer be slayne…" [I'd rather be dead] or "I could not abyde it" [I can't stand it] (Erasmus, 2004). Voicing these, Erasmus undermines the "natural" argument, namely, that the given hierarchical construction of marriage is a mirror of Nature's order, or better yet, an ordination by God, for it seems neither natural or just to women who are subjected to it.[11] Railing against it, like Xanthippe and Katherina does, seems more natural. "My tongue will tell the anger of my heart, / Or else my heart concealing it will break, / And rather than it shall, I will be free / Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words" – exclaims Kathrina in her vexation (IV.iii. 77-80). And yet, at the end both Xanthippe and Katherina acquiescent to a different approach, namely, to obedience in show.

Indeed, critics have often concluded that Katherina's final speech cannot be meant for real, interpreting it either as a foil to best Petruchio or as a collusion with Petruchio to best the others (cf. Kahn 1981: 104-118; Karmalli 2012: 89-110; Schaub 2015: 225-242). The play is truly Shakespearean in that it refuses to give a conclusive ending as there is a sense of lingering wonder at the end of the play, expressed by Lucentio's final sentence, inviting readers and audiences alike to puzzle over the outcome: "'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tam'd so" (IV.2.190). Did the shrew learn to be shrewd? Is she merely appropriating the techniques Petruchio employed in her own taming? For certainly Katherina has no Eulalia to advise her;

as a matter of fact, she is the only Shakespearean heroine without a female ally or a friend throughout the play.

At this point I would like to turn to Katherina's and, by proxy, Bianca's education because it has an important role beyond the one emphasized by Thompson, namely, to provide "opportunity for all the comic disguising of the sub-plot" and allowing the contrast between Bianca's "spurious education" by her would-be-suitors and Kathrina's by Petruchio to play out (2003: 34). Thompson is quick to exclude Baptista Minola from the Shakespearean father figures who are personally invested in the teaching of their daughters, contrasting him with the father of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, of Miranda in *The Tempest* and of Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* (32-3). And yet there are small details in the play that set Baptista and his daughters well apart from the practice of the age, namely, the topics he is allowing and encouraging his daughters to learn.

The main plot starts with Lucentio's arrival at Padua, the "nursery of arts" and his pronounced ambition, fickle as it will soon prove to be, to "breath and haply institute / A course of learning and ingenious studies" (I.i.8-9). Given this setting, the opportunity for the subplot's comic disguise is Baptista asking Bianca's erstwhile suitors, Grumio and Hortensio, to recommend tutors for his daughters. "[F]or I know she [Bianca] taketh most delight / In music, instruments, and poetry, / Schoolmasters will I keep within my house", adding that "to cunning men / I will be very kind, and liberal / To mine own children in good bringing-up." (I.i.92-99). Morris makes no remark on this, while Thompson merely notes that "[s]uch objects [music, instruments and poetry] would be studied by a very few aristocratic women in Shakespeare's time" (2003: 71). The extent of Baptista's "liberal", i.e. free of convention, approach to his daughter's education is his ready acceptance of the tutors themselves who are far from being mere music and poetry teachers (and here I do not mean the fact of them being in disguise).

Namely, Petruchio introduces Hortensio / Litio to Katherina as "[c]unning in music and the mathematics, / To instruct her fully in those sciences, / Whereof I know she is not ignorant" (II.i.55-68). The pairing of music and mathematics is remarkable in and of itself, for although girls were encouraged to learn music (particularly singing, dancing, and perhaps playing an instrument), the aim was to be cultivated for the benefit of domestic entertainment, and they were seen (even nowadays)[12] more as performers than composers / producers. However, music in Shakespeare's time was still classified by theoreticians as one branch of mathematics, and in this capacity it would eventually contribute to the emergence of the Scientific Revolution in the 16th and 17th century. It was Kepler who argued for elliptical planetary orbits "as relieving the music of the spheres from dull monotony" producing "scale passages and chords to replace the sustained tones that would inevitably result from perfectly circular motions" (Drake, 1992: 5). As such, mathematics was deemed as a highly unfitting subject for female students, whose realm of knowledge, especially following protestant humanism, revolved around the domestic sphere of virtue and housewifery (Aughterson 1995: 163). Similarly, while women were not barred from poetry either as readers or occasionally as authors themselves (although cautioned against romances that would furnish them with false ideals), their study was conducted in vernacular literature and often restricted to biblical texts for their virtue's sake. Latin education, let alone Greek, "among non-noble women was rare enough that it was remarked – 'learned beyond their sex,' the saying went", as Natalie Davis remarks (apud Sowards, 1982: 88).[13] Therefore, it is indeed remarkable that in *The Shrew* Grumio presents Cambio (Lucentio in disguise) as a tutor to the Minola daughters, describing him as a "young scholar, (…) cunning in Greek, Latin, and other languages" (II.i.78-82). Even more so, as Grumio's present is complimented by the additional material gift of a "small packet of Greek and Latin books" by Tranio (posing as Lucentio).

The educational titbits of the Minola sisters, introducing the sub-plot, are particularly remarkable if compared to the anonymous play *A Pleasant Conceited Historie, called The Taming of a Shrew*, arguably a variation of *The Shrew*. The main plot's setting is similar: the location is Athens, home to "*Platoes* schooles and *Aristotles* walkes," but this is as far as education is referenced. Aurelius' (Lucentio's equivalent in *A Shrew*) has no academic ambition in visiting Athens, he is there to meet with his friend Polidor (a semi Hortensio character), and in order to infiltrate Alfonso's home (Baptista's equivalent) he will disguises himself as "a Merchants sonne of *Cestus*, / That comes for traffike [business] unto *Athense* here" (1594). Nor is there any occasion for education in David Garrick's severely cut and rewritten appropriation, *Catherine and Petruchio* (1756), admittedly the most popular adaptation of *The Shrew*, which has for almost a century and half supplanted Shakespeare's play altogether. A comedy in three acts, it completely omits the subplot of the tutors, except for a short music-master scene for the sole purpose of displaying Katherine's temper. Indeed, most of the stage adaptations leave out the scope of Katherina's and Bianca's learning as an unimportant detail and yet, to me, it seems the most unique feature of Shakespeare's play.

Not the least because of Shakespeare's reputation, courtesy of Ben Jonson, of having "small Latin and less Greek," which should definitely make the reader appreciate Shakespeare's sense of self depreciating humour, especially when remembering Portia's offhanded dismissal of her English suitor in *The Merchant of Venice*: "He hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian, (…) He is a proper man's picture, but alas, who can converse with a dumb show?" (I.ii.62-5). But apart from offering tickling incongruity, the details about Katherina's education provide a more sinister take on Petruchio's taming school, namely, seeing it as a backlash to women's liberal education. This interpretative possibility is of course nowhere explicitly stated in the play itself, however, it is implied in its broader historical contexts. The relation of women's

education to shrew-taming can be better understood in the light of another colloquy of Erasmus and its echoes in a later educational treatise by Bathsua Makin.

Erasmus' *The Abbot and the Learned Lady* (1524) is a dialogue on the benefits/disadvantages of reading and whether it constitutes the source of a pleasurable/good life between Antronius, a worldly abbot, and Magdalia, an erudite woman. Although Erasmus is far more set upon ridiculing the ignorant abbot, Antronius, than advocating the education of women modelled after Magdalia, the opening dialogue is worth quoting at some length for its stance on books in Latin and Greek:

> Antronius: What furnishing do I see here?
>
> Magdalia: Elegant, aren't they?
>
> Antronius: How elegant I don't know, but certainly unbecoming both to a young miss and a married woman.
>
> Magdalia: Why?
>
> Antronius: Because the whole place is full of books.
>
> Magdalia: Are you so old, an abbot as well as a courtier, and have never seen books in court ladies' houses?
>
> Antronius: Yes, but those were in French. Here I see Greek and Latin ones.
>
> Magdalia: Are French books the only ones that teach wisdom?
>
> Antronius: But it's fitting for court ladies to have something with which to beguile their leisure.
>
> Magdalia: Are court ladies the only ones allowed to improve their minds and enjoy themselves?
>
> Antronius: You confuse growing wise with enjoying yourself. It's not feminine to be brainy. A lady's business is to have a good time.
>
> (…)
>
> Magdalia: Shrewd abbot but stupid philosopher! Tell me: how do you measure good times?
>
> Antronius: By sleep, dinner parties, doing as one likes, money, honours.
>
> (…)

> Magdalia: What if I enjoy reading a good author more than you do hunting, drinking, or playing dice? You won't think I'm having a good time?
>
> Antronius: *I* wouldn't live like that.
>
> Magdalia: I'm not asking what *you* would enjoy most, but what *ought* to be enjoyable.
>
> Antronius: I wouldn't want my monks to spend their time on books.
>
> Magdalia: Yet my husband heartily approves on my doing so. But exactly why do you disapprove of this in your monks?
>
> Antronius: Because I find they're less tractable; they talk back by quoting from decrees and decretals, from Peter and Paul.
>
> Magdalia: So your rules conflict with those of Peter and Paul?
>
> Antronius: What *they* may enjoy I don't know, but still I don't like a monk who talks back. And I don't want any of mine to know more than I do.
>
> (Rummel, 1996: 174-5)

Since this dialogue ridicules the wilful ignorance of Antronius, Erasmus also ridicules the commonplace objections against women's liberal learning, here voiced by the abbot: learning for wisdom's sake is not a feminine endeavour, because they are not fit for it to begin with, and should they engage in it they will end up "less tractable" and shrewish, for they will "talk back" – like the monks reading Latin – and not docilely follow imposed authority. They might even end up knowing more than their alleged superiors and, hence, becoming unable to marry (or be controlled in the case of the monks). The issue of eligibility emerges from Bathsua Makin's *An Essay To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen*, in which she advocates a broader education for women, not restricted to the management of domestic chores, providing a list of prominently learned women in subjects deemed beyond their ken and answering the most common objections against women's education, the first being that "[if] we bring up our Daughters to Learning, no Person will adventure to Marry them," seconded by the objection

that "[they] will be proud, and not obey their Husbands; they will be pragmatick, and boast of their Parts and Improvements" (1673).[14] Both aforementioned texts, as well as *The Shrew* in my reading, reveal the double standard whereby cunningness is perceived as a shrewd quality in men and as shrewishness in women. Both words, *shrew* and *shrewd* have, in fact, the same etymological origin from, most likely, Middle English *schrewen* ("to curse") implying "evil, wicked person", and it is hard to resist inferring an intertextual connection with the Garden of Eden, where Eve's transgression in pursuit of knowledge resulted in a curse and an often cited reason why all her female descendants should be perceived to be cursed by their very nature, while the same pursuit of knowledge will be seen as cunning bravery in men and an ambition to be admired (despite its explicit connection to satanic hubris). Nor should this sex-typing of shrew and shrewd be seen as a practice belonging to an outmoded misogynistic culture. One only needs to remember the coverage of the last US presidential election and the way media (political preferences notwithstanding) referenced Hilary Clinton as opposed to Donald Trump. Though published in 1981, Shirley Morahan citing the paper of student Sasha Tranquili on the word *shrewd* still rings true:

> Women who have been called shrewish, step forward. Let your voices drum quietly, ceaselessly, on those men who stay out all night drinking and carousing, who take your hours of work in the home for granted, who eat your food without thanks or compliment, who fill you with babies and leave you with the responsibility of raising them, who work you into old age and demand that you be young, who push you and prod you to the point of anger and then call you "Shrew!"
>
> Women were not always shrews. Not until the middle of the sixteenth century was the word shrew ascribed specifically to women. Originally, and as early as the mid-thirteenth century, any evil person, one who stole or was a trickster was considered a shrew. How easily the slipping has been, from shrewd-evil in the thirteenth century to shrewd-clever by the eighteenth century, a forked definition to the benefit of man.

> The man, the trickster, now is considered clever, insightful and therefore admirable; he is shrewd. But the woman who is sharp with her mind and therefore her words is not admirable. She is a shrew. She has forgotten her place. She must be reconditioned, or she will be a weight the man does not deserve, an embarrassment he must suffer. I tell you, the word shrewd has come forward in time to be woman's punishment and man's reward. It is time for the next definition. (Morahan, 1981: 105-6)

Finally, I should probably qualify my earlier statement about Petruchio's taming school being a backlash to women's liberal education. It is not Petruchio's taming per se, but the whole setting that "necessitates" it. Namely, when using the term backlash, I am deliberately evoking Susan Faludi's seminal work *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women*, first published in 1991, in which she showcases the vengeful response of media to the positive advancements of 1970s feminism – women's education included. In this present context, the most telling example of that backlash would be the recurring rhetoric of how "'the hard-core feminist viewpoint' (…) has relegated educated [female] executives to solitary nights of frozen dinners and closet drinking" (Faludi, 2006: 4). In other words, their education and success in professional life amounts to nothing as they "end up without love, and their spinsterly misery would eventually undermine their careers as well" (22). A similar argument was launched at the outset of the women's movement, when a marriage study was making "rounds in 1895, asserting that only 28 percent of college-educated women could get married" (63). Faludi summarizes this aspect of the backlash as follows: "The arguments were always the same: equal education would make women spinsters, equal employment would make women sterile, equal rights would make women bad mothers" (92). So, the passages referencing the Minola sisters' education, the insistence on Katherina's shrewishness, which is often stated by other characters in the play and rarely displayed,[15] *is* the backlash itself to which Petruchio's taming is merely the redress.

I would argue that, as "twentieth-century feminism had the good effect of restoring the full text" (Schaub 2015: 234) of *The Shrew*, it is perhaps time for the twenty-first-century Shakespeare scholars, feminists included, to shift their focus from Katherina's last speech and facilitate a performance not excluding the educational titbits but, rather, highlight them as different, relevant interpretative possibility of the play, perhaps even by updating the tutoring subject range to include STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects – the Greek and Latin of our age. Most importantly, I would argue for the responsibility of myself and my colleagues to problematize these issues instead of merely attempting the recuperation of Shakespeare's good name (and our investment in teaching his works) from misogynistic charges, by acknowledging that Shakespeare's work too is vested in a continuous myth of transcending/overarching values preferring the institutionalization of certain interpretations, and given the complicated relation of literature and ideology, and the collusion of criticism with ideology, one should not shy away from the fact that the bard was (and presumably will be in the future) evoked as a cudgel at the service of reactionary and/or misogynistic ideas.

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[1] Brian Morris warns that claiming a ceaseless theatrical popularity for *The Shrew* might be an exaggeration because "for nearly two hundred years it was supplanted on the stage by adaptations, altered and partial versions, and its stage history cannot be said to have been an uninterrupted triumphal progress" (Morris, 1981: 88). However, his observation, though true, is not peculiar to *The Shrew* and therefore hardly conclusive. As noted by Fiona Richie and Peter Sabor, all of Shakespeare's plays "were adaptations of the originals by Restoration dramatists", achieving longevity well into the early 19th century (2012: 4-5; for more detail cf. Davidson, 2012), and while there were revisions and substantial shortenings of *The Shrew*, particularly of Kate's concluding speech, none of those revisions subvert the play to the level of surviving Romeos and Juliets, and happy ending King Lears.

[2] Anna Bayman and George Southcombe claim that Fletcher was rejecting Shakespeare's ending by referencing Kate in his play as untamed – haunting the dreams of Petruchio, so that he would "start in's sleep, and very often / Cry out for cudgels, cow-staves, anything, / Hiding his breeches, out of fear her ghost / Should walk and wear 'em yet" (I.i.31-6) –, so they interpret this rejection as something that "may have been shared by some of Shakespeare's original audience" (Bayman / Southcombe, 2010: 19).

[3] Also, Kamaralli does not seem to be taken by Holderness and Wootton's open-ended argument that a diverse body of cultural production (i.e. shrew-taming narratives) would challenge the audience's fixed and consistent view of gender and sexual dynamics in Shakespeare's plays because, as she argues, by the time Shakespeare wrote his plays, "the shrew was as familiar a theatrical archetype as the tyrant, the lover or the clown, so audiences would have been primed by convention to identify her, particularly when watching comedies, which most often made use of this figure" (2012: 3; cf. 2010: 71). I agree with her assessment, particularly in light of Stott's definition of traditional comedy as a "plot driven" play in which characterization is "usually subordinated to the demands of the plot, and therefore more effectively realized with stereotypes and one-dimensional characters than anything approaching the realistic portrayal of human emotions" (2005: 40). The comic effect relies, therefore, on recognizable character types – e.g. Petruchio as the protype of the jovial wife-beater Mr. Punch – and on the temporary subversions of social stereotypes. This of course begs the question as to whether the punch line is equally amusing to those portrayed on the receiving end of the joke (cf. Garner 1988; Carlson 1998: 91-2).

[4] Kamaralli calls it "the crux of every argument about this [*The Shrew*] play" (2012: 93).

[5] All quotations from *The Taming of the Shrew* are from the Arden Shakespeare edited by Brian Morris (1981).

[6] See the enduring significance of the drum beating topos as marker of marital problems in John Gay's *Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking in the Streets of London* (1730): "Here rows of drummers stand in martial file, / And with their vellom thunder shake the pile, / To greet the new-made bride. Are sounds like these / The proper prelude to a state of peace?" (II.17-20).

[7] Among other humanistic sources David Bevington and David Scott Kastan indicate Erasmus' marriage colloquy as a possible source for *The Shrew* in order to distance it from misogynistic extremes of other possible sources (Bevington / Kastan 2005: 217). A more extreme narrative is *A Merry Jest of a Shrew and Curst Wife Lapped in Morel's Skin, for her Good Behaviour* (c. 1550-1560), in which the husband beats his wife till she bleeds, wrapping her in the flayed and salted skin of his old horse, Morel. The similarity to Shakespeare's play is that here too the father has a younger, meeker daughter, whom he favours over his eldest, shrewish daughter, and will have the first married only after he gets rid of the latter. The difference, apart from the existence of a mother figure, is that the shrew wife of *A Merry Jest* is identified as such by her violent, mean attitude towards the servants, a behaviour mirrored in *The Shrew* not by Katherine but by Petruchio in Act IV (also the very reason he is named a shrew in the play). Something else worth noting is that the jest throws the challenge of a superior taming method: "He that can charm a shrewd wife / Better then thus, / Let him come to me, and fetch ten pound, / And a golden purse" (Amyot 1844: 91).

[8] Indeed, the famous chamber-pot incident is recorded in Taylor's *A iuniper lectures* too: "beware that shee doe not meete with you as Xantippe the wife of Socrates, did meet with him: for after hee had endured her railing & bitter words for two or three hours together, and slighted her by his merry conceits, she studying how to bee revenged of him, as he went out of his house she poured a Chamber-pot on his head, which wet him exceedingly; whereupon he presently said, I did think that after so great a clap of Thunder, we should have some shower of raine, and so past I off merrily" (2005).

[9] This is somewhat obscured by the fact that in the modern translation the male application of the term vanishes completely. For example, "I obserued his appetite and pleasure I marked the tymes bothe whan he woulde be pleased and when he wold be all by shrwed" (Erasmus 2004) is rendered as "I noted his mood and feeling; I noted the circumstances too, and what soothed and irritated him" (Rummel 1996: 134). In quoting Erasmus' *A Merry Dialogue,* I will occasionally resort to the English translation of 1557 (2004) for the obvious reason that it was the version readily available to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and for the word use I intend to highlight.

[10] The modern translation by Craig Thompson obfuscates the gender-neutral use of the word *shrew*, for in the 1557 English translation it reads as indicated in the parenthesis.

[11] I am particularly fond of Erasmus for Xanthippe's scepticism in response to the theological underpinnings of her friend's advices (cf. Rummel, 1996: 133). Better yet for Shakespeare because, as Thompson notes among the positives features of his approach, he blissfully avoids "that other principal weapon of the shrew-tamer or male supremacist: theology" (2003: 28).

[12] See Sara Cohen's study "Men Making a Scene: Rock Music and the Production of Gender", in Sheila Whiteley (ed.), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (Abingdon / New York, Routledge, 1997, pp. 17-36. I am grateful to Barna Emília, whose Hungarian article in *TNTeF* vol. 7, nr. 1 (2017) has drawn my attention to this continued gendered binary dynamic in the contemporary (punk and indie) music scene.

[13] Antronius, the abbot from Erasmus' colloquy *The Abbot and the Learned Lady* (1524), will also claim that the "public agrees with me, because it's rare and exceptional thing for a woman to know Latin" (Rummel 1996: 177).

[14] Makin references Erasmus' colloquy twice in her *Essay*, the first time highlighting the underlying motive (fearmongering) that objects to women's education: "He gives her one Answer to all this, *That Women would never be kept in subjection if they were learned*; (…) Doubtless if that generation of Sots (who deny more Polite Learning to Women) would speak out, they would tell you, If Women should be permitted Arts, they would be wiser than themselves (a thing not to be endured) then they would never be such tame fools and very slaves as now they make them; therefore it is a wicked mischievous thing to revive the Ancient Custom of Educating them" (1673).

[15] After all, as Kamaralli also notes, "Katherine speaks a paltry 8 percent of her play's line" (2012: 90) and even those are mostly provoked instances.

Towards a Critical Reevaluation of *The Rape of Lucrece*

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The Rape of Lucrece is currently not amongst Shakespeare's most popular works.[1] It can be argued that 1855 lines of iambic pentameter, distributed among 265 septets of steady "rhyme royal" (*ababbcc*), is not the most fashionable format in the Netflix-obssesed late-modern cultural climate of 2019. But this wasn't always the case. Together with numerous editions and praising references by fellow poets, in 1598 Gabriel Harvey annotated in the margin of his copy of Chaucer that "[t]he younger sort take much delight in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, but his *Lucrece* and his tragedy of *Hamlet Prince of Denmarke*, have it in them to please the wiser sort" (*apud* Hehmeyer, 2013: 140). This makes us think about the intellectual depth and popularity with which the poem was perceived at the time. A high regard which contrasts with the marginal position the poem holds nowadays within the Shakespeare canon. Even specifically, within the specialized circles of Shakespearean scholarship, the poem has not fared too well and, as Katharine Eisaman Maus has suggested, such limited attention can be at least partly attributed to how modern critics have "persistently object[ed] to its elaborate rhetoric" (Eisaman Maus, 1986: 66). This is, I believe, an accurate characterization of much of what has been written about the poem. A line of inquiry that is to a large extent exhausted, or at least outdated, as debates about the rhetorical quality of Shakespeare's works have become rare in a research community that now tends not to evaluate, but to historicize Shakespeare's writing.

However, there is a different approach that has kept the poem alive, and that is (what I should broadly term) feminist criticism. It is not a surprise that feminism would have something to say about a poem that re-versifies the semi-historical, semi-mythical account of the rape of Lucrece, the virtuous, chaste and beautiful wife of the nobleman Collatine, at the

hands of Tarquin, son of the last Roman king: a poem that provides an extensive and intensive representation of the psychological processes involved in a sexual assault; a poem that is concluded by Lucrece's suicide, the banishment of Tarquin and the rest of the royal family, and the establishment of the Roman republic. So taking the text's sustained attention to the motivations, processes and consequences of rape, my initial standpoint is that the poem is worth revisiting in 2019, a time in which sexual violence – from the Harvey Weinstein scandal to the Spanish "Wolfpack"/"La Manada", just to name two high-profile cases – has taken up a specially relevant space within the preoccupations of late-modern feminism.

Why did Lucrece commit suicide?

Much of what has been written about the poem has had to do with Lucrece, her reaction to abuse and, especially, the motivations and implications of her final suicide. To frame the debate and establish what I see as the three basic strands of criticism regarding Lucrece, we have to go back in time around eleven centuries prior to the writing of the poem, for it was Saint Augustine in *The City of God*, his influential theological/philosophical/political treaty that inaugurated a moralistic evaluation of Lucrece's suicide that has influenced later critical reactions to the poem. If she was chaste, why was she killed, wonders Saint Augustine. In his view, if women keep a clean mind during the sexual aggression, even when raped, "in the witness of their own conscience, they enjoy the glory of chastity" (Augustine, [426 AD] 1871: 30). This is not the case of Lucrece for Augustine, who finds her actions incoherent and explains that in her suicide Lucrece was excessively eager for honour and covetous of glory. Shakespeare's poem reactivated the debate in 1594, and as Sasha Roberts has shown, in the 17th century Lucrece is represented through "contradictory images (…) as both a honourable icon and adulterous sinner" (Roberts, 2002: 107), the latter position being articulated through numerous

Augustinian-inspired attacks, which include one by Margaret Cavendish.

It is difficult to gauge the contemporary strength of these "Augustinian criticisms" of the poem, but Katharine Eisaman Maus's article locates the two latest scholarly discussions in the 1960s. It is tempting to assume that in 2019 Saint Augustine's views are anachronistic. But as hard as it is to imagine an Augustinian attack on Lucrece's suicide within current gender debates, we shouldn't be too quick to assume that Augustinian values are a thing of the past. Taking into account that Christian faith is cemented on the idea that "God created man in his own image" (Genesis 1:27), Christianity assumes that human life is sacred from the moment of its inception and any attempt of any kind to end it is unjustifiable. Christian beliefs on the preservation of life go beyond suicide and are intimately linked to current debates on issues such as euthanasia and pregnancy termination. What we could call "pro-Life ideology" rests on perspectives on human life that we could call Augustinian. In other words, as much as feminism will quickly oppose this view, it is not difficult to accept that Christian-inflected reactions that deem Lucrece's suicide as morally reprehensible may be still available now.

The antagonism between pro-life movements and feminism has been constant since the passing of abortion laws in most Western countries in the late 1960s and 70s (UK: 1967/US: 1973). But, paradoxically, Lucrece's suicide makes her an uncomfortable heroine for feminism too. Renowned Shakespeareans, such as Nancy Vickers (1985) and Coppelia Kahn (1997: 27-45) among others, have expressed their reservations towards Lucrece, because of the poem's "belittling image of [Lucrece's] feminine passivity" (Hyland, 2003: 119). To put it succinctly, this critical position interprets Lucrece not just as a victim of Tarquin's abuse, but also as an accomplice of patriarchy in the way she fails to resist male domination. After the Augustinian, this second perspective reads Lucrece's suicide as an example of victimized, disempowered and inactive femininity. Within this view, it is problematic to regard Lucrece as an icon for the

kind of feminism that Vickers and Kahn seem to subscribe to. As Catherine Belsey notes, "critics influenced by feminism have predominantly seen Shakespeare's Lucrece instead as the victim of patriarchal values, whether the passive object of a struggle between men or in her suicide complicit with masculine misogyny" (Belsey, 2001: 315).

It is in this article of 2001 that Catherine Belsey establishes a third position towards Lucrece's suicide which is in a way closer to later feminist standpoints. According to her, Shakespeare is very clear in presenting the "appalling character" of Tarquin's assault, which "impugns the identity of a faithful wife and eradicates the personal sovereignty of a human subject". But instead of reading Lucrece as a victim of a "forcible bodily violation" (*idem* 329), Belsey see her as the source of action and agency, as she is responsible for Tarquin's banishment, for the end of Roman monarchy, and for the beginning of the democratic republic:

> Her final victim-ization, rendered by her own hand, is at the same time the ultimate act of self-determination; the object of violence is simultaneously the subject as agent of her own judicial execution (…) By her death Lucrece dissolves her shame, erases the threat of Collatine's lineage, and motivates political action (…) a new political order founded not on possession but on consent (*idem* 331).

In her reading of the poem Belsey sides with more recent debates on sexual violence, in which feminism is trying to react against the victimization of rape "survivors" (not of rape "victims"). An updating of the discussion that aspires to improve the epistemology of rape by emphasizing positive models of female agency and empowerment. Lucrece does not survive, but Belsey's reading makes her a martyr for a higher cause. Her death was worthwhile as she is solely responsible for political change, for democracy, for a more equalitarian model of Roman citizenship.

Within the three perspectives I have presented, I personally connect better with Belsey's take on the poem, but St. Augustine, Kahn and Belsey share a common problem, which is of central importance to late-feminist approaches to rape: that is, their focus on the *evaluation* of the victim's response to the assault, an assessment that is at risk of promoting the hierarchical classification of victims of sexual violence depending on their reaction to the attack. The three perspectives seem to be looking for an answer to the same question: did Lucrece react to Tarquin's assault in the right manner? When it comes to the sexual assault, the poem is very clear and neither St. Augustine, Kahn nor Belsey dispute that Lucrece's endurance is exemplary. But the three are judgmental in their approach to Lucrece's response to the assault and perhaps too comfortable in deciding whether her final suicide was the right way to handle the aggression. From a modern knowledge of post-traumatic disorders, Lucrece's suicide is hardly an enigma, and from this perspective Shakespeare can only be praised for articulating the complexities of a character in such mental distress so richly. But if we can learn anything from a late-modern understanding of sexual violence, it is that, provided that there is no consent (and not even St. Augustine takes issue with that) rape victims' thoughts and behaviour throughout the assault (whether they fought bravely or froze in terror) or how they carried themselves after the assault should take up a marginal space in the conversation, if any space at all. Thus, my point is that, although in different degrees, Augustinian and feminist readings of the poem (whether they attack or defend Lucrece) have so far provided analyses that tend to perpetuate the scrutiny of the victim. In turn, late feminism advises us not to concentrate on Lucrece, but on the perpetrator.

Why did Tarquin rape Lucrece?

In 2019 the question is not anymore "was Lucrece right in killing herself", or "is she a viable

model for feminism". Late feminism begs us to go back to the poem and take up Lucrece's question, when she awakes, terrified, as Tarquin has begun the assault, and wonders: "Under what colour he commits this ill" (v. 476). The question then is not "why did Lucrece commit suicide", but "why did Tarquin rape her". In her book of 1998, *Gender and Violence in Contemporary Theory*, Gill Allwood claims that it was around the 1980s that feminist debates about rape started to shift:

> Although the emphasis was still on women as survivors of violence, the 1980s also saw a growing (if still limited) interest in men and masculinity. Feminists had begun to consider the violent man and not just the survivor. Attention was drawn to the ordinariness of rapists and men who are violent in the home, and the notion that there is something different about them was slowly being worn away (Allwood, 1998: 109).

The first sustained discussion of the issue dates to 1975, with the milestone publication of Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. There she credits Austrian psychologist Wilhelm Reich as being the first to call attention to the "masculine ideology of rape", but her book stands as the seminal feminist contribution that characterized rape not as an individual but as a systemic problem. As Alison Healicon has recently argued in *The Politics of Sexual Violence* (2016), up until the 80s and 90s, rape had historically been understood as "isolated incidents resulting from individual pathology rather than a pattern within the wider social and political context" (Healicon, 2016: 5). Since then, the literature on the topic has become growingly abundant. Allwood describes rape as an instrument of social control. Anderson and Doherty characterize rape as being socially produced and socially legitimated (2008). The list goes on to paint a picture of what feminism has come to term *rape culture*, that is, the "culture in which sexual violence is a normalized phenomenon, in which male-dominant

environments (…) encourage and sometimes depend on violence against women" (Projanski, 2001: 9), a claim that has gained especial relevance in the last couple of years with the Harvey Weinstein scandal and the resulting proliferation of incidents disclosed by the #metoo movement. Within this perspective of "rape culture", Allwood lists the three "most commonly held beliefs" rejected by feminism: "that rape is due to men's sudden and uncontrollable sexual urges; that rape is always committed by strangers; and that rapists are "mad" or in some way marginal to "normal" society" (Allwood, 1998: 125).

If we look at Shakespeare's poem from a late feminist approach to rape, the result is problematic. From this perspective, the problem is not, as Kahn suggested, that Lucrece is too passive, but that Tarquin's abuse is represented as a case of lustful insanity. As Belsey reminds us, "in accordance with a metaphoric commonplace of the period, passion enslaves the desiring Tarquin" (Belsey, 2001: 323). And the problem is not just that the rhetoric of the impassioned slave is recurrent in the poem, but that throughout the over 700 lines that Shakespeare dedicates to Tarquin and his inner process, the poem provides a picture of an out-of-line sociopath, unable to control his sexual urges: "My will is strong", Tarquin says, "past reason's weak removing" (v. 243). Within this perspective, the poem facilitates a psychoanalytical reading, as Belsey has remarked:

> The poem's image of Tarquin beside himself, slave to an insatiable desire beyond the reach of Law, is strangely Lacanian three hundred and fifty years *avant la lettre*. In a manner that closely resembles Jacques Lacan's doomed, desiring subject, in command of everything but its own desire (…), the king's son, dissatisfied with what he already possesses, wants precisely what, because it is forbidden, will destroy him and all he already has (Belsey 2001: 323).

A psychoanalytical reading of the poem, like this one, can be disappointing for

feminism because a Lacanian interpretation would attribute Tarquin's abuse to the *nature* of the human psyche and would fail to frame the poem within the bigger picture of the *culture* of rape, its ideological motivations and political ramifications. As French sociologist Welzer-Lang argues, "the fact that men choose exactly when and whom they hit demonstrates that their behaviour is both intentional and conditioned and that violence is not due to a loss of control" (*apud* Allwood, 1998 121), but Shakespeare's portrayal of Tarquin, inflamed with Lucrece's beauty, falls within the stereotype of the uncontrollably mad rapist that feminism has been resisting in the last few decades. A reading of Tarquin as prey to his untameable passion shuts down the social and institutional dimension of rape. And if we give credibility to Tarquin's explanations of his motives and passions, as Shakespeare's rhetoric promotes, we give in to the individualization of the problem, which disconnects Tarquin's violence from the larger patriarchal culture that feminism demands us to inspect. Perhaps at this point we can take on again the old attack against the poem's rhetoric. But from a feminist perspective, the complaint wouldn't be that the lines are too elaborate but that they are misdirected. To give an example, that instead of making Lucrece blame Tarquin's assault on the "Night", "Opportunity" and "Time" for almost two hundred lines, Shakespeare could have dedicated those long rhetorical passages to exploring the social mechanisms that provoked the attack and led to her suicide.

Before I close my discussion, it is important to acknowledge that, if we look past the sociopathic portrayal of Tarquin, the poem offers plenty of opportunities to comment on the larger patriarchal system that Shakespeare depicts. For example, the poem assumes the essential physical and mental weakness of women as a gender; through mercantile rhetoric and metaphors of possession Lucrece is continuously objectified and subdued to an ownership power-struggle between her father, her husband and, ultimately, her aggressor; and both Belsey and Hyland have provided convincing arguments on how at the end of the poem Brutus, who

will become a leader of the Republic, takes political advantage of Lucrece's suicide. Still, I contend that the portrayal of Tarquin is problematic in the way it erases the ideological foundations of rape. In a late feminist perspective, *The Rape of Lucrece* understands rape as an isolated, extraordinary incident, characterized by contingent and deranged passion, and not as the endemic social, political and cultural problem that the #metoo scandals are a clear example of.

I believe that many of the feminist perspectives I have presented in the discussion are to a large extent complementary and that, rather than excluding each other, together they constitute a crucial body of contributions within the critical history of the poem. But, in 2019, in the age of #metoo, late-modern feminism is especially sensitive to de-politicised understandings of rape, which are still very much in circulation. So, let me close the discussion with an anecdote, that is relevant. In the recent Spanish presidential race, a news comment by Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo, congressional candidate of the Partido Popular illustrates my point. She said:

> Enough with instrumentalizing the pain of victims and women. Conjugal violence is not a political crime. There is no macho organization devoted to killing women. There is no ideology behind conjugal violence. There is no organization that says "let's kill women" (Álvarez de Toledo 2019).
> [Basta ya de instrumentalizar el dolor de las víctimas y de las mujeres. La violencia de pareja no es un crimen político. No hay una organización de machos que se dedique a matar a mujeres. No hay ideología tras la violencia de pareja. No hay una organización que diga 'matemos a las mujeres'"] (translation by the author).

This paper was aimed to explore how *The Rape of Lucrece* has provided problematic responses, even within feminist criticism, by evaluating and overemphasizing Lucrece's suicide. And then I meant to shift the debate towards Tarquin and alert that Shakespeare's

treatment of rape may portray a de-politicised understanding of gender violence, a perspective that would promote views like the one expressed by Cayetana Álvarez. Feminism, I am sure, will continue to shape and be shaped by Shakespeare's works and, in the case of this congresswoman, I am not too worried, because I do not think her ideology welcomes much debate, just as I do not think she reads much Shakespeare.

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LOL and LLL

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Contemporary society is obsessed with and suffers from the offensive impact that words can have. The web has obviously become the playground of evil tongues and the ideal and easy medium for abuse, mockery, slander, verbal humiliation or hateful speech, all speech acts that create or are signs of crises. In February 2019 in France, a group of journalists and a kind of boys' club that went under the pseudonym 'LOL' (Laugh Out Loud League) on social networks was denounced for having harassed mainly female colleagues through that faceless, anonymous medium. The collective abuse which took women as targets was supposed to make the group 'laugh out loud'; it could have been 'no abuse', as Falstaff says in *2 Henry 4* (2.4.320),[1] but it seems on the contrary that jesting turned into mockery and insult. In fact, these words circulating mainly on Twitter caused many cases of trauma and had a concrete impact on the victims' careers and lives.

Contemporary politics has to deal with the way words must, may, or can be controlled to avoid outrageous torrents of linguistic injuries be left unpunished. Words have probably never had such an extensive, global power than they have today, at a time when they circulate quicker and at a wider scale than they ever have. In the all virtual digital world, the power of words has never been so *real*, and words definitely act. When referring to abusive words that are exchanged on the web, commentators and politicians refer to these words as acts, giving J. L. Austin's famous theory on 'how to do things with words' (Austin, 1962) all its relevance.

In Shakespeare's days, the world was smaller; words' wings did not carry them as fast and far as they do today, but Shakespeare's world was obsessed with the insulting impact of words too. It is from this LOL league scandal that the idea of this paper emerged as it appeared to me that it could be read in relation to *Love's Labour's Lost* and that the mechanisms that are at work in this LOL scandal could illuminate *LLL*. This paper will start by focusing on the performance of the Pageant of the Nine Worthies, which can be seen as an episode of collective mockery. Then it will argue that *LLL* is a kind of "Facebook", that is a book or a play that reveals a preoccupation with one's *face*. And finally, it will briefly suggest that the end of the play shows a way out of crisis, by refusing a bad use of laughter and promoting a good use of it.

The reign of "mockery merriment"

In Shakespeare's plays, crises are often triggered off and nourished by words, and especially by insults. By insults, we mean words that can be delivered and/or received as insults. When studying insults, one should always have in mind Évelyne Larguèche's illuminating concept of *effet injure* (Larguèche, 1983). She shows that words are not insulting *per se* but become insults if they are received as such and have an insulting effect. The first aspect that is striking in the parallel of LOL and *LLL* is that the two worlds cultivate what the princess calls "mockery merriment" (5.2.139).[2] From the beginning of the play two characters are designated as the boy's club's butts: Armado and Costard. In the austere "Academe" that they imagine, "Costard the swain" and Armado "shall be [their] sport" which will make their three years of abstinence and study seem "short" (1.1.177-178). In the "mortif[ying]" (1.1.28) life that they are planning to have, some "quick recreation" will be granted (1.1.159). Using people as a source of collective sport: here is what the four men agree on at the beginning of the play. Armado will provide "interim" to the men's "studies" (1.1.169); he will be "used" for the king's "minstrelsy" (1.1.174). This is what the LOL league was based on: collective mockery that newspapers defined as moral harassment, to serve their personal plans and ambitions and disqualify the other as being out of place. The two characters, Armado and Costard, both coming from a lower social class, become "laughing stocks to other men's humours", to quote Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (3.1.76-77).[3] Longaville is identified from the start by the Princess as "some merry mocking lord" (2.1.52) in a sequence that relates wit to mocking and describes it as a blot to virtue:

> The only soil of his fair virtue's gloss,
> […]
> Is a sharp wit matched with too blunt a will,
> Whose edge hath power to cut, whose will still wills
> It should none spare that come within his power. (2.1.47-51).

Dumaine is known for his wit (2.1.59), Berowne for his "mirth-moving jest[s]" (2.1.71). Wit is thus presented as both sharp and seductive. The princess then speculates on this link between mockery and wit through the aphorism "good wits will be jangling" (2.1.221) and by referring to a "civil war of wits" (2.1.222). If the battle of wits in *LLL* is balanced between the men and

women, the characters rendering "mock for mock" (5.2.140), things are not balanced between the nobility and the lower status characters who ironically embody the Nine Worthies in the play within the play. As expressed by the princess, mocking is a matter of power. And this is what very strikingly appears in the Pageant of the Nine Worthies. What the lords do to and with the amateur actors at the end of the play can be compared to public bashing, collective humiliation, which Holofernes describes as such when he declares: "This is not generous, not gentle, not humble" (5.2.614) in a sequence that can be very moving on stage. Contrary to the exchanges that the princess defines as "a set of wit well played" (5.2.29), the exchanges between the audience and the actors show how what is supposed to be mere jesting may hurt. Boyet, called by Berowne "old mocker" (5.2.540), is part of the chorus of railing and mocking that the Pageant triggers off. The mocking effect is formulated by the unworthy Worthies. Costard leaves the stage by commenting on his performance: "'Tis not so much worth, but I hope I was perfect. I made a little fault in 'Great'" (5.2.549-550), a comment that reveals how the audience have destabilized the character-actor. The Princess notes that Nathaniel, playing the part of the conquering Alexander, is "dismayed" (5.2.557), while Costard becoming part of the audience describes him as "soon dashed" (5.2.569) and "a little o'erparted" (5.2.571). Nathaniel's dismay may come from the unsettling intervention of the audience who comment on his inappropriate nose. Dumaine uses the pun on Judas and ass to "shame" (5.2.588) Holofernes. The constant interruptions of the spectacle lead Armado to ask Longaville to "rein [his] tongue" (5.2.541) and the princess to "bestow on [him] the sense of hearing" (5.2.646-647) in a passage where Armado asks for the lord's indulgence: "beat not the bones of the buried. When he breathed, he was a man" (5.2.644-645). The "quick recreation" announced at the beginning of the play takes on all its meaning when Costard and Armado's strife about Jaquenetta emerges on stage, Costard "infamonis[ing]" Armado "among the potentates" by mentioning Jaquenetta "that is quick by him" (5.2.659-61). The transportation of elements of privacy onto the stage creates a moment of unease which only Marcadé's arrival will stop. Beyond Pompey and Hector, it is Costard and Armado who become the butts of collective scorn. The merriment that Marcadé is interrupting is a cruel, mockery "merriment" (5.2.692), a shaming moment when characters lose face.

LLL as a face book

LLL is the play in which there are the most numerous occurrences (26) of the word "face". What happens on social networks when you are a target of collective public abuse is that you lose (your) face. In his book *Impoliteness. Using Language to Cause Offence*, Jonathan Culpeper draws a link between face and offense in a chapter that shows that "Notions such as reputation, prestige and self-esteem, all involve an element of face". He notes that "In English, the term is perhaps most commonly used in the idiom 'losing face', meaning that one's public image suffers from damage, often resulting in emotional reactions, such as embarrassment." (Culpeper: 24). For Culpeper, losing face means that one's public image suffers from damage and this creates an emotional reaction of embarrassment (Culpeper: 24). "The point is that how you feel about your 'self' is dependent on how *others* assume about you" (Culpeper: 25). Face meets fame, "fame" which is the second word of *LLL* in a passage that refers to their "brazen tombs" (1.1.2), which may mean "shameless" tombs. Yet, as Ewan Fernie has noted in his book *Shame in Shakespeare*, the lords feel shame in the play, especially when they are exposed to one another's eye in what Fernie calls the "shaming sequence" in 4.3.[4] Shakespeare dramatizes their "Sweet fellowship in shame" (4.3.41) in an eavesdropping scene that is based on "hiding and exposure" (Fernie: 228).

Fernie notes that the word "shame" may be deriving from pre-Teutonic "skem", a variant of "kem", which means "cover". Hence the insistence on the motif of the faceless face, the visors that the lords wear when they approach the ladies as Muscovites, which can be a "sign of shame" (Fernie: 90). After this episode, the princess predicts that the four "woodcocks" will "hang themselves tonight", "Or ever but in vizards show their faces" (5.2.270-271). It is in this context that the final Pageant must be read. It is as if the lords were compensating for the shame they have felt by inflicting shame to the actors on stage. Having themselves become "shame-proof" (5.2.507), having themselves lost face, they are happy to find external targets for their mockery. This clearly appears in the following exchange:

> King: Berowne, they will shame us. Let them not approach.
> Berowne: We are shame-proof, my lord; and 'tis some policy
> To have one show worse than the king's and his company. (5.2.506-508).

The text regularly insists on the motif of the face, from the very beginning of the play when Jaquenetta expresses her skepticism to Armado who claims he will tell her "wonders" by exclaiming: "With that face?" (1.2.113-114), to Boyet's referring to Navarre's "face's own

margin" (2.1.242) which is like a book that betrays his love, to the shaming sequence when the King notes how his fellowmen "did blush" (4.3.130). It is in the final sequences of act 5 that the face is most emphasized, precisely because the characters lose face, one after the other. First the Muscovites are unmasked, which leads to the women's mockery expressed in Berowne's words:

> Can any face of brass hold longer out?
> Here stand I, lady; dart thy skill at me.
> Bruise me with scorn, confound me with a flout,
> Thrust thy sharp wit quite through my ignorance,
> Cut me to pieces with thy keen conceit, (5.2.395-399).

The battle with the ladies leaves the men, especially Berowne, "out of countenance quite" (5.2.272). According to Boyet, the Lords will never "digest this harsh indignity" (5.2.289), they are "lame with blows" (5.2.292), an expression that clearly shows the effect of mockery and points to what Judith Butler calls "linguistic vulnerability" in *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative* (1997). As Boyet says:

> The tongues of mocking wenches are as keen
> As is the razor's edge invisible,
> […] Their conceits have wings
> Fleeter than arrows, bullets, wind, thought, swifter things. (5.2.256-261)

The Lords are "dry-beaten with pure scoff" (5.2.263). Thus mockery leads to losing face and losing the fame Navarre was aiming at in the opening lines of the play. After these two shaming sequences, the eavesdropping scene and the Muscovites' scene, the Pageant of the Nine Worthies, with its defects, is an easy target for the lords to restore their self-image. The actors' distress is expressed in terms of faces too, especially in the following exchange between Holofernes and the Lords:

> Holofernes: I will not be put out of countenance.
> Berowne: Because thou hast no face.
> Holofernes: What is this?
> Boyet: A cittern-head.
> Dumaine: The head of a bodkin.

Berowne: A death's face in a ring.
Longaville: The face of an old Roman coin, scarce seen.
Boyet: The pommel of Caesar's falchion.
Dumaine: The carved-bone face on a flask.
Berowne: Saint George's half-cheek in a brooch.
Dumaine: Ay, and in a brooch of lead.
Berowne: Ay, and worn in the cap of a tooth-drawer. And now forward, for we have put thee in countenance.
Holofernes: You have put me out of countenance.
Berowne: False. We have given thee faces.
Holofernes: But you have outfaced them all. (5.2.592-608)

Face and offense are here tightly connected and we attend Holofernes's ironic loss of face as he is given too many faces. Mocking has the power to outface, that is to destroy the face, the name, the fame of the character. And outfacing the character means silencing him, as he then disappears after having just delivered a few words, like Moth who declares a little earlier that the ladies "Do not mark [him], and that brings [him] out" (5.2.173). A lot of faces get lost in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Even Armado who is said to "make faces" (5.2.626) while playing Hector loses his during a moment of merriment that illustrates the dark side of laughter.

"Stabbed with laughter"

While attending the fiasco of the episode of the Muscovites, Boyet exclaims: "O, I am stabbed with laughter!" (5.2.80). Here he expresses the mocker's point of view who is dying of laughter. But the mocker's words here may ironically point to the damaging power laughter can have on the other. The end of the story theorizes on the good and the bad side of laughter and delineates a kind of ethics of laughter.

In her book *Shakespeare and Laughter. A Cultural History*, Indira Ghose includes a section on laughter in *LLL*, in a chapter entitled "Courtliness and Laughter" (Ghose: 15-51). She rightly notes that "the characters are not only mocked by exposing their linguistic extravagance. They are further deflated by means of the formalized, stylized structure of the plot. Every scene with the courtiers is mirrored by parallel scenes with the subplot characters." (Ghose: 37). She mentions the "harassing" of the Worthies and notes that in 5.2 "The hostility between members of the elite is now deflected to scapegoat figures from the lower ranks of society" (Ghose: 41), a phenomenon that seems to perfectly reflect what can happen nowadays

on social networks. In this play, she notes, it is the ladies who have "the upper hand" (Ghose: 41). The battle is not as balanced as the mathematical distribution of parts seems to suggest. Thus it is not fortuitous that it should be the women who at the end write new rules for the men. And these new rules are based on a good usage of laughter which should generate "pleasure and not aggression" (Ghose: 43).

The end of the play tells us that laughter should no longer be "an instrument to exclude outsiders through mockery" (Ghose: 47). The Princess gives the men and our contemporaries a lesson in laughter, formulating what Indira Ghose has termed, in another essay, an "ethics of laughter" (Ghose 2014). Mocking is identified at the end of the play as a mortifying speech act while it should be restorative and re-creative. In her article on "Shakespeare and the Ethics of Laughter", Indira Ghose notes that there is a "darker side to laughter" (Ghose 2014: 56) and that "in the Renaissance, laughter continued to be equated with mockery" (Ghose 2014: 65). She quotes a passage from the *Traité du Ris* (*Treatise on Laughter*) by Laurent Joubert (1579) which, she notes, "recycles Aristotle's definition of the ridiculous". Joubert writes that "What we see that is ugly, deformed, improper, indecent, unfitting and indecorous excites laughter in us, provided we are not moved to compassion" (Joubert 1980: 20 apud Ghose 2014: 65),[5] emphasizing the gap or tension between laughter and compassion. Ghose distinguishes benevolent from malevolent laughter, noting that Shak "repeatedly calls the practice of humiliation through laughter into question" (Ghose 2014: 65-66).

Rosaline at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* puts into question the practice of jesting. If the Nine Worthies, and especially Costard and Armado have been the Lords' sport, the Lords' love has also been a sport for the ladies, as appears when the Princess says they "met (their) loves/ In their own fashion, like a merriment" (5.2.758). Rosaline wants to come back to a benevolent use of jesting:

> Rosaline: Oft have I heard of you, my Lord Berowne,
> Before I saw you, and the world's large tongue
> Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks,
> Full of comparisons and wounding flouts,
> Which you on all estates will execute
> That lie within the mercy of your wit.
> […]
> to win me, if you please,
> […]

You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
Visit the speechless sick and still converse
With groaning wretches; and your task shall be,
With all the fierce endeavor of your wit
To enforce the pained impotent to smile.
Berowne: To move wild laughter in the throat of death?
It cannot be, it is impossible:
Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.
Rosaline: Why, that's the way to choke a gibing spirit,
Whose influence is begot of that loose grace
Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools.
A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it. Then, if sickly ears,
Deafed with the clamours of their own dear groans,
Will hear your idle scorns, continue then,
And I will have you and that fault withal;
But if they will not, throw away that spirit,
And I shall find you empty of that fault,
Right joyful of your reformation. (5.2.809-837)

The end of the play tells us that laughter or mirth making[6] should no longer be "an instrument to exclude outsiders through mockery" (Ghose: 47). Rosaline at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* advocates a benevolent use of jesting, when she asks Berowne to put his sharp wit to the service of "the speechless sick" (5.2.819). In fact, by excluding what Ghose calls "derisive and punitive laughter" (Ghose 2014: 66), she reformulates what Holofernes expressed in simple words: be "generous", "gentle", "humble" (5.2.614).

Making faces, blushing, laughing: you can read crisis in the book of faces. We hope that this quick paper has shown how relevant *LLL* is to understand a culture of LOL. Collective abuse, jesting that turns into insults, the exposure of one's private life, the traumatic experience of offensive words, the malevolent effect of laughter, all these facets that are present in *LLL* speak to us nowadays. This comedy shows that behind a wonderful façade, behind Navarre, the "wonder of the world" (1.1.11), there is a mortifying use of the tongue which disfigures and

defaces. No wonder the play should end on the song of the owl and the cuckoo, two birds that are associated with ill omen and mockery:

> The cuckoo then on every tree
> Mocks married men; for thus sings he:
> "Cuckoo
> "Cuckoo, cuckoo! O word of fear
> Unpleasing to a married ear. (5.2.863-8§7)

"Tu Whit, to who", "Tu Whit, to who" (5.2.883; 892): to quote the last words of the play, the words of Mercury, the messenger, the "twitter", are harsh indeed. It's up to us and the world of Navarre to make them more "gentle".

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[2] All references are to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. William C. Carroll, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2009.
[3] *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori, Arden, 2000.
[4] On shame in *Love's Labour's Lost*, see also Jane Kingsley-Smith, "Aristotelian Shame and Christian Mortification in *Love's Labour's Lost*", in Patrick Gray and John D. Cox (ed.), *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 76-97.
[5] Laurent Joubert, *Traité du Ris*, Paris, 1579, p. 16: "Ce que nous voyons de laid, difforme, des-honneste, indessant, mal-seant, & peu convenable, excite an nous le ris, pourveu que nous n'an soyons meus à compassion."
[6] On the early modern culture of jesting, see Chris Holcomb, *The Rhetorical Discourse on Jesting in Early Modern England*, Columbia, SC, U of South Carolina P, 2001.

From a Corrupt Eden to Bio-power: War and Nature in the Henriad[1]

Martin Prochazka, Univerzita Karlova

In the Henriad, nature and war coexist and their closeness implies deep changes of their conventional understanding. Representations of nature in Shakespeare's mature works differ from those in the works of his predecessors and contemporaries. A crucial distinction is the absence of a Neoplatonic perspective, which informs the works of Edmund Spenser (Waller, 1994: 76-77) and considerably influences also those of other early modern poets, such as Michael Drayton (Ewell, 1983: 515-525), Sir Philip Sidney (Sinfield 1980: 29) or Ben Jonson (Sanders 2010: 33-34; 324-325).

Just one example out of many: in the fragmentary seventh book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, nature is the origin and principle of the cosmic order (called "*Natures* Sergeant" 7.7.4)[2] and the source of its laws. Although it is almost identified with God ("God of Nature" 7.6.35) and His omnipotence ("all, both heauenly Powers, & earthly wights, / Before great Natures presence should appeare" 7.6.36; "Nature *soone / her righteous Doome arades* 7.7.0), her identity is based on paradoxes ("Great *Nature*, euer young yet full of eld,/ Still moouing, yet vnmoued from her sted; / Vnseene of any, yet of all beheld 7.7.13) and her personification transcends the differences of gender and sex ("Yet certes by her face and physnomy, / Whether she man or woman inly were, / That could not any creature well descry" 7.7.5). As a result, sovereign Nature can graciously tolerate "Mutability," but only as a power helping individual beings on their way to heavenly perfection. Anticipating Hegel's theodicy, Book VII of *The Faerie Queene* represents change in nature as a mere temporary alienation from primeval perfection which must be later overcome by the return of individual beings to their eternal, unchangeable identities ("They are not changed from their first estate; / But by their change

their being doe dilate: / And turning to themselues at length againe, / […] / […] they raigne ouer change, and doe their states maintaine" 7.7.58).

In contrast to this discourse relating nature permanently to its divine origin, the representation of nature in the Henriad is subject to "the revolution of the times," in the course of which "chance's mocks / And changes fill the cup of alteration / With divers liquors" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.1, 45, 51-2).[3] Anticipating theories of chaos, this representation emphasizes fortuitous temporality pervading nature seen as a universal process, which, envisaged in human dimensions, acquires a deterministic character. Warwick's "history in all men's lives" can be grasped as a cumulative representation of the past, a set of diverse temporal processes and events ("Figuring the natures of the times deceas'd;"), whose respectful understanding ("The which observed") can reveal future potentialities of historical development based on general probability – "the main chance of things / As yet not come to life, who in their seeds / And weak beginnings lie intreasured" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.1.75-80).[4] Even though the passage may draw on Renaissance typology, where the past events prefigure the future ones, it completely abstracts from the metaphysical framework of this typology, the Divine Providence. The book which King Henry longs to read is neither the Scripture, nor even the Book of Nature, but "the book of fate" (3.1.44).

The probabilistic as well as determinist framework of universal "history" in *2 Henry IV* informs the representations of nature in the whole Henriad. These are characterized by the growth of their pragmatic character: the shift from Nature as an ideal, which is the source of perfection as well as the objective of all existence, to nature as a power which has to be controlled and exploited for political and military purposes.

In *Richard II* nature is identified with the symbolic authority and "the body politic"[5] of the monarch ("This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle" *Richard II*, 2.1.40), yet this

"body politic" is no longer "a theological idea" (Kantorowicz, 1957: 8ff). It is a presented as a fiction to be unravelled in the course of the play. As Victoria Kahn points out: "Kantorowicz appears more interested in the way Shakespeare imaginatively anticipated the unraveling of the fiction of the king's two bodies" especially in the moment when "the fiction of the oneness of the [fictive] body breaks apart" (Kahn 2009: 86; Kantorovicz 1957: 31)[6] The "duplications" characteristic of the "two bodies of the king" also influence the verbal aspects of the representation of nature: "This fortress built *by nature for itself*" (2.1.43; emphasis added) and its cognates: "This *royal* throne of *kings* (…) /(…) / This *other* Eden" (2.1.40, 42; emphasis added). In this way, seemingly equivalent or "adequate"[7] notions are played "off against each other," confused or balanced again (Kantorowicz, *idem*: 25-26). As a result, Platonic and Aristotelian principles of mimesis are unsettled and "the idea of a legislator" shifts "from the imitator of nature to the creator of laws ex nihilo" (Kahn, *idem*: 87). The last changes mentioned had in most cases led to the glorification of poets and affirmation of the independence of their creation, often called "second nature."[8]

These features, however, do not characterize the representations of nature in *Richard II*. Here, nature as the corrupt "Eden" (2.1.42; "now bound with shame" 3.1.63) and the representation of the gradual loss of Richard's royal power ("the blushing discontented sun" shaded by "the envious clouds" 3.1.62, 64) is replaced by the allegory of a "garden (…) full of weeds" (3.4.44-45), which can no longer represent good government as a model[9] ("Showing as in a model our firm estate" 3.4.42).

Although John of Gaunt still believes that nature's "fortress" can protect "against infection and the hand of war" (2.1.43, 44), war evidently prevails, being identified with a disease, an "infection" (2.1.44) wasting the body politic, caused by the corruption of the king and his advisors. In this way, nature can no longer serve as a bond between the "two bodies of

the king." And since the "body politic" of the king can no longer be represented as the actual location of power, political theology itself has to be transformed by means of fiction, whose "usefulness" consists precisely in dislocating power "from one particular place and one particular body" (Kahn, *idem*: 95).

Anticipated by Kantorowicz, this solution is discussed at some length by Claude Lefort, who suggests that "democracy" is the only form of government representing power as "an *empty place*" and thus maintaining "a gap between the symbolic and the real," in order to show

> that power belongs to no one; that those who exercise power do not possess it; that they do not, indeed, embody it; that the exercise of power requires a periodic and repeated contest; that the authority of those vested with power is created and re-created as a result of the manifestation of the will of the people (Lefort, 1988: 225).

Lefort has also shown that this condition is not new but rather results from a process common to all changes of the representations of political and social power, namely the transfer "from one register to another (…) intended to ensure the preservation of a *form* which has since been abolished" (*idem*, 255). This, among others, implies two rather fatal flaws of democracy: First, the reactivation of the religious fiction, whose "efficacy is no longer symbolic but imaginary, (…) at the weak points of the social" (*ibidem*), where it can generate violent symbolic practices, such as those typical of nationalism or racism. Secondly, this internal instability of democracy appears to be, in Lefort's words, "the unavoidable – and no doubt ontological – difficulty democracy has in reading its own story" (*ibidem*) leading to the fundamental weakness of its political ideologies, where the notions like "n/Nature," or "the people" lose their meaning and performative power. It can almost be said that the ominous

aspect of Lefort's approach consists in his effort to re-establish the "Theologico-Political" as an underlying pattern of all forms of government. In this way, the essential vulnerability of democracy and the imminence of civil war may almost appear as a 'natural' feature of somehow absurdly repeating history, where "falseness" and corruption grow to demand a radical response,[10] "the inward [i.e., civil] wars" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.1.102), as King Henry fears.

In the introductory monologue of the king in *1 Henry IV* the link between nature and war becomes imminent and threatening. "The other Eden" invoked by John of Gaunt (*Richard II* 2.1.42) is not only corrupted, but also destroyed. Personified by a disfigured female body or face, where the mouth is as a mere opening gorged with blood[11] ("No more the thirsty entrance of this soil / Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood" *1 Henry IV* 1.1.5-6), the land is drained ("channelled"1.1.7) and mutilated by "trenching war" (1.1.7).[12] The polarization of the body politic reaches down to the level of strife between individuals ("Those opposèd eyes" 1.1.9). As a consequence, the body politic is no longer that of the king but of the nation, and its near destruction is associated with a cosmic disaster ("like the meteors of a troubled heaven /All of one nature, one substance bred / Did lately meet in the intestine shock" 1.1.10-12). The last line of the passage represents the violence of civil wars by means of the image of a fierce hand-to-hand combat ("furious close of civil butchery" 1.10.13). The metaphor of war as "infection" in *Richard II* (2.1.44) is intensified in *1 Henry IV*: the birth of one of the rebel leaders and the representative of the exotic, 'barbaric' and demonized culture, the Welsh king Owain Glyndŵr, is described as a violent outbreak ("eruption") of disease ("Diseasèd nature oftentimes breaks forth / In strange eruptions" 3.1.25-26). Despite all effort to rectify the stereotyping of Wales and the Welsh in 3.1, the threat of acculturation (Howard, 1997: 1149), is looming large over the civil war in *1 Henry IV* and intensifies its catastrophic representations.

The imagery of war as a disease inaugurates also the scenes of the battle of Shrewsbury ("The day looks pale / At his distemp'rature." 5.1.2-3). Metaphors of the disturbance of cosmic order are repeated in the exchange of the King and Prince Harry with the Earl of Worcester, one of the leaders of the rebels. The metaphorical image of the Earl represents him (and – synecdochically – the whole rebellion) as a star, which was moving "in [an] obedient orb" and giving "a fair and natural light" but has turned into "an exhaled meteor, / A prodigy of fear, and a portent / Of broachèd mischief to the unborn times" (5.1.16-21). This parallel between the disintegration of the body politic and the disruption of the macrocosmic order is extended beyond the limits of the present and near future. War represented as a cosmic disorder becomes a powerful omen of evil haunting "the unborn times."

The representation of war is further monumentalized in Hotspur's speech to his allies which uses the words "instruments," "embrace" and "courtesy" as syllepses, meaning both "musical instruments" and "weapons"; "friendly hug" and "grip in a close man-to-man fight"; "graciousness" and "chivalrous combat"; and ascribes them a cosmic ("heaven to earth") dimension: "Sound all the lofty instruments of war, / And by that music let us all embrace, / For, heaven to earth, some of us never shall / A second time do such a courtesy" (5.2.97-100). In this way, war becomes an ironical and perverted version of a cosmic dance, which at the beginning of *2 Henry IV* changes into a *danse macabre* in Northumberland's eschatological tirade:

> Let heaven kiss earth! Now let not nature's hand
>
> Keep the wild flood confined! Let order die!
>
> And let this world no longer be a stage
>
> To feed contention in a ling'ring act;
>
> But let one spirit of the first-born Cain

Reign in all bosoms, that each heart being set

On bloody courses, the rude scene may end,

And darkness be the burier of the dead!

(*2 Henry IV*, 1.1.153-60)

This over-inflated image of civil war as the self-destruction of nature, order, representation ("And let this world no longer be a stage") and the body politic can be read as a coda of a specific history of representing based on the disintegration of the King's body politic and its transformation into the collective body of the nation. As Jean Howard has shown, further development of this representation will require "a complex illusion of temporal simultaneity" (*idem*, 1149). This is also in keeping with Benedict Anderson's definition of nation as an "imagined community" (1991: 6).[13]

The emergence of Falstaff in this catastrophic situation does not merely represent the debasement of the unity of the humans with nature symbolised by the "grotesque body," the main agency of the "carnivalesque" which, according to Bakhtin, "is not separated from the rest of the world," and in which "the cosmic, social and bodily elements are given (…) as an indivisible whole" (Bakhtin, 1984: 19).[14] Beyond this symbolic function, Falstaff represents the alienation of common humanity from the unity of nature, when he denies its authority, seeing "no reason in the law of nature" (*2 Henry IV* 3.2.297) and valuing nature (and "time") only as random processes and opportunities for aggressive or calculating behaviour.[15]

At the end of the second part of *Henry IV*, nature is identified with death. When the king dies, "He's walked the way of nature" opposed to "our purposes" ("and to our purposes he lives no more"), as Warwick dryly states (5.2.4). In other words, the body politic is no longer represented by the body of the king, but defined by the "purposes" of the powerful, or rather, the strategic nature of power. A similar feature characterizes Falstaff's influence on Prince Hal.

Falstaff's passionate entreaty, which identifies his obese body with the collective "grotesque body" of the carnival, "Banish plump Jack and banish all the world" (*2 Henry IV*, 2.5.439), is treated by Hal with ironic humour ("I do, I will" 2.5.439), which undermines the carnivalesque subversion of the preceding parodic game.

It can be said that the influence of Falstaff and his companions engenders Hal's pragmatic, strategic approach to politics: "Redeeming time, when men think least I will" (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2.195). Hal comes to understand fairly soon that an efficient political action cannot be based on political theology but draws from an unscrupulous, even criminal, use of "political technology" (Foucault, 1982: 780). He can "offend to make offence a skill" (1.2.194).

When Hal is enthroned and leads the nation into an aggressive war, his actions acquire the features of modern political technologies leading to genocide in later centuries (Foucault, 1978: 137).[16] When he talks in disguise to his soldiers, Williams and Bates, about justice and war, he denies his responsibility for the deaths of soldiers in his military campaign, comparing his subjects to potential criminals:

> Besides, there is no king, be his cause never so spotless, if it comes to the arbitrament of swords, can try it out, with all unspotted soldiers. Some, peradventure, have on them the guilt of premeditated and contrived murder; some of beguiling virgins with the broken seals of perjury; some making wars their bulwark, that have before gorged the gentle bosom of peace with pillage and robbery. Now, if these men have defeated the law and outrun native punishment, though they can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God. War is his beadle. War is his vengeance. So that here men are punished for *before-breach of King's laws*, in now the King's quarrel.
> (*Henry V*, 4.1.149-60, emphasis added)

Taking war as a just, though extra-legal, punishment for the potential or undetected crimes committed by his subjects, King Harry subscribes to modern strategy, not yet of the

circulation of power in the network and "network-centric warfare" (Reid, 2003: 7), but to the "strategical model" of power, which has supplanted "the model based on law" (Foucault, 1978: 102; Reid, *idem*, 13), whose representation was also the body politic of the king. In modernity, wars are not waged for the preservation of the king, but, as Foucault points out, "on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity" (Foucault, *idem*, 137): in the latter plays of the Henriad this takes the form of overcoming the threat of civil war. War also becomes an efficient means of policing the population, or in Foucault's terms, managing the "bio-power" (*idem*, 140ff). Seen in this context, King Harry's strategies anticipate the ominous dictum of Carl von Clausewitz: "War is the continuation of *Politik* by other means," where the German word "*Politik*" means both "politics" and "policy," the latter meaning government control of the population (Foucault, 1988: 158-159).[17] As a result, the existence, which is at stake in modern wars, "is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty" but "the biological existence of a population" (Foucault, 1978: 137).

It is important not to confuse this condition with that of the totalitarian state. As King Harry says, "Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own" (*Henry V* 4.1.164-65), articulating the position of the individual in a *liberal society* characterized by the responsibility towards the law combined with the freedom of choice. While the first one becomes increasingly problematic (as in Kafka's parable "Before the Law"), the second one is all the more restricted by the allegedly free market.

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[2] All quotations are from Spenser (1995) with emphases added. Numbers of book, cantos and stanzas are in brackets in the text.

[3] All quotes from Shakespeare follow Shakespeare (1997). Abbreviated titles of plays and numbers of acts, scenes and lines are in parentheses in the text.

[4] King Henry's and Warwick's speeches may be said to anticipate the main aspects of recent definitions of chaos: "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" ("the main chance of things / As yet not come to life, who in their seeds / And weak beginnings lie intreasured"), "topological mixing" ("Make […] the continent, / Weary of solid firmness, melt itself / Into the sea" 3.1.46-48) and a number of "dense periodic orbits" ("Figuring the natures of the times deceased"). For mathematical definitions of these aspects see Hasselblatt and Katok (2003: 209-210).

[5] Ernst H. Kantorowicz has identified the source of this representation in Edmund Plowden's transformation of the abstract legal concept of Sir John Fortescue. According to Plowden, "the Body politic includes the [king's] Body natural … [and] these two bodies are incorporated in one person" (Kantorowicz, 1957: 9).

[6] Kahn has also demonstrated Kantorowicz's interest in the "duplications" revealed in the central scenes of *Richard II*: "The duplications [are] (…) all one and all simultaneously active in Richard: 'Thus play I in one person, many people' (5.5.31) (…). Moreover, in each one of those three scenes we encounter the same cascading: from divine kingship to kingship's 'Name' and from the name to the naked misery of man" (Kantorowicz, *idem*, 27).

[7] On mimesis as "*adequatio*" ("the measured quality of proportion to a model" – Hobson, 2001: 138) see Derrida (1981: 219).

[8] "It is therefore of Poets thus to be conceiued, that if they be able to deuise and make all these things of them selues, without any subiect of veritie, that they be (by manner of speech) as creating gods" (Puttenham, 1904: 2). "[T]he artist is a God-like creator of a second nature" (Abrams, 1971: 274).

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[9] "The common-sense relationship between a model and its copy, which is one of cause and priority, is disturbed." This "mime" (Derrida uses Mallarmé's "Mimique") "delivers activity which is reduplication without origin" (Hobson, *idem*, 136). In this way, "law and form" are no longer "in a due proportion" (*Richard II* 3.4.42). However, as Derrida shows in *The Truth in Painting*, the word "model" can also function as a "fetish," that is, as a replacement for something banned or taboo (Hobson, *idem*, 141). In *Richard II*, the "unweeded garden," whose "herbs," are "swarming with caterpillars" cannot present the unity of the "two bodies of the king" and the representation of truth as *adequatio* becomes impossible.

[10] See Warwick's speech in *2 Henry IV*, 3.1.81-87: "Such things become the hatch and brood of time; / And by the necessary form of this / King Richard might create a perfect guess / That great Northumberland, then false to him, / Would of that seed grow to a greater falseness, / Which should not find a ground to root upon, / Unless on you." In terms of political theology, the fortuitous, chaotic process of history, "the hatch and brood of time" (see above) is represented not only as "necessities" (3.1.87), but also as ongoing corruption ("grow to greater falseness"3.1.85) which must be stopped by force.

[11] The ambiguity of the personification derives from the violence of disfiguration which obscures the difference between the face and other body parts.

[12] The word "trench" has been used in its modern military meaning since 1500 and appears frequently in Shakespeare. The original etymology of the verb "to trench" is to maim, mutilate, cut off (*Online Etymology Dictionary*).

[13] Instead of imagining the community in a temporal simultaneity ("along time" as Benedict Anderson has it), which includes both the mythical time and the cycles of growth and cultivation (the gardening and planting metaphors as a model for good government in *Richard II* 3.4.), the country is seen in a "transverse, cross-time" simultaneity, "marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence" (*idem*, 24-25). Anderson has pointed out that religious communities, including monarchies based on the authority of sacred kingship, are not imagined at certain historical moments but always with respect to the whole course (and end) of time represented in their sacred texts. Every historical moment is simultaneously a moment in the totality of mythical time, which accounts for the spiritual authority of individuals (priests, kings). The links between individual moments are meaningful only because of this mythical time, providential or sacred history.

[14] "The material bodily principle in grotesque realism is offered in its all popular and festive aspect. The cosmic, social and bodily elements are given here as an indivisible whole. And this whole is gay and gracious (…) contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world" (Bakhtin, *idem*, 26).

[15] "Let time shape, and there an end" (*2 Henry IV* 3.2.298).

[16] "If genocide is indeed the dream of modern power, this is not because of the recent return to the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of the population" (*ibidem*).

[17] Foucault draws on the work of Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717-71), *Grundsätze der Polizeywissenschaft* (*Elements of Police*, 1756), which distinguishes *Politik*, dealing with the internal and external enemies of the state, and *Polizei* as the employment of measures improving the quality of citizen's life. Clausewitz does not make this distinction, using the term *Staatspolitik* which incorporates both meanings (Clausewitz, 1832-34: xi).

Crises of Our Time in Song of the Goat Theatre's *Island*

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Introduction

In the programme of Song of the Goat Theatre's *Island* we read that the performance has been inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Indeed, *Island* is not an adaptation of the play, but an independent theatrical project whose links with the Shakespearean romance are, at the same time, easily traceable and deliberately loose. Rather than offering a modern interpretation of the early modern play, Grzegorz Bral's ensemble uses references to *The Tempest* to establish a mental and emotional frame for their highly idiosyncratic contemplation on the condition of man in today's world. Their method is, aptly, similar to the trial Prospero devises for his wrongdoers – the tempest as a total experience. It consists in submerging the audience in a syncretic and synesthetic theatrical event which activates several channels of perception and enables a diagnosis and interpretation of our time's crises on many different levels. This immersive quality has been notices by many reviewers, one of them suggestively describing the production as a "sculpture of vibrating air," and a "tempest of breaths and gestures" which sets the whole theatrical space in motion:

> Everything around the Island is swaying. We are observing inflows and outflows – after the introduction the dominating energy is that of the polyphonic singing, then our bodies are hit by the wave of the air moved by the dance. Again. And again. (Pułka, 2016)

The visual and musical layer of the performance is irresistible, even hypnotic. What stays in the viewer's memory are the overwhelmingly impressive movements of the dancers, the once dynamic, once frozen images their bodies form with unbelievable acrobatic

skilfulness, and the powerful music of the songs. The verbal layer, on the other hand, does not get through easily in such density of non-verbal elements. This is mostly due to Bral's overall approach "characterised by a refusal to compromise with the idea that the text, or the story, is the most important element of performance" (Sakowska, 2014: 48). As a typical representative of what has been described as postdramatic theatre (Lehmann, 2006), he is not interested in developing characters or telling plots, but rather in creating for the viewers a sensory experience. Having this in mind, my purpose in this article is, nevertheless, to analyse the production's libretto in order to inspect the nature and function of the Shakespearean inspirations integrated in the performance. The nature of this integration is perhaps best illustrated with reference to Lehmann's definition of the performance text:

> The linguistic material and the texture of the staging interact with the theatrical situation, understood comprehensively by the concept 'performance text'. (…) Consequently the significance of all individual elements ultimately depends on the way the whole is viewed, rather than constituting this overall effect as a sum of the individual parts. Hence, for postdramatic theatre it holds true that the written and/or verbal text transferred onto theatre, as well as the 'text' of the staging understood in the widest sense (including the performers, their 'paralinguistic' additions, reductions or deformations of the linguistic material; costumes, lighting, space, peculiar temporality, etc.) are all cast into a new light through a changed conception of the performance text. (…) it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information. (*idem*, 85)

Before "the linguistic material" of Bral's *Island* is presented, it is necessary to provide some insight into Song of the Goat Theatre's specificity.

Song of the Goat Theatre and their Method

Established in 1996 by Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycka, Teatr Pieśń Kozła [Song of the Goat Theatre] is nowadays recognized as one of Europe's most significant training-based theatre ensembles. Its name – alluding to the etymology of the Greek *tragōidia*, and commemorating the group's first production based on Euripides' *The Bacchantes – Pieśń Kozła. Dytyramb* of 1997 – indicates their fascination with ancient theatre. A distinctive feature of their practice and training is the integration of movement, voice, song, live music and text, which results in performances based on rhythmicality and musicality. Bral's artistic manifesto flows from his conviction that tragedy has its roots in the spirit of music. It is also in line with the postdramatic concept of the auditory semiotics, i.e. the view that "the intrinsic musicality of the text is as important as its dramatic content, and in many cases even more important" (Bouko, 2009: 28). Bral's theatre aims at affecting the viewers' senses holistically which is fostered by the performances' multi-mediality, in *Island* exemplified by exploration of various forms of stage expression, including dance, opera, pantomime, ethno-performance and elements of shadow theatre (Kowalski, 2017). While Bral repeatedly underlines his striving for connection and openness as the root of authentic theatrical experience, the effect of the synesthetic appeal is well illustrated by the following response to the group's 2012 "Songs of Lear":

> This is essence of *Lear*, desiccated and condensed; sensed rather than watched and absorbed until it hasn't just got under your skin, but right into your bone marrow. For the half hour that followed, I was static electricity, too knock-kneed to stand. It is a full-body detox; catharsis pure and simple and transcendent. (Trueman, 2012)

Song of the Goat Theatre's daily training goes beyond traditional acting techniques to include physical and musical exercises. They function as a laboratory theatre in the tradition of

Grotowski, in which the training and the performances are treated integrally as an ongoing creative process, open to discoveries and ready to employ new techniques and means of stage expression. An important part of the actors' work includes anthropological and ethnomusicological research conducted through various multicultural projects, which include travelling and seeking contact with local practitioners and preservers of ancient indigenous traditions that are dying out, as was the case with the hugely successful Scottish project "Return to the Voice" of 2014. Bral explains that his techniques are rooted in an understanding that true acting is born from a particular way of being, with every culture having its own way of performing. His Theatre does not limit itself to including traditional Georgian, Albanian, Russian and Greek texts and tunes. The cultural openness is also visible in its cast, half of which consists of actors from various places of the world, as well as in its cooperation with international, often multicultural, groups and ensembles. In *Island* the director enriched his stage movement method by including the modern dance ensemble led by Ivan Perez, a Spanish choreographer working in the Netherlands.

Linked to the Theatre's methods and interests is their role, since 2005, as organisers of the Brave Festival, an international event which offers an overview of cultures, traditions and rites which are on the verge of extinction. Recognised by its meaningful subtitle, "Against Cultural Exile," this festival brings together people from all over the world who, through their art, save forgotten, abandoned or otherwise neglected cultures. Bral's idea, as initiator and artistic director, was to create a space to show authentic art, cultivated and maintained by participants of communities living in unfavourable social, religious and political conditions, or which are endangered with a loss of their own culture for the benefit of civilizational assimilation. Four years later, the festival developed a branch focused on children, *Brave Kids*, the special mission of which is to teach children respect for other cultures and inspire them by

means of artistic experiences to strive for a better future for themselves and the communities they represent. The festival's most recent extension is *Brave Together*, which fosters integration of people with and without disabilities, using different artistic tools to help the participants find a common language. The *Brave Festival* supports underprivileged children and orphans from the poorest regions of the worlds donating the proceeds from tickets to the ROKPA charity organization.

Yet another integral part of Song of the Goat Theatre is pedagogical work, in which they propagate their technique called "Acting Coordination Method". In the years 2004-2012 they created, together with Manchester Metropolitan University, an MA acting programme, which from 2013 has been offered in cooperation with Bral School of Acting in London. Acting Coordination Method is an original practice based on the integration of all the acting tools, including text, voice, energy, movement into one common and organic unity, which enables the actors to explore the flow between song and word, rhythm and gesture, sound and character.[1]

For almost a decade now the group's repertoire has included productions in various ways related to Shakespeare's plays. These performances belong to some of their most successful projects, acclaimed and rewarded worldwide. The first was *Macbeth*, featuring a multinational cast and prepared in cooperation with the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2010. Two years later *Songs of Lear* followed, which was awarded the Scotsman Fringe First, the Herald Archangel, as well as the Musical Theatre Matters Award during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2012. *Crazy God* inspired by *Hamlet* was first performed in July 2016, followed by *Hamlet. A Commentary*, which premiered in July 2017. In the meantime, *Island* was first performed in December 2016. In all these productions the Theatre typically interweaves text with choral singing, meticulously choreographed movement and live music. The effect is stunning and appreciated by audiences and reviewers.

Everyone is an Island: Analysis of the Libretto

Island offers a multi-layered theatrical mediation on the human condition created from songs, music and tightly orchestrated stage movement. The whole performance consists of fifteen pieces, both with and without lyrics. Most of the texts were written by Alicja Bral, while four texts quote lines from Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aristophanes' *Birds*. Such "palimpsestuous intertextuality," frequent in postdramatic theatre (Jürs-Munby, 2006: 8), is a characteristic feature of Bral's other projects as well, but *The Tempest* – with its fragmentariness and sketchiness[2] – lends itself to such a treatment perhaps more readily than other plays by Shakespeare. The other feature of the play which may have inspired the creators of *Island* to rewrite it into a series of songs is the importance of music and, more generally, sound. This aspect is highlighted in the music of Ariel's songs – the "sweet air" (1.2.396),[33] the "ditty" that Ferdinand rightly assumes must be "no mortal business, nor no sound / That the earth owes" (1.2.408-410) – and the "heavenly music" (5.1.52) of Prospero's magic. As Prospero's "isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight (3.2.133-4), so is Bral's "Island." The performance's music, mostly written by Jean-Claude Acquaviva and Maciej Rychły, contains inspirations from traditional Georgian and Greek tunes. As for the language of the songs, *Island* has been performed in English, with the opening poem, recited as the prologue, in some performances spoken in Polish. The printed version of the libretto, from which I am quoting, is bi-lingual.

The songs' titles mention several characters from *The Tempest*: Prospero, Ariel, Miranda, the Monster. In the "Introduction" printed in the programme the titular Island is described as the mind of Prospero, a lonely aging man, imprisoned by his own unfulfilled desires, obsessions and longings. He creates all the characters that surround him, and he is all

of them at the same time. While the tempest exists only in Prospero's head, his imagination is poetic and magnetic, his narrative illogical, yet suggestive, and his story not easy to follow and describe ("Island…," 10).[4] The "Introduction" suggests that the production focuses on Prospero, but an analysis of the songs reveals that Prospero is not the only, not even the main, persona in the libretto. In the prologue "the identity of the speaking voice is never revealed, so we ponder whether it can be that of Caliban (…), or of Ferdinand (…) or of any one of us, human wrecks who need an encounter with life-preserving magic" (Bottez, 2017). In most of the other texts the speakers are of equally blurred identity. The speaker of the prologue poem, entitled *Prospero*, seems to be outside the island-prison. I read it as Miranda's relation of her, apparently coincidental, meeting with the magician: "I met him in late autumn" (16). Formally, the text alternates between Miranda's report and Prospero's words as she remembers them, printed in bold type. Neither Prospero nor Miranda are identified until line thirteen, where Prospero introduces himself in direct speech: "I am Prospero, the King. I have Ariel and Caliban at my service. / I know man with his madness and love. Everything is in the Books /and it serves me, Miranda" (16). The opening lines highlight Miranda's wretched state at the moment of the meeting: "I was despaired. / Pain would stick to my soul, like leaves to the wet ground. / I had no idea who I'd become. The world had no reason" (16). While we have much access to Miranda's inner suffering, Prospero presented to us, as she sees him, is an old body without the spirit: "his soul was absent. / An aged man with a body like a cracked pine. / Only eyes – an island amid deep loneliness. / His heart pulsated. / He survived. (…) He would put a magic coat on and sob" (16). The focus is on the physical: the body, the intense look of the eyes, his pulsating heart, the sobbing. Prospero, an old survivor, meets Miranda, a person of yet unshaped, or lost, identity, a shipwreck of her own life, who initially does not see any hope for survival.

Yet the second part of the song brings a change in Miranda's perception of Prospero. She remembers his tantalising eyes gazing at her as he was providing his explanation, "Nothing bad happened. Nothing bad. I did it for you, for you. / You don't know who you are yet," uttering his promise, "You shall not die," and formulating his powerful command: "Go beyond. Go to the other side of things, Miranda. (…) You will wake up there" (17). Once Prospero has revealed his identity and his plan towards Miranda, she describes him as a guardian of hope, "an old druid. /Wizard of the wind tied to his cell" (17), the one who has shown her how to endure. His words sound like a mission when he is commanding her to tear the pine and free Ariel as "[e]veryone must survive" (17). This part of the poem, as I see it, is the core of the prologue because it poses the production's most important question – Is there a hope for survival in the world of global violence and wars? It also explains the islands in "Island." "Each time he met me he revealed a piece of this reality," relates Miranda, "He called them islands" (17). Each of us may be a lonely island on the sea of desperation, but the main instinct is to survive, and the survival may only be spiritual, effectuated by tearing apart the "cracked pine" of the body and letting out Ariel. Such hopeful interpretation of the exposition seems to be strengthened by the ending of the prologue. We learn that Miranda's retrospective report is delivered after Prospero's "good death", that he "died in his cell – happy" (17). May we take this as a foreshadowing of a happy, or at least cathartic, ending of *Island*?

In the songs that follow we get some insight into the reasons for, and nature of Miranda's initial unhappiness and desperation, although in them Miranda is not the speaker anymore. The songs entitled "Last Breath," "My hands," "Night" and "Silence" differ from the opening poem in their much looser connections with *The Tempest*. In the prologue the links are explicit: names of the characters, references to the play's plot and to several famous lines. Alicja Bral clearly alludes in it to Shakespeare's text, but never uses it *verbatim*. Her method is to

paraphrase, but echoes of phrases like "There's no harm done" (1.2.15), "a cloven pine" (1.2.277) or "master of a full poor cell" (1.2.20) are easily recognisable. Thanks to the dialogic form of the first poem and its narrative character we are transported to a quasi-fantastical world governed by the magician-ruler: the "old druid," the "wizard." The other songs' common denominator is that they all bring us back to a reality easily recognised as today's world and that their speakers seem to be modern alter egos of Prospero, Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban.

In the "Last Breath" there is a first-person description of a body infected with violence and killing that are brought daily by the news: "The shell of my heart crushed / By the breaking news / drowned in the aggression / Which I drink every morning" (21). The "venom of unclear games" poisons the speaker's heart, while he breathes "the air polluted by cruelty" and chokes with the images brought by the media. Such permanent contact with atrocities, from which there is no escape, erases compassion, "My hands don't shake / When I watch killing" (21), and has a degrading effect on the senses: "I see nothing / Deaf is my ear" (21). The song closes with an image of the persona standing numb under the sky covered with clouds of the victims' dried eyes, while his last thought is a fearful question about the circumstances of his own death. The horrors of the surrounding reality contaminate life, cause emotional emptiness and make death the more frightening. In "My hands" the diagnosis of the bleak situation is completed by further elements. The speaker finds himself in a vicious circle of commercialised existence, in which the main force is the demand to live faster and faster in pursuit of prosperity. As conscience is constantly "invigilated by commercials," greed is "the most cruel prison / In which the prisoner and the guard are one" (26). In a world thus controlled by the rules of market, in which one is ready to sell "body, speech and heart," the speaker realises that his hands are, paradoxically, empty. This part of the song concludes with the speaker's bitter observation that estimating the price of his life is "the very essence of this blind solitude" (26). Yet the rest of the song brings

an unexpectedly hopeful turn. As the miserable state of "humanity deprived of tenderness" (26) resembles a bad dream, there is a chance of waking up and opening oneself to a change. The last two stanzas suggest that a way out of the hopeless emptiness might be possible through noticing the other: "I see you there," "We are the same /We breathe together (…) with the same love" (26). So perhaps compassion and tenderness can be recovered and the slavery of the profit-pursuing life can be overcome?

This feeble hope is crushed in the song entitled "Silence," which continues the plural form introduced by the final lines of "My hands." The progression from the single persona of "Last Breath" and "My hands" to the collective speaker in "Silence" reflects the fact that the process of degradation and dehumanisation is not limited to individuals, but corrodes whole societies. Of all the songs commented on so far, "Silence" reveals the most frustrated and desperate speaker, while the text contains some of the most graphic images. This is well illustrated by the opening lines, "Gagged with collective madness / False needs / We vomit with anger /And we eat it again" (36), and in the closing sections of the song: "Covered in furs of annihilation / We stuff our empty stomachs with slaughter (…) We are drowning in the swamp of artificial needs" (37). Some of the themes mentioned in the previous texts, like the pursuit of false needs, dependence on advertisement, or readiness to destroy others for the sake of profit, return with a double force. The main social concern, the most disconcerting result of the "collective madness" introduced here, is the corruption of law reflected in the image of criminals "changing paragraphs in order to hide their hands," so that "in the light of the well-constructed law / Profits [could be] weighted with the life of the victims" (36). The final, most damaging, result is spiritual. The song finishes with a grim conclusion: "Our hearts embedded with pride / Crushed the Spirit into silence" (37).

Apart from the opening poem, there are two more texts whose titles allude directly to *The Tempest*. "Monster" and "Ariel's Song" can be interpreted in the immediate context of the songs analysed above, as they extend and complement the themes of imprisonment, dependence, rejection, loneliness, longing and hopelessness which result from violence and/or spiritual estrangement. "They called me a monster / And my heart went silent (…) My rage is turned to whisper / My hopes are ruined" (50), complains the speaker. The addressee of the song "Monster" is a beloved with whom the speaker has been separated, or whom the speaker has lost, and longing for whom worsens the suffering caused by his captivity: "Your absence / Envelops me with the shadow of this prison" (51). The link between the branding inflicted on him by the unidentified enemies, "I can't bear this change they made" (50), and the state of imprisonment is not clear, but the song can be described as a pleading for reunification (with its repetitive requests and imperatives "Would you come back?", "Please take me there," "Hear me love"), which seems to be conditioned on the addressee seeing beyond the speaker's alleged monstrous identity, forced on him and, thus, false. The conflict suggested in this song has as its roots prejudice and/or hatred and as its effect – rejection, separation and loss of freedom. There are certain key words of the libretto that keep repeating in the songs, "Monster" included: ruins, corroded reality, solitude, prison. This song presents a figure of someone silenced by humiliation and suffering, whose "rage is turned to whisper" (50).

"Ariel's song" is a complaint which begins with the song's refrain – "I cannot choose to die. / I was given birth and I remain" (41). Ariel seems to be suffering from a different kind of imprisonment, one that consists in being suspended between life and death, perhaps forever. The endlessness of this state is highlighted with the repetition of the opening phrase in the closing line, as well as once in the middle of the text. Ariel's attitude to his/her creator is ambiguous, as is his/her condition of a creature unfinished, and therefore utterly dependent,

with an unripe identity, unable to decide about its fate: "I have not had enough time to create myself outside your / body—I tremble with bliss and fear," "I am a hostage of my unfulfilled dreams of grandeur," "I am falling," "I will not fall" (41). The creature is at the same time frightened, awe-stricken and grateful, while the full dependence on the creator seems to be the only imaginable way to go on living: "There is so much light within you— / It flows from your skin. / I want to cling to it and survive" (41). There is no way out of the state of being alive: "I remain / To live and breathe, to smell and remember" (41). This Ariel is not longing to hear the releasing command "to the elements / Be free (5.1.317-318) because it would mean annihilation.

The song "Night" stands out as perhaps the most topical and, at the same time, the most explicit, of all the texts written by Alicja Bral. It is also, in many ways, the most central to the director's idea of speaking about the problems of today's world with references to *The Tempest*. The opening stanza brings an image of a war survivor who has been deprived of everything he cherished and is left clenching a bullet in his fist. War has "shattered all [his] life's bonds" and "chained [his] will to revenge" as he "lost love in a sudden gust of hate" (31). He sees himself as a figure "collapsed into ashes, unable to rise" (31), left with nothing, but the readiness to kill and/or die. The second stanza extends this catalogue of the war's grim consequences to include exile, loneliness and loss of memory: "The winds of exile scatter my beliefs around this / cage of loneliness. / I try to reach memory, which is dispersed in tears" (31). As a result of the forced displacement, the speaker's integrity has been shattered, with the values and rules that governed his life before having lost their meaning and significance. Being separated from the formative core of his previous existence, i.e. from his past, has a destructive impact. In the subsequent stanza the negative effects of this violent separation and forceful transfer to a place which is a "cage of loneliness" manifest themselves in the speaker's impaired

physicality: his heart, "raped, beats without rhythm," and his eyes cannot see as he is crawling "blindly, in search for light" (31). But, most importantly, the disintegrating effect of war and exile is visible in the speaker's mind and psyche. He is disoriented, perceives the surrounding reality as chaotic and irrational, and feels deceived and abandoned by whatever guarding powers he used to believe in: "I beg for logic in this chaos. / You have deceived me, exiled god. / We have drowned on the way to the promised land – / My island does not exist" (31). Thus the song "Night" presents the darkest existential night of a person uprooted and displaced as a result of a military conflict, left at a loss and helpless, desperate and revengeful. The topicality of this song is highlighted in the penultimate line with the shift from the first person singular to the plural form "we," which changes the speaker into a representative of a group that has not been lucky enough to reach the refuge land. This is a Prospero without his island.

Theatre of the Capacious Metaphor

Apart from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Grzegorz Bral mentions another important source that had an inspiring influence on his *Island*. It is the drama of the shipwrecks presented on Theodore Gericault's 1819 *The Raft of the Medusa*, the gruesome story of the worst imaginable human behaviour in the situation of desperate fight for survival. The extreme emotions of the survivors maddened by mortal fear and the dead bodies scattered around the raft as depicted by the painter are easily associated both with the uproar on the board of Alonso's sinking vessel and with the desperate situation of today's refugees transported in overloaded boats and dying in coastal waters of the unwelcoming "promised lands." Bral wants his Prospero to be one of such survivors.

And yet the strength of his performance lies in the fact that it is much more than a comment on topical events.[5] Although it is inspired by the migration crisis – the acutest political

and social problem of the modern world – its appeal is more universal. This is achieved in two ways. One is that Bral's reading of *The Tempest* is existential rather than political. *Island* is not about the desire for power and about revenge, but about loneliness and death and, as such, it has been viewed by reviewers as "a contemporary treatise on man" (Szatkowska, 2017). As it "entangles the viewers in a dream about loneliness so desperate that no cleansing storm can be of any help" (Matuszewska, 2016), its message is rather grim: "as humanity we are still alive, breathing, and until it is so, there is some hope for the world plunged into loneliness, violence, maddening race and consumerism (…) but *Island* is, more than anything else, a lament" (Chojnowski, 2016). Maciej Rychły, the co-author of the music, commenting on the use of the old Greek and Georgian tunes, emphasizes the communal aspect of traditional music, its ability to interconnect people in mourning and loss, which is especially valuable in today's culture, when there is a tendency to eliminate sadness and lament from the public space (Szatkowska, 2017).

The other aspect that enhances the production's universality is Bral's method to reach the spectators' emotional sphere directly through metaphor. *Island* is contemporary in the very literal sense of the world, "not because of modern setting or costumes, but thanks to the directness of theatrical experience" (Pułka, 2016), the viewers being physically drawn into the swirl of movement and sound. One of the characteristic features of Brals' aesthetically refined theatre is simplicity of the means of expression. The actors, who wear "unflattering black jeans and turtlenecks, as if in a world of despair no body can be beautiful" (Bottez, 2017), are located in an empty space. Aurally, all is created by their voices. Visually, there are the actors' bodies on the dark floor, their shadows against the white walls, actors animating chairs and mirrors[6] which, activated with the use of lights, create overwhelmingly suggestive images – all of this is based on sparsity of tools. This minimalistic approach is also visible in Bral's libretto, "being

not a foundation, but rather a distant background for the dozen or so loosely linked music-kinaesthetic impressions" (Karow, 2017), in which the characters are but sketched and their situations hardly signalled by a few phrases. The characters are not engaged in a linear plotline but become frozen in a series of metaphors. "'Island' operates on the abstract plane and impacts directly on the emotional sphere. It is a total experience" (Werpachowska, 2017).

Conclusions

"I see Shakespeare as creator of the basic European myths. We have nothing stronger than this, his plays are the foundation of the most important European universals," says Grzegorz Bral (Olasz, 2016). Asked whether he wants his theatre to comment on current events, Bral observes that this happens automatically because each theatre operates within a specific context which generates references and associations. But he never forgets that the specific power of theatrical comment is metaphor. Alicja Bral's songs depict a drama of a person trapped in chaos, violence and loss of identity which cause loneliness in the world of wars, migration and consumerism, but the key feature of her libretto is flexibility and openness to a variety of readings. Inspiration is a broad notion, but I consider the vagueness in the title "inspired by *The Tempest*" to be a very conscious decision that signals the production's decidedly inclusive character. Bral sees his Prospero as an Everyman, while at the same time each of the characters is a Prospero – a refugee on an island of loneliness.

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[1] More about Song of the Goat Theatre methods, workshops, projects and initiatives can be found on their official website, http://piesnkozla.pl/en; on www.octopustheatricals.com/songofthegoat, on www.songsoflear.com, and in the BBC Interview with Grzegorz Bral, full version of which is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25O7ZAgUrq4. A documentary film on the project "Return to the Voice" can be watched online on https://vimeo.com/102506709.

[2] In his lecture on *The Tempest*, in which it is discussed as Shakespeare's successful mythopoetic writing, W. H. Auden talks about the play's relative frugality of poetic passages. Were it not for Prospero's monologues, the wedding mask, and Ariel's songs, he argues, "you could put *The Tempest* in a comic strip." He also observes that, similarly to "other mythopoetic works, *The Tempest* inspired people to go on for themselves," and gives examples of Browning's "Caliban upon Setebos," Renan's *Caliban*, and his own "The Sea and the Mirror" (Auden, 2002: 297). Bral's *Island* is another instance of such going on for ourselves, albeit on a different scale and in a different mode.

[3] *The Tempest* is quoted from The Arden Shakespeare edition by Frank Kermode, reprinted 1992.

[4] The numbers is brackets refer to the pages of the *Island* theatre programme available at http://piesnkozla.pl/en/spektakle#178-island.

[5] Which can be related to *The Tempest*'s own capacity for the universal. As Kermode argues, "there is nothing in *The Tempest* fundamental to its structure of ideas which could not have existed had America remained undiscovered, and the Bermuda voyage never taken place. The New World stimulated interest in the great and perennial problem of the nature of Nature; but the fact that Shakespeare is at pains to establish his island in the Old World may be taken to indicate his rejection of the merely topical" (*idem*, xxvi).

[6] There is nothing in Bral's performance to suggest any link to Auden's "The Sea and the Mirror." The poem is not referred to by the creators of *Island* as a source of inspiration or plane of reference. Although the mirrors are central to the stage design, they are never mentioned in the libretto. If one looks for any thematic closeness of these two works, it may perhaps be admitted in the very broad sense of both responding in certain extent to

contemporary crises, that of 1940s and of 2010s, respectively. In Auden, Prospero admitting his responsibility for Antonio's treason might be seen as "a suggestion of the failure of liberal humanism to avert Hitler" (Fuller, 1970: 159). There is, however, a formal similarity between Alicja Bral's series of songs and the shape of Auden's poem which is divided into "voices" of particular characters.

Mrs Shakespeare's New Face(t)s

Paola Spinozzi, University of Ferrara

What do we know about Shakespeare's wife? How do we know about her? Why do we want to know? Delving into the life of Mrs Shakespeare involves identifying the sources which have been chosen to reconstruct, or rather construct, her biography, and understanding why she arouses the interest of scholars, creative writers, and readers. She has been studied from various perspectives of literary criticism and represented in a variety of literary genres. Different modes of approaching and appropriating Shakespeare's wife call attention to the ways in which what is known has been used and what is less or not known can be conjured up. Historical sources and fictional material generate an intricate biographical discourse and raise aesthetic and ideological issues about life, art, and life writing.

Rewritings and remediations by poets, playwrights, novelists and scholars reveal biases and idiosyncrasies, highlight new face(t)s, historical and fabricated. The title *Imagining Shakespeare's Wife: The Afterlife of Anne Hathaway*, chosen by Katherine West Scheil for her 2018 book, suggests that imagination is essential to her approach as a cultural historian: "No one Anne emerges […], but instead, we will encounter a multitude of Annes, in conjunction with their equally fictive Shakespeares" (West Sheil, 2018: 15).

Starting from the assumption that creative writing and criticism intertwine, sources of knowledge about Shakespeare's wife can be classified as: legal documents; poems; plays; novels; scholarly criticism. Firstly, intergeneric and intertextual dynamics will be identified in documents, poems and plays. Secondly, three biographies, one by a literary scholar and two by creative writers, will be examined to understand new forms of remediation.

LEGAL DOCUMENTS, POEMS, AND PLAYS

It is widely acknowledged that in November 1582 William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway: he was eighteen, she was twenty-six and pregnant with their first child, born six months later. Age difference and pregnancy have been mentioned as evidence that the wedding was planned by her family and forced on him, yet evidence is missing. An entry dated 27 November 1582 in the bishop of Worcester's register records that a license was granted to William Shakespeare for his marriage to Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton. The key entry, on folio 43v, reads: "It*e*m eodem die si*m*ilis emanauit li*c*enc*i*a inter W*ill*el*mu*m Shaxpere et Annam Whateley de Temple grafton" ("Also on the same day a similar licence was issued between William Shakespeare of Stratford and Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton") (Bearman, 2018a). A marriage bond dated 28 November 1582 states that there was nothing to prevent William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway's marriage from taking place, and the bishop of Worcester, who issued the marriage license, would be safeguarded from any future possible objections. The marriage bond is an original document and thus likely to be more accurate than the register entry, which is a later copy. Fulk Sandells and John Richardson, relatives of Hathaway from Stratford, signed a financial guarantee of £40 for the wedding (Bearman, 2018b).

In *The Man Shakespeare and His Tragic Life Story* (1909) the Irish writer, journalist and publisher Frank Harris declared that these documents testify to Shakespeare's involvement with two women. He intended to marry Anne Whatley, but when his preference for her became known, he was compelled to marry Anne Hathaway by her family. In the entry on "Whatley, Anne" in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (2005) Stanley Wells observes that the name Whatley is regarded as "almost certainly the result of clerical error" (Wells, 2005: 185) by most scholars. The popular assumption that Shakespeare came to dislike his wife should also be considered as widely conjectural.

It is well known that Anne Hathaway may be the subject of Sonnet 145. The couplet "'I hate' from hate away she threw, / And saved my life, saying 'not you'" seems to contain strong allusions to her: the pronunciation of the words 'hate away' in the Elizabethan age may point to a pun on 'Hathaway'. Likewise, the final line "And saved my life" would sound indistinguishable from "Anne saved my life".

> Those lips that Love's own hand did make
>
> Breathed forth the sound that said 'I hate'
>
> To me that languish'd for her sake;
>
> But when she saw my woeful state
>
> Straight in her heart did mercy come,
>
> Chiding that tongue that ever sweet
>
> Was used in giving gentle doom,
>
> And taught it thus anew to greet:
>
> 'I hate' she alter'd with an end,
>
> That follow'd it as gentle day
>
> Doth follow night, who like a fiend
>
> From heaven to hell is flown away;
>
> 'I hate' from hate away she threw,
>
> And saved my life, saying 'not you.'
>
> (Shakespeare, 2007: 355)

Whether the sonnet was composed by Shakespeare in 1582, when he was eighteen years old, and whether the pun is plausible, as Andrew Gurr has claimed (Gurr, 1971: 221-226), have been largely debated. His interpretation is significant from a metacritical perspective, being an attempt at regarding Anne Hathaway as a woman who was doted on by Shakespeare. Whether Mrs and Mrs Shakespeare experienced romantic love for each other has been a

captivating topic. In the collection *The World's Wife: Poems* (1999) Carol Ann Duffy gives poetic voice to the wives of celebrated men. She evokes Mrs Shakespeare, Mrs Midas, Mrs Aesop, Mrs Darwin, Mrs Sisyphus, Queen Kong, Mrs Quasimodo, the Devil's Wife, Frau Freud, drawing on myth and history. In the sonnet "Anne Hathaway" the passage from Shakespeare's will regarding his "second-best bed" triggers a lyrical narrative in which that bed is conjured up as a memento of their love and cherished as an enchanted place of delight.

> *'Item I gyve unto my wief my second best bed…'*
> (from Shakespeare's will)
> The bed we loved in was a spinning world
> of forests, castles, torchlight, cliff-tops, seas
> where he would dive for pearls. My lover's words
> were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses
> on these lips; my body now a softer rhyme
> to his, now echo, assonance; his touch
> a verb dancing in the centre of a noun.
> Some nights I dreamed he'd written me, the bed
> a page beneath his writer's hands. Romance
> and drama played by touch, by scent, by taste.
> In the other bed, the best, our guests dozed on,
> dribbling their prose. My living laughing love –
> I hold him in the casket of my widow's head
> as he held me upon that next best bed.
> (Duffy, 2015: 256)

The bed is a synecdoche for passionate lovemaking, in which "romance and drama" are ignited by verbal ingenuity and nurtured by the senses, in contrast with the other bed, where

guests can entertain themselves with prose, the best one objectively, but not subjectively. The couplet is a hymn to romantic love, where possession circulates between a material and an immaterial object, a tangible piece of furniture, signifying their bond, and her mind, guarding fond memories: "I hold him in the casket of my widow's head / as he held me upon that next best bed".

The newly widowed Anne Hathaway meets her old rival, Mistress Anne Whatley, in Hubert Osborne's *The Shakespeare Play: A Drama in Rhythmic Prose* (c. 1911) and its sequel *The Good Men Do: An Indecorous Epilogue* (1917). Osborne focuses on the lives of the women in Shakespeare's life, his wife Anne Hathaway, their daughters Judith and Susanna, and Mistress Anne Whatley, portrayed as the one he truly loved. The confrontation between Anne Hathaway and Mistress Whatley, two women significantly older than Shakespeare, intersects age and gender issues. In a climactic scene of *The Good Men Do* Osborne imagines a dialogue in which Whatley vents her frustration by openly accusing Hathaway:

> You tricked him into marrying you knowing that he did not love you. You made no home for him who loved the little niceties of life, but made him live in squalor. You drove him from you by your nagging tongue to taverns and low company. Your jealous tantrums made banishment a happy liberty (Osborne, 1917, 52).

Emotional details boost the story and serve artistic purposes: Shakespeare's love life captures the attention of wide audiences and reinforces the idea that his genius shines through personal events which can be faithfully rendered by the adaptor. As Daniel Fischlin observes, "in so doing, the adaptor links his or her own production to the very 'genius' being promulgated in the adaptation, a way of building on the artistic capital guaranteed by association with the Shakespearean legacy" (Fischlin, 2004).

Edward Bond's *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death* (1973), influenced by Bertolt Brecht and Epic theatre, explores politics and interpersonal relationships as it portrays Shakespeare, ageing, melancholic, worried about money in his Warwickshire home in 1615 and 1616. Expanding on the idea of a problematic relationship between Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, Bond represents Shakespeare's last days, suggesting that he and his wife had become estranged and showing that their daughter Judith resents his treatment of her mother. *Mrs Shakespeare. Will's First and Last Love* (1989) is a long solo show performed by American actress-writer Yvonne Hudson: separated by dramatic events, Anne and Will have become good friends and she is sympathetic towards his infatuations and possible adulteries. Like Duffy in her sonnet, Hudson attaches a positive symbolic meaning to the bed bequest, the only place where Anne felt she possessed William. *Mrs Shakespeare. Will's First and Last Love* explores what it means for a woman to look after a house without a husband and delves into the emotional sphere, expressing sympathy for her husband's world as she quotes sonnets and soliloquies. New narrative material in the twenty-first century explores Shakespeare and Hathaway in the very last stages of their existence: *Shakespeare's Will* (2005) by Canadian playwright Vern Thiessen is a one-woman piece about Anne Hathaway on the day of her husband's funeral. While combining details of her personal life with dramatic twists, the poetic monologue also claims a place as a historical document about women's lives in Elizabethan England.

LITERARY CRITICISM

Germaine Greer, *Shakespeare's Wife*, 2007

Stereotypes about Anne Hathaway are the core concern of the lengthy *Shakespeare's Wife*, published by Germaine Greer in 2007. In deconstructing prejudices and received opinions, she constructs her own ideological discourse, one that targets canonical scholars of Shakespeare

and exposes their gender bias. She rejects the uncritical plainness of the assumption that Mrs Shakespeare was not able to read, let alone appreciate her husband's work, based on the fact that illiteracy was shared by most women at the time:

> Scholars desirous of separating Shakespeare from his pesky wife have taken for granted that all her life she could neither read nor write. They want her, need her to have had no inkling of the magnitude of her husband's achievement.
>
> > Of course most of the women in his world had little or no literacy, but the commonness of the condition does not change the fact: it is entirely possible that Shakespeare's wife never read a word that he wrote, that anything he sent her from London had to be read by a neighbour and that anything she wished to tell him – the local gossip, the health of his parents, the mortal illness of their only son – had to be consigned to a messenger.
>
> Greenblatt can see no one to help Ann keep in touch with her husband beyond an Elizabethan version of a courier service. He imagines that any letter of Shakespeare's would have to have been read by a 'neighbour'.
>
> If Shakespeare wrote at all, he would have written as Richard Quiney did, to a kinsman or a close friend, who had the duty of reading the letter to his wife and of penning her response. Abraham Sturley used to sign himself off to Quiney as writing 'at your own table in your own house', with Elizabeth Quiney beside him, virtually dictating what he was to write.
>
> At least one of Shakespeare's brothers was fully literate and should have kept Shakespeare informed of the health of his parents. Ann's brother could read and write, as could her elder daughter Susanna.
>
> Ann did not have to depend on the kindness of strangers or on professional messengers, who did not exist. Early modern letters were not private, but designed to be read aloud, in company. Truly intimate matters were deemed unsuitable for a letter.
>
> Certainly it is possible, even entirely possible, that Ann could not read. It is also possible, given the absolute absence of evidence to the contrary, that she was blind. She may have been illiterate when

> Shakespeare met her, and he may have spent the long hours with her as she watched her cows grazing on the common, teaching her to read. (pp. 51-52)

Greer cannot accept that women's illiteracy should be taken for granted, disparaged, and exposed as a form of social disability. She detects a methodological flaw in Greenblatt's value judgement on the epistolary correspondence between Mr and Mrs Shakespeare. Greenblatt wrongly assumes that they would be obliged to adopt a plain and neutral register, as she almost certainly could not read and should always require the intervention of someone specially summoned to fulfil that specific task. As a matter of fact, it was perfectly normal to write plain letters that would circulate among family and friends. Relatives would easily read and write for each other, and the social stigma would not be an issue.

Greer's discourse on Mrs Shakespeare thrives on the deconstruction of what she defines as the biased view of other famous Shakespearean scholars. However, her critique of other critiques is so vehement that it comes across as her major goal, partly overshadowing her biographical study. The forcefulness which fuels her interrogation of other scholars' methods and intentions backfires, instilling the doubt that Mrs Shakespeare may be a pretext. In this sense Stanley Wells' polemical review of *Mrs Shakespeare*, published on *The New York Review of Books* in 2008, is hardly unexpected and his reasons for retaliating sound convincing:

> When I heard that Germaine Greer was embarking on a biography I was skeptical of what seemed likely to be a tenuous enterprise. There are serious gaps in our knowledge of Shakespeare himself, and facts about the woman he married are even harder to come by. Though Greer makes no use in *Shakespeare's Wife* of the fictions I have mentioned, she is nevertheless much concerned with what she sees as fictions masquerading as truth in what claim to be biographical writings about Shakespeare (or the Bard, as she is all too apt to call him). Ann, she considers, has had an unjustifiably bad press at the hands of (mainly male) biographers such as Anthony Burgess, Anthony Holden, and Stephen Greenblatt, and her book

> offers characteristically pugnacious challenges to what she sees as received opinion. Drawing on her own research in the archives of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust on the place of women in Elizabethan society, she makes use of the techniques and skills of a social historian and, to a lesser extent, a genealogist. (Wells, 2008)

As Greer targets and accuses male biographers, Wells targets and accuses her of criticising and even disparaging their biographical work by default, rather than on the basis of solid arguments. The patronising attitude she believes they display when tackling the topic of Shakespeare's wife becomes a fixation:

> *Shakespeare's Wife* is an example of an emerging subspecies of Shakespearean biography. Other examples are James Shapiro's *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare, 1599* (2005) and Charles Nicholl's *The Lodger* (2008). They approach Shakespeare's life story partially or obliquely, and they may be all the more illuminating than cradle-to-grave accounts for doing so. Greer's book opens up new perspectives in offering alternative hypotheses to many of the all-too-easy assumptions about Shakespeare's wife and his relationship to her. Greer is often unnecessarily, stridently, and self-defensively combative. She ends with a gratuitous insult to those whom she derides as "the Shakespeare wallahs" who "have succeeded in creating a Bard in their own likeness, that is to say, incapable of relating to women," as if she herself were not a Shakespeare wallah. But this is an important book in the challenges that it poses to received opinion. It will have a permanent and beneficial effect on attempts to tell the story of Shakespeare's life. (ibidem)

Wells appreciates Greer's determination to interrogate common knowledge and truisms about Shakespeare and his wife, recognising that there is critical work to do. This battle of the critics reveals that Shakespeare's life and relationships incorporate methodological and ideological negotiations. In the twenty-first century the biography of Mrs Shakespeare becomes the catalyst of metacritical questions about canonical and feminist scholarship.

NOVELS

Mrs Shakespeare attracts creative writers, especially those who draw upon sentimentality and sensationalism to fabricate fictional biographies in which historical facts are peripheral. Karen Harper's *Mistress Shakespeare*, published in 2009, and Arliss Ryan's *The Secret Confessions of Anne Shakespeare*, published in 2010, deserve attention as contemporary expressions of popular literature investing in Shakespeare's love interests.

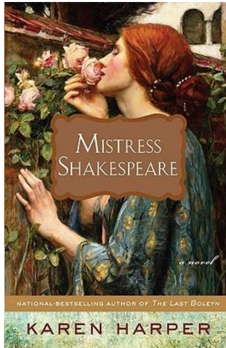
Both titles play with mystery and expectations. *Mistress Shakespeare* alludes to a woman who may or may not be his wife, *The Secret Confessions of Anne Shakespeare* points to unknown events that have been unveiled. Cover images and reviews offer clues to understanding the genesis and intended audience of both.

Karen Harper, *Mistress Shakespeare*, 2009

For thirty-five years Karen Harper has lived in Columbus, Ohio, and periodically in Naples, Florida; after teaching English at the Ohio State University, in 1984 she started writing novels. Harper is a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling writer of books published in foreign languages and the recipient of the Mary Higgins Clark Award for 2005. She has gained popularity as the author of historical and contemporary fiction blending suspense, mystery and romance. The Maplecreek series, the Home Valley series, the Cold Creek series are formed by 10 suspense novels published between 1996 and 2014, the Queen Elizabeth I series comprises 9 historical mystery novels published between 1999 and 2007, and many other novels are standalone.

Her favourite settings are the Amish community in the contemporary age and England in the Tudor period. One of the main reasons for Harper's success as a writer of popular

literature is her focus on historical British women, which indicates her ability to satisfy an appetite for stories that are left untold in scholarly books.



Cover image of the US edition

Cover image of the UK edition

The sentimental and sensational component of *Mistress Shakespeare* is announced in the cover images of both the US and UK edition, the former showing *The Soul of the Rose* (1910), a famously lavish painting by John William Waterhouse, the latter presenting a young lady in a Tudor costume and introducing the tantalizing question: “Is the dark lady of the sonnets William’s secret wife?”. Her face is only visible from the nose down; eyes and forehead are cut off from the picture, alluding to the mysterious identity of Shakespeare’s beloved mistress.

Karen Harper’s rich website offers an enticing presentation of the plot, which revolves around the idea that Anne Whateley is real, and Shakespeare truly loved her. Harper indicates two main reasons why this lady must have existed. First, the discrepancy between Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton and Anne Hathaway from Stratford is too strong, which points to the existence of both. Second, the presence of Fulk Sandells and John Richardson is ambiguous: the role of sureties who should take responsibility for the outcome of the wedding sounds weak, instead they may have well exerted a function of control and enforcement:

> *MISTRESS SHAKESPEARE* is the real story of Shakespeare in love.
>
> All fiction—and real life—is about 'what if?'
>
> What if the record of the marriage bond previous to and in the same 1582 registry (still in existence) between Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton and William Shakespeare indicates that Will loved and wed another woman before he married Anne Hathaway? A later entry links him to "Anne Hathway [sic] of Stratford in the Dioces [sic] of Worchester maiden." The earlier Whateley entry can hardly be a mere slip of the pen, for not only the last names but the women's villages are different. As Germaine Greer says in her recent nonfiction book, *SHAKESPEARE'S WIFE* (about Anne H.), if the Whateley/Shaxpere marriage bond is a scribal error, it's really an odd one.
>
> Will's marriage to Anne H. was what we would call a "shotgun" wedding, not unusual for the time, but it may well not have been voluntary on his part, for it was enforced by two friends of the bride's family, who put up a goodly sum to produce Will for the ceremony. What if the famous "second best bed" in Shakespeare's will was given to Anne H. because he and Anne W. had the first best bed at their Blackfriars Gatehouse in London – a property he made certain did not go to his wife or daughters in his will.
>
> So – what if Anne Whateley was really the love of his life, the dark lady of his sonnets, his inspiration and muse? What if you read their story, then decide for yourself?
>
> (For a look at the Shakespeare/Whateley marriage license (in Latin, with the usual loose Elizabethan spellings) go to http://home.att.net./~mleary/positive.htm.
>
> If you would like to hear the music to a song with the words by Will Shakespeare, one that fits the era and theme of *MISTRESS SHAKESPEARE*, try artist Emilie Autumn – O Mistress Mine – Listen free at www.last.fm/music/Emilie+Autumn/_/O+Mistress+Mine (Harper, 2006-2011)

Harper skilfully arouses the readers' desire for empowerment. She invites them to enjoy the novel and develop their own conjectures. In order to do so, she suggests they become acquainted with authentic documents, providing links which must have worked initially, but have not been updated and are thus no longer available. She also publicizes contemporary fairy

pop singer Emilie Autumn, whose genres encompass classical, dark cabaret, electronica, industrial, new age, and folk.

All the reviews point to a bestselling book by a bestselling author whose strength lies in the ability to re/produce the Elizabethan and Jacobean culture, blending truth-likeness, intensity, and sentiment.

> *Mistress Shakespeare* was selected by *Womans* [sic] *Day Magazine* in June 2009 as one of the Best 10 Summer Beach Reads
>
> "This intoxicating, fictionalized memoir of Shakespeare in love is a romantic roller coaster rich with vivid details reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet.*"
> -- *Womans* [sic] *Day magazine*
>
> "Karen Harper has written a riveting tale of intrigue and passion that plunges the reader straight into the complex heart of Elizabethan England. Rich with details and drama, *Mistress Shakespeare* is a story Shakespearean fans will love."
> -- Deanna Raybourn, author of *SILENT ON THE MOOR*
>
> "Told in first-person by Anne Whateley, this fictional memoir is a touching perspective of the life of William Shakespeare told by his soul mate and life-long love. Expertly researched and woven with the pageantry of Elizabeth and Jacobean history, this author has given us a rare glimpse of real persons from history, turning their lives into narratives that will entertain and delight the most discriminating readers."
> --*Fresh Fiction,* on-line review
>
> "[Harper] has a great knowledge of the way that people acted and spoke back then, and her characters never feel overly modern. Maybe Harper was an Elizabethan in a previous life?"
> --*Historical Fiction*, on-line review

> "Everyone knows William Shakespeare – or thinks they do – yet few know the woman who inspired so many of his greatest works. A richly satisfying novel that recreates Elizabethan London at its riotous, unruly best."
> --Susan Holloway, author of *The King's Favourite* (ibidem)

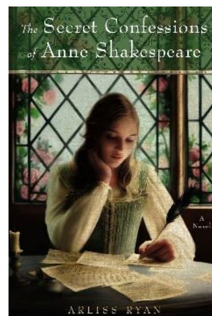
The fact that the book appears on the list of the Best 10 Summer Beach Reads selected by *Woman's Day Magazine*, spelled twice without the Saxon genitive, invites two considerations: it is on a list produced by a magazine discussing food and recipes, health and fitness, life, sex and relationships, and it suited for summer holidays. Entertainment is the major feature, highlighted in all reviews, which praise the coexistence of (much) imagination and (some) objectivity: "fictionalized memoir of Shakespeare", "the complex heart of Elizabethan England", "lives into narratives that will entertain and delight", "great knowledge of the way that people acted and spoke back then". All these appreciations share the assumption that, because Harper thoroughly studied the Elizabethan and Jacobean age, she has developed a unique ability to reproduce the atmosphere of London, the language, the cultural habits and emotional turmoil of the people. Hyperbole permeates the last endorsement, in which the author of another historical fiction suggests that Harper has been endowed with the gift of authenticity and with other supernatural powers that allow her to penetrate the life of the woman who was the muse of Shakespeare.

Arliss Ryan, *The Secret Confessions of Anne Shakespeare*, 2010

Arliss Ryan holds a Phi Beta Kappa B.A. degree in English from the University of Michigan and lives in St. Augustine, Florida. In January 2017 she and her husband moved aboard their

35' sailboat Corroboree and began a circumnavigation of the globe, which she has documented in her blog "The Old Woman and the Sea".

The Secret Confessions of Anne Shakespeare is her third novel, published by New American Library and Penguin Books in 2010. The choice of historical fiction allows her to tackle the question of Shakespeare authorship from the perspective of romance. Compared to the US edition of *Mistress Shakespeare*, the cover image of *The Secret Confessions of Anne Shakespeare* is even more allusive and tantalizing: the virginal beauty of a young lady in a generic Renaissance garb is captured while she is engrossed in writing, oblivious to the outside world. Sheltering and imprisoning her, the window grid also symbolizes her impossibility to come out as an author, while the roses make sure that the aesthetic titillation is felt by the reader.



Living as a widow in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1623, Anne Hathaway is lying in bed, quickly deteriorating. While her granddaughter Lizbeth reads aloud from Shakespeare's plays, Anne reveals that he is not the only author. Ryan recounts how Anne Hathaway follows Will to London to support his decision to become an actor. His career as a professional writer develops mainly thanks to the support and active contribution offered by Anne, an author in her own right, whose talent must remain in the shadow. Far from being a country girl who beguils him, she is portrayed as a resourceful woman with extraordinary artistic creativity, sharp intellect, and acute practical sense. It is their secret collaboration that makes Will the most

celebrated playwright in Elizabethan England. The relationship between Mrs and Mrs Shakespeare is thus presented in a highly compensatory way: owing to the lack of equal opportunities, she did not become famous, but at least she was able to make the most of her talent by building up a highly successful partnership.

While *Mistress Shakespeare* thrives on romantic speculations about Shakespeare's love life, *The Confessions of Anne Shakespeare* tests the limits of historical fiction as a genre by combining romance and the question of authorship. Its distinctive feature is the way in which Ryan uses the first-person narrative to envision how Anne Hathaway would deal with gender issues. The result is a post-modern stream of consciousness in which the predicaments of the protagonist sound all too similar to the problems with which contemporary women find themselves constantly confronted:

From *The Secret Confessions of Anne Shakespeare*

I admit the thought of a lover, or rather a husband, was on my mind. I would soon be twenty-six, a prime age to wed, and Duck's push had a hint of impatience to it… Yet when my brain played over the likely candidates, my heart remained strangely empty. I did not fancy any of the local bachelors, though one or two had come calling. Even less did I incline toward the widowers and the taking on of their children as my stepmother had done. I knew I did not possess her gifts of patience or nurture. It frightened me to admit I might not make a good mother at all. But whomever I wed, he would expect me to bear him a brood, and the idea of childbirth sent a cold shudder along my spine. My mother had died of it and a dozen more wives I could name. You may call me lily-livered, but I would not have been unhappy to have proven barren.

I had reached the secluded place where the brook pools into a large pond, surrounded by reeds and overhung by willows, dragonflies buzzing above the lily pads. Catching my reflection in the dappled water, I pictured beside it the faces of various eligible men and heaved a glum sigh. Too bad that our late fornicating monarch Henry VIII, in breaking with the church of Rome, had dissolved the monasteries and religious houses; if we were still Catholic, I would at least have had the option of

becoming a nun. It might have well suited me, for in a company of sisters I could have had a brisk and purposeful life, tending gardens or supervising the kitchen or managing the daily affairs. I could have muttered whatever prayers were required. The more I envisioned it, the greater pity it seemed to have missed out.

I tossed my hand over the water in a commanding arc. "Get thee to a nunnery!" I cried.

"What?"

I whirled around, and there stood Will Shakespeare, chuckling.

"What nunnery?" he demanded, coming closer, pleased at my discomfort.

"No nunnery. It's not important. I—"

"Is there a fish?"

"Where? In the nunnery?"

"No, in the water. You were staring at it as I approached."

"No, there's no fish in the water," I replied.

"But you were fishing, wishing, for something."

"I was only imagining faces." I shrugged, perturbed and hoping to end the conversation. Will's outfit, a blue satin doublet and breeches, seemed a little dandified for a country stroll.

"A strange river that has not fish but faces floating in it," he observed.

"That's not what I meant. There probably are fish in the brook, but I was imagining faces because, well, you can see how the play of sunlight and water and the lily pads might suggest…Here, you can see my reflection."

He stepped up beside me, and we both gazed into the pond. While he took the opportunity to study my visage in the water, I found myself contemplating his. Not bad. His hair was close to mine in color but gingery where I was amber brown. His face was well shaped and the forehead prominent. His upper lip was somewhat thin, his mouth and chin fringed with the first appearance of down. Not bad, but far too young for me. Still, I kept looking. (Ryan 2019)

Ryan's skill in combining macro and micro stories is evident in the fictionalization of the first encounter: Anne ponders on the first manifestations of erotic tension, elaborates on the

socio-economic advantages and dangers of marriage, mentions the religious controversies following Henri VIII's Act of Supremacy and explores the prospect, less feasible after the schism, of becoming a nun. Then she exclaims the very famous line from *Hamlet*, "Get thee to a nunnery!", which many readers will be pleased to recognise. Finally, they see each other and immediately start flirting. These self-reflexive moments of erotic arousal, religious critique and flirtatious banter are historically implausible, each of them sounding fictionally construed and narratively superimposed. Yet their tone is pleasant, and the effect is entertaining.

Codified notions of femininity and individual eccentricity generate a mismatch that resonates through the whole narrative. In spite of the great confession, which has the potential to change history, nothing changes, not only because times were not ripe for the genius of Anne Shakespeare, but because her attitude is traditional and conservative, expressing self-denial, support and subservience. Ryan's perspective is only apparently and superficially feminist.

Reviewers stress the boldness of Ryan's imagination, which allows her to access Hathaway's private thoughts and public aspirations, desires and predicaments.

> "This story is a fantastic view of life in the theatre, and one woman's struggle to maintain her family; her attempt to keep the love for her selfish husband; and, understand the remarkable stories that are piling up inside her own head.... After reading this, you'll not only applaud Anne Shakespeare, but you'll also give Arliss Ryan a standing ovation for a job well done."
>
> – Feathered Quill Book Reviews

> "An entertaining and admirable novel that offers a surprising reinterpretation of Will Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway, who shares, and helps shape, his dream."
>
> – Sandra Worth, author of The King's Daughter: A Novel of the First Tudor Queen

> "This is a book to savor! The cover screams 'young adult' but looks are deceiving in this case, as it is a very mature, well-written story and absolutely plausible…"
>
> – Historical-fiction.com (Arliss, 2019)

Hathaway's "struggle to maintain her family; her attempt to keep the love for her selfish husband", the ways in which she "shares, and helps shape, his dream", the "absolutely plausible" story show that ultimately the novel works as a form of normalization and neutralization of femininity and female autonomy. However, within the normative parameters of the genre, Ryan's focus on confessions of authorship may be seen as bold, especially if compared to Harper's preference for pure romance. Indeed, Harper's endorsement of Ryan's novel highlights "controversial", "daring", and even shocking features:

> Controversial and clever, daring and detailed, *The Secret Confessions of Anne Shakespeare* out shocks any modern day tell-all. Anne, the feisty and dynamic narrator, gives us an in-depth view of her own life and of Queen Elizabeth's England. The novel is as sweeping and insightful, tragic and comic as some of the bard's own plays.
>
> -Karen Harper, national bestselling author of *Mistress Shakespeare* and *The Queen's Governess*
>
> (Ryan, 2010)

Five couples of adjectives – "controversial and clever, daring and detailed", "feisty and dynamic", "sweeping and insightful, tragic and comic" – form a paratactic sequence exhibiting Harper's perception of Ryan's inclination for extremity, mitigated by acceptance and praise. Fictional biographies of Shakespeare's wife must count on their authors' mutual endorsements to enhance public recognition.

It might be tempting to classify diverse renditions of Mrs Shakespeare according to the reliability of the sources: historical documentation would be placed on top of the list, scholarly biographies and literary criticism in the middle, fictional representations at the bottom. However, such hierarchical classification would be fragile, because different approaches to life writing, especially if the subject is a woman whose husband happens to be one of the most famous persons in the world, are adopted to pursue different aims. Filling gaps may be a shared aim, but other objectives are pursued, which may vary significantly. Historical truth, accuracy, objectivity, authenticity, conjecture, ambiguity, bias, preconception, projection, fictionalisation are components of a wide spectrum of methods and practices through which a predominantly unknown life comes to be known. How a biographer – scholar or creative writer – would like a life to be known is entwined with how s/he would like that life to be.

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