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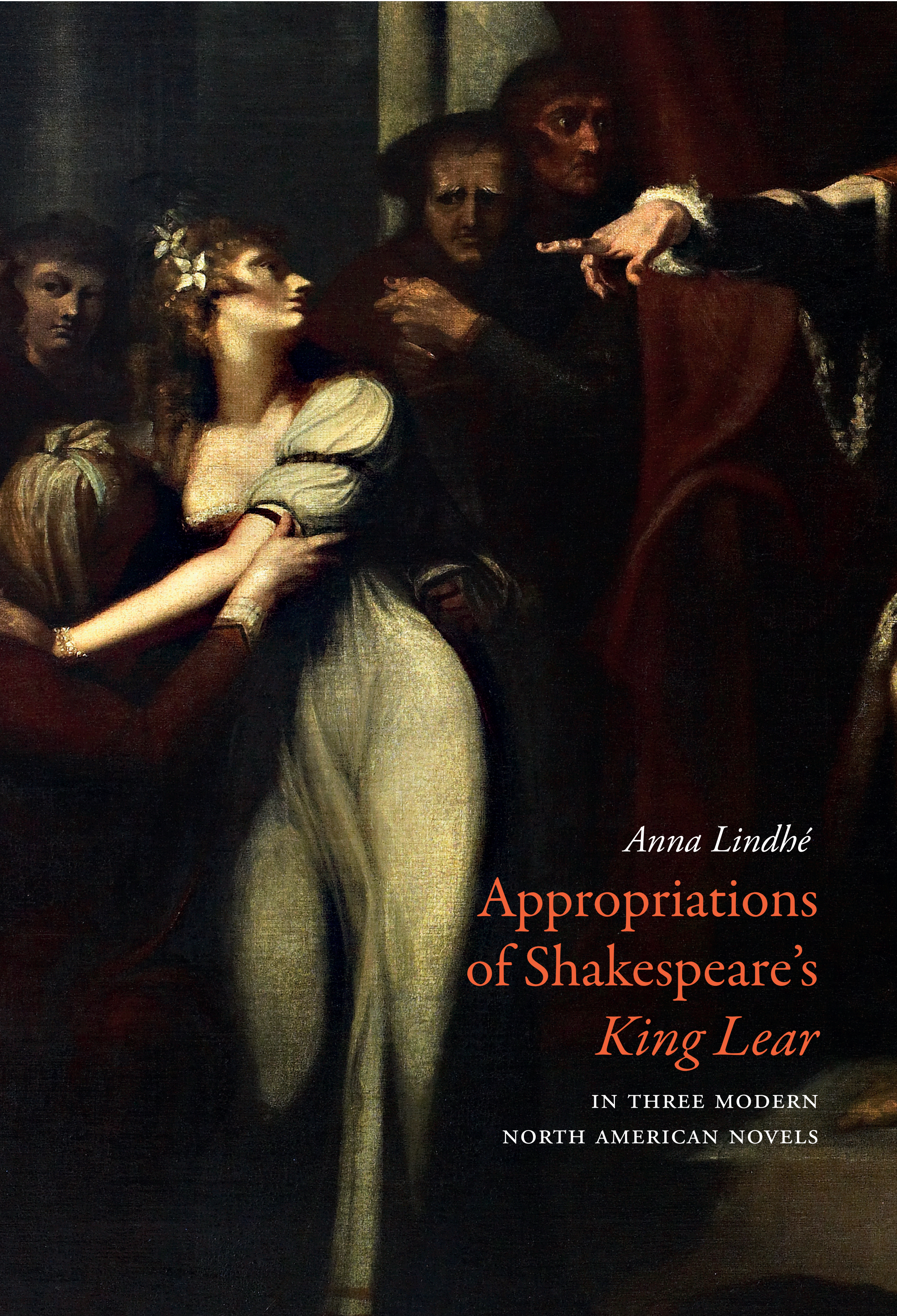
Anna Lindhé
Appropriations of Shakespeare's *King Lear*
IN THREE MODERN
NORTH AMERICAN NOVELS

'I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning'

For centuries, readers and spectators have felt invited to sympathize with the father in one of William Shakespeare's most famous tragedies, *King Lear*. Towards the end of the 20th century, however, these sympathies shifted towards Lear's daughters in both the critical and the creative afterlife of the play. This book examines the ways in which three modern appropriations of *King Lear* – *A Thousand Acres* (1991) by Jane Smiley, *Ladder of Years* (1995) by Anne Tyler, and *Cat's Eye* (1988) by Margaret Atwood – suspend the reader's inclination to assign blame to Goneril and Regan, transferring a measure of responsibility back on to the father. It demonstrates that literary appropriation is able to alter the reader's understanding of a major work of literature and even engender ethical effects in its readers.

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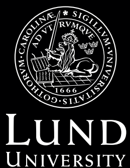
Lear Banishing Cordelia c. 1784–1790, © 2013 AGO



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Carita Paradis and Marianne Thormählen

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Abbreviations and Editions

The following editions were used for this study: William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R.A. Foakes (Surrey: Nelson and Sons, 1997); Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres* (New York: Ballantine, 1991); Anne Tyler, *Ladder of Years* (London: Vintage, 1995); Margaret Atwood (London: Virago, 2002; orig. published in 1988). Page and chapter references to the books are given in parentheses throughout.

The following abbreviations were used in chapter five: *TA* (*A Thousand Acres*); *LY* (*Ladder of Years*); *CE* (*Cat's Eye*).
Parenthetic references to *King Lear* appear throughout. Upper-case Roman numerals refer to acts, Arabic ones to scenes and lines.

Introduction

'The history of appropriation may suggest', Jonathan Bate says, 'that "Shakespeare" is not a man who lived from 1564 to 1616 but a body of work that is refashioned by each subsequent age in the image of itself'.[1] The questions when, why, and how Shakespeare became constituted as a national and cultural symbol have formed a steady concern of Shakespeare critics; but with the rise of 20th-century critical theory, interest in the rise of bardolatry was supplemented by an interest in the fall of bardolatry. As terms such as 'author', 'origin', and 'originality' were exchanged for 'intertextuality', 'author-function', and 'indeterminacy', Shakespeare became 'the author-function "Shakespeare"'. According to Christy Desmet: '[t]he history of Shakespearean appropriation contests bardolatry, by demystifying the concept of authorship'.[2] If the history of Shakespearean appropriation is understood as a process that involves a separation between the author and the work, the author is obviously placed 'beyond ethical recall', to use Séan Burke's phrase.[3]

It was an interest in the question of how appropriation may affect the reader's response to canonical texts that drew me to the subject of Shakespeare and appropriation. This study rethinks appropriation from the perspective of whom the appropriation of Shakespeare ultimately serves: the reader. As such, it departs from examinations of how Shakespeare has been appropri-

1 Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 3.

2 Desmet, 'Introduction' in *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, ed. by Desmet and Robert Sawyer (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-12 (pp. 5 and 4). The worldwide dissemination and appropriation of Shakespeare further suggests, to Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin, that 'there is no single "Shakespeare" that is simply reproduced globally'; see Loomba and Orkin, eds., 'Introduction' in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-19 (p. 7).

3 Seán Burke says that '[d]uring the twentieth century […] most academics, aesthetes and art lovers would have had us believe […] [that] the writer is beyond ethical recall. A freestanding object, the literary work is independent of its creator and answerable only to itself'; see *The Ethics of Writing: Authorship and Legacy in Plato, Nietzsche, Levinas (and Derrida)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 20.

ated to serve imperial, colonial, and national projects as well as commercial, economic, and political interests.[4] When the concept of appropriation is put to use in an investigation of a Shakespearean text as evoked in a novel by a late-20th-century woman writer, the nature of the connection between the author and his work also becomes essential. The act of appropriation as understood in this study confirms the writer as an originator and therefore as a co-responsible agent. When the present work pursues paths towards an origin and an originator, it does so on behalf of the reader.

Summary of Research

Several studies have also investigated the general processes of appropriation and adaptation of Shakespeare's work into different media. One of the earliest examples is Ruby Cohn's *Modern Shakespearean Offshoots* (1976), which surveys ways in which material from Shakespeare has been used in novels, poetry, and drama.[5] Scholars have also examined theatrical adaptations from the Restoration to modern times, for instance Jean I. Marsden in her edited volume, *The Appropriation of Shakespeare* (1991).[6] Others have attempted to develop theories of adaptation and appropriation.[7] Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) is a particularly valuable contribution to this endeavour in her examination of adaptation as a process of creation *and* reception.[8] Most studies provide fairly wide-ranging

4 See, for example, Kim C. Sturgess, *Shakespeare and the American Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Sturgess examines how Shakespeare was 'appropriated to serve the American nation' after the war of independence; p. 21. See also Michael D. Bristol, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1990). In another book, Bristol examines the institutionalization of Shakespeare by, for example, big corporations; see *Big-Time Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). For a discussion of how Shakespeare was claimed as a symbol of British national identity, see Michael Dobson, *The Making of a National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; repr. 2001).

5 Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

6 Marsden, ed., *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991). See also Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996).

7 See also Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, eds., *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

8 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). See also Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

views on how writers and playwrights – both male and female – have used 'Shakespeare' and Shakespearean materials over a long period of time. One exception is Lynne Bradley's recent study, 'Meddling with Masterpieces: The On-Going Adaptation of King Lear', which investigates how theatrical adaptation changes over time by examining the theatrical afterlife of one particular play: *King Lear*.[9]

As a study in the creative reception of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* by three contemporary women novelists, this dissertation joins a by now well-established area of research: women's creative appropriation of Shakespeare. Although women writers have turned to Shakespeare in their own work for centuries, it was not until feminism entered Shakespeare studies[10] that critical opinion began to engage seriously with how female writers from Margaret Cavendish onwards have used and responded to Shakespeare.[11] With her landmark anthology *Women's Re-Vision of Shakespeare: On Responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H.D., George Eliot, and Others* (1990), Marianne Novy introduced readers to a long tradition of women writers rewriting Shakespeare and brought feminist criticism of women writers and feminist criticism of Shakespeare together. Several studies followed, such as Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer's edited volume *Shakespeare and Appropriation* (1999), which examines 'big-time Shakespeare' as well as 'small-time Shakespeare',[12] and Julie Sanders' *Novel Shakespeares: Twentieth-Century Women Novelists and Appropriation* (2001), an overview of the way Shakespeare's material has been made to fit the novel of the late-20th-century female writer.[13]

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9 Lynne Bradley, 'Meddling with Masterpieces: The On-Going Adaptation of King Lear' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Victoria, 2009).

10 See, above all, Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; orig. published in 1975), and Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely, eds., *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980). Brian Vickers asks whether 'such a new school of criticism can adapt itself to the literature of the past, especially something as remote as the Renaissance'; see *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 327.

11 See, for example, Katherine M. Romack, 'Margaret Cavendish, Shakespeare Critic' in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by Dympna Callaghan (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2000; repr. 2001), pp. 21-41 (p. 39).

12 Desmet, 'Introduction', p. 2.

13 Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares: Twentieth-Century Women Novelists and Appropriation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001). See also Novy, ed., *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare: Responses of George Eliot & Other Women Novelists* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), and Novy, ed., *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999). See also Peter Erickson, *Rewriting*

Selection of Texts

Although some research has been carried out on ways in which women writers in general transform Shakespeare's plays in their novels, this study is unusual in that it takes three women novelists and examines how they appropriate a single play by William Shakespeare, in this case, *King Lear*. This study is based on close readings of *King Lear* alongside three appropriations of Shakespeare's play in works of fiction by three North American women writers: Jane Smiley, Anne Tyler, and Margaret Atwood. The novels by these writers all belong to the late 20th century, a time when women writers began to engage more and more seriously with Shakespeare's *King Lear*.[14] Novy suggests a reason for this development: 'Perhaps partly because the relation of women writers to the past has often been thematized as a daughter-father issue, *King Lear* has been of increasing interest to women in recent years'.[15] It should come as no surprise that Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991) was selected for this study: it is well known that that novel sticks very closely to the plot of *King Lear*. With the generational transfer of inheritance from father to daughters, *A Thousand Acres* occupies a special place in the following chapters. Another reason for its importance in this context, in addition to its thorough-going use of *King Lear*'s plot and characters, is the presence in *A Thousand Acres* of three generations, not just two. The present work reads Smiley's novel as an allegory of literary relations: the process of inheritance from father to daughters, a process which would in the natural course of things continue to yet another set of daughter-heirs, is transferred to a model of appropriation in which the successor's appropriation of the precursor's materials is seen in relation to the successor's own 'heirs', her readers.

While it is easy to imagine that a classic tragedy dealing with patriarchal rule and the relationship between father and daughters will hold special fascination for modern women authors, *King Lear* also seems to harbour dimensions that attract female writers apart from the father-daughter dynamics. It offers a broad range of interpersonal relationships, not only between father and daughters, but also between husband and wife and between siblings. Because of their respective emphases on these relation-

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Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991; paperback 1994). Erickson combines new historicism and feminist criticism.

14 See Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares*, p. 5. According to Cohn, writing in 1976: 'No important fiction has embraced *Lear* as it has *Hamlet*, and very few dramatists have used *Lear* as a springboard for their own plays'; see *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*, p. 232.

15 Novy, 'Introduction' in *Transforming Shakespeare*, p. 5. See also Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares*, p. 5.

ships, Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years* (1995) and Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988) were chosen alongside *A Thousand Acres*. These two novels signal their relation to *King Lear* overtly in that they feature characters named Cordelia, but above all because they too contain a family pattern borrowed from *King Lear*: a powerful father, three daughters, and an absent or powerless mother. Although the relation between father and daughters is not in the principal focus of these novels, they both examine a daughterly dilemma which recalls Cordelia's contradictory position in *King Lear*. The Cordelia characters in both novels are expected to return something to their fathers, an expectation which impedes their development towards independence and has serious repercussions on marriage (*Ladder of Years*) and sisterhood (*Cat's Eye*). Both novels, then, capture what this study introduces as the 'Cordelia complex', a feature which links the two novels not only to *King Lear* but also to *A Thousand Acres* – a book that also deals with the expectation of daughterly 'returns' of a father's 'interest'.

Appropriation in Theory – An Ethical Perspective

The idea that Shakespeare has been appropriated to serve political ends is especially current in studies of women's appropriation of Shakespearean materials. Whereas several critical works thus underline the subversive potential of appropriation, this study understands the act of appropriation as an ethical process. It is ethical in the sense that literary appropriation is transacted not only in relation to a precursor but also in relation to a recipient, to someone outside itself, to an Other, a reader.[16] That perspective was stimulated by the revelation of an ethical commitment behind Jane Smiley's appropriation of *King Lear*, a commitment that challenged the idea of literary appropriation as primarily a political or oppositional act. In 'Shakespeare in Iceland', Smiley tells us about the artistic process behind the creation of *A Thousand Acres*. Her essay suggests that appropriation is a far more ethically complex procedure than the precursor-successor model commonly employed in appropriation studies allows. Source studies, the way they are normally conducted, seek to trace and confirm what the suc-

16 The term ethics is used here in the relatively uncomplicated way suggested by Patrocinio P. Schweickart: 'ethics may refer to one's relationship with an other, to considerations of one's duty with regard to someone or something outside oneself'; see 'Introduction' in *Reading Sites: Social Difference and Reader Response*, ed. by Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2004), pp. 1-38 (p. 11).

cessor owes the precursor in terms of images, ideas, verbal echoes and so on. But by virtue of that very process, the successor does not only become a recipient of the precursor's material; he or she also becomes a 'giver' who carries this inheritance forward. Consequently, the successor's obligations reach beyond his or her debt to a precursor, extending in the opposite direction towards a recipient of his or her own: a reader. In 'Shakespeare in Iceland', Smiley states that she 'hoped that the minds of adolescent girls would encounter *A Thousand Acres* first, and that it would serve them as a prophylactic against the guilt about proper daughterhood that [she] knew *King Lear* could induce'.[17] Smiley's urge to protect the female reader from the engendering of daughterly guilt formed a powerful stimulus to the rethinking of the respective obligations and responsibilities conventionally attached to precursors and successors. Chapter one below outlines a methodology which takes the reader into consideration as an active and essential part in the dynamic process of appropriation.

Appropriation in Practice

A typical feature of women's creative appropriations is the change in point of view from a male to a female perspective. Featuring women protagonists, *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye* obviously grant more space to their 'Shakespearean' female characters than *King Lear,* though it should be observed that whereas Smiley and Tyler give 'narrative authority' to Ginny/Goneril and Delia/Cordelia, Atwood does not give her Cordelia character access to a narrative voice.[18] At a different level, Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, Tyler's *Ladder of Years*, and Atwood's *Cat's Eye* have something else in common, though. They invite the reader to recognize a poetic injustice in *King Lear*: the daughters are driven into a debt that they are not entirely responsible for. This pattern is visible in all three novels in that daughters are compelled to carry a burden of debt/guilt/shame which originates in their fathers, not in themselves. Chapters two to four below show how the novels transfer a degree of responsibility for that burden

17 Smiley, 'Shakespeare in Iceland' in *Transforming Shakespeare*, pp. 159-179 (p. 173).

18 For Nancy A. Walker, *A Thousand Acres* counts as a 'disobedient' narrative in that it 'expose[s] and question[s] patriarchal patterns that Shakespeare and his contemporaries took for granted' by giving 'narrative authority to the female characters'; see *The Disobedient Writer: Women and Narrative Tradition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 7-8.

back onto the father. Each of these three chapters attempts to demonstrate how the '"poetically just" revision'[19] performed by the novels is able to deactivate the stigma of daughterly guilt in *King Lear* by showing that fathers can have something to do with the fall of daughters. In this regard, *Cat's Eye* offers a particularly arresting picture of a daughter who is shamed, driven out of her home, and left helpless.

The final chapter in this study, chapter five, illustrates how female characters in Smiley's, Tyler's, and Atwood's novels may be associated with that pattern of descent that has contributed to 'the power of Lear's pathos'.[20] In *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye*, the main female protagonists all fall into nothingness – into states of emptiness, loss, and darkness. However, this pattern is altered in the novels in that the three women rise after their fall, empowered to redeem others as well as themselves: the experience of nothingness becomes a source of renewal. As chapter five will explain, their fall thus provides them with something that Lear's fall does not. Though afforded a possibility of redemption thanks to Cordelia's loving forgiveness, Lear does not respond to it. Rejecting her suggestion that they negotiate with the victors, Lear ties her to himself as a prisoner, thereby opening the door to the tragic ending. The 'poetic injustice' of Cordelia's death prompted Nahum Tate to heavily revise the play whereas A.C. Bradley endeavoured to discover a redemptive pattern in *King Lear*.[21] There is hence no actual redemption in *King Lear*; but as this study shows, a reader of *King Lear* can easily imagine that the tragedy could have been forestalled if Lear's desire to liberate the next generation had been stronger than his yearning

19 This is Marvin Rosenberg's expression used to describe Nahum Tate's adaptation of *King Lear*; see *The Masks of King Lear* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1972), p. 334.

20 According to Marsden, for example, 'the power of Lear's pathos [in 18th-century adaptations] was attributed not to his position as fallen king but almost universally to his position as wronged father'; see 'Shakespeare and Sympathy' in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Peter Abor and Paul Yachnin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 29-41 (p. 35). According to Rosenberg, 'Lear is only the most powerful focus; and as we grieve for him, we yet participate in and accept his downfall, because fall he must; we are involved in his punishment as well as his hope of escaping it'; see *The Masks of King Lear*, p. 335. See also Kathleen McLuskie, 'The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*' in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edn (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1994; orig. published in 1985), pp. 88-108 (p. 101).

21 See A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (London: Macmillan, 1956; orig. published in 1904). Rosenberg remarks that '[s]o oppressive to some critics is the apparently unrelieved darkness of the finale that they must discover in it transcendent illumination: so Bradley's earnest wrestling with the facts of the text to make them fit a "redemptive" pattern'; see *The Masks of King Lear*, p. 323.

to liberate himself.[22] In *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye*, the female characters' rise after their fall, to assume responsibility for something beyond themselves, exposes what is missing in *King Lear*: a third generation, and Lear's active sense of responsibility for what he passes on. In their very different ways, Tate, Bradley, and Smiley/Tyler/Atwood respond to an injustice in the play by creating something out of nothing.

From Play to Novel and Back

Despite the fact that the female characters in the novels are the main protagonists, occupying the central role that is Lear's in *King Lear*, the novels do not actively create sympathy for the female characters in Shakespeare's play. *King Lear* does not allow for such a reading in any sustained way, since it is not the suffering of the female characters that is in focus. What the novels do is to invite readers to recognize a poetic injustice in *King Lear*, a recognition which encourages the reader to suspend judgment in relation to Lear's daughters.[23] This idea obviously relies on the reader's familiarity with *King Lear* and presupposes that he or she is moved to activate the relation between pre-text and post-texts.[24] Or, in other words, that he or she reads the 'adaptation *as an adaptation*':

22 Cf. Harold Bloom who claims that Cordelia could have 'forestall[ed] the tragedy by a touch of initial diplomacy, but she will not'; see *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 63.

23 This does not mean that the reader must become a 'resisting reader', i.e. one that reads the text 'against the grain' as it were. It is rather the appropriations themselves that put up resistance towards traditional ways of reading and interpreting *King Lear*. For a further discussion of the 'resisting reader', see Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978). For a discussion that employs Fetterley's concept, see Kay Leslie Campbell Pilzer, '"Contrary Possibilities": A Woman Reads Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*' (master's thesis, University of Alabama, 1993).

24 The terms 'pre-text' and 'post-text' were chosen for this study – principally for the reason that they are straightforward, but also because they indicate a chronological order. They have been employed by Heinrich F. Plett, who suggests that the pre-text and the post-text are simultaneously an intertext; see 'Intertextualities' in *Intertextuality* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1991), pp. 3-29 (p. 17). The term 'intertext' is not suitable in this context, as it does not regard the time aspect involved in the process of appropriation as it is understood here. Although Gérard Genette's term hypertext constitutes an adequate choice considering its definition as 'any text derived from a previous text either through simple transformation […] or through […] *imitation*', in a time permeated by digital media, it seems to lend itself better to electronic (literary)

> To deal with adaptations *as adaptations* is to think of them as, to use Scottish poet and scholar Michael Alexander's great term (Ermarth 2001: 47), inherently "palimpsestuous" works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts. If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works. It is what Gérard Genette would call a text in the "second degree" (1982:5), created and then received in relation to a prior text.[25]

In order to experience reading in a 'palimpsestic way', meaning that the reader oscillates between post-text and pre-text, the reader must activate the appropriating text's relation to the original text or receive it in the 'second degree', to use Genette's expression.[26] Thus, the reading model proposed here is one in which the reader contains both pre-text and post-text in his or her mental vision, having accepted the post-text's invitation to experience and perceive the prior work in a different way.[27] *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye* send readers who possess some knowledge of *King Lear* back to the play equipped with the experience of the fictional protagonists. Returning to *King Lear* accompanied by those experiences – the life-stories of women who were made to pay for something they had (whether or not they realized it at the time) imposed on them – readers may find their sense of justice appealed to. Where is the justice in blaming the female characters in *King Lear* for something for which they are not entirely responsible? And where is the justice in liberating somebody who is not altogether innocent?

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The discussions in the following chapters are conducted with an eye to a long tradition which recognizes the ethical value of literature. But contrary to the (neo)humanist tradition of ethical literary criticism, this book does not raise questions about literature's ability to show us how to live;[28] and

texts. See *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997; orig. published in 1982), p. 7.

25 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 6.

26 Hutcheon describes this movement as an oscillation 'between a past image and a present one'; see *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 172.

27 According to Marsden, 18th-century adaptations of *King Lear* invited spectators to identify with the common experience of being the parent of 'thankless children'; see 'Shakespeare and Sympathy', p. 36. In the novels discussed in this study, the (female) reader is invited to identify with the common experience of being the daughter of overbearing fathers who demand that they give their father all.

28 Martha C. Nussbaum is one of the foremost (and most criticized) advocates of the ethical values of literature. Devising a canon of books whose principal qualities is that they "promote compassion", she raises questions about the ability of literary narrative to undermine stereotypical and de-humanizing images of characters. See 'Exactly and

unlike the works of poststructuralist ethicists, it is not concerned with the novel's ability to train the reader in 'the honoring of Otherness'.[29] Rather, I want to raise the question of who is responsible when readers are not moved to compassion or to a 'respect for alterity',[30] but threatened by a kind of 'guilt by association' owing to finding themselves in life situations that have points in common with those of 'guilty' women characters.

This study places a degree of responsibility on the author for choices which he or she made at the moment of production and which may have ethical effects on the afterlife of any given text. Even though Lear is not redeemed in the world of the play, Shakespeare chose to place a male character in a potentially redemptive pattern that invites the audience to 'liberate' Lear from guilt and responsibility at the expense of his daughters (who have carried most of the blame in the critical afterlife of *King Lear*). Jane Smiley, Anne Tyler, and Margaret Atwood counter Shakespeare's choice by placing a female character in that very same redemptive pattern, inviting their readers if not to extend grace, then at least to suspend judgment. For centuries, *King Lear* has 'trained' the spectator/reader to liberate a 'transgressive' father from guilt; in our time, *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye* encourage readers to withhold condemnation of 'transgressive' mothers, daughters, and sisters, so that all sides of the story can be heard.[31]

Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism', *Philosophy and Literature* 22.2 (1998), 343-365 (pp. 352 and 354).

29 Dorothy J. Hale, 'Fiction as Restriction: Self-Binding in New Ethical Theories of the Novel', *Narrative* 15.2 (2007), 187-206 (p. 189).

30 See, for example, Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics, and the Novel*: *From Leavis to Levinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 207.

31 Molly Hite uses the expression 'other side' in order to account for the way in which '[s]tories in the modern sense are always *somebody's* stories: even when they have a conventionally omniscient narrator they entail a point of view, take sides'; see *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.4. For a further discussion of the 'other side' of well-known stories, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

CHAPTER ONE

Shakespeare Carried Forward: Towards a New Ethics of Literary Appropriation

> This is the real work we face, the work of tradition. And our real problem lies in an understanding of "tradition" that depicts it as simply a deposit of faith. For it is better understood as an activity, an ongoing act of forgiveness. We inherit our ability to reflect from our elders, and we come to see that their tools only imperfectly fit the problems we face.[1]

> A philosophy of composition (not of psychogenesis) is a genealogy of imagination necessarily, a study of the only guilt that matters to a poet, the guilt of indebtedness.[2]

Introductory Remarks

The term 'tradition' derives from the Latin word 'traditio' which *The Oxford English Dictionary* translates as 'delivery', 'surrender', 'handing down'.[3]

1 Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 69.
2 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry,* 2nd edn (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; orig. published in 1973), p. 117.
3 'tradition, *n*', *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, 1989) http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50255726 [accessed 9 November 2009].

Having its roots in Roman inheritance law, the term 'traditio' signified a legal transaction, the handing over (transfer) of material possessions from a 'giver' to a 'receiver'. Accordingly, it involved 'the transfer of rights and obligations, authority and power, property and possessions'.[4] The transfer of any kind of inheritance between generations is almost always accompanied by tensions and anxieties on both the receiving and the sending end. Rights and duties accompany such a transaction, and it is often the uncertainties and the expectations surrounding these that are at the basis of schisms between generations.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* is one of the most disturbing literary examples of such generational anxieties. What it means to transfer power and material possessions – the existential and material vacuum that the giver ends up in – is painfully experienced by Lear and amply verified by a long critical tradition. But the *reception* of power and material possessions also gives rise to anxiety: at the very moment when ownership is transferred to the daughters, they run into debt – a debt of gratitude – and the audience becomes witness to how Lear's insistence on his daughters' debt drives him and the plot forward, until they pay the debt with their lives.

Literary tradition has its own transferential anxieties. What the burden of debt to a predecessor entails for the recipient of literary tradition has been most distinctively illustrated by Harold Bloom.[5] In his tetralogy on poetic influence, he developed a theory about what it means to be heir not to 'the rich legacy of the past' but to what that legacy entailed: 'immense anxieties of indebtedness'.[6] For Bloom, reception is coupled with debt; and in this, as in much else, he diverges from another pioneer critic of literary tradition: T.S. Eliot.[7] For Eliot the past gives the individual talent (the present) a sense of direction or guidance; for Bloom, by contrast,

4 Aleida Assman, 'Exorcizing the Demon of Chronology: T.S. Eliot's Reinvention of Tradition' in *T.S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*, ed. by Giovanni Cianci and Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 13-25 (p. 13).

5 R. Clifton Spargo points out that 'Bloom perceived the burdensomeness of the past to be its greatest legacy'; see 'Toward an Ethics of Literary Revisionism' in *The Salt Companion to Harold Bloom*, ed. by Roy Sellars and Graham Allen (Cambridge: Salt, 2007), pp. 66-119 (p. 69). In *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), W. Jackson Bate maintained that 'the remorseless deepening of self-consciousness, before the rich and intimidating legacy of the past, has become the greatest single problem that modern art [...] has had to face'; p. 4.

6 Asha Varadharajan, 'The Unsettling Legacy of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 69.4 (2008), 461-480 (p. 462).

7 Cianci and Harding point out that 'Harold Bloom approached Eliot's legacy as the strong precursor to be "misread" and deconstructed'; see 'Introduction' in *T.S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*, pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

the past only gives the *ephebe* (Bloom's term, meaning the young poet) indebtedness.[8] The *ephebe* is thus hopelessly and deeply 'mortgaged' to his precursor.

Consequently, when a recipient accepts a legacy of some substance, he or she also lays him- or herself open to debt; but how is it possible to incur debt merely by receiving inheritance? It is the axiomatic and paradoxical nature of the idea that the recipient incurs a debt when he or she makes use of material taken from literary tradition that is challenged here, not by invoking a Foucauldian perspective[9] or the Barthian idea about the death of the author or by appealing to the intertextual nature of all texts – which would solve the question of debt by eliminating it –[10] but through examining the act of appropriation. This is accomplished through source study, but not the typical kind of study that departs from the idea that the successor is locked in indebtedness to his or her precursor, but one that directs attention to what the successor 'owes' his or her own recipient. The method developed here is one designed for a study that takes into account the reciprocal aspect of appropriation – that is, one that attempts to illustrate how the transformation of images and ideas between pre-text and post-text affects both texts, as well as the reader of either who also has a degree of awareness of the other.

The present work started out from a sense that the conceptual models which have so far been used in appropriation studies allow too little space for ethical reflections. A reading of Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* as an allegory of the writer's responsibility caused a new ethics of literary appropriation to emerge.[11] Lear's determination to renounce responsibility for his creation and transfer it onto his two elder daughters in *King Lear* is countered by *A Thousand Acres*, a novel that transfers a degree of responsi-

8 T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1917) in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; repr. 1948), pp. 13-22 (p. 15).

9 Sonia Massai writes that she wanted to 'encourage contributors [to her book] to think about the politics of appropriation anew, outside the Foucauldian box, as it were', which is why she turns to Pierre Bourdieu instead; see 'Defining Local Shakespeares' in *World-Wide Shakespeares*: *Local Appropriations in Film and Performance*, ed. by Massai (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 3-11 (p. 5).

10 Broadly speaking, intertextuality entails the idea that any text functions within a network of texts without referring to particular sources or authors. The suggestion that we can never reach a source in order to derive meaning – that we can never trace ideas and images to sources – should also mean that all debts are cancelled: there is no author/originator to take responsibility for them anyway.

11 Susan Ayres suggests that literature, 'especially literature that rewrites or re-envisions dominant reality' 'provides a model for the recovery of women's voices and stories'; see 'The Silent Voices of the Law' in *Literature and Law*, ed. by Michael J. Meyer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 21-36 (p. 24).

bility back to the originator/the father. The redistribution of responsibilities between generations in *A Thousand Acres* encouraged a visualization of the relations between precursor, successor, and reader: the father was seen to represent the precursor, the daughter the successor, and the third generation – a notable absence in *King Lear* – the reader.

Other questions arise: what happens when we remind ourselves that the 'recipient' of literary tradition is also always first a reader? Can the 'giver' ever completely divest him- or herself of the burden of inheritance, of power, authority, possession, rights and obligations? Is he or she, in other words, released from all responsibility in the act of delivery? Further, if tradition refers to a handing down – a transfer intended to be carried forward or bestowed upon later generations – why do we speak about the act of literary appropriation as a seizure of power in contemporary appropriation studies? To what extent is the idea of a power struggle the consequence of the adoption of a Foucauldian perspective on literature, and to what extent has the idea of rivalry and competition helped shape appropriation studies?[12] And what happens if we move beyond such perspectives towards the idea that any appropriation of a literary work is also, by necessity, a surrender, a giving of 'credit', a granting of an 'afterlife'?

The following chapter endeavours to answer these questions by taking a closer look at the dynamics of literary transmittance. It attempts to develop a methodology that safeguards that dynamics and captures the complexity which the meeting between texts entails. I hope to show that ethical effects emerge from the development of such a methodology in its challenge to the respective obligations and responsibilities conventionally attached to precursor and successor.[13]

Above all, the ensuing pages attempt to develop the notion that the successor becomes responsible for the images that are altered and carried forward from *King Lear* to the present, to the successor's own recipient as reader/writer. One aspect that is often said to characterize late 20th-cen-

12 Bloom's idea of poetic influence locks the precursor and the late-coming writer in a kind of rivalry, a 'filial competition', in which precursor and *ephebe* are seen to vie for the same space.

13 Such a reading strategy might also be useful in the context of, for example, the teaching of (World) Literature. Tanya Agathocleous and Karin Gosselink explain that there is a fear that a sense of indebtedness will be confirmed on the part of the post-colonial text towards the British and American canons when texts such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Heart of Darkness, Jane Eyre*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are discussed together: 'This construction can imply a hierarchical genealogy of narrative traditions; the British canon takes its place as the source of all modern writing in English and other traditions are positioned as weaker offshoots'; see 'Debt in the Teaching of World Literature: Collaboration in the Context of Uneven Development', *Pedagogy* 6.3 (2006), 453-473 (p. 465).

tury women's appropriations of canonized literature is what is frequently referred to as a political endeavour to create a space in their narratives, a space from which marginalized and silenced characters can be heard.[14] What is rarely addressed is the responsibility involved in representing other voices – the risks, but also the ethical possibilities contained in such an undertaking.[15] 'Acts of appropriation', writes Christy Desmet, 'can be intensely personal as well as political'.[16] Along with the writer's personal endeavour to make room for herself, the political perspective of clearing space for other voices has dominated appropriation studies. This study adduces an ethical perspective: the endeavour to make room for the reader in appropriation studies.

Metaphors of Conflict – Submission or Transgression?

The idea of literary influence as 'grounded in metaphors of conflict', as 'a dialectic between transgression and submission', is foregrounded in contemporary appropriation studies concerned with women writers' entry into the literary domain of male writers.[17]

According to Nancy Walker, 'women writers have more commonly addressed [male texts from the Western literary traditions] from the position of outsider, altering them either to point up the biases they encode or to make them into narratives that women can more comfortably inhabit'.[18] Women writers are often perceived by critics as striving to 'make space' for

14 See, for example, Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 57; Sarah Appleton Aguiar, *The Bitch is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), p. 82; and Kate Chedgzoy, *Shakespeare's Queer Children: Appropriation in Contemporary Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 2. See also David Brauner, '"Speak Again": The Politics of Rewriting in *A Thousand Acres*', *Modern Language Review* 96.3 (2001), 654-66 (p. 655).

15 Some critics stress the subversive and empowering potential of female speech. In contexts concerning opposition or resistance to male normativity, voice has come to denote 'power of expression'; see Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993; orig. published in 1982), p. xvi, and Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 5.

16 Desmet, 'Introduction', p. 7.

17 Desmet, 'Introduction', pp. 6-7.

18 Walker, *The Disobedient Writer*, p. 3.

themselves in the canon,[19] a self-authenticating undertaking not unlike that delineated by Bloom in regard to male poets.[20] In fact, Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, both attracted to and repelled by Bloom's agonistic model, paradoxically tried to clear space for, in this case, 19th-century women writers within that very same framework.[21] For Gilbert and Gubar, two of the main questions that feminist literary criticism must answer are:

> does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she "talk back" to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint?[22]

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, tradition emerges as a menace to the female writer's very existence, and the male precursor – 'the King' – as somebody who threatens her creative abilities. A woman writer, Gilbert and Gubar suggest, suffers from an 'anxiety of authorship', which is the 'fear' that she will never be able to 'create', and 'that because she can never become a "precursor" the act of writing will isolate or destroy her'.[23] Much like the *ephebe*'s attempts at 'self-appropriation',[24] the women writers enter into the 'revisionary process' as a result of their 'battle for self-creation'.[25] Since the precursor symbolizes 'authority' – and since the female artist desires to define herself – she is compelled to rebel against the power of the precursor.

Even so, tradition – or the representatives of the canon, notably Shakespeare – does not always arouse hostility in women writers, as Marianne Novy shows in *Engaging with Shakespeare*. In a critique of Gilbert and Gubar's view, she suggests that George Eliot, among others, did not feel any anxiety in relation to Shakespeare: 'her tone is not [that of a] rebellious protest against a forerunner who denies her autonomy, as Gilbert and Gubar's hypothesis would suggest'.[26] In another book, *Women's Re-vision of Shakespeare*, Novy says that Shakespeare is invoked as

19 Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare*, p. 1.

20 It is appropriate to point out that in Bloom's world, there is no 'direct' meeting between a precursor and the poet, since relations between texts are all that exist. See Peter de Bolla, *Harold Bloom: Towards Historical Rhetorics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 20.

21 Ample criticism has been levelled at their model. For a recent example, see Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism* (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 64-71.

22 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979; repr. 1984), p. 46.

23 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 49.

24 Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 5.

25 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 49.

26 Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare*, p. 6.

somebody with whom the woman writer could identify, at the same time as he is someone from whom she can express 'distance'.[27] But in spite of Novy's successful endeavour to exchange anxiety for support and competition for collaboration or 'negotiation,' for her, 'appropriations shade into the self-authenticating process of "re-vision"'.[28] And despite not identifying any Oedipal competition between women writers and Shakespeare, *Engaging with Shakespeare* retains the idea of the 19th-century writer as self-absorbed, one who is using Shakespeare to author herself.

Certain insights may be drawn from Gilbert and Gubar's and Novy's respective reviews of 19th-century women writers' relation to male writers. In spite of the apparent dissimilarities between their two distinct stances, the revisionary impulse, to these critics, seems to concern the woman writer's attitude to her precursor and the female writer's struggle to define herself, either benevolently or subversively, in relation to the male precursor. If the tone is not defiant, it is celebratory or friendly.

If Novy identified a personal commitment behind early women writers' acts of appropriation, embracing the idea that appropriation is 'different from either rebellion or submission',[29] the ideas of Julia Kristeva, among others, paved the way for the notion that a take-over is a 'simple' procedure in that '*all* literary precedent is plagiarized'.[30] Kristeva argued that all texts are already and always constitutive of 'a mosaic of quotations: any text is the absorption and transformation of another'.[31] Because there is no originator, there is no need to feel any respect or anxiety. Along with the

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27 Novy, ed., 'Introduction: Women's Re-Vision of Shakespeare: 1664-1988' in *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*, pp. 1-15 (p. 9).

28 Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares*, p. 2.

29 In *Engaging with Shakespeare*, Novy suggests that appropriation 'involves choosing – within a tradition and within a writer's work – what can be made one's own and how'; p. 7.

30 Kathleen Hulley argues that 'intertextuality as a strategy of feminist interpretation must be pursued in those interstices where writing acknowledges that *all* literary precedent is plagiarized'; see 'Transgressing Genre: Kathy Acker's intertexts' in *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. by Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 171-190 (p. 172). See, for example, Rebecca Mark, who makes use of Julia Kristeva's theories in *The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty's 'The Golden Apples'* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), p. 15.

31 Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' (1967) in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi, trans. by Seán Hand and Léon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 34-61 (pp. 39 and 37). See also 'The Bounded Text' (1969) in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Léon S. Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardin, and Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 36-63. It was Julia Kristeva who, on the basis of M.M. Bakhtin's dialogic theory of language and literature, introduced the term 'intertextuality'.

theories of Barthes and Foucault, the concept of intertextuality thus facilitated discussions of women writers' entrance into the male-dominated literary tradition, making it possible to speak about how female writers undermine the authorship and ownership of a text.[32] But such a standpoint is, of course, also difficult to assume considering the fact that the female writer had just gained a position to talk from and must thus have somebody to talk *back* to.[33] In studies of late 20th-century women writers' responses to Shakespeare, critics tend to recognize a subversive or 'oppositional' attitude towards Shakespeare or to his work, a stance that has often been described as political.[34] In *Transforming Shakespeare*, Novy notices that women writers 'talk back aggressively to Shakespeare's plays, to earlier interpretations of them, and to patriarchal and colonialist attitudes that the plays have come to symbolize'.[35]

Contemporary women writers' relation to Shakespeare is thus often addressed in terms of rebellion or 'disobedience', or in terms of 'talking back' to an authority.[36] In *Talking Back to Shakespeare*, Martha Tuck Rozett compares the female writer to an 'assertive adolescent' who 'visibly and volubly talk[s] back to the parent in iconoclastic, outrageous, yet intensely serious ways',[37] seeing the woman writer as a misbehaving daughter who endeavours to stand up to her powerful father.

There is a tendency to divide writers into those who relate honorifically to the source and those who relate iconoclastically to the source.[38] Although attempts have been made, for example by Linda Hutcheon and Julie Sanders, to nuance such thinking, a binary logic is still distinguishable in these two critics' books on adaptation and appropriation in gener-

32 See, for example, Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000; repr. 2001), p. 146.

33 In the words of Elaine Showalter, '[i]t's ironic that the poststructuralist critique of the unified female subject appeared just at the time when women were making a claim to their own subjectivity'; see 'Feminism and Literature' in *Literary Theory Today* , ed. by Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 179-202 (p. 195). For a feminist critique of the 'postmodernist decision that the Author is Dead'; see Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 106.

34 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 98.

35 See Novy, ed., 'Introduction' in *Transforming Shakespeare*, pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

36 To change or revise a specific writer's text is, according to Nancy Walker, to 'exercise' a 'kind of disobedience' which 'questions the singularity and ownership of certain themes, plots, tropes, and narrative strategies'; see *The Disobedient Writer*, p. 5.

37 Martha Tuck Rozett, *Talking Back To Shakespeare* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), p. 5.

38 See Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 46. See also Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares*, p. 2 and Desmet, 'Introduction', p. 2.

al.[39] The methodological consequences of such a logic is limiting, in that it prevents an understanding of the dynamics that arises when literary inheritance is carried forward. This movement is never just a meeting between two generations,[40] between a precursor and one successor: there has to be a third party who activates the meeting – the relation – between them, a recipient who, in turn, receives the inheritance of both the 'old' and the 'new' generation. The transmittance of material from the precursor to a successor thus implies yet another transmittance: that from the successor to a recipient (as reader, writer, and/or source critic).

The motivating force behind many studies of women writers in relation to Shakespeare seems to be the desire to provide an answer to the question: what does it mean to come after Shakespeare; how does the successor deal with being a successor? This study seeks to widen the field of inquiry by asking what we leave out by only attending to the 'continuum of attitudes toward Shakespeare',[41] ignoring the continuum that extends after the successor. The source-study technique used in this study turns Smiley/Tyler/Atwood into recipients of Shakespeare's material, and in that way they themselves become transmitters of tradition. The moment a reader activates the relation between two writers is also the moment when the successor becomes a bearer of tradition. Via such an activation, other readers – including readers who are also critics and/or writers – become recipients of the successor's and Shakespeare's common inheritance.

Harold Bloom and the Metaphor of Debt

To what extent is it the metaphor of debt that has prevented source-study-oriented critics from extending the line of transmittance, visualizing the successor as a new precursor? Phrases such as 'Milton's debt to' are legion in literary studies, prompting the question to what extent the language

39 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 93, and Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 46. See also Diana E. Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare Across Time and Media* (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 3. Parmita Kapida detects a binary logic in the uses of Shakespeare in the colonial context; see 'Transnational Shakespeare: Salman Rushdie and Intertextual Appropriation', *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 3.2 (2008), 1-21 http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/781652 [accessed 7 August 2010]

40 In *Literary Inheritance* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), Roger Sale regards tradition 'primarily as a relation of one generation of writers to those in the generation immediately preceeding', p. 1.

41 Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare*, p. 185.

of debt structures our understanding of literary relationships.[42] The idea that the successor is the 'debtor' and the precursor the 'creditor' implies that the former, when he or she receives the literary inheritance, is seen to be placed in debt to the precursor, a debt that can be either denied or affirmed.[43] If the assumption is that such a debt is consciously felt by the writer, it comes as no surprise that critical discussions revolve around the question of whether the writer rebels against the obligation or whether he or she honours it. The idea that the writer is obligated to return something contributes to preserving the binary method in appropriation studies that was explained above, and consequently also the rigid distinction between successor (as debtor) and precursor (as creditor) and between their respective duties and obligations.

Harold Bloom's development of a model of poetic relations comes across as an answer to the heavy ancestral debt that the successor is burdened with.[44] The *ephebe*'s reaction to such indebtedness is to deny it. What is original in Bloom's model is the way in which it challenges the idea of a compulsory repayment of the debt inherited by the younger poet;[45] 'what [he] *means* is right, for this egocentricity is itself a major training in imagination'.[46] If Bloom's model is used, as it is by Caroline Cakebread, as a 'starting point for articulating the nuances of literary parenthood in the novels of contemporary women writers', the question is to what extent such an undertaking upholds and carries forward the idea of the precur-

42 Agathocleous and Gosselink performed a search on the word *debt* in the Modern Language Association bibliography and found 'literally hundreds of articles on one author's debt to another: on Pound's debt to Dante, for example, or George Eliot's debt to Hardy'; see 'Debt in the Teaching of World Literature', p. 458. For an interesting discussion of literary debt, see Colin Burrow 'The Borrowers', *The Guardian* 6 December 2008 www.guardian.co.uk/boons/2008/dec/06 [accessed 5 May 2010]

43 It is not only in contemporary appropriation studies that such a binary logic can be seen: it has long been regarded as a central fact of literary history that writers 'assimilate and then consciously or unconsciously affirm or deny the achievements of their predecessors'. To bolster their case, Gilbert and Gubar call on theorists as diverse as T.S. Eliot, M. H. Abrams, Erich Auerbach, Frank Kermode, and lately Harold Bloom; see *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 46.

44 This is one of the indications of the 'Nietzschean legacy' of Bloom's theory. Anders H. Klitgaard discusses another sign of Bloom's 'Nietzschean legacy'; see 'Bloom, Kierkegaard, and the Problem of Misreading' in *The Salt Companion to Harold Bloom*, pp. 290-302 (p. 290).

45 Obviously, though, it is the Freudian legacy which has left the principal impression on his model of 'revisionist psychoanalytic literary theory', a model which, in Paul Endo's words, 'revolutionized the study of poetic influence'; see 'Harold Bloom' in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. by Irena R. Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 257-258 (p. 257).

46 Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 121. See also Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 18.

sor as a 'creditor' and the successor as a 'debtor', and to what extent that is desirable.[47] One can understand why his model has attracted feminist critics,[48] but there is a risk that it could be used to support the idea of women writers as 'stealing themselves' into the male-dominated canon. Again, it is worth repeating that writers do not write themselves into the literary tradition on their own (as is suggested in Bloom's expression 'clear space'); it is the recipients of their inheritance (as readers/writers/critics) who place them in the literary tradition.

If it is generally considered to be in bad taste – or even a criminal act – not to pay one's dues, or to fail to give credit where credit is due, for Bloom (as for T.S. Eliot) failing to return one's debt is not equivalent to failing as a poet. On the contrary, it is a sign of maturity and strength on the part of the successor to steal from and misread his precursor (for Bloom, as a way – the way – to achieve originality). In matters pertaining to finance and accounting, however, such evasion would unavoidably contribute to the accumulation of debt. Moreover, to avoid paying one's debt implies the deferral not only of repayment but also, on a different level, of responsibility: as debt accumulates if it is not paid off, somebody else eventually has to pay. If the debt is then *carried forward* to the future, to be resolved by an unknown agent, there is a risk that it cannot be traced back to its source, preventing the allocation of responsibility.

It was precisely this retracing of the route back to the source that Bloom deemed totally beside the point: source study, he proclaimed, is 'wholly irrelevant here'.[49] The rejection of source study might seem to bring him close

47 Cakebread, 'Shakespeare in Transit: Bloom, Shakespeare, and Contemporary Women's Writing' in *Harold Bloom's Shakespeare*, ed. by Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 199-212 (p. 204). Desmet points out that Bloom's 'quasi-Freudian account of the "anxiety of influence" […] still influences our understanding of literary relations of the personal kind'; see 'Introduction', p. 7. Helen Small points out that '[p]ositing a historical and etymological connection between debts ('*Schulden*') and guilt ('*Schuld*'), [Nietzsche] argues that the concept of guilt grew out of an awareness that the relationship between a given generation and its forebears is structurally equivalent to that between debtor and creditor'; see 'The Debt to Society: Dickens, Fielding, and the Genealogy of Independence' in *The Victorians and the Eighteenth Century*: *Reassessing the Tradition*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman and Katherine Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 14-40 (p. 14).

48 See, for example, Cakebread, 'Shakespeare in Transit: Bloom, Shakespeare, and Contemporary Women's Writing' and Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Sinéad Murphy points out that '[t]he misconception common to […] feminist criticisms of Bloom is related to their failure to grasp the extremity of his antifeminism, the extent to which his theory is a *complete* exclusion of female creativity'; see '"From Blank to Blank": Harold Bloom and Women Writers' in *The Salt Companion to Harold Bloom*, pp. 378-392 (p. 380).

49 Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 70.

to poststructuralist ideas, as does his assumptions that 'there are *no* texts, but only relationships *between* texts' and '[t]he meaning of a poem can only be another poem'.[50] There is an essential dissimilarity between Bloom and the poststructuralists, however.[51] As was suggested above, the debt that tormented Bloom's poet could easily have been cancelled if Bloom's ideas had merged with the poststructuralist's or the intertextualist's: if a point of origin cannot be reached, the debt can be written off. But the burden of debt is precisely the point: indebtedness is not only that which caused the strong poet to agonize; it is also that which nourished him – in fact, that which feeds the whole literary tradition of strong poets. One reason why source study is extraneous to Bloom's theory would appear to be that if the critic attempts to trace ideas backwards, that would suggest that the poet is seen to pay back, honouring his debt by acknowledging his precursor. And paying his dues is the last thing a strong poet does. The execution of source study, relying as it does on the idea of credit, would populate literary tradition with weak poets.

When the path towards an origin is not pursued, then, debt and responsibility are deferred. This means that not only is the *ephebe* released from debt and responsibility, but so is the precursor, since he does not have to be held accountable for what he bestows on the successor: studies in 'poetic influence', Bloom makes clear, do not amount to 'the passing-on of images and ideas from earlier to later poets'.[52] With its contention that the *ephebe* is accountable only to himself,[53] harbouring no apparent concern about the transmission of images and ideas, Bloom's model grants little space to ethical reflections regarding the successor's responsibility towards his own successor, towards future generations. The idea of divestiture and rivalry, along with the endorsement of the 'contractual relationship'[54] between writers, make Bloom's model unsuitable as a basis for the development of an ethics of literary appropriation of the kind that this study is interested in.[55]

50 Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, p. 3 and Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 94.

51 Cf. Roger Gilbert, 'Acts of Reading, Acts of Loving: Harold Bloom and the Art of Appreciation' in *The Salt Companion to Harold Bloom*, pp. 35-65 (p. 41), and Spargo, 'Toward an Ethics of Literary Revisionism', pp. 67-68.

52 Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, p. 3.

53 Roger Gilbert, 'Acts of Reading, Acts of Loving', p. 41.

54 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Genealogy of Morals' (1887) in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 149-299 (p. 195).

55 However, Spargo suggests Bloom's agonistic model as a 'ground for ethics': 'In perceiving an ethics even in *agon*, I am suggesting then that revisionary responses to the past entail a crucial ethical possibility – specifically, that of admitting the importance of an anterior voice, poetic representation, or cultural paradigm without simply acceding to a cultural

This chapter suggests that the idea of literary tradition as a matter of *quid pro quo* has thwarted the development of an ethics of literary appropriation as proposed in this study. Such thinking excludes the idea that a writer as a transmitter him- or herself has other obligations, other responsibilities, and it precludes the movement forward which is essential to take into consideration in order to understand the dynamics of literary transmittance. This is why the concept 'to carry forward' is introduced. It is a fiscal term, originating in accounting, and it refers to the transfer of assets and debts to the next financial year. Debts and assets are negotiated, so that what is carried forward is a balance. The concept is employed in this book to reorient the writer's debt from an obligation to the precursor towards the notion of an obligation to the recipient. Consequently, it thus also brings a sense of balance into the controlling metaphor of debt, helping to re-distribute literary debt and reduce or reassess the debt that is thought to tie the successor to the precursor. In fact, the concept makes it possible to move away from the idea of a 'contractual relation' between precursor and successor, towards an understanding of both as trustees or beneficiaries – as temporary holders of debts and assets – reminding us that literary material is meant to be passed on, to be communicated to new recipients.

Appropriation and Afterlife

There are a great many terms that are used in attempts to elucidate the diverse dynamic processes of textual encounters, such as reworking, redoing, symbiosis, recycling, and transformation, to name a few.[56] Appropriation, especially current in Shakespeare studies in recent years, is one of them. As was pointed out above, it has often come to characterize political reactions to canonized works. According to Sanders, 'there is frequently heart-

or literary vision as to a different way of understanding the world'; see 'Toward an Ethics of Literary Revisionism', pp. 89-90. de Bolla reminds us that Bloom's is a 'poetic theory of poetry, not a methodology of reading'; see *Harold Bloom*, p. 8. For a reading which suggests that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* 'offers itself […] as a compelling allegory of intrapoetic relationships that affirms the agonistic energies of Bloom's myth while also reversing their polarity', see Damian Walford Davis and Richard Marggraf Turley, eds., 'Introduction' in *The Monstrous Debt: Modalities of Romantic Influence in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

56 For an enumeration of a number of terms used to capture meetings between texts, see Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), p. 3, and Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 3.

felt political commitment standing behind acts of literary appropriation or "revision"'.[57] The idea that processes of adaptation and appropriation are 'frequently, if not inevitably, political acts'[58] relies on the idea that the appropriator attempts to seize power. Many have thus applied the term in its Latin legal sense of 'rendering or making one's own',[59] often coupled with a desire 'to gain power over'. In *Victorian Appropriations of Shakespeare*, Sawyer makes use of the term precisely because it signals 'the taking of "possession…for one's own" purposes, a seizure often without permission'.[60] Jean Marsden suggests that appropriation 'is neither dispassionate nor disinterested; it has connotations of usurpation, of seizure for one's own uses'.[61] Perhaps it appears odd, then, to suggest that there is an ethical element in the appropriation process, particularly considering the fact that the act of appropriation also suggests the taking-over of something without permission – that is, theft.[62] Sanders even points out that the term 'frequently adopts a posture of critique, even assault',[63] and Thomas Cartelli maintains that it is a 'selectively predatory act'.[64]

It might be owing to such negative associations that a mild discontent with the term pervades studies of Shakespearean appropriation.[65] The etymological definition seems to have prompted its pejorative undertones,[66] furnishing the term with ideas of resistance, struggle, subversion, opposi-

57 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 7.
58 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 97.
59 See Stephen Prickett, *Origins of Narrative*: *The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 26.
60 Sawyer, *Victorian Appropriations of Shakespeare: George Eliot, A.C. Swinburne, Robert Browning, and Charles Dickens* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), p. 16. See also, Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).
61 Marsden, ed., 'Introduction' in *The Appropriation of Shakespeare*, p. 1.
62 See Prickett, *Origins of Narrative*, p. 32. However, Prickett also emphasizes the dual nature of appropriation 'described by Benjamin'; p. 32. Bate has also emphasized the kind of reciprocity that appropriation entails; see *Shakespearean Constitutions*, p. 210.
63 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 4. She also points out that 'the notion of hostile takeover [is] present in a term such as "appropriation"'; p. 9.
64 Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 17.
65 Donald Hedrick and Bryan Reynolds suggest an alternative to the term 'appropriation', namely 'Shakespace'; see 'Shakespace and Transversal Power' in *Shakespeare Without Class: Misappropriations of Cultural Capital*, ed. by Hedrick and Reynolds (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 3-47 (p. 6).
66 See, for example, Prickett, *Origins of Narrative*, p. 27. In 'The Cultural Processes of "Appropriation"', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.1 (2002), 1-15, Kathleen Ashley and Véronique Plesch point out that '[a]ccording to this concept of "appropriation," the model is always a relationship between cultural unequals – a dominant culture that appropriates and a weaker culture that has no control over its representations or products'; p. 3.

tion, and even aggressiveness. In *Remaking Shakespeare: Performances Across Media, Genres and Cultures*, Pascale Aebischer and Nigel Wheale discard the term, preferring 'remaking' because it is 'less judgemental' than appropriation and also an 'inclusive' and 'neutral term'.[67] Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier find that the 'label' might not do 'justice' to 'other, more respectful, aspects of the practice [they] are examining'.[68] In *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare Across Time and Media*, Diana E. Henderson also abandons the term 'appropriation', arguing that it is involved in a 'zero-sum economics'. She prefers the term 'collaboration' because it 'focuses attention on the connection among individuals, allowing artists credit and responsibility, but at the same time refusing to separate them from their social location and the work of others'.[69] The shift in terminology suggests a new direction, partly towards a more collaborative idea of literary relations and partly towards a coming into view of the human agent behind the literary work –[70] not as the 'isolated genius', which Henderson is quick to point out, but as the 'diachronic collaborator' which 'more accurately [captures] the practice of Shakespeare and his inheritors'.[71] As will become clear below, however, I use the term appropriation precisely because it 'allows' artists 'credit and responsibility'.[72] The term 'collaboration', although supplying a welcome movement away from regarding literary relationships in terms of conflict, does not adequately take into account the transfer and reception of substance that occurs when literary inheritance is carried forward. In addition, whereas the term is suitable for describing the

67 See 'Introduction' in *Remaking Shakespeare: Performances Across Media, Genres and Cultures*, ed. by Pascale Aebischer, Edward J. Esche, and Nigel Wheale (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 1-17 (pp. 6 and 7).

68 See Fischlin and Fortier, 'General Introduction' in *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, pp. 1-22 (p. 3).

69 Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past*, p. 8. The term 'collaboration' has gained ground in many other areas of study as well, such as World Literature; see Agathocleous and Gosselink, 'Debt in the Teaching of World Literature', p. 459. Se also Fortier, 'Undead and Unsafe: Adapting Shakespeare (in Canada)' in *Shakespeare in Canada: A World Elsewhere?*, ed. by Diana Brydon and Irena R. Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 339-352 (p. 340).

70 See, for example, Patrick Cheney, 'Introduction' , *Shakespeare Studies* 36 (2008), 19-25. Cheney says that '[d]uring the first years of the twenty-first century, […] scholars and critics have challenged the twentieth-century view with a new classification: Shakespeare is a literary author, both a playwright and a poet, who took an interest in the publication not just of his poems but of his plays, and thus in his own literary legacy'; see p. 19.

71 Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past*, pp. 2 and 258.

72 By credit and responsibility, Henderson mainly means 'the challenge of attributing credit and responsibility in art forms that are far more obviously group collaborations than are novels. People are still making choices when they re-construct stories as their own, and to ignore their artistic agency would be patronizing and evasive'; see *Collaborations with the Past*, p. 28.

synchronic process behind what Shakespeare and his contemporary collaborators were doing, it is less adequate as a designation for the diachronic aspect of literary tradition.

Despite its pejorative undertones, 'appropriation' is an apt term in this context because the term suggests, in a literary context, the reception of power and substance. This study espouses the idea of appropriation in the 'non-acquisitive' sense of *Aneignung*.[73] It was Paul Ricoeur who introduced a more flexible interpretation of the term, demonstrating that it can accommodate more dimensions than merely the seizure of power: '"Appropriation" is my translation of the German term *Aneignung*. *Aneignen* means to make one's own what was initially "alien"'.[74] In addition, Ricoeur argues that the idea behind the term has to do not with the seizure but with the relinquishment of power: 'Relinquishment is a fundamental moment of appropriation and distinguishes it from any form of "taking possession". Appropriation is also and primarily a "letting go"'.[75] However, one may well ask whether it is not necessary to have held some power in order to be able to 'let go'. Is it possible to relinquish something one has never had? The receiving of literary material surely comes first, and that is what the successor does – both from the precursor and through the agency of his/her own recipient – when he or she enters a literary tradition. Reception is thus also a fundamental moment in the process of appropriation.

In appropriation studies, the use of the term 'appropriation' in its acquisitive sense has overshadowed the fact that all writers intend their work to become public in one way or another. Their material was produced on the understanding that it would be transmitted to a recipient, be it a reader, an audience, another writer or a playwright. As Hutcheon points out:

> Stories […] do not consist only of the material means of their transmission (media) or the rules that structure them (genres). Those means and those rules permit and then channel narrative expectations and communicate narrative meaning *to someone* in *some context*, and they are created *by someone* with that intent. There is, in short,

73 See also Robert Weimann, '*Hamlet* and the Players: Performance and Appropriation of Shakespeare in East Berlin' in *Angles on the English-Speaking World*: *Charting Shakespearean Waters: Text and Theatre*, ed. by Niels Bugge Hansen and Søs Haugaard (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2005), pp. 109-120 (p. 109), and Weimann, 'Text, Author-Function and Society: Towards a Sociology of Representation and Appropriation in Modern Narrative' in *Literary Theory Today*, pp. 91-106 (p. 94).

74 See Paul Ricoeur, 'Appropriation' in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. by Mario J. Valdés (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 86-98 (p. 89).

75 Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', p. 95.

> a wider communicative context that any theory of adaptation would do well to consider.[76]

The idea of the work of art as a commodity that can be taken over illegitimately 'from a precursor unable to defend his property'[77] is thus contradicted by the very fact that the writer desired his or her material to be communicated, carried forward, received.[78] 'Appropriation' defined as the seizure of power which rests on the idea that the writer takes something away from the precursor – stealing something which does not belong to him or her – turns the successor into a 'criminal', an idea that installs the author as the originator and the legitimate possessor of his or her work.

According to Desmet,

> Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?,' a founding text for appropriation studies, begins with the assumption that all "discourses are objects of appropriation" (1984:108). The author, no longer regarded as the origin of writing, becomes simply a proper name by which we describe a piece of discourse. Shakespeare therefore becomes the author-function Shakespeare.[79]

What Desmet describes is not, however, appropriation but (poststructuralist) intertextuality; and if we were strictly to keep to the original idea behind Kristeva's term, intertextuality cannot be employed in this discussion as it undermines the notion of authorial responsibility altogether. After all, as Murray J. Levith puts it:

> Kristeva's concept of intertextuality […] is not really about fixed influences, but rather posits a far-reaching complex of embedded ideologies, sociologies and cultural nuances and complexities. Along these lines, Stephen Lynch writes that […]

76 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 26. David Cowart introduces the expression 'literary symbiosis' to account for the way texts are mutually dependent on each other for their survival. The symbiosis requires an active authorial intention as well as an active reader intention; see *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993). In *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: State University of New York, 2001), Christian Moraru defines rewriting 'as an intertextual form that entails a strong tie to "chronologically prior works," the "trace" of which is discernible in the text (Owen Miller 28, 31) and is marked by the author as an "intentional" presence'; p. 19.

77 James Hirsh, 'Covert Appropriations of Shakespeare': Three Case Studies', *Papers on Language and Literature* 43.1 (2007), 45-67 (p. 66).

78 According to Michael D. Bristol '[g]ift exchanges rather than monetary circulation is one of the central categories necessary for an understanding of Shakespeare's plays both at a thematic level and at the level of their historical reception'; see *Big-Time Shakespeare*, p. 142.

79 Desmet, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5.

> 'the old notion of particular and distinct sources has given way to new notions of boundless and heterogeneous textuality'.[80]

Intertextuality – or, to be more precise, poststructuralist intertextuality – may certainly mean that the reader moves between texts;[81] but the theory ultimately positions the reader as the ultimate owner of meaning and therefore recognizes him or her as the sole responsible agent – if responsibility is at all relevant to the poststructuralist intertextualist – an idea which is challenged in this book (see below). In addition, as touched upon in the quotation above, a poststructuralist intertextualist would inevitably submit to an understanding of literature and culture as existing in 'endlessly interwoven relationships with one another'.[82] It is one thing to embrace the *idea* that any text is a mosaic of quotations; it is quite another to transform that idea into a method. As Udo J. Hebel writes: intertextuality 'should always be dealt with as feature of the text, not as device of the work'.[83] In this context, appropriation in the sense of deliberate and acknowledged taking-over for new purposes is a different phenomenon,[84] and one that involves 'fixed influences' and the appropriating writer's giving something back to the precursor: credit. The acknowledging of indebtedness is a conscious recognition that that which the successor uses for his or her own ends originated in – belonged to – someone else. And when credit is given where credit is due, a measure of responsibility is transferred back to the precursor.

By giving credit, the appropriating writer contributes to the precursor's afterlife. According to Walter Benjamin, afterlife (*Nachleben)* denotes the process whereby a text endures throughout the ages.[85] When the successor

80 Murray J. Levith, *Shakespeare's Cues and Prompts* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 1.

81 Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 12.

82 Susan Bassnett, 'Influence and Intertextuality: A Reappraisal,' *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 43.2 (2007): 134-146 (p. 138).

83 Hebel, ed., 'Introduction' in *Intertextuality, Allusion, and Quotation: An International Bibliography of Critical Studies* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), pp. 1-19 (p. 13).

84 Gérard Genette understands the term 'intertextuality' in a 'more restrictive sense, as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another'; pp. 1-2. Genette's 'intertextuality' is one of five types subsumed under the larger umbrella term of transtextuality or transtextual relationships. His taxonomy – especially his discussion of hypertexts – is helpful when distinguishing different ways in which literary texts derive from prior texts, but it offers little in the way of ethical guidance on matters relevant to authorial and readerly responsibility.

85 Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' in *Illuminations*: *Walter Benjamin, Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hanna Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 69-82.

carries Shakespeare forward into that afterlife, she gives him a return gift: she helps to guarantee that his name and work survive and are handed on to subsequent generations of writers through the reading audience that is the successor's direct recipient. In that way, she is no longer indebted to the precursor: she has already paid back what she 'owed' him by passing that which she inherited from him to a recipient of her own. As Michael D. Bristol states: 'there is no form of compensation by which the objects of a tradition are rendered back directly to the giver. Gifts of this kind can only be "returned" in the sense that they are bestowed on successor generations'.[86]

In the successor's act of giving credit, the precursor's responsibility for the material that originated with him is established; but as its components are modified and made the successor's own, responsibility is transferred to the successor for those 'new' images and ideas. Since it is the successor's recipients who guarantee that these images and ideas survive into an afterlife where they in their turn become transmitters of traditions and sources – the successor becomes accountable to these recipients. The original writer's obligation to his successors, which comes into being owing to his afterlife as a precursor, resembles the appropriating writers' obligation to their own successors – their readers, who turn the appropriating novelists into transmitters of literary inheritance the moment they activate a debt to the original author.

The Responsibility of the Reader

The many 'turns' that the recent history of literary criticism has taken are, in their very different ways, marked by an endeavour to shift or reallocate power. The premise on which New Historicism is based originates in Stephen Greenblatt's idea of a transfer of power from church to theatre, an appropriation of power that gradually secularized the Elizabethan stage.[87] In 'The Death of the Author', Roland Barthes famously transferred power from the author to the reader by turning the reader into the producer

86 Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare*, p. 145. Bristol's term 'big-time' (taken from Bakhtin) refers to something similar in the term 'afterlife', but that term does not conjure up the notion of accountability and responsibility that the term 'afterlife' does.

87 See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

of meaning.[88] Meaning could thus be deferred endlessly, as the text was taken to be boundless and the number of readers endless. Barthes's notion of the death of the author cleared the way for a transfer of responsibility: ethics re-entered academia, some poststructuralist ethicists recognizing that with power over meaning comes responsibility.[89] The question about who is speaking 're-emerged' when Paul De Man's wartime journalism was revealed posthumously, as well as Martin Heidegger's involvement in the National Socialist Party.[90] Many suggested that these revelations initiated the turn to ethics in 'Theory'. Geoffrey Galt Harpman, perhaps less seriously, even went so far as to suggest that they changed literary theory overnight.[91]

One of the principal ways in which ethics 'returned' in literary studies is the focus on 'readerly responsibility' and 'literature as the reader's other', according to Lawrence Buell.[92] This is also, by necessity, a movement towards acknowledging the reader as a category of agency. Wayne Booth, a landmark critic on ethics and the novel, celebrated the fact that '[i]n recent years critics have […] begun to place more responsibility on readers'. For Booth, the ethical is not 'an interest only in judging stories and their effects on readers.' For him the term also encapsulates 'the ethics *of* readers – their responsibilities *to* stories'.[93]

As the example below suggests, ethical criticism performed through a post-structuralist lens is not always inspired or guided by the inter-human stance in the way it sometimes purports to be. When a poststructuralist perspective is combined with Levinas' ethical perspective about being for the other in literary studies, the reader that emerges is one whose stance resembles the critic's.[94] To Andrew Gibson, an ethical experience of read-

88 As Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein put it: 'Barthes advances a theory of intertextuality that depends entirely on the reader as the organizing center of interpretation'; see 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality' in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 3-36 (p. 21).

89 Dorothy J. Hale calls these poststructuralist ethicists the 'new ethicists' – those 'working in and through post-structuralist approaches to literature'; see 'Fiction as Restriction', p. 188.

90 Burke, *The Ethics of Writing*, p. 23.

91 Harpman, *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 20.

92 See Buell, 'Introduction: In Pursuit of Ethics', *PMLA* 114.1 (1999), 7-19 (p. 12).

93 Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 9.

94 '"Morality," [Levinas] insists, "is what governs the world of political 'interestedness'; but "the norm which must continue to inspire and direct the moral order is the ethical norm of the interhuman"'; quoted from Buell, 'Introduction: In Pursuit of Ethics', p.

ing comes into existence through the reader's 'respect for alterity'.[95] In an article in which Dorothy J. Hale sees the beginning of a 'new ethical theory of the novel' that emerges from 'new ethical theory', Hale states:

> The novel reader's experience of free submission, her response to the "hailing" performed by the novel, becomes, for these theorists, a necessary condition for the social achievement of diversity, a training in the honoring of Otherness, which is the defining ethical property of the novel – and is also what makes literary study, and novel reading in particular, a crucial pre-condition for positive social change.[96]

The reader adumbrated by the new ethicists would appear to be a remarkably passive one – a reader obviously influenced by Levinas's subject, one whose *attempt* to contain the Other is halted by his or her *failure* to contain the Other.

If the assumption of an ethical stance rests solely upon the reader in relation to the text, new questions arise. Does that assumption mean that the reader owes the text something,[97] having incurred some kind of debt to the text the moment he or she receives it?[98] Can he or she be expected to respond responsibly whereas the author is exempt from responsibility? When J. Hillis Miller says that in respect of each reading, 'the reader *must* take responsibility for it, and for its consequences in the personal, social, and political worlds', where in all this is the author?[99] Can the reader be responsible for more than the meaning he or she creates? The idea of the reader as one who 'bears no grudges, assumes responsibility without

15. But ethics risks becoming normative morality at the moment when politics enters the domain of literary criticism.

95 Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics, and the Novel*, pp. 206-207. For Gibson, 'in the context of an ethics for which ethical and epistemological questions are inseparable, distinctions between modes of narration are [...] the crucial ethical distinctions'; p. 26. Vera Nünning subscribes 'to the ethical importance of being exposed to experiences of alterity, [but she is not] sure whether there is an analogy between the experience of alterity produced by literary devices and the experience of and attitude towards individuals who are perceived as "other"'. Nünning thinks that the experience of alterity 'should be related to life-like characters, with whom one can have sympathy'; see 'Ethics and Aesthetics in British Novels at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century' in *Ethics in Culture: The Dissemination of Values through Literature and Other Media*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Herbert Grabes, and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2008), pp. 369-391 (pp. 370-371).

96 Hale, 'Fiction as Restriction', p. 189.

97 '[Derek] Attridge proposes the model of "the work as stranger, even [...] when the reader knows it intimately": a stranger to whom one *owes* respect'; quoted from Buell, p. 12, my emphasis.

98 For a discussion about the range of responsibilities that may be explored between readers and authors, see Booth, *The Company We Keep*, pp. 125-153.

99 Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 59.

ressentiment',[100] seems to rule out any considerations about the possible 'price' recipients have to pay for taking 'full' responsibility for the effects that the literary work has on him or her.

Three Literary Classics and Vulnerable Reader Categories

The method developed here supplies room for the reader as a recipient of the images and ideas that are carried forward from the past to the present.[101] It takes into account the fact that the recipient of such images is in a position that carries some risk.[102] One example germane to this context is Harold Bloom himself as a Jewish reader of *The Merchant of Venice*. In *Big-Time Shakespeare*, Bristol writes that 'the gifts of tradition can be inimical and even injurious to members of a successor culture'.[103] Bristol is here referring to Bloom's ambivalent and deeply personal response to *Merchant*, a play that 'provokes a sense of unresolved grievance' in one of the Bard's greatest defenders. It is a response that has given rise to chain reactions. James R. Andreas, Sr. says that Bloom's 'Judaeocentric reading' is an ex-

100 Judith Butler remarks that '[t]he Levinasian subject, we might say, also bears no grudges, assumes responsibility without ressentiment'; see 'Ethical Ambivalence' in *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. by Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 15-28 (p. 25).

101 In its emphasis on 'the meaning of Shakespeare's text in our present', it may appear as if this method can be subsumed under Presentism; see Hugh Grady, 'Presentism, Walter Benjamin, and the Search for Meaning in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare* 5.2 (2009), 145-161 (p. 146). But if this critical practice '"relinquishes the fantasy of recovering the text's previous historical reality in favour of embracing its true historicity as a changing being in time"', the present method, as will be seen in chapters two to four, retains the historicity of *King Lear*. Quoted from Adrian Streete, 'The Politics of Ethical Presentism: Appropriation, Spirituality and the Case of *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Textual Practice* 22.3 (2008), 405-431 (p. 405).

102 Burke states that it is 'when a work is caught up in real-life world catastrophes, [that] the rarified notions of artistic and philosophical impersonality implode and authorial intention reasserts itself as an indispensable category in the ethics of discourse'. Burke refers to the commotion around the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* to comment on the risk of writing, suggesting that a risk of being misunderstood or misinterpreted always follows the publication of any work of art since the writer cannot be present to correct misreadings. To Burke, '[t]he "risk of writing" gives the question "Who is speaking?" its perennial urgency'; see *The Ethics of Writing*, pp. 22 and 25.

103 Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare*, p. 145.

ample of just such an ideological reading that he himself so adamantly resents.[104] According to David M. Schiller, Bloom's argument that the play is anti-Semitic poses a challenge to his bardolatry, for '[i]f *Merchant* is anti-Semitic, so must Shakespeare be'.[105] It is Bloom's 'refusal' to identify with Shylock that, according to Schiller, marks the 'limits of his bardolatry'.[106]

In their endeavour to undermine Bloom's defence of Shakespeare, these readings tell us more about Bloom and less about the play itself. What if Bloom's refusal to identify with Shylock has something to do with the play's movement towards liberating Antonio – not Shylock – from guilt and responsibility? The problem with the play in relation to the method proposed in this study is not that it is anti-Semitic, but that the play's drive to liberate Antonio is stronger than the drive to 'humanize' or liberate Shylock. Antonio gains his freedom at the expense of Shylock, which may explain why Bloom, to the unhappiness of his students, tells them that 'to recover the comic splendor of *The Merchant of Venice* now, you need to be either a scholar or an anti-Semite, or best of all an anti-Semitic scholar'.[107] Thus, the play's ethical movement towards 'humanizing' Shylock, famously captured in his 'Hath not a Jew eyes' speech,[108] is thwarted by its ending, by the ethical movement towards releasing Antonio. Whereas the law and the play assume responsibility for Antonio's welfare, they hold Shylock responsible for his own undoing. Shylock never takes his pound of flesh, but he does not place any restraint upon himself; the audience has reason to believe that given the chance, he would perform the act of cruelty. Antonio is thus cleared from guilt and from any complicity in Shylock's fall; Shylock only has himself to blame.

In view of this outcome, it is natural to ask whether the act of sympathizing or identifying with Shylock entails the same predicament or risks for a non-Jewish as for a Jewish reader. The possibility that the answer may be 'no' raises the question of writerly responsibility and calls for a transfer of responsibility back to the author, not in order to bring him to justice –

104 Andreas's expression; see 'Shakespeare and the Invention of Humanism: Bloom on Race and Ethnicity' in *Harold Bloom's Shakespeare*, pp. 181-197 (p. 184).

105 According to Schiller, however, Bloom 'is well aware of the threatening metonymy' and thus tells his readers '"[t]hat Shakespeare himself was personally anti-Semitic we reasonably can doubt"'; see '"I Am Sure this Shakespeare Will Not Do": Anti-Semitism and the Limits of Bardolatry' in *Harold Bloom's Shakespeare*, pp. 247-258 (p. 248).

106 Schiller, '"I Am Sure This Shakespeare Will Not Do"', p. 247.

107 Quoted from Schiller, '"I Am Sure This Shakespeare Will Not Do"', pp. 248-249.

108 Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2nd edn (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), pp. 1111-1175 (III. 1. 45-61).

to accuse him of anti-Semitism – but in order to trace harmful images back to their source, so as to protect the reader from a potential stigma attached to historically vulnerable groups.

Another example of the precarious ethical stance of the reader is provided by Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885); and since one of the three women novelists whose works are examined in this study has played a part in the controversies surrounding Twain's book, it is a particularly relevant instance. The image of Jim and the view of race and slavery in *Huckleberry Finn* have been extremely disturbing, especially to African-American readers and critics.[109] To Paul Moses, the late African-American professor at the University of Chicago, it was so offensive that he refused to teach it to his students.[110] Julius Lester, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, found himself roused to a similar resentment:

> As a black parent […] I sympathize with those who want the book banned, or at least removed from required reading lists in schools. While I am opposed to book banning, I know that my children's education will be enhanced by not reading *Huckleberry Finn*.[111]

Who is responsible for the effects that *Huckleberry Finn* has on these African-American readers? In a controversial essay in *Harper's Magazine,* Jane Smiley transfers responsibility back to the author. She argues that the aesthetic problem that she, along with many others, identifies in Twain's novel derives from the absence of an ethical commitment on Twain's part to the racial Other. According to Wayne Booth, one of the main ways of defending 'the book as an American classic' is to attribute 'all the ethical deficiencies' to Huck and not to Twain.[112] Smiley, however, accuses both Huck and Twain for using Jim because 'they really don't care enough about his desire for freedom to let that desire change their plans'.[113] According to Smiley, the novel's and Huck's initial endeavour to 'humanize' Jim is halted by an ending that finally releases Huck from responsibility for Jim

109 See, for example, Lester, 'Morality and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*' in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*, ed. by Gerald Graff and James Phelan (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), pp. 340-348.

110 See Booth, *The Company We Keep*, pp. 3-4.

111 Lester, 'Morality and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*', p. 342.

112 Booth, *The Company We Keep*, p. 470. However, Lester, for example, suggests that Twain 'must be held responsible for choosing to write from that particular point of view', i.e. from 'the limited first-person point of view of a fourteen-year-old-boy'; see 'Morality and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*', p. 343.

113 Smiley, '"Say It Ain't So, Huck": Second Thoughts on Mark Twain's "Masterpiece"', *Harper's Magazine*, January 1996, 61-67 (p. 64).

as Huck 'light[s] out for the territory'.[114] If Twain had understood a man's 'desire for freedom', he would, or so Smiley implies, have found the means to change the 'flawed' ending.[115] One way of opposing Smiley's reproaches might be to argue that in one way, Twain did understand a man's desire for freedom: the desire to be released from the white man's burden of guilt and responsibility. Because Twain understood that desire so well, the reader is not invited to recognize the injustice of what Tom and Huck expose Jim to – the injustice of slavery – they are invited to laugh. That could in itself be said to constitute an invitation to the reader to release him- or herself from guilt and responsibility – at the expense of Jim – who is used to provide comic relief.[116]

The critical controversy over the novel's ending involves 'Jim's imprisonment in the hut at the Phelps farm and Tom Sawyer's fanciful schemes for "freeing" him even though Tom knows that Jim has already been freed by Miss Watson's will'.[117] This mock-release of Jim may be seen as a reminder that however hard he may try to liberate himself from guilt and responsibility (now that slavery has been legally abolished), the white man can never liberate the black man. Thus, it is possible to argue that the 'joke' is as much on Huck as it is on Jim. But when the narrative must finally choose between freeing Jim or Huck, the novel comes down in favour of Huck. The narrative has made a choice. The aesthetic choice becomes difficult to separate from the ethical. Even if the novel moves towards a 'humanization' of Jim, it also moves towards liberating Huck from responsibility for the Other. To what extent this has 'educated' some readers to release themselves from responsibility for the Other remains an open question;[118] what is clear, however, is that aesthetic and ethical (in)justice are more entangled than one would like to believe.

For centuries, *King Lear* has moved its audience to sympathize with Lear, responding to his suffering with compassion. A look into its critical and creative history tells us that the play has long prompted critics and

114 Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004; orig. published in 1885), p. 263.

115 Despite the fact that the critical attention is less on the final eleven chapters which contain the farcical freeing of Jim by Tom and Huck than on the 'the question of Twain's treatment of slavery', 'the status of the ending remains a topic of unresolved controversy today'; see Graff and Phelan's 'The Controversy over the Ending: Did Mark Twain Sell Jim Down the River?', pp. 279-284 (p. 279).

116 See Booth, *The Company We Keep*, p. 466.

117 Graff and Phelan, 'The Controversy over the Ending', p. 279.

118 Booth's partial answer to the question: 'But just what is the "vision of love and harmony" that this novel "educates" us to accept?' is that '[t]he idea of freedom, for both blacks and whites, is a *freedom from* restraint, not a *freedom to* exercise virtues and responsibilities'; see *The Company We Keep*, pp. 467 and 469.

audiences to recognize Lear's 'humanity' and vulnerability. The critical and creative reception of *King Lear* is thus an example of how a work of art is able to activate a sense of responsibility in the audience/reader/critic. But having accepted the play's invitation to 'humanize' Lear and free him from guilt, readers/audiences are indirectly invited to place the burden of guilt on Goneril and Regan instead (and in the process free themselves from responsibility for the female Other). The play thus moves the reader towards one ethical response at the expense of another.

In her essay 'Shakespeare in Iceland', Smiley explains that she resented *King Lear* for 'condemning [Goneril and Regan] morally for the exact ways in which they expressed womanhood that [she] recognized. [She] was offended'.[119] *A Thousand Acres* attempts to halt such condemnation by directing the reader's attention to how the Shakespearean daughters are driven into debt by their father. The re-direction of debt and guilt away from the female characters opens up a space for hesitation or suspense on the part of readers, who may be moved to pursue the origin of current notions of gender-related guilt, at least as they are represented in the novels. Such a 'palimpsestic' experience of reading may be ethical if the novels are able to move the reader to 'humanize' all of *King Lear*'s characters, which also means that he or she takes part in the endeavour that the successful staging of any Shakespearean play depends on: for its characters to come alive to the audience.[120]

The shift in perspective from a male to a female character engineered by Smiley has often been taken to contribute to a shift of sympathy from Lear to Goneril.[121] As I hope to show in the following chapters, however, it is the shift of patterns from one that drives women into debt and guilt to one that releases them from debt and guilt that encourages *A Thousand Acres* readers to suspend judgment of the female characters in *King Lear*. *A Thousand Acres*, along with *Ladder of Years* and *Cat's Eye*, encourages the reader to identify a degree of injustice when blame is imputed to somebody who is driven into debt by somebody else, a parental creditor/father. Such a reading may be able to offer the female reader an opportunity to protect herself from daughterly guilt by inviting her to liberate Lear's elder

119 Smiley, 'Shakespeare in Iceland', p. 161.

120 As Jessica Slights and Paul Yachnin remind us, 'character is important as the organizing formal feature of Shakespeare's drama and also the heart of audience engagement with his plays'; see 'Introduction' in *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*, ed. by Slights and Yachnin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1-18 (p. 12).

121 Sanders points out that 'many Shakespearean appropriations are motivated [...] by the desire to ascribe motivations, as exemplified in the (unreliable) first person narration of Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*'; see *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 57.

daughters from the blame that has traditionally been attached to them, and to some extent to Cordelia as well. If so, Jane Smiley's hope that her novel might serve young female readers as a 'prophylactic against the guilt about proper daughterhood that [she] knew *King Lear* could induce'[122] may be realized; and in that event, the 'ethical *conversation*' initiated by Smiley in her essay and taken up in this study will have 'done its work'.[123]

122 Smiley, 'Shakespeare in Iceland', p. 173

123 Cf. Booth's response to Paul Moses in *The Company We Keep*, p. 477. For the interesting corrective to Booth's initially negative response to his African-American colleague Paul Moses's ethical objections to teaching *Huckleberry Finn*, see pp. 3-4 and pp. 457-469.

CHAPTER TWO

Redistributing Guilt and Responsibilities in *A Thousand Acres* and *King Lear*

> A novelist is someone who has volunteered to be a representative of literature and to move it forward a generation. That is all.[1]
>
> ‘tis our fast intent
> To shake all cares and business from our age,
> Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
> Unburdened crawl toward death.[2]
>
> The evil that men do lives after them; the good
> is oft interred with their bones.[3]
>
> This is the land. We have our inheritance.[4]

1 Smiley, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), p. 32.
2 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R.A. Foakes (Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997), I. 1. 37. Subsequent references to the play are provided in the text.
3 Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 1549-1613 (III. 2. 72).
4 T.S. Eliot, ‘Ash-Wednesday III’ in *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974).

Introductory Remarks

From her first novel, *Barn Blind* (1980), to her last to date, *Private Life* (2010), Jane Smiley has covered everything from the short story and novella to romance, detective fiction, comedy, tragedy, and epic. Her interest in horses has taken both non-fictional and fictional expression, and her fascination with Charles Dickens resulted in the biography *Charles Dickens* (2002). In 2003, *Good Faith* was published, a book which, like most of her novels, 'features the ownership of property'.[5] Set in 1982, at the beginning of the Reagan era – a time of deregulation – the novel captures how the expectation of money and riches introduces new rules for the honest real-estate broker Joe Stratford to play by.[6] Like her novel *Ten Days in the Hills* (2007), it depicts how American politics influences and infiltrates interpersonal relationships and disturbs the entrenched moral values of individuals. *Ten Days in the Hills* is modelled on Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, but the plot is transposed to California, and the threat that ties the characters together in a house for ten consecutive days is not the plague but the Iraq war.[7]

Smiley thus evokes the recent past of her country, but she recalls the more distant past as well. *The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton* (1998), which has been called an 'alternative to Twain's classic' *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,[8] is set in the 1850s in the Kansas Territory, during a violent time when Kansas' future – as a free or slave state – was still to be determined.[9] Smiley borrows a pattern from Twain's novel in Lidie Newton's attempt to rescue a Black slave.[10] However, Lidie does not succeed in rescuing Lorna from slavery, and she does not 'light out for the territory' at the end of the novel in an attempt to free herself from responsibility. From having been driven by an antagonistic desire to make

5 Jason Polley, 'Acts of Justice: Risk and Representation in Contemporary American Fiction' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, McGill University, 2007), p. 228.

6 Smiley, *Good Faith* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003). See Smiley, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*, p. 259.

7 Smiley, *Ten Days in the Hills* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

8 Ron Charles, 'Challenging Mark Twain's Tales of Simpler Times', *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 March 1998, 1-1 (p. 1).

9 Smiley, *The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998). Smiley herself calls the novel an 'anti-romance'; see Bill Goldstein, '"Every Time You're Free, You're Lonely": A Talk with Jane Smiley, author of *The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton*', *The New York Times on the Web*, 4 April 1998 http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/04/05/specials/smiley-interview.html [accessed 29 June 2010].

10 According to Smiley, '*Lidie* owes a lot to *Huck*. I owe a lot to Twain'; see Kay Bonetti, 'An Interview with Jane Smiley', *Missouri Review* 21.3 (1998), 91-108 (p. 106).

her voice – along with other white voices – heard against pro-slavery advocates, she is eventually driven by a responsibility to Lorna, and to everybody who was trapped in slavery, as she decides to tell the story of the Black Other.[11]

It was Smiley's decision to tell the story of the female Other in *King Lear* that earned her her reputation as one of the most important North American writers of her generation. Called a 'tour de force' and a 'big book',[12] *A Thousand Acres* was given overwhelmingly favourable reviews when it first appeared.[13] Smiley's bold undertaking to rewrite Shakespeare's literary masterpiece paid off in a concrete sense, as it brought her the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1992. To Marina Leslie, 'it seems clear that it was, in no small measure, the conspicuous ambition of this novel to rewrite *King Lear* which generated much of its critical acclaim'.[14]

Previous Research

Smiley's novel occupies a different position in this study from the two books by Anne Tyler and Margaret Atwood. Meticulously re-positioning plot, characters, and themes into a 20th-century setting, *A Thousand Acres* emerges as a particularly careful and consistent response to *King Lear*.[15]

11 This is where the influence of Harriet Beecher Stowe can be most clearly felt, a writer whose desire to see an end to slavery was put into practice in the writing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. See Smiley, '"Say It Ain't So, Huck"', p. 64. According to Lewis Burke Frumkes, Smiley has said that she likes '"to see Huck as the dad and Harriet Beecher Stowe as the mom of [her] novel"'; quoted from Susan Farrell, *A Thousand Acres: A Reader's Guide* (New York and London: Continuum, 2001), p. 19.

12 David Gates, 'Reports from the Heartland', *Newsweek*, 18 November 1991, http://www.newsweek.com/1991/11/18/reports-from-the-heartland.html [accessed 24 August 2010], and Ron Carlson, 'King Lear in Zebulon County', *The New York Times Book Review*, 3 November 1991, 12-12 (p. 12).

13 See Farrell, *A Thousand Acres: A Reader's Guide*, p. 63.

14 Leslie, 'Incest, Incorporation, and *King Lear* in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*', *College English* 60.1 (1998), 31-50 (p. 32).

15 But *A Thousand Acres* is also what Carl D. Malmgren calls a 'narrative[...] of the land'; see 'The Lie of the Land: Heartland Novels by Smiley and Kinsella', *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.2 (1999), 432-456 (p. 432). Through its preoccupation with land, *A Thousand Acres* writes itself into another tradition of appropriations of *King Lear* of various national origins, such as Lorna Doone Beers' *A Humble Lear* (1929); Mary MacInnes' *The Quondam Wives* (1993); Arne Sand's *Ljugarstriden* (1956); Honoré De Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* (1834); Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862); Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1937); and Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958). For a discussion, see

Critics have probed the novel's American roots and typical American features – Mary Paniccia Carden has, for example, focused on the novel's ambition to 'unsettle American "nostalgia" for its mythical past', and Kyoto Amano has commented on its aim to 'debunk[…] the Alger myth', suggesting that Smiley 'attacks the rags-to-riches myth that promotes male dominance and the suppression of women' –[16] but previous research has also paid a good deal of attention to *A Thousand Acres* as a feminist revision of *King Lear*. David Brauner's detailed analysis in '"Speak Again": The Politics of Rewriting in *A Thousand Acres*' stands out, as well as James Schiff's article 'Contemporary Retellings: *A Thousand Acres* as the Latest *Lear*'.[17] In 'The Daughters' Subversion in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*', Susan Strehle discusses *A Thousand Acres* as a subversive retelling of *King Lear*, in which Ginny's (feminine) voice subverts the 'logic of patriarchy'.[18] In 'Incest, Incorporation and *King Lear* in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*', Marina Leslie offers yet another analysis of the relationship between the play and the book. She finds the novel to be a 'remarkably faithful and a profoundly subversive revision of Shakespeare's *King Lear*'.[19] The preoccupation with land and with nature in Smiley's book has also prompted many analyses. *A Thousand Acres* has been read as an eco-feminist text, and Barbara Mathieson offers an account of the way in which Smiley's environmental vision is linked to Shakespeare's earlier vision.[20]

Peter Conrad, *To Be Continued*: *Four Stories and Their Survival* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

16 Carden, 'Sons and Daughters of Self-Made Men: Nation-Building and Gender-Constructions in Modern and Contemporary American Novels' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York, 1997), p. 175; see also Amano, 'Alger's Shadows in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*', *Critique* 47.1 (2005), 23-39 (pp. 24 and 37). Sinead McDermott asks if it is 'really possible to mine the past or look to it as a source of change, without at some point engaging in nostalgic longings?'; see 'Memory, Nostalgia, and Gender in *A Thousand Acres*', *Signs* 28.1 (2002), 389-407 (p. 391). Sara Farris argues that Smiley 'shapes her novel in precise and consistent resistance to pastoral tradition'; see 'American Pastoral in the Twentieth Century: *O Pioneers!, A Thousand Acres*, and *Merry Men*', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 5.1 (1998), 27-48 (p. 34). Lori Ween reads *A Thousand Acres* in terms of the family saga. See 'Family Sagas of the Americas: Los Sangurimas and *A Thousand Acres*', *Comparatist* 20 (1996), 111-125.

17 See also Tim Keppel, 'Goneril's Version: *A Thousand Acres* and *King Lear*', *South Dakota Review* 33.2 (1995), 105-117; Iska Alter, '*King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres:* Gender, Genre, and the Revisionary Impulse' in *Transforming Shakespeare*; Caroline Cakebread, 'Remembering *King Lear* in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*' in Desmet and Sawyer's *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, and Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares*, particularly pp. 191-216.

18 Strehle, 'The Daughter's Subversion in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*', *Critique* 41.3 (2000), 211-226.

19 Leslie, 'Incest, Incorporation, and *King Lear*', p. 31.

20 See Mathieson, 'The Polluted Quarry: Nature and Body in *A Thousand Acres*' in *Transforming Shakespeare*, pp. 127-144. For another ecofeminist analysis of *A Thousand*

Goneril and Regan in the Creative and Critical Afterlife

In the terms of the present work, what emerges through a comparative analysis of Smiley's novel and *King Lear* in this study is above all the borrowing of a motif for use in *A Thousand Acres*, a motif in which a sovereign father divests himself of responsibility for what he has created.[21] The very first thing Shakespeare's Lear does as the curtain has risen is to renounce his responsibility for the land he rules declaring his intention to 'shake all cares and business from our age,/ Conferring them on younger strengths, while we/Unburdened crawl toward death' (I. 1. 38). One of the intended heirs does not accept Lear's 'unburdening', however. When Lear's favourite daughter does not serve her father/king as he wished her to, 'her price is fallen' (I. 1. 198), and she can be of no 'value' to him. Consequently, Lear passes on a kingdom – which, to the naked eye, only consists of assets, of 'shadowy forests and with champaigns riched,/With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads' (I. 1. 64) – to Goneril and Regan who are, together

Acres, see Almila Ozdek, 'Coming Out of the Amnesia: Herstories and Earth Stories and Jane Smiley's Critique of Capitalist Ownership in *A Thousand Acres*' in *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Andrea Campbell (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 62-73. Deborah Slicer has a short section on *A Thousand Acres* in 'Toward an Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory: Bodies as Grounds' in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 49-73. Maureen Devine discusses students' reading of the novel from an ecological perspective; see 'Swamp Semantics, or Where Goes the Gym? An Ecodidactic Essay' in *Towards a Dialogic Anglistics*, ed. by Werner Delanoy, Jörg Helbig, and Allan James (Wien: Lit Verlag, 2007), pp. 65-80. See also Scott Vander Ploeg, '*A Thousand Acres* of *King Lear*: Reading Shakespeare Through Smiley', *CEA Critic* 68.1-2 (2005-2006), 36-42 (p. 37). In 'Consuming Nature: Literature of the World that Feeds Us' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2009), Kathryn C. Bunthoff reads *A Thousand Acres* in terms of its critique of industrialized agriculture and analyses the novel's 'food and foodways'; p. 36. For an analysis of the novel's comment on food and eating, see Steven G. Kellman, 'Food Fights in Iowa: The Vegetarian Stranger in Recent Midwest Fiction', *Virginia Quarterly Review* 71.3 (1995), 435-448.

21 A Renaissance audience would be alarmed at the fact that a king sets his personal preferences above his public duties. Laurie Shannon points out that '[t]he exercise of a king's private will, unsubordinated to the good of the realm "unkings" the king; indeed, it locates him within one of the worst Renaissance categories of moral failure: tyranny'; see *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 154. In *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), Naomi Conn Liebler writes that 'Lear violates his royal obligation to protect the realm, and also the custom of primogeniture in promising the "third more opulent" portion of the land to his youngest, not his eldest, daughter'; p. 199.

with their husbands, invited to share the crown. But the daughters will come to share something else too: indebtedness and, in due course, blame. The new 'owners' are not those whom Lear anticipated, and when the male ruler terminates his property relation to the land, a debt of gratitude is imposed on the new rulers. In the course of the play, the reader/audience witnesses how the father tries to collect a debt from his daughters, in exchange for the 'gift' he bestowed on them, a gift that they eventually 'return' in paying for it with their lives. Whereas generations of critics and audiences have been able to exculpate Lear, Goneril and Regan have had to share the burden of blame for the tragic outcome of the play. As we will see below, however, *A Thousand Acres* invites readers to recognize this as a poetic injustice in *King Lear*.

Even though a few critics have emphasized Lear's complicity in Goneril and Regan's behaviour,[22] to many readers and spectators the evil in the play comes in the guise of the two elder daughters. Until recently, the prevailing critical idea of Goneril and Regan could be summarized in Bloom's acceptance of the two as 'unnatural hags' and 'monsters of the deep'.[23] They have been referred to as Lear's 'ungrateful daughters'[24] and as selfish 'embodiments of monstrous implacability';[25] Goneril has been called 'an animal or beast of prey'.[26] In recent years, however, a less censorious critical attitude has emerged towards Lear's elder daughters. Cristina León Alfar's cultural-materialist reading of *King Lear* rejects the notion of Goneril and Regan as innately evil, arguing that their actions are 'symptomatic of the patrilineal structure of power relations in which they live and to which they must accommodate themselves'.[27] The altered critical opinion of the two 'bad'

22 See, for example, Harry Berger Jr.,'"King Lear": The Lear Family Romance' in *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*, ed. by Peter Erickson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 25-49 (p. 35). See also Bruce W. Young, '*King Lear* and the Calamity of Fatherhood' in *In the Company of Shakespeare: Essays on English Renaissance Literature in Honor of G. Blakemore Evans*, ed. by Thomas Moisan and Douglas Bruster (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), pp. 43-64 (p. 49); and Guy Butler, 'The Deaths of Cordelia and Lear', *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 6 (1993), 1-12 (p. 8). For an early attempt to rehabilitate Goneril and Regan, see Stephen Reid, 'In Defense of Goneril and Regan', *American Imago* 27.3 (1970), 226-244.

23 Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p. 64.

24 Waldo F. McNeir, 'Cordelia's Return in *King Lear*', *English Language Notes* 6.3 (1969), 172-176 (p. 176).

25 Helen Gardner, *King Lear* (London: The Athlone Press, 1967), p. 4.

26 J. Stampfer, 'The Catharsis of *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Survey* 13 (1960), 1-10 (p. 5).

27 Alfar, 'King Lear's "Immoral" Daughters and the Politics of Kingship', *Exemplaria* 8.2 (1996), 375-400 (p. 375). See also Alfar, *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press, 2003).

daughters is partly to do with the changes of emphasis in critical stances that have attended cultural materialism, new historicism, and feminism.[28] According to Bruce W. Young:

> Recent interpretations have taken a kindlier view of Goneril and Regan than has been traditional, and to a degree an understanding of Renaissance attitudes helps justify the newer view. If Lear is judged by Renaissance standards, Goneril and Regan are, in fact, right to see his behaviour as foolish and dangerous.[29]

It is not only an understanding of Renaissance attitudes that has encouraged a suspension of judgment of the 'evil' daughters. The 'dehumanizing' tendencies discernible in some recent scholarship – work that seems determined to disregard literature's ability to move its audience by inviting it to identify with characters – may also explain the weakening of condemnatory impulses: 'judgmental' responses are frowned on, and like Jane Smiley herself, present-day readers have found 'the older sisters, figures of pure evil according to conventional wisdom, [...] familiar'.[30]

Critical readings that induce recipients to withhold interest in characters as human beings restrict the ethical potential of the literary text as it is understood in the present study. Such an endeavour also ignores the reader/audience's part in turning language into a humanizing instrument, and thus stands in direct contradiction to the endeavour of fiction to move its recipients towards a response, whatever that response may be.

Shakespeare has a long history not only of critical but also of creative responses.[31] Peter Brook's landmark production of *King Lear* (1962) – which was turned into a cinema film in 1971 – presented Lear's daughters as victims of an unhappy upbringing.[32] According to Carol Chillington

28 It should be said that some feminist readings have confirmed Goneril and Regan's evil in support of the idea of a misogynistic Shakespeare. See, for example, Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); and Diane Elizabeth Dreher, *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986).

29 Bruce W. Young, '*King Lear* and the Calamity of Fatherhood', p. 48.

30 Smiley, 'Shakespeare in Iceland', p. 161.

31 According to Philippa Kerry, the daughters in Gale Edward's *King Lear* (1988) 'were not traditional monsters who fleshed out Lear's "unnatural hags," but rational, mature women whose patience was sorely tried by their father's querulous frailties'; see 'Performing Australian Identity: Gendering *King Lear*', *Theatre Journal* 57.2 (2005), 205-227 (p. 214). See also Graham Saunders, '"Missing Mothers and Absent Fathers": Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*', *Modern Drama* 42.3 (1999), 401-410 (p. 406).

32 See Carol Rutter, 'Eel Pie and Ugly Sisters in *King Lear*' in *Lear from Study to Stage: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by James Ogden and Arthur H. Scouten (Madison, Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1997), pp. 172-225 (p. 174). Brook's film was first adapted for the stage in 1962.

Rutter, Irene Worth's performance as Goneril 'makes us understand Lear's daughters anew, not as Ugly Sisters but abused children whose father is responsible for inventing the metaphors that turn them, one by one, into monsters'.[33] Such an understanding of the daughter cannot emerge if the character is only understood in terms of language, or if attention is exclusively directed towards the material conditions of literature. The idea that the reader/audience will be able to think more kindly of Goneril is based on the conviction that literature is able to move readers by 'humanizing' characters, and that readers can be moved.

A number of creative responses to *King Lear* invite the play's audience/readers to move towards a more favourable attitude to Goneril by transferring a measure of guilt and responsibility to her father. Gordon Bottomley's verse play and prequel to *King Lear*, *King Lear's Wife* (1915), features a less evil Goneril. According to Richard Foulkes in Bottomley's text, Goneril's 'subsequent treatment of her father […] stems from his of her'.[34] In *Lear's Daughters* (1987), the innovative adaptation of Shakespeare's play by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group, the daughters' perspective tells us that it is not their fault that *King Lear* ends in tragedy. In Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971), it is, as Thomas Cartelli puts it, 'Lear who starts out wanting to know where in her physical being the evil of Fontanelle can be found, [and] ends up locating the source of her misdirected life in his own actions'.[35]

A Thousand Acres invites the reader to suspend his or her judgment of Lear's supposedly 'evil' daughters, an undertaking that in this case entailed a shift in genre from play to novel; a shift of perspective from father to daughter; and a shift of guilt from daughter to father. In order to alert readers to Lear's complicity in his daughters' guilt, *A Thousand Acres* invokes the motif from *King Lear* in which Lear saddles his daughters with debt but refuses to admit his own part in the burden that is placed on them.[36] In fact, *A Thousand Acres* suggests that if readers/audiences of *King Lear* pass judgment on Goneril and Regan, they might find that they are complicit in what the play finally recognizes as the ultimate tragedy: the making of hasty judgments and the abandonment of responsibility jointly

33 Rutter, 'Looking at Shakespeare's Women on Film' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 241-260 (pp. 251-252).

34 Foulkes, '"How Fine a Play was Mrs Lear": The Case for Gordon Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*', *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002), 128-138 (p. 131).

35 Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Pain: Edward Bond's *Lear* and the Ghosts of History' *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002), 159-169 (p. 168).

36 According to Ewan Fernie, 'Cordelia […] embodies Lear's guilt'; see *Shame in Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 189.

contribute to the growth of evil.[37] Paul A. Cantor says that 'by the end of the play, Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund are all dead. If nothing else, the regime has been purged of its most evil elements, clearing the way for the surviving good characters to prevail'.[38] But evil cannot be subdued by killing off the evil characters; it is still manifest through the death of the 'young' and 'true'. Lear's failure to assume responsibility opens the door for Cordelia's death.[39] Despite 'a common desire to give him back the crown',[40] Lear refuses to reclaim it, and Cordelia is made to pay for Lear's urge to free himself from responsibility. The question of evil is thus displaced by the play itself.

If *King Lear* is a play in which the misdirection of guilt has apocalyptic consequences, it follows that the audience will be well advised to be careful with their judgments. Harry Berger Jr. argues that *King Lear* 'encourages us to assign responsibility; it does not encourage us to confuse this with assigning guilt'.[41] But whereas Berger suggests that such distribution of responsibility may arise because we see that it derives from Lear's suffering, this study maintains that the injustice of blaming someone who is not altogether guilty may encourage readers to make excuses for Goneril and Regan instead of activating the guilt that is conventionally attached to them. Goneril and Regan might not be redeemed in the play; but neither in fact is Lear: they all die with no one to release them from their guilt. When Cordelia returns from France, she saves her father from the guilt that almost drove him into death, but she cannot release him from the guilt that ultimately drives her into hers. Subsequently, Lear meets his own death without having been released from the guilt that is caused

37 According to David N. Beauregard, there is an 'insistently recurrent desire to punish'; see *Virtue's Own Feature: Shakespeare and the Virtue Ethics Tradition* (London: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 158.

38 Cantor, 'The Cause of Thunder: Nature and Justice in *King Lear*' in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Jeffrey Kahan (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 231-252 (p. 242).

39 Catherine S. Cox reminds us that 'the events leading to Lear's and Cordelia's deaths are facilitated by the malign behavior of Goneril and Regan'; see '"An Excellent Thing in Woman": Virgo and Viragos in *King Lear*', *Modern Philology* 96.2 (1998), 143-157 (p.154).

40 In 'Great Things of Us Forgot: Seeing Lear Better' in *Futures for English*, ed. by Colin MacCabe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 15-31, David Simpson argues that '[t]here is a general deference to old majesty, a common desire to give him back the crown, and a reciprocal reluctance on the part of Albany, Kent and Edgar to accept it for themselves'; p. 20.

41 Berger, 'Text Against Performance: The Gloucester Family Romance' in *Making Trifles of Terrors*, pp. 50-69 (p. 52).

by Cordelia's. Final redemption, if at all, occurs outside the play; and the Shakespearean daughters are in the hands of the reader/audience.

Intergenerational Debts, Guilt, and Shame in *King Lear*

One of the female characters whose afterlives persistently feature in our cultural imagination is Cordelia.[42] In *King Lear*, Cordelia does not accept her father's gift; consequently, she refuses the debt of gratitude that her father asks her to acknowledge. Responding to Lear's request with her repeated 'nothing,' she becomes vulnerable to his power and wrath. At this point, Lear has not given away all his power; he is therefore able to use it to disempower, disinherit, and banish his youngest daughter. Lear's shameless act thus becomes Cordelia's shame, the shame of banishment. While Goneril and Regan dissembled in order to gain power, that power was given away voluntarily by Lear; and once the daughters hold power, they are able to use it to challenge their father or subdue any threat that might rob them of the gift.[43]

The implicit responsibility for the passing-on of the inheritance to a future generation thus rests not with Cordelia, but with Goneril and Regan. In accepting Lear's power, Goneril and Regan exemplify what happens when daughters become not only 'debtors' but also 'creditors'. When they accept their father's inheritance, they incur a debt of gratitude and are expected to pay something back in acknowledgment of that debt. But they also become 'creditors,' with a licence to exact payment themselves, in that they are trustees of the land and the kingdom, trustees whose new respon-

42 Several contemporary appropriations have made an issue out of Cordelia's refusal to accept her father's inheritance. In a contemporary film adaptation of *King Lear* directed by Don Boyd, *My Kingdom*, the Cordelia character, Jo, wants no part in the inheritance of what is really a kingdom of crime. She has seen what such a responsibility would entail.

43 For analyses of Goneril's rhetoric, see Hazel Sample Guyol, 'A Temperance of Language: Goneril's Grammar and Rhetoric', *English Journal* 55.3 (1966), 316-319; and Jacqueline E. M. Latham, 'Unconscious Self-Revelation by Goneril and Regan', *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 113 (1977), 164-167.

sibilities involve not only law enforcement but also the authority to collect moral debts.[44]

Goneril's new duties as queen clash with her duties to her father, who attempts to collect a debt which she and Regan are unwilling or unable to pay back. She complains about the 'disordered,' 'debauched,' and 'bold' knights who make the court look

> like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust
> Makes it more like a tavern or a brothel
> Than a graced palace. The shame itself doth speak
> For instant remedy. (I. 4. 233)

Any effort on her part to assume the responsibilities of a ruler is undermined by her debt of gratitude to Lear: the audience witnesses how the two elder daughters are tied to their father by this indebtedness, which makes it difficult for them to execute other duties or express other loyalties. Lear expects his daughter Goneril to continue serving him, but she is no longer in his service. He has effectively turned himself over to the new rulers and is now in the hands of his daughters.

When Goneril does not pay back what her father expects from her, he attempts to make her feel guilty of undaughterly behaviour and ingratitude: 'Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,/More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child/Than the sea-monster' (I. 4. 251). The demands Lear makes are not inconsiderable, a circumstance which may prompt *Lear* critics to regard him as wilfully provoking. Berger, who clearly holds that view, observes that '[t]hey owe him all, and he is going to do his best to demonstrate that they can't and won't pay it; by acting unreasonably he will test their gratitude and prove it inadequate'.[45]

When Lear does not succeed in reclaiming the debt of gratitude from Goneril, he threatens to go to his other daughter:

> I have another daughter,
> Who I am sure is kind and comfortable:
> When she shall hear this of thee with her nails
> She'll flay thy wolvish visage. (I. 4. 297)

Lear thus threatens to ask Regan for help not only to collect the debt, but also to punish Goneril. In spite of Lear's attempt to play one sister off against the other, his second daughter 'clears [Goneril] from all blame' (II.

44 Foakes reminds us that Goneril is 'queen of half of Britain, concerned with order and rule'; see his editorial note in *King Lear*, p. 203.

45 Berger, '"King Lear": The Lear Family Romance', p. 35.

2. 334). So far, the two sisters stand united against their parental 'creditor'. Lear has divested himself of his assets, but he cannot unburden himself of the guilt and/or debt that he himself is the originator of, because Goneril and Regan will not accept it. The guilt that he tries to infuse into them is a burden that he has brought upon himself, namely the fate of Cordelia – a burden that surely weighs heavily on his shoulders, and which he attempts to remove by projecting it onto his two present daughters.[46] He does not succeed, of course. Regan seems particularly immovable in her determination that '[t]he injuries that they themselves procure/Must be their schoolmasters' (II. 2. 493).

The transfer of inheritance disturbs not only the balance of power but also the balance of guilt and responsibility, raising the question of who is 'just' and who the 'thief'. Attempting to take what will obviously not be given or returned, Lear suddenly emerges as a 'thief' whereas Goneril and Regan, whose recent power was bestowed upon them as a gift, have 'justice' on their side. But the 'thief' refuses to accept guilt and complicity; he will do anything to exonerate himself from blame, persuading himself and others of his innocence, or at least of his being more sinned against than sinning.[47] He even brings himself to a kind of 'court' in order to acquit himself of guilt. When Cordelia finally returns owing to a sense of combined indebtedness and responsibility, Lear's innocence seems to be confirmed; it was, after all, Cordelia whom he wronged, and Cordelia has not come back to 'collect a debt' from Lear but to cancel one:

> LEAR: I know you do not love me, for your sisters
> Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
> You have some cause, they have not.
> CORDELIA: No cause, no cause. (IV. 7. 73)

Whereas Goneril and Regan throw back responsibility on their father instead of recognizing their debt, Shakespeare's Cordelia does not appear as someone who comes to claim something back. She thus never develops into a character that constitutes a threat to a stable order, nor does she induce a shift of responsibility away from herself and towards the father.

The subplot in *King Lear* also shows readers and audiences how readily the older generation can transfer guilt and shame to the younger. Cordelia

46 See Claudette Hoover, 'Women, Centaurs, and Devils in *King Lear*', *Women's Studies* 16 (1989), 349-359 (p. 355), and Sharon Hamilton, *Shakespeare's Daughters* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), p. 172.

47 See Mark Berge, '"My Poor Fool is Hanged": Cordelia, the Fool, Silence and Irresolution in *King Lear*' in *Reclamations of Shakespeare*, ed. by A.J. Hoenselaars (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 211-222 (p. 215).

is not the only character to carry a burden that belongs to a father. Edgar is also banished by his father without enough support to prove his alleged guilt; and Edmund becomes the epitome of shame in his role as 'bastard'. Critics have expressed concern about the exposure of Edmund [48] in the short exchange of words between Kent and Gloucester before the division of the kingdom. As we witness the process by which Gloucester's private shame becomes Edmund's public stigma,[49] the scene draws our attention to the attempted downplaying of shame and guilt:

> KENT: Is not this your son, my lord?
> GLOUCESTER: His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge.
> I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I
> am brazed to't.
> KENT: I cannot conceive you.
> GLOUCESTER: Sir, this young fellow's mother could;
> whereupon she grew round-wombed, and had, indeed,
> sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her
> bed. Do you smell a fault? (I. 1. 7)

Gloucester does not call attention to the act of adultery as an act of transgression – at least not his – but describes it, with an attempt at facetiousness, as there being 'good sport at his making' (I. 1. 22).[50] The avoidance of recognizing himself publicly as the originator of shame comes across, even to Edmund himself, as an evasion of responsibility for Gloucester's past action, and as a sign of the 'excellent foppery of the world' (I. 2. 118). Guilt and shame are projected onto the absent mother instead; it is her shameful action that is brought to light. In *King Lear* mothers are never

48 Coleridge famously remarked that Edmund's subsequent ruthless actions against his father can be explained from these initial remarks on his mother. Bruce W. Young has pointed out that 'Lear's actions in the play's first scenes are calamitous not because they fit contemporary expectations for fatherhood, but because they violate them'; see '*King Lear* and the Calamity of Fatherhood', p. 46.

49 William F. Zak writes that 'Gloucester's self-indulgent failure to assume the burden of fatherhood reveals that his life has been ordinary until now, an unburdened crawl toward death, in which the shame originally attached to his own sinfulness has been conveniently transferred to Edmund and, with him, pushed out of sight'; see *Sovereign Shame: A Study of King Lear* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1984), p. 129. For further discussions about shame in *King Lear*, see Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*, p. 179. See also Stanley Cavell, who hypothesized that shame is the motivating factor behind Lear's behaviour towards Cordelia in the opening scene; see *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; updated edition, 2003), pp. 59 and 58.

50 Fernie writes that 'Gloucester's [shame] derives from a moral fault of which he says he is not ashamed: adultery, the fathering of his illegitimate son Edmond'; see *Shame in Shakespeare*, p. 184. But Gloucester says that he is no longer ashamed of *Edmund*: 'I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I'm brazed *to't*' (my emphasis).

allowed to dwell in the world of the play except when responsibility is to be distributed. But since the mother is not physically there to take the blame or carry the burden of shame, it is ultimately her son Edmund who must bear it.[51]

Gloucester's refusal to assume responsibility leaves Edmund stigmatized and burdened with shame, a burden that legally keeps him from sharing in his father's inheritance. His brother Edgar is his closest threat, but also the closest possibility for Edmund to be released from his stigma. The forged letter which imposes guilt on Edgar protects Edmund from suspicion and eventually frees him from the taint of bastardy. For once a suspicion of Edgar's guilt is created in Gloucester, the inclination to condemn the accused is placed above any desire to see the accused free, and Gloucester is, as R.A. Foakes puts it, 'heedlessly sentencing Edgar without even giving him a trial': 'Not in this land shall he remain uncaught,/And found – dispatch!' (II. 1. 57).[52] Gloucester even enlists Edmund to help him pursue and punish his brother: 'Find out this villain, Edmund' (I. 2. 114). As Edgar is found guilty, Edmund is not only liberated from his stigma, he is immediately ready to become a holder of assets:

> I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
> May have due note of him; and of my land,
> Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
> To make thee capable. (II. 1. 82)

Gloucester's readiness to accept Edgar's guilt and Edmund's innocence has been met with astonishment and disbelief by some critics,[53] but it emphasizes how quickly the older generation is ready to assign guilt to the younger without enough evidence to prove their case: the only 'proof' of Edgar's guilt is a letter, and anyone, not least a loving father, ought to have realized that it might easily be a case of forgery. This also tells us something about the power of 'telling': the letter is able not only to persuade a father of the guilt of an innocent son, but also to exonerate a guilty one from guilt – a fact sure to rouse suspicions in the audience.

Edgar is eventually cleared from guilt, leaving Gloucester to carry it in his place. It is a burden, however, that weighs so heavily on his shoulders

51 In *King Lear*, mothers are conspicuously absent. Edmund's mother is, as Janet Adelman puts it, 'invoked only to be absented,' and 'exiled as a bodily presence'; see *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 105 and 106.

52 See Foakes' editorial note in *King Lear*, p. 220.

53 Tolstoy found Gloucester 'incredibly gullible'; see Ruby Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*, p. 240. See also Beauregard, *Virtue's Own Feature,* p. 168.

that he attempts to shake it off by throwing himself off the cliffs of Dover. Ironically, it is his son Edgar who is asked to help release Gloucester from life and thereby from guilt. This can be compared to Cordelia's intervention to save Lear; but whereas Cordelia loses no time in attempting to exculpate her father, Gloucester's son delays in revealing himself to his – a fact that has led a number of critics to question Edgar's 'goodness'.

In the guise of Poor Tom, Edgar leads his father not towards the terrible verge at Dover, but up a hill. When Gloucester jumps to what he thinks is his death, he only falls flat on his face. Critics have been confounded as to why Edgar avoids recognition and why he exposes his father to such deception.[54] According to Berger, many critics have commented on the element of 'cruelty' in Edgar's character, 'his retaliatory impulse, his shame and guilt, and the "lethal" quality of his actions'.[55] Some suggest that Edgar acts the way he does to protect his father from despair and suicide,[56] which seems to be based on Edgar's own assertion: 'Why I do trifle thus with his despair/Is done to cure it' (IV. 6. 33). Edgar's motives certainly seem complex, and his actions are not altogether easy to understand. He stages a mock-rescue of his father, making Gloucester believe that his survival is a 'miracle' and that he has been saved by something not of this world. The cruelty of tricking a blinded man into believing that he will take his own life, thereby liberating himself from an intolerable burden of guilt and shame, may be mitigated if we accept that Gloucester's best hope of restoration to anything that might be called a meaningful life could be the shock of having it bestowed on him as a gift from a higher power – a gift, moreover, which he is obliged to honour (IV. 6. 34-79). Edgar, who praises Gloucester's vow never to attempt suicide again, could not have implemented the trick had Gloucester known who his 'attendant' was. Even so, Edgar does acknowledge that his deferred revelation of his identity was a 'fault' to be regretted (V. 3. 191), and that he could not face his fraternal adversary without the paternal blessing.

When Lear carries the dead body of his favourite daughter on stage – and as death comes to him too – the survivors of both generations are left to cope with the guilt that the undoing of the young represents. Reluctant to rule the kingdom, a kingdom that no longer carries life, Albany 'unburdens' himself on to Kent and Edgar by asking them to '[r]ule in th[e] realm' (V. 3. 319). Kent declines in order to follow his master, and if Edgar's

54 See, for example, Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p. 63.

55 Berger, 'Text Against Performance', p. 62.

56 Fabiny Tibor, '"The Eye" as a Metaphor in Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet, Cordelia and Edgar: Blinded Parents seeing Children' in *Celebrating Comparativism*, ed. by Katalin Kürtösi and József Pàl (Szeged: Jate, 1994), pp. 461-478 (p. 468).

uneasy and ambiguous final words signal his acceptance of the kingdom, he is left to carry the burden of guilt alone: in *King Lear*, there is no third generation to pass the burden on to.[57] It is those 'that are young' now that have to assume responsibility. And those that are present with Edgar – the 'apocalyptic survivor', as Bloom calls him – [58] are the audience who now seem exhorted not to assign guilt but to assume responsibility, so that they shall never see the fall of the young generation before the old:

> The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (V. 3. 322).

King Lear in America

The desire to pass judgment on Lear is halted by the final image of suffering and injustice: the image of a dying father holding his dead daughter in his arms. One could stop with this 'pietà-like' image, [59] but *A Thousand Acres* does not let us. It compels us to remember that fathers are responsible for the burden of guilt that is placed upon their children. As was pointed out above, *King Lear* has invited audiences/readers to suspend judgment of someone who is clearly not innocent, but it has also invited audiences/readers to pass judgment on someone who is not altogether guilty. *A Thousand Acres* challenges that view. The reader's attention is drawn to how daughters are driven into debt and guilt by their father, thus thwarting readings that would place all blame on the female representatives of the next generation. *A Thousand Acres* guides the reader towards the primary source of guilt instead: the father. The shift of guilt away from daughters discourages the reader from making incautious judgments and prevents him or her from identifying the elder daughters as evil incarnate. As suggested above, the de-activation of daughterly guilt in *A Thousand Acres* may even protect the female reader from the engendering of daughterly guilt.

57 In the Quarto text, these are Albany's words.

58 Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p. 65.

59 John J. Joughin discusses what he calls an 'after-effect' of *King Lear* which is 'the "*pietà*-like" image of Lear holding the dead Cordelia in his arms, a scene of "pity and hope" which has continued to haunt critics, editors and spectators of the play alike'; see '*Lear*'s Afterlife', *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002), 67-81 (p. 68). See also Guy Butler, 'The Deaths of Cordelia and Lear', p. 8.

It is time to look at what happens when the *Lear*-pattern described above is activated in *A Thousand Acres*, being applied to a book which is, as Edmund Fuller puts it, a 'quintessentially mid-American' novel.[60] *A Thousand Acres* has been celebrated for its 'profound look at American culture'[61] and its realistic portrayal of farm and family life.[62] The novel's attention to the land and to farm-life gives it, according to Martha Duffy, an 'exact and exhilarating sense of place, a sheer Americanness that gives it its own soul and roots'.[63] For John Mack Faragher, 'the power of *A Thousand Acres* comes from Smiley's decision to root her story in American soil'.[64] According to Kenneth Millard, the distinctive American peculiarities risk being lost in a comparative reading:

> [A]n interpretation of the novel that is devoted to spotting correspondences with *King Lear* must be inattentive to the cultural specificity of the Iowa landscape, to the crisis in agriculture during Carter's presidency, and to the history of the frontier which has no antecedent in Shakespeare's play.[65]

However, *King Lear* does capture the emergence of an important historical development; as land passes into private property, the great shift creates new rights and responsibilities of authority and tenure.[66] And what is the history of the frontier if not 'the transformation of land into private property'? The westward expansion transformed the land of America into individual holdings following Thomas Jefferson's Land Ordinance in 1785, in consequence of which the agricultural system gradually gave way to ownership.[67] Mary Paniccia Carden observes that Shakespeare and Smiley

60 Fuller, 'Kind and Unkind Daughters', *Sewanee Review* 101.2, (1993), 50-52 (p. 51).

61 Terry Heller, '*A Thousand Acres*', *Magill's Book Reviews*, 1 January 1992, *Literary Reference Center,* EBSCO [accessed 26 August 2010].

62 See Ann H. Fisher, 'Review of *A Thousand* Acres, by Jane Smiley', *Library Journal*, 1 October 1991, 142-142, and Becky Faber, 'Women Writing about Farm Women', *Great Plains Quarterly* 18.2 (1998), 113-126.

63 Martha Duffy, 'The Case for Goneril and Regan', *Time*, 11 November 1991, 92-94 (p. 92).

64 John Mack Faragher, 'The Historical Imagination of *A Thousand Acres*' in *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past (and Each Other)*, ed. by Mark Carnes (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), pp. 146-159 (p. 156).

65 Millard, *Contemporary American Fiction: An Introduction to American Fiction since 1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 63.

66 See Nicholas Visser, 'Shakespeare and Hanekom, *King Lear* and Land: A South African Perspective' in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, pp. 205-217 (p. 210).

67 Ozdek, 'Coming Out of the Amnesia', p. 63. Prior to that, most American farmers did not own their own land but worked for landowners. See also Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1978; orig. published in 1950). Nash writes, for example, that 'Jefferson's program for the state of Virginia included the abolition of entails and

ask 'a similar question: what happens when the law of male ownership of land and women is interrupted?'[68] Or rather, what happens when women become inscribed as owners of land and when new ideas, including 'green' ideas (expressed by Edmund/Jess), are brought to bear on established principles? Jane Smiley's novel comes across as an attempt to answer such questions from a contemporary American perspective.

The presence of the *Lear*-pattern in *A Thousand Acres* elicits an important facet of American nation-building: the release from responsibility that attends the transfer of property. In spite of the contemporary setting of *A Thousand Acres* – 1979 in the Mid-West, just before the agricultural crisis – 'its first paragraph returns readers to the birth of the nation, when American capitalism was blossoming, when the industrial revolution was getting its full head of steam, when American farmers were pushing west in search of new lands'.[69] Ginny explains how her forebears left 'the west of England, hilly country, and poor for farming' to dig into 'the primeval mold' of Iowa, in 1890, just before the closing of the frontier.[70] Ever since then, land has been transferred through patrilineality in Zebulon County and in the grand history of the farm.

As long as society is dominated by this principle, sons are the temporary holders of land, power, and privileges. By staging a transfer of land and ownership to daughters, *A Thousand Acres* foregrounds the idea that patrilineality rests on the expectation that the younger generation discharge the owner from responsibility. However, what complicates the transfer in Smiley's novel is not that daughters become recipients of inheritance, but that they do not liberate the owner from responsibility for what is passed on to them: a poisonous inheritance in more than one sense. Ginny and Rose, but also Jess, shift responsibility back to the older generation – to the fathers – who react by attempting to project a sense of indebtedness on to them. This reaction indicates how strong their desire to unburden themselves on 'younger strengths' is. That may come as no surprise – after all, when ownership is passed on, so is responsibility – but *A Thousand Acres* suggests that if such a divestiture means that the previous owner does not

primogeniture and the proposal that every landless adult should be given fifty acres from the public domain'; p. 128.

68 Carden, 'Sons and Daughters of Self-Made Men', p. 159.

69 William Conlogue, *Working the Garden: American Writers and the Industrialization of Agriculture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 160. See also Kathleen Jeannette Weatherford, 'Inextricable Fates and Individual Destiny in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* and E. Annie Proulx's *Postcards*', *Philological Papers* 44 (1998), 147-153 (p. 149).

70 Smiley, *A Thousand Acres* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), pp. 14 and 15, ch. 3. Subsequent references to the novel are provided in the text.

manage to escape accountability for what he bequeaths, the freedom from day-to-day responsibility for the managing of the property is a precarious benefit.

Lear's desire to impose a debt of gratitude on his daughters and clear himself from responsibility for ruling is paralleled in the behaviour of Larry Cook in *A Thousand Acres*. The two men's shared wish to 'unburden' themselves – to become unencumbered, debt-free – but still live off their assets exposes their shortcomings as fathers and as rulers of land. The consequences of bad stewardship are evident in Lear's failure to take care of the 'Poor Toms' of this world. Despite admitting that he has 'ta'en/Too little care of this' (III. 4. 32), Lear continues to indulge in his own suffering instead of involving himself in 'Poor Tom's'.[71] Larry's 'rape' of the land he poisoned was perpetrated in the name of profit and progress. In *King Lear*, land is conjured up as something that can be divided, apportioned, and given away. Both Larry and Lear regard themselves as owners of the land, not stewards – creditors, not debtors – who possess the right to divide the land as they please.[72]

Kathryn Bunthoff suggests that 'Larry Cook's decision to incorporate his farm is largely a product of his appetite for "more," for increasing his sense of power and status and for bragging rights'.[73] The daughters owe their father/landlord all, and they are asked to prove it. Their gratitude is expected to be expressed to the landlord, not to the land itself or to God. According to Sara Farris, '[i]n the farmer's connection to this land, there is no echo of Farmer James's most sincere gratitude" [sic] to the "lord of all land"'.[74] In fact, there is no place for God in Zebulon County; just as in *King Lear*, there is never a sense of a sovereign benevolent deity.[75] In *A Thousand Acres*, Ginny recollects that '[h]owever much these acres looked like a gift of nature, or of God, they were not. We went to church to pay our respects, not to give thanks' (15, ch. 3).

The property relation that exists between king and land in *King Lear*, and between farmer and land in *A Thousand Acres*, secures Lear's author-

71 See Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*: *Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; orig. published in 1984), p. 193.

72 Ronald W. Cooley points out that Lear treats 'the crown as if it were real property'. See 'Kent and Primogeniture in *King Lear*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 48.2 (2008), 327-348 (p. 239).

73 Bunthoff, *Consuming Nature*, p. 36.

74 Farris, 'American Pastoral in the Twentieth Century', p. 38.

75 The many invocations of 'Gods', in the plural, in Shakespeare's play are of course easily explained by the fact that the action of *King Lear* takes us back to pagan times.

ity in his kingdom and Larry's elevated position in the community.[76] In *A Thousand Acres*, Larry Cook is the king of his unmortgaged thousand acres of land and the epitome of power in the farming community. Larry is thus not just any farmer; as one of the most prosperous farmers, he is also one of the most revered men in the community. His 'kingly' standing is reminiscent of Lear's majestic appearance. As James Keller says, 'Zebulon County resembles feudalism with Larry Cook as principal ruler'.[77] The community relies on investing the farmer with power and fuelling the myth of the self-made man.

The farmer keeps his superior position partly owing to the debt of gratitude that is expected from the community to their landlord, the provider of food. Ginny observes that they 'might as well have had a catechism: What is a farmer? A farmer is a man who feeds the world' (47, ch. 8). In *A Thousand Acres*, the community attempts to instil a debt of gratitude in the daughters too. Initially pleased with Larry's decision to 'retire', Harold Clark will soon come to realize how much his own status is contingent on Larry's. Harold is dependent on men like Larry in order to maintain his own authority, both in the eyes of his sons and in the eyes of the community. Hence Harold's later keenness to defend Larry: 'I want you to say that he's your dad, and even though he's a pain in the butt, you owe him. Rose owes him, too' (220, ch. 26).

When daughters receive their inheritance, their debt of gratitude is activated immediately, but when sons receive theirs, the debt is to an order of succession rather than to a person. In *A Thousand Acres*, it is daughters who inherit from the father; but the transfer benefits their husbands, Pete and Ty, just as much, perhaps even more. In fact, Ginny accepts the gift not only in deference to her father's wishes but also in deference to her husband's. During Larry's announcement that he wants to 'form [a] corporation', Ginny remembers that

> Ty was looking at me, and I could see in his gaze a veiled and tightly contained delight – he had been wanting to increase the hog operation for years. I remember

76 In Jacobean England, the political theory of kingship was defined 'as the possession of the kingdom and of the subjects who inhabit it'. King James regarded himself as a landlord, and it was, in the words of Richard Halpern, this '"property relation that secured his political authority"'; see Dan Brayton, 'Angling in the Lake of Darkness: Possession, Dispossession, and the Politics of Discovery in *King Lear*', *ELH* 70.2 (2003), 399-426 (pp. 402 and 399).

77 See Keller, 'Excess and Defect: Spenser and Medieval Cosmology in *A Thousand Acres*', *Year's Work in Medievalism* 14 (1999), 118-134 (p. 132).

> what I thought. I thought, okay. Take it. He is holding it out to you, and all you have to do is take it. (19, ch. 4)[78]

Ty is the right man to carry the farm further, standing for much the same values and ideas as Larry. They work towards the same goal, a goal in which they themselves play an important part. Ty must maintain Larry as an exemplary figure and as an upholder of pioneer values, so that he can give something back to him as compensation for what he has been given. That is why Ty turns against Ginny when she attempts to disengage Larry from the elevated position of 'almighty' farmer and father. Larry is the upholder of a way of life that is close to sacred in Zebulon County, which is partly why the minister Henry Dodge, who wishes to be a peacemaker, comes to persuade Ginny to 'preserve a way of life that [he and his wife] believe in' (287, ch. 34).

In *A Thousand Acres,* the older male generation owes a debt of gratitude to their settler ancestors. Larry's status as a landowner is owing to the 'hard work' of these pioneers. Larry attempts to instil the debt to the ancestors in his daughter, who is 'a beneficiary of this grand effort, someone who would always have a floor to walk on' (15, ch. 3).[79] With the assistance of pioneer stories, Larry inculcates the values or the 'law' of pioneer life in his daughters: 'Every story, when we were children, revealed a lesson – "work hard" (the pioneers had no machines to dig their drainage lines or plan their crops)' (142, ch. 18). But when ownership is transferred to his daughters, he comes to regard himself as one among these ancestors. Larry views his daughters as recipients of what was his to give, and he starts collecting the debt of gratitude right away. The expression of gratitude he now expects from them goes beyond their usual habit of serving, pleasing, and appeasing him.[80] Indirectly, his insistent demand for a return gift renders Ginny and Rose incapable of returning any debt of gratitude to their ancestors: his claim on them prevents them from being inscribed in the grand narrative of the farm as the rightful and dutiful heirs. In other words, Larry stops reminding his daughters of their debt to the pioneer ancestors because what they own, they owe to their father.

78 It is not evident from *King Lear* that Goneril's acceptance and speech are driven by a similar kind of loyalty towards Albany, but a director may very well invite the actors to signal such desires via eye movement and body language.

79 See Carden, *Sons and Daughters of Self-Made Men*, p. 175.

80 As Tore Høgås points out: 'Their destiny is their debt to Larry, a debt of filial duty that is masked by a demand for love'; see '"A Destiny We Never Asked For": Gender and Gifts, Property and Power in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*', *American Studies in Scandinavia* 33.1 (2001), 65-73 (p. 67).

Ginny and Rose's new role in this grand narrative of the farm conflicts with the role they are traditionally expected to assume. During their adolescent years, Larry has transmitted stories to his daughters that are supposed to teach them their place on the farm. The place that women traditionally inherit is a place associated with silence and obedience:

> The story of how my father and his father came to possess a thousand contiguous acres taught us all these lessons, and though we didn't hear it often, we remembered it perfectly […] It was a satisfying story. There were, of course, details to mull over but not to speak about. One of these was my grandmother Edith, daughter of Sam, who married John when she was sixteen and he was thirty-three. The marriage consolidated Sam's hundred and sixty acres with John's eighty. (142, ch. 18)

The stories that Larry passes on to his daughters are idealized descriptions of a past which leave out essential information about any female ancestors. Consequently, any backward links that might have helped them conceive of a different role for themselves than that of homemaker are lost.

That pride in the grand narrative of the farm which forms part of the American history of progress is contingent on the repression of shameful histories. In *A Thousand Acres* and elsewhere, it is an uncomplicated success story as long as any tales of dispossession – of previous inhabitants or women – and of land abuse are repressed. To pass on stories that focus on strong white male individuals fighting their way to the top is also to pass on silence about guilt and shame. As Carden points out: 'Dutiful "girls" - - keepers of appearances - - perpetuate silence, a legacy from mother to daughter'.[81]

As farm-wives, Ginny and Rose are expected to pass on these stories and to retain their place in this narrative as silent and passive women, just like their mother and grandmothers, as carriers and even guardians of guilt and shame; but the moment they are inscribed as owners of land in this story, their roles change and they become agents – 'creditors' – not only in the narrative of the farm, but also in the narrative of American progress. The gender role that Larry has always expected them to play thus conflicts with their new role as owners of land, a role which engenders other responsibilities, obligations, and interests. Implicitly, they take over the right to expect repayment from the younger generation. When Ginny and Rose become landowners, the issue of guilt and responsibility is reopened and given a new direction. As we will see, they do not pass on debts to Rose's daughters Pam and Linda, but claim something back from the father instead, directing the reader's attention to the fact that the father does not own them; he

81 Carden, *Sons and Daughters of Self-Made Men*, p. 178.

owes them. Like Goneril and Regan, Ginny and Rose have not been bound by love to the father-landlord, but tied to him by a debt of gratitude. As creditors, and owners of land, they are initially free to gratify and serve themselves, as their father had done before.

Larry had not anticipated this development, any more than Lear did in handing over his kingdom to Goneril and Regan. The father does not expect the daughters to serve themselves, but to continue to serve and work for him. It is clear that Lear and Larry expected to gain something from the transfer, but their attempt to retain privileges is frustrated; themselves debtors, they cannot collect any more debts. They are nothing without property: 'I got nothing', Larry complains (159, ch. 20), just as Lear is gradually reduced to 'nothing,' to: 'an O without a/ figure' (I. 4. 183). As we will see below, it is precisely such a state that the new steward of the land, Ginny, voluntarily ends up in; at the end of *A Thousand Acres*, Ginny is not 'left with' nothing, she deliberately walks away from her property rights in order to enter upon a dispossessed existence in the city in which she neither owes nor owns anything. Freehold is not for her, because any ownership of land given to her by her father makes her less than free, tying her even closer to a debt of gratitude.

Even before the transfer of property rights, Ginny's sense of indebtedness to the father-landlord kept her a prisoner on the farm; and it retained Larry on a pedestal, impervious to any criticism or judgment. In Ginny's eyes, Larry has an almost God-like presence as the creator of magic lines of tile and the sole begetter of three daughters. He possessed that stature from her early years:

> When I went to first grade and the other children said that their fathers were farmers, I simply didn't believe them. I agreed in order to be polite, but in my heart I knew that those men were imposters, as farmers and as fathers, too. In my youthful estimation, Laurence Cook defined both categories. To really believe that others even existed in either category was to break the First Commandment. (19, ch. 4)

The allusion to the First Commandment indicates Larry's standing in Ginny's eyes as a 'divine authority', an image that keeps the daughters subdued and subservient – up to the point when they take possession. It is not only the formal assumption of ownership that alters the relationship between Larry and his adult elder daughters. More than anything else, the rousing of the memories of incest makes it impossible for Ginny to maintain the 'divine' image of her father. Revering and pleasing him offered a momentary relief from a sense of intermingled guilt and gratitude towards her father; but once she realizes her father's crime, she redirects guilt away

from herself, a shift that encourages readers to suspend their judgments of Lear's 'ungrateful' daughters and locate guilt in the father instead.

According to the principle of patrilineality, repayment to the older generation consists in the son's carrying the inheritance, assets and debts, forward to the next generation. With no sons to take over in the 'natural' course of things, Ginny and Rose are as it were next in line; but there is nothing self-evident about their taking possession. In fact, people start to suspect that there is more to it than meets the eye, and so, of course, there is. Ginny and Rose and perhaps – despite Ginny and Rose's attempts to shield her – the youngest daughter Caroline as well, [82] have been incestuously assaulted by their father, a dimension which stays within the walls of the private sphere but of course provides an additional dimension to Larry's guilt. The transfer of land was intended to unburden Larry; but instead of freeing him from guilt, it enables his initially empowered two elder daughters to remember, and remind him of, what he exposed his daughters to in the past.

Incest is perhaps the most shameful transgression of all, and Larry's shameful act is at the heart of *A Thousand Acres*; but it is Ginny who has incorporated that shame, who has been compelled to carry the burden of it. Rose never accepts that burden, and since she does not forgive her father for his transgressions, she does not release him from guilt:[83]

> 'So all I have is the knowledge that I saw! That I saw without being afraid and without turning away, and that I didn't forgive the unforgivable. Forgiveness is a reflex for when you can't stand what you know. I resisted that reflex. That's my sole, solitary, lonely accomplishment'. (384, ch. 44)

Ginny's feeling of shame has had no name until her body remembers, in the middle of her narrative, what happened to her. As she visits her old room, lying down on her bed, the memories come back (247, ch. 29). It is not until the moment when her father's body becomes palpable to her, when she remembers the feeling of him on top of her, that her own body recalls the experience of sexual abuse. Previously, her image of her father had had super-human dimensions; he was never just a man: 'He was never dwarfed by the landscape – the fields, the buildings, the white pine windbreak were as much my father as if he had grown them and shed them like a husk' (20, ch. 4). Making him sublime and transcendental has been

82 See p. 294, ch. 34.

83 Kalene Westmoreland discusses sisterhood in *A Thousand Acres*; see *Interior Revolutions: Doing Domesticity, Advocating Feminism in Contemporary American Fiction* (doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2006). Westmoreland also observes that 'Larry's almost violent reaction to any hint of change stalls Ginny's progress'; p. 170.

consonant with her efforts to disembody him. Now that he is perceived as a flesh-and-blood human being, she remembers what she has repressed for so long. As he assumes a definite shape, she can hold him responsible for the burdens of guilt and shame that are his but that she has been compelled to carry all along.

Whereas the focus in *King Lear* is on Lear's desperate attempt to liberate himself from the guilt that accompanies his rash decision to divide the kingdom and banish his favourite daughter by saddling his eldest daughters with responsibilities beyond their duties as queens, the focus in *A Thousand Acres* is on Ginny's endeavour to liberate herself from a sense of gratitude and guilt that does not belong to her. If the reader recognizes Ginny's struggle to unburden herself of misdirected guilt, he or she may also see Goneril (and Regan) in the light of a dilemma which is crucial to both works. The essence of that dilemma is found in the demand on daughters to honour their obligations towards their fathers at the same time as they are – as owners – given rights as well as new obligations. Perhaps the worst transgression of the two elder daughters is not the brutal treatment that the conflict between father and daughters activates, but that the latter value their rights above their obligations to their father. To some readers/spectators, the elder daughters' refusal to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to their father suggests that they are guilty of a transgression; but if it is perceived as a refusal to pay for or assume responsibility for another's (the father's) error, it becomes possible for readers/spectators to recognize the father's complicity in the daughters' guilt and subsequent fall.

In *A Thousand Acres*, the incest calls attention to how it is the victim who is induced to carry shame and guilt and not the perpetrator; but the novel firmly imposes responsibility on the older generation by this element, which has been criticized as 'over the top'.[84] It is because of the incest that there can be absolutely no doubt about who should be held accountable; the older male generation must face up to its complicity with evil, its responsibility not only for the violence directed against the wom-

84 Susan Ayres discusses whether the incest is a 'cheap trick', an 'excessive play on our emotions' in 'Incest in *A Thousand Acres*: Cheap Trick or Feminist Re-Vision', *Texas Journal of Women and the Law* 11.1 (2001), 131-155 (p. 144). For a critique of Smiley's use of the incest narrative, see Brenda Daly, *Authoring a Life: A Woman's Survival in and through Literary Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). Marinella Rodi-Risberg reads *A Thousand Acres* in terms of trauma theory; see 'Trauma and its Resolution in Jane Smiley's Novel *A Thousand Acres*' in *Reconstructing Pain and Joy: Linguistic, Literary, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Chryssoula Lascaratou, Anna Despotopoulou, and Elly Ifantidou (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 195-207.

en's bodies but also for that directed against nature. Ginny and Rose are a constant reminder of Larry's 'debt' to them.

After the distribution of his property, Larry annoys his daughters and their husbands, challenging their patience, by committing various other 'transgressions', such as buying an expensive couch and kitchen cabinets which he then leaves outside in the rain. These are acts that eventually get his daughters into further (financial) debt. The daughters are coerced towards assuming responsibility for acts of Larry's that they cannot control but are now obliged to take the material consequences of, as owners. Ginny finds an opportunity to 'lay […] down the law' when Larry, who has been drinking and driving, ends up in hospital. The 'exhilarating' feeling she gets from speaking to her father 'as if he were my child' urges her on, but she falls silent before Larry's attempt to induce guilt in his daughter by his response: 'I got nothing' (159, ch. 20). His attempt to activate her guilt is frustrated as it gradually becomes apparent to Ginny – and to the reader – that she has paid enough.

The conflict between father and daughters culminates during the storm mid-way through the novel. Larry's confrontation with his daughter and his cursing of Ginny, which, of course, echoes Lear's curse on Goneril, forms a malicious and misogynistic outburst:

> 'How can you treat your father like this? I flattered you when I called you a bitch! What do you want to reduce me to? I'll stop this building! I'll get the land back! I'll throw you whores off this place. You'll learn what it means to treat your father like this! I curse you! You'll never have children, Ginny, you haven't got a hope.' (198, ch. 23)

Whereas the audience/reader is present during the storm and Lear's moment on the heath, in *A Thousand Acres* the focus remains on the daughters during the crisis point where Rose makes an incredulous Ginny recall their father's crime (204, ch. 24).

The conflict between Larry and his two daughters is driven so far that it cannot be contained within the walls of the private sphere. As was pointed out above, Ginny and Rose do not accept guilt, and they do not pay back what they are believed to owe their father. If a person fails to pay back what he/she demonstrably owes, he/she is guilty of a criminal act; and the most obvious way to allocate guilt and punishment is, of course, by taking matters to court. Smiley hence brings the courtroom into her work. With the assistance of Caroline, his youngest daughter, Larry attempts to collect his debts due by charging his older daughters with mismanagement of the farm. In *King Lear*, the mock-trial – in which the accused, Goneril

and Regan, are not even present – exculpates Lear from guilt, whereas in *A Thousand Acres*, the trial frees Ginny and Rose from blame (352, ch. 40). The courtroom scene in *A Thousand Acres* also reveals another fact about guilt: Larry becomes free from guilt by acting/becoming insane. To lose control or become mentally deranged implies that he does not act freely, and as a result he escapes being penalized for his transgressions.

Even so, the fathers in Smiley's novel do not escape punishment. According to Sharon O'Dair:

> Harold's blinding, in particular, reminds us that, in line with the norms of gothic, 'the present is in thrall to the past. All are guilty. All must, in time, pay up.' It reminds us that Larry Cook will not get off 'scot-free', even if Rose never gets him to acknowledge what he did to her or what it meant.[85]

Jess Clark, who was drafted into the military to be sent to Vietnam, returns to Zebulon Country to 'settle a debt' with his father or with the older generation:

> 'Can you believe how they've fucked us over, Ginny? Living and dying! I was *her* child! What ideal did *she* sacrifice me to? Patriotism? Keeping up appearances in the neighbourhood? Peace with Harold [...] I'd never seen a fucking checkbook, never owned anything in my own name, never touched a stove or washed my own clothes!' (57, ch. 8, my emphasis)

Even if his father is the source of power, it is ultimately the mother who is held accountable. It seems that the one with the least power to effect change must carry most of the blame. Since she is not present to carry the burden of guilt, her children must carry it in her place, just as was the case in *King Lear*. Jess – like Edmund – is associated with a taboo for which his father is responsible. In the eyes of his father, Jess is a 'deserter' from the Vietnam War. In spite of the fact that it was the father who sent him away – young and unprepared for the brutality of war –[86] it is Jess who must carry the burden of shame. At a public potluck dinner, Harold stigmatizes his son as a deserter, transferring his own shame onto Jess by making it public:

> He stretched across the table and grabbed Jess by the hair and pulled him out of his seat, then, with his other hand, he grabbed him by the collar of his shirt. Jess said, 'Shit!' Harold jerked him across the table. Styrofoam cups of pop rolled every which way. He yelled, 'I got your number, too, you yellow son of a bitch. You got your eye

85 O'Dair, 'Horror or Realism? Filming "Toxic Discourse" in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*', *Textual Practice* 19.2 (2005), 263-282 (pp. 268-269).

86 See Ozdek, 'Coming out of the Amnesia', p. 68.

> on my place, and you been cozying up to me for a month now, thinking I'm going to hand it over. Well, I ain't that dumb.' His voice rose mockingly, 'Harold, you ought to do this! You ought to do that! Green manure! Ridge the cultivation!
> Goddamm alfalfa! Who the hell are you to tell me a goddamm thing, you deserter? This joker ain't even got the guts to serve his country, then he comes sashaying around here'. (236-237, ch. 28)

At this stage, Jess has become a threat to Harold. Jess's new 'green' ideas stir up the issue of guilt as he introduces an element of responsibility on the part of the farmers in relation to the land. Consequently, Harold is reminded of his debt to the land he owns and lives by. Jess hence activates his father's guilt, and in order to carry the story of the farm forward, a story that recognizes only the assets that have been created and not the debts that accumulate at the very same time, Jess's voice must be subdued. Like Rose's husband, Pete, Jess does not fit into the grand narrative of the farm. Pete holds Larry responsible, seemingly blaming him for not making room for and giving a voice to Pete in the narrative of the farm. Pete's attempt to take vengeance on Larry originates in his intense disappointment with his father-in-law, but it is fuelled by the revelation of Larry's molestation of Rose. His desire to kill Larry does not stem from a desire to seek revenge for what Larry did to Rose, though, but for what Larry has done to Pete himself. Whereas Pete's anger with Larry ends in self-destructive behaviour as he dies in a car-crash after drinking and driving, Jess eventually keeps in with the power base. Jess does not succeed in holding Harold responsible because, paradoxically, the source of guilt/responsibility is also the source of power. As Almila Ozdek writes: 'Jess eventually finds it easier to employ the prevalent paternalistic language than to rebel against it, as it gives him a privileged position'.[87]

The fathers' endeavours to be free from guilt and debts take place at the expense of the younger generation, especially its women. By employing the latest technology to work the land and 'swell productivity' (47, ch. 8), Larry commits himself to carrying forward the accumulating debt to the over-strained and polluted land but also to present and future inhabitants of that land, to those that live off its tainted assets. In Zebulon Country, those who are biologically assigned to carrying forward life have to pay these debts with their own lives. Ginny's mother and grandmother both die young of cancer, as does Rose, whereas Ginny reports having five miscarriages, presumably owing to the chemicals that run into the well of the drinking water. As Ozdek writes: 'The soil is poisoned with farming

87 Ozdek, 'Coming out of the Amnesia', p. 68.

chemicals and so are the women's bodies'.[88] The land and the female body thus become toxic bearers of a guilt that belongs to someone else.

Both daughters are determined not to carry debts and guilt forward themselves. By denying stewardship, Ginny liberates herself from the debt of gratitude but not from responsibility. As it gradually comes to the daughters' knowledge that debts and guilt accompany the acceptance of the father's poisonous inheritance, a sense of responsibility is roused in Ginny and Rose which keeps them from passing that burden on to their own young 'heiresses'. It is to prevent debt and guilt from being carried forward to the next generation that Ginny and Rose assume responsibility for the father's debt/guilt instead of unburdening themselves, like their father. Before Rose dies, she decides that her share of the poisonous inheritance shall not be bequeathed to her daughters, refusing to burden Pam and Linda with a legacy connected with violence, incest, silence, shame, and guilt. Ginny is thus left with a monetary debt, a '$34,000 tax bill on the sale of the properties,' a debt that she takes responsibility for so that it shall not be passed on to Rose's daughters over whom she is now guardian: Ginny 'work[s] extra hours, and they [the IRS] don't press Pam and Linda for money. I pay two hundred dollars a month, every month' for fourteen years (396, Epilogue).

Glynis Carr argues that when Ginny takes on Rose's children, this is a 'decision to become Demeter' and that this recasting finally unites mother and daughter.[89] Jocelyn Moorhouse's adaptation of *A Thousand Acres* even 'emphasizes a link with the next generation'.[90] But there is never any union between mothers and daughters in this novel. Ginny's mother is never a source of comfort or hope; she never becomes an alternative or a source of empowerment for Ginny, who only feels 'the habitual fruitlessness of thinking about her' (100, ch. 13).[91] However, even though there is no emotional link with the next generation – Ginny 'recognize[s] that [Pam and Linda] don't have a great deal of faith in [her] guardianship' (397, Epilogue) – Ginny pays off her father's debts, setting the balance straight and shielding the next generation against debts, guilt, and silence.

88 Ozdek, 'Coming out of the Amnesia', p. 66.

89 Glynis Carr, ed., 'Persephone's Daughters: Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* and Classical Myth', *Bucknell Review* 44.1 (2000), 120-136 (p. 133).

90 O'Dair, 'Horror or Realism', p. 269.

91 For contrary viewpoints, see, for example, Schiff: '[t]hough largely a mystery to her daughters, Mrs Cook nevertheless offers, in this novel about daughters, hope for the future'; see 'Contemporary Retellings', p. 379; see also Xerardo Fernández Álvarez, 'Discovered Past, Recovered Future: Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*' in *Re-Interpretations of English: Essays on Literature, Culture and Film*, ed. by Isabel Moskowich-Spiegel Fandiño (Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, 2001), pp. 31-38 (p. 33).

If the first book of *A Thousand Acres* reads in part like Genesis, the last book of the novel, book six, reads almost like the Book of Revelation, with an 'apocalyptic survivor' who has witnessed the end of an era and the destruction of a family and who will bring us into a new era – a holy city, or the New Jerusalem – in which the possibility for redemption is offered. But as Ginny drains the poisonous sausages and sauerkraut that were meant for her sister Rose 'down the disposal' because she 'relied, as [she] always did now that [she] lived in the city, on the sewage treatment plant that [she] had never seen. [She] had misgivings' (395, ch. 45). Despite the fact that she does not pass on a financial debt to the next generation, she repeats what the previous generation did by flushing the poison into a communal system. The almost spiritual dwelling-place where Ginny lives in the city offers no guarantees for life or fertility, not her own and not that of coming generations. Even though Ginny's twisted hope that Rose's 'appetite would select her death' was not realized (339, ch. 39), it may be taken to imply that the appetite of the human race will select its own demise, turning all into 'barbarous Scythian[s],/ Or [they] that [make their] generation messes/To gorge [their] appetite' (*King Lear* I. 1. 117), unless the human race assumes responsibility for what it passes on to the next generation. When Jane Smiley carries *King Lear* forward to the reader via *A Thousand Acres*, she passes on a literary work which invites the reader to extend a measure of clemency towards the female characters instead of merely assigning guilt to them. Smiley also leaves the reader of her own novel satisfied that the youngest generation – the two girls whose mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother died before their time as a result of masculine greed having poisoned that which should have sustained them – can grow to maturity unburdened by that tainted inheritance.

CHAPTER THREE

Marriage, Love, and Sacrifice in *Ladder of Years* and *King Lear*

> 'I'm Delia Grinstead', she told him. She plucked a bottle of mint flakes from the spice rack.
> 'I don't believe I've ever run into a Delia before.'
> 'Well, it's *Cor*delia, really. My father named me that.'
> 'And are you one?'
> 'Am I one what?'
> 'Are you your father's Cordelia?'
> 'I don't know," she said. 'He's dead'.[1]

> Sure I shall never marry like my sisters
> To love my father all. (*King Lear* I. 1. 103)

> Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
> The gods themselves throw incense. (*King Lear* V. 3. 20)

Introductory Remarks

It seems natural to discuss Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years* in immediate connection with *A Thousand Acres*. In Tyler's novel the reader is moved into a domestic world similar to that of Smiley's. Both novels moor the stories in family life and place the female 'Shakespearean' protagonists in a complex

1 Anne Tyler, *Ladder of Years* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 8, ch. 1. Subsequent references to the novel are provided in the text.

network of relations, one in which they occupy different positions as sisters and wives and as daughters and mothers. The two novels also outline a similar pattern of development for their respective female protagonists. In depicting 'the housewife's departure', *A Thousand Acres* appears, to Janis P. Stout, 'to have exerted a strong pull on Tyler's imagination during the writing of *Ladder of Years*'.[2] From having figured as objects to serve their fathers' and husbands' goals, both protagonists thus move into a public world where they attempt to create their own future; but whereas Ginny's departure is a definite one, the departure of Tyler's protagonist is succeeded by a return home.

The previous chapter dealt with the ways in which judgmental reactions to Shakespeare's 'bad' daughters are halted by *A Thousand Acres*. This chapter examines how Tyler's novel qualifies censorious reactions to Shakespeare's 'good' but 'obstinate' daughter. What brings Shakespeare's Cordelia and Tyler's Delia together is a violation of a taboo; but whereas Cordelia breaks a Renaissance taboo by disobeying her father, Tyler's Cordelia transgresses one of our most persistent cultural taboos by abandoning her children.[3] As will be discussed below, both 'transgressions' originate in a debt of gratitude that is expected to be returned to a father. This expectation epitomizes a dilemma which defines what this study refers to as the 'Cordelia complex' and derives from an examination of a daughter's conflicting loyalties in a patriarchy. The debt that a daughter owes her father confines her to eternal daughterhood. The father's complicity in the daughter's captivity invites the reader to suspend his or her desire to assign guilt to Cordelia/Delia for their 'transgressions'.

Points of Departure in Anne Tyler's Fiction

Ladder of Years is not alone among Tyler's novels to suspend the reader's inclination to assign blame. Most of her novels frustrate readers' attempts to find the ultimate source of guilt. This may have something to do with the

2 Stout, *Through the Window, Out the Door: Women's Narrative of Departure, from Austin and Cather, to Tyler, Morrison, and Didion* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), p. 113.

3 Although Cordelia breaks a taboo, not many in the world of the play condone Lear's initial action to banish her. In *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968; orig. published in 1949), John F. Danby discusses parental and daughterly duties. See, for example, p. 116.

fact that her characters often fail to identify the source of their own emotions, be they feelings of guilt, anger, emptiness, loss, or disillusionment. If a character is unable to trace guilt to the appropriate source, it may follow that the reader is too. Instead of encouraging readers to assign guilt, Tyler's novels encourage them to feel sympathetic towards the sometimes ordinary and sometimes quirky, but almost exclusively appealing characters that populate her novels. As Gene H. Bell-Villada points out: there are no real villains in Tyler's *oeuvre*.[4]

Readers familiar with Tyler's fiction will immediately recognize themselves on entering her literary universe. She has, as Judith Caesar points out, 'long been an unusual voice in American writing'.[5] Her sympathetic characters, the strong sense of place (Baltimore), and the disorganized domestic situations are all part of her unique contribution to American literature. Critics agree that Tyler is an author who almost exclusively addresses the disarray of American family life. Brooke Allen typically argues that Tyler 'is doggedly determined to celebrate the clutter and mess of domestic life'.[6] Tyler's characters, however, often try to escape the domestic scene. Many are not in fact at home in their homes or in society, and they give vent to a kind of restless desire to be on the move, one that gives way in the end – if not to resignation, then to endurance and patience,[7] but also, I would argue, to a sense of responsibility.

Caren J. Town observes that 'homes and cities make Tyler's characters feel frustrated, trapped, and anxious to be on the move; when they do leave, however, they intermittently long to return'.[8] For these characters, however, there is more at stake than a yearning to escape and return. In *Searching for Caleb* (1976), Tyler is, according to Catherine Peters, 'con-

4 Bell-Villada, 'Every Woman's Fantasy – *Ladder of Years* by Anne Tyler', *Commonweal*, 16 June 1995, 21-23 (p. 21).

5 Caesar, 'The Foreigners in Anne Tyler's *Saint Maybe*', *Critique* 37.1 (1995), 71-79 (p. 71).

6 Brooke Allen, 'Anne Tyler in Mid-Course', *New Criterion* 13.9 (1995), 27-34 (p. 27). See also Anne G. Jones, 'Home at Last, and Homesick Again: The Ten Novels of Anne Tyler', *Hollins Critic* 23.2 (1986), 1-13. Elizabeth Mahn Nollen argues that there is 'much emphasis in studies of Tyler on her portrayal of the many and varied forms of dysfunction […] represented in her thirteen novels'; see 'Fatherhood Lost and Regained in the Novels of Anne Tyler' in *Family Matters in the British and American Novel*, ed. by Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, Nollen, and Sheila Reitzel Foor (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), pp. 217-236 (p 217).

7 See, for example, Paul Christian Jones, 'A Re-Awakening: Anne Tyler's Postfeminist Edna Pontellier in *Ladder of Years*', *Critique* 44.3 (2003), 271-283 (p. 272).

8 Town, 'Location and Identity in Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years*', *Southern Quarterly* 40.1 (2001), 7-18 (p. 7).

cerned with an existential examination of the nature of freedom'.[9] In *Earthly Possessions* (1977) and *Morgan's Passing* (1980), Tyler continues to probe more deeply into such questions, but deals primarily with characters who finally accept the oftentimes unfulfilling disorder of everyday life instead of running away.

In *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (1982), we see the emotional and existential consequences for those who are left behind after a father's departure towards freedom from familial constraints. The novel features a single 'angry sort of mother' of three, whose frustration over her situation is taken out on her children.[10] The root of Pearl Tull's emotional dysfunction – and consequently her children's – is more or less vaguely manifest in the father/husband's desertion, although, as Alice Hall Petry makes clear, in Tyler's *oeuvre*, 'one individual alone [is rarely] the sole culprit in another person's difficulties'.[11]

In Tyler's latest novel to date, *Noah's Compass* (2009), we see the emotional and existential effects on a person who tries to disengage himself from relations and possessions. The book focuses on a 61-year-old retired teacher who moves towards a dispossessed and disencumbered existence. His wish to 'Simplify, simplify!'[12] captures the Thoreauvian exhortation to attain 'freedom from other people as well as from things'.[13] According to Barbara Harrell Carson:

> When Thoreau advises his readers to 'Simplify, simplify,' he is only giving philosophical voice to the central ideal of the American hero. Rip Van Winkle's shucking off the encumbrances of nagging wife and burdensome children; Huck Finn's opting for the emotional and moral simplicity offered by the Territory; Nick Adams's and Jake Barnes's finding their truest selves in simple, ritualistic retreats into the countryside; Yossarian's jumping out of the impossibly muddled system of *Catch-22* to save himself – all express a conviction at the heart of American life and literature (and one repeatedly explored by literary critics): that personal wholeness and authenticity are to be found only through discovery of one's radical freedom, freedom from other people as well as from things. The goal was, as Thoreau said, to 'live free and uncommitted'.[14]

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9 Quoted from Alice Hall Petry, *Understanding Anne Tyler* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 149.

10 Tyler, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (London: Vintage, 1992; orig. published in 1982), p. 18.

11 Petry, *Understanding Anne Tyler*, p. 81.

12 Tyler, *Noah's Compass* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2009), p. 4.

13 Barbara Harrell Carson, 'Complicate, Complicate: Anne Tyler's Moral Imperative', *Southern Quarterly* 31.1 (1992), 24-34 (p. 24).

14 Carson, 'Complicate, Complicate', p. 24.

According to Carson, Anne Tyler's fiction offers one place to look for an alternative to the Thoreauvian selfhood.[15] In the end, the male teacher's Thoreauvian inspiration gives way to an understanding that living entails 'encumbrances' and responsibilities,[16] an acceptance that eventually reconciles him with time and with his life. A similar process of realization prompts Delia Grinstead's return home. In Tyler's writing, freedom cannot come through a disencumbered existence, particularly if such an existence leads to the 'sacrifice' of the 'young and true'; in *Ladder of Years*, the kind of freedom that it is right to seek for is the freedom that is achieved through the liberation of the next generation.

Much like her characters, who often feel uncomfortable inhabiting predetermined roles, Tyler walks her own path, reluctant to let plot elements control her characters or to allow the action of her novels to adhere to any fixed patterns.[17] Delia Grinstead seems to be a product of that reluctance, in that she is a character who literally walks her own path by departing from home and family and who characteristically fails to recognize the source of that 'whim'. Cathleen Schine notes that '[i]f the reader is never quite sure why Delia deserts her life, neither is Delia herself'.[18] However, *Ladder of Years* moves readers towards the origin of Delia's departure by directing their attention to a literary debt which is not the one from which Hemingway claimed '[a]ll modern American literature comes from':[19] not *Huckleberry Finn*, but *King Lear*. Read in relation to *King Lear*, *Ladder of Years* reveals that it is Delia's debt to her father – or, rather, the sudden freedom from that debt – that prompts her departure towards a disencumbered future. The fact that Delia does not recognize her father's part in her departure is perhaps not surprising: he is represented as a generous and affectionate parent. In addition, the fact that he is gone – when the novel opens, three months have passed since he died – poses a challenge

15 Carson, 'Complicate, Complicate', p. 24.

16 Tyler, *Noah's Compass*, p. 4.

17 Stout argues that Tyler is concerned with 'the fundamental tension between homing and escape', and that 'in maintaining a similar, acutely realized ambivalence both about going and about staying, [she] can well be seen as the heir of both Cather and Welty'; see *Through the Window, Out the Door*, pp. 113 and 114. In addition to Willa Cather and Eudora Welty, Tyler has been compared to William Faulkner; see, for example, Mary J. Elkins, '*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*: Anne Tyler and the Faulkner Connection', *Atlantis* 10.2 (1985), 93-105. Tyler herself has always resisted attempts to determine her literary models.

18 Schine, 'New Life for Old', *The New York Times on the Web*, 7 May 1995, 1-2 (p. 2). http://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/07/books/new-life-for-old.html [accessed 24 June 2010].

19 Quoted from Millard, *Contemporary American Fiction*, p. 79.

to the reader's ability to identify him as the source of her present feeling of confinement.

Most critics have explained Delia's departure as her response to feeling imprisoned by marriage and/or motherhood. Roberta Rubenstein's response is typical: 'Tyler exposes and explores a particularly female anxiety about being trapped both at home and in time, remaining stuck in roles, routines, and relationships in which the self has stagnated'.[20] Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson observes that '[f]ew writers so faithfully delineate the position of the mother in contemporary fiction, nor explore the desire for escape from this role so openly'.[21] Delia's departure evokes several other female literary heroines who depart from home and family as a necessary step towards freedom. According to Rubenstein, 'despite Tyler's own expressed distance from feminism, *Ladder of Years* follows a pattern established in earlier feminist fiction: the psychological "awakening" of a woman who has unthinkingly defined herself through conventional female roles'.[22] It is Delia's return – which has been perceived both as a feminist failure and as a post-feminist success –[23] that separates *Ladder of Years* from the pattern usually found in fiction belonging to the feminist 'awakening' tradition. As Doris Betts writes about Tyler's fiction in general: 'No rebellious Nora goes slamming out of her doll's house in her conclusions; no woman is swimming out to where horizon meets sea or going mad from seeing creatures swarm inside her yellow wallpaper'.[24]

In order to account for Delia's departure, *Ladder of Years* invites the reader to go beyond Henrik Ibsen, Kate Chopin, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman to a point even further back in time: an age when marriage and all that came with such an arrangement was not the prime threat to a woman's sense of freedom – rather the contrary.[25] In *King Lear*, the principal threat

20 Roberta Rubenstein, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 93.

21 Macpherson, 'Comic Constructions: Fictions of Mothering in Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years*', *Southern Quarterly* 39.3 (2001), 130-140 (p. 130).

22 Rubenstein, *Home Matters*, p. 86. According to Bethanne Kelly Patrick, critics 'have accused [Tyler] of literary sins including anti-feminism, ignoring political realities, and superficiality'; see 'Writing is No Accident for Anne Tyler', *The Writer* 117.4 (2004), 24-27 (p. 24).

23 Paul Christian Jones writes that '[w]ithin this postfeminist novel then [there is a] strong feminist assertion about the women's capability of transforming their spheres of influences, wherever those might be'; see 'A Re-Awakening', p. 282.

24 Betts, 'Tyler's Marriage of Opposites' in *The Fiction of Anne Tyler*, ed. by C. Ralph Stephens (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), pp. 1-15 (p. 11).

25 Some critics suggest that Cordelia does not assert her independence in Act I, but that is precisely what she does: for her, marriage is a vehicle that is supposed to carry her from her father's house towards independence from the power that ruled her early life.

to a daughter's freedom is not marriage but her father, or, rather, a father's wish to live unencumbered by instilling a debt of gratitude in the younger generation. If it is such a debt that prompts Delia's departure in that it tied her to 'eternal daughterhood', it is another debt that prompts her return: the debt to and responsibility towards the third generation. This pattern is not pursued in the feminist fiction referred to above, nor is it invoked in *Huckleberry Finn* or in the literature that followed Twain's novel. Granted, there is no third generation in *King Lear*; but that is precisely the point: the older generations' desire to lead an unburdened existence ends in tragedy because the generation that is biologically assigned to carry life forward pays for the old men's yearning with their lives. Edgar, who did not let his father unburden himself twice, is the sole survivor from that generation in the play.[26]

Cordelia in the Critical and Literary Afterlife

If Goneril and Regan have come down to us as representatives of evil, Cordelia has been epitomized as an embodiment of goodness and truth. For centuries, she was seen to symbolize love, innocence, and filial duty. Anna Jameson honoured her as a 'redeeming angel'; [27] and through the nineteenth century she was celebrated for her sweet and innocent disposition; and at the turn of the last century, A.C. Bradley confirmed her as 'a thing enskyed and sainted', one whose 'higher nature' is almost too sacred even to put into words.[28] Following the lead of Bradley, the first half of the 20th century belonged, with a few exceptions, to the religiously-oriented

According to Sarah Werner, however, '[i]n defying her father's incestuous desire to have her all to himself, Cordelia is not claiming her own independence, but her adherence to her dutiful transfer from father to husband; in Quilligan's terms, she is speaking in order to insist on her silence'; see 'Arming Cordelia: Character and Performance' in *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*, pp. 232-249 (p. 241). It is precisely by adhering to that transfer that she is claiming her independence and her insistence on speech. McLuskie also argues that '[Cordelia's] first defence is not a statement on her personal autonomy or the rights of her individual will: it is her right to retain a part of her love for "that lord whose hand must take my plight"'; see 'The Patriarchal Bard', p. 99.

26 See the discussion in chapter two in this study.

27 Jameson, *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1889; orig. published in 1832), p. 294.

28 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 317 and 316.

critics.[29] In their view, *King Lear* traced the redemption of Lear, a redemption in which Cordelia's 'sacrificial love' played a vital role.[30] Cordelia came to be likened to Christ. Gayle Whittier suggests that 'Biblical allusions contribute to [the] expectation' that 'she will redeem the playworld's sufferings'.[31] It it is, after all, her 'dear father['s] […] business that [she] go[es] about' (IV. 4. 23).

Even though Shakespeare's Cordelia has thus primarily lived in the cultural imagination of generations as the good and self-sacrificing daughter who returns to redeem her father, critical opinion has been far from unanimous in its appraisal of this character. Some critics have found it hard to reconcile the image of a loving daughter in the fourth act with the assertive and obstinate daughter in the first. A streak of rebelliousness that is not seemly in an obedient and loving daughter is sometimes picked up in her speech, or in her silence: Catherine S. Cox observes that Cordelia's 'elusive and evasive speech is interpreted by some readers and viewers as a demonstration of love and goodness, by others as an assertive rejection of patriarchal authority, and by still others as an exhibition of arrogance, a kind of haughty naivete'.[32] Although by and large 'sympathetic' towards her, some of the most influential Romantic critics felt that she did not articulate the feminine ideals of solicitousness, obedience, and selflessness that a daughter is supposed to embody and is hence somehow reprehensible.[33] Even for A.C. Bradley, Cordelia is, as Barbara Everett puts it, 'far from perfect, and fully involved in the tragedy'.[34] Bradley admitted that 'truth is not the only good in the world, nor is the obligation to tell truth the only obligation. The matter here was to keep it inviolate, but also to preserve a father'.[35] Jayne Sears thinks that '[t]he fault in the quarrel is partly Cordelia's', and John McLaughlin argues that Cordelia 'is partly to blame for her own trag-

29 According to Jeffrey Kahan, '[s]ecular-minded critics' like George Orwell and Maynard Mack 'had the courage to break with Bradley'; see 'Introduction' in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Kahan (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1-103 (p. 46).

30 See Kahan, 'Introduction', p. 46.

31 Whittier, 'Cordelia as Prince: Gender and Language in *King Lear*', *Exemplaria* 1.2 (1989), 367-399 (p. 393). She suggests, however, that 'there is no female Redeemer'; p. 393.

32 Cox, '"An Excellent Thing in Woman"', p. 146.

33 See Janet Bottoms, '"Look on Her, Look": The Apotheosis of Cordelia', *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002), 106-113 (p. 107). Bottoms perceives a tendency in 20th-century school editions and even in students today to 'blame [Cordelia] for the catastrophe'; p. 113.

34 Everett, 'The New King Lear' (1960) in *Major Literary Characters: King Lear*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1992), pp. 119-131 (p. 122).

35 A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 320-321.

ic end'.[36] As was observed above, Harold Bloom claims that Cordelia could 'forestall' the tragedy 'by a touch of initial diplomacy, but she will not'.[37] Sharon Hamilton says that Cordelia 'does not show much empathy – or even tact', arguing that she must 'be aware of Lear's vulnerability, especially in this moment of public exposure'.[38] Cordelia has to pay a high price for her father's error in the play and if she is held responsible for the tragedy in the eyes of critics, she continues to 'pay' for it in the play's critical afterlife.

According to Stanley Cavell, '[r]eacting to oversentimental or over-Christian interpretations of [Cordelia's] character, interpreters have made efforts to implicate her in the [tragedy's] source, convincing her of a willfulness and hardness kin to that later shown by her sisters'.[39] The latter part of 20th-century criticism of *King Lear* was generally driven by a desire to break with the idea of *King Lear* as a religious play. Jan Kott's new political emphasis in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964) –and Peter Brook's in his adaptation of the play (1962, 1971) – helped replace the view that Lear's journey is a pilgrimage towards redemption and instead emphasized the inevitability of despair,[40] a view that contributed to the over-all challenge to Cordelia's goodness. If *King Lear* is not a play of redemption, it follows that Cordelia's return is not a redemptive act.

It is not uncommon for 20th-century appropriations of *King Lear* to portray Cordelia in a way that contradicts the mythologization that attaches to this character's afterlife. If earlier creative responses to Cordelia picked up on the redemptive aspect of her character – Nahum Tate's adaptation of *King Lear* is a well-known example, Charles Dickens's novels another –[41] many appropriations of *King Lear* in the previous century fea-

36 Sears, 'Charity in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.2 (1964), 277-288 (p. 278). See also John J. McLaughlin, 'The Dynamics of Power in *King Lear*: An Adlerian Interpretation', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29.1 (1978), 37-43 (p. 38).

37 Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p. 63.

38 Hamilton, *Shakespeare's Daughters*, pp. 112-113.

39 Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, p. 62.

40 R. A. Foakes, *Hamlet Versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 71.

41 According to Alexander Welsh: 'Of all Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* made the deepest and most lasting impression on Dickens'; see 'A King Lear of the Debtors' Prison: Dickens and Shakespeare on Mortal Shame', *Social Research* 70.4 (2003), 1231-1258 (p. 1233). Welsh also suggests that '[w]henever Dickens required an exalted test of love and truth in his fiction, he tended to favor the Cordelia model of loyalty to a difficult father'; see *From Copyright to Copperfield: The Identity of Dickens* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 88; see also Jerome Meckier, 'Dickens and *King Lear*: A Myth for Victorian England', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 71.1 (1972), 75-90 (p. 75). Jane Austen's characters Fanny Price and Anne Elliot have both been read as Cordelia characters; see, for example, 'Introduction' in *Mansfield Park*, ed. by James Kinsley and Jane Stabler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), vii-xxxvi (pp.

ture a Cordelia character who breaks rules or is, in one way or another, disinclined to surrender what she values for someone else's sake. In Valerie Miner's novel *A Walking Fire* (1994), the Cordelia character, Cora, is exiled from her country and her family because she puts political opinions into practice. In Mairi MacInnes' *The Quondam Wives* (1993), the talented and beautiful favourite daughter Delia will not have anything to do with her father's inheritance – or with her sisters Gwen and Reggie – and refuses to live under his roof.[42] In the contemporary film adaption of *King Lear* directed by Don Boyd, *My Kingdom* (2001), the Cordelia character, Jo, wants no part of an inheritance passed on by what she knows is a kingdom of crime.

As the next chapter will show, Margaret Atwood's Cordelia in *Cat's Eye* is a rebellious child and teenager whose inability to humour her father brings about her fall, the fall out of her father's favour. In Gordon Bottomley's verse play *King Lear's Wife* (1915), the Cordelia character is 'a whimpering child',[43] and in Elaine Feinstein's adaptation for the stage, *Lear's Daughters* (1987), a similarly pampered daughter emerges.[44] Smiley's Cordelia (Caroline) in *A Thousand Acres* (1991), as well as P.D. James' Cordelia in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972),[45] comes across as a stickler for truth. In Lorna Doone Beers' *A Humble Lear* (1929), a Puritanical Cordelia pursues an 'act of deliberate disobedience': but the book makes it clear that 'her defiance of her parent [is] a declaration of affection'.[46] Edward Bond's Cordelia in *Lear* (1971) is among the most chilling characterizations of Shakespeare's 'good' daughter.[47] Here, Cordelia is a political figure, but she is not a daughter of Lear's who returns to save him. According to Ruby Cohn, '[l]ike Shakespeare's Cordelia, Bond's commands an army, but un-

xxvi-xxvii). See also Clara Calvo, 'Rewriting Lear's Untender Daughter: Fanny Price as a Regency Cordelia in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*', *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005), 83-94; and Jocelyn Harris, 'Jane Austen and the Burden of the (Male) Past: The Case Reexamined' in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. by Devoney Looser (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), pp. 87-100 (p. 94).

42 MacInnes, *The Quondam Wives* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

43 Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*, p. 251.

44 Feinstein's daughter will, however, eventually find a voice to speak back to her father: 'Cordelia not want to be Daddy's girl'; see *Lear's Daughters* in Fischlin and Fortier, *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, pp. 217-232 (scene 10, p. 227).

45 James, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

46 Beers, *A Humble Lear* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1929), pp. 26 and 35.

47 Bond, *Lear* (London: Methuen, 1972). According to Leslie Smith, Bond's Cordelia emerges as 'uncompromising' and as an 'idealist' whose 'arguments […] [perpetuate] violence and the suppression of truth'; see 'Edward Bond's *Lear*' in *King Lear: Major Literary Characters*, p. 207.

like her predecessor who wars through love, she wars in fierce hatred'.[48] Generally speaking, goodness and innocence, two features often associated with Lear's youngest daughter, cannot be said to characterize Cordelia figures in 20th-century fiction.[49]

Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years* also challenges the apotheosized image of Cordelia, preventing such an idea from forming in the reader's mind, but not by bringing out an element of cruelty or hostility in her character.[50] It is the idea that Cordelia is good because she sacrifices herself that is questioned in *Ladder of Years*. Typically, it is Shakespeare's Cordelia's return that is taken as a sign of her goodness and as an act of sacrifice. By means of its treatment of the female protagonist's return to the world she left, *Ladder of Years* instead draws the reader's attention to the distinction between Cordelia's return – which is, or could have been, redeeming – and her imprisonment, which is not: what critics have called Cordelia's self-sacrificing love is Lear's sacrifice of his daughter in the name of love, and what has been called a daughter's 'saving love' is a subject's absolute obedience to a king. Cordelia's return to release her father from guilt is a redemptive move, but since Lear does not release her, yet again binding her to his own guilt by taking her with him to prison, the way is paved for her sacrifice. Much *Lear* criticism over the years has built on the misconception that the play endorses the idea that goodness is manifested in sacrificial or 'saving love'.[51]

It seems odd to view *King Lear*'s Cordelia as returning expecting to sacrifice herself; after all, she comes back a foreign queen – an 'armed general' in the Folio text –[52] with an invading army behind her, ready to overthrow the powers that keep Lear from the throne. Cordelia might subordinate herself as a subject does to a king: 'For thee, oppressed King, I am cast

48 Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*, pp. 257-258.

49 For an interesting discussion of how Adrienne Rich 'rewrites Cordelia's "silence" by taking the daughter's point of view' and how 'compassion for Lear is [thus] qualified'; see Peter Erickson 'Adrienne Rich's Re-Vision of Shakespeare' in *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*, pp. 183-195 (p. 193). For a discussion of earlier appropriations of *Lear* and the Cordelia character, see Desmet, 'Some *Lears* of Private life, from Tate to Shaw' in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, pp. 326-350.

50 See, for example, Jean R. Brink who suggests that 'Shakespeare's Cordelia is not saintly. She remains hostile toward Goneril and Regan and reveals the same resentment that we saw in the first scene; she says: "Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?" (24.5-7)'; see 'What does Shakespeare Leave Out of *King Lear*?' in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, pp. 208-230 (p. 219).

51 According to McLuskie, 'Cordelia's saving love, so much admired by critics, works in the action less as a redemption for womankind than as an example of patriarchy restored'; see 'The Patriarchal Bard', p. 99.

52 See Werner, 'Arming Cordelia', p. 233.

down' (V. 3. 5); but that is not the same thing as a daughter's self-sacrifice for the sake of her father. Her act *becomes* a sacrifice because Lear refuses to assume responsibility for the crown, opting for prison before confrontation:

> CORDELIA: Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?
> LEAR: No, no, no, no. Come, let's away to prison,
> We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage. (V. 3. 7)

Lear's daughter thus returns as a queen to forgive a father and restore a king, but the final sacrifice of her cannot be called a 'free and willing act' on her part;[53] it is, after all, not Cordelia herself who holds the final call. No one is freed by the sacrifice of Lear's youngest daughter; consequently it is a mistake to represent her as a redeeming Christ-like character.[54] Lear's failure to protect Cordelia destroys, as we will see below, the instruments that are supposed to ease the transition to the younger generation forward: marriage, the production of a new set of heirs, and patrilineality.[55] Cordelia's return could have restored the patriarchal system as Shakespeare knew it.[56] Instead her death brings that system to a halt, forming the final stage in Lear's disastrous scheme to free himself.

53 According to Bruce W. Young, Cordelia's 'offer of herself is a free and willing act and brings redemption not only to Lear but to herself'; see '*King Lear* and the Calamity of Fatherhood', p. 54.

54 According to R.V. Young, '[a]ny spectator or reader, in Shakespeare's day or ours, will almost inevitably be reminded of Christ's mission of redemption and his sacrificial death. Cordelia, however, is not Christ. She is a pagan woman who leads a French army into England, is defeated and captured, and brutally put to death by her captor. She will not rise from her grave in three days. In reminding us of the Christian Savior, she reminds us – and certainly Shakespeare's original audience – of what the world of *King Lear* did not have'; see 'Hope and Despair in *King Lear*: The Gospel and the Crisis of Natural Law' in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, pp. 253-277 (p. 273).

55 Ronald W. Cooley points out that 'patrilineal ideology […] powerfully shapes early modern England's social order and economic history'; see 'Kent and Primogeniture in *King Lear*', p. 328.

56 According to Werner, '[i]t is important to recognize that even as Cordelia is being her most unruly, she is also arguing for a return to patriarchal values. She resists her father's totalizing love in order to insist on the importance of her being handed over from her father's household to her husband's'; see 'Arming Cordelia', p. 240.

The Shakespearean Pattern in *Ladder of Years*

Critics have not paid much attention to the relation of *Ladder of Years* to *King Lear*. Many have observed the connection between the novel and Shakespeare's play in passing, however. Sarah Appleton Aguiar, for example, states that '*Ladder of Years* revises *King Lear*, becoming a powerful feminist *Bildungsroman*';[57] Macpherson has commented that Tyler 'nods to Shakespeare' and that the novel 'points to Shakespeare's *King Lear*'; and Schine observes that *Ladder of Years* contains 'echoes of […] the tragedy of "King Lear"'.[58] But no one has attached any great importance to *King Lear*'s significance for our understanding of *Ladder of Years* or vice versa.

Tyler appropriates a Shakespearean pattern of an overpowering father, three daughters, and an absent mother. Like Shakespeare's Cordelia, Tyler's Delia is the youngest daughter of three and her father's favourite. Again like Cordelia, Delia lets her father expect her to provide what Lear calls 'kind nursery' (I. 1. 124) for him as he grows older. Being a father's favourite daughter proves to be detrimental to both women, however, as they are expected to return their fathers' favour in ways that undermine their integrity as independent, adult human beings. Like many adaptations of *King Lear* for the stage, such as Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*, *Ladder of Years* presents a daughter who has been 'unable to escape from her father's influence'.[59] In many late-20th-century appropriations, the Lear figure is a man in a profession of power, and as such he often plays, or has played, an important public role.[60] Delia's father had been an established family doctor, an occupation which is associated with power and privileges, and we are told that Delia had looked up to her father in a way that excludes any critical distance towards him. Her father succeeded in inspiring awe and obedience in Delia: 'When her father spoke, all others fell silent, and she had felt proud and flattered to hear how people revered him' (36, ch. 3). A doctor also has a certain

57 Aguiar, '(Dis)Obedient Daughters: (Dis)Inheriting the Kingdom of Lear' in *He Said, She Says: An RSVP to the Male Text*, ed. by Mica Howe and Aguiar (Madison and London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), p. 199.

58 Macpherson, 'Comic Constructions', pp. 134 and 135. Schine, 'New Life for Old', p. 12.

59 Graham Saunders, '"Missing Mothers and Absent Fathers": Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*', p. 407.

60 In Mairi MacInnes' *The Quondam Wives*, eighty-year-old Anthony Quondam is an estate owner, a former soldier, and a Member of Parliament; in Valerie Miner's *A Walking Fire* (1994), 'Pop' is a 'militaristic old patriarch', as Myra Goldberg puts it; see 'Anti-War Story', *The Women's Review of Books* 12.5 (1995), 16-16 (p. 16).

amount of control over life and death, and thus over other people's future. That was why Delia's grandmother, who was 'a famous Baltimore beauty', could marry 'that short, stumpy nobody Isaiah Felson': 'he was a doctor [...] and he promised that if she married him she would never get TB' (60, ch. 4).

Ladder of Years also follows a common pattern in *Lear* appropriations by absenting the mother.[61] Delia's mother, an 'import from the Eastern Shore, had died of kidney failure before Delia could remember, leaving her in the care of her father and her two older sisters' (15, ch. 2). Eliza and Linda serve as less calculating and belligerent counterparts to Goneril and Regan; but the favouring of the youngest daughter plays a part in the way they relate to each other, contributing if not to hostility, then to a lack of warmth between them. In *A Thousand Acres*, the favouring of Caroline appears to tie the two elder sisters close together; but once they no longer compete for their father's favour, the bond that has kept them together gradually comes apart. The recollection of the 'betrothal scene' in *Ladder of Years* with the three 'marriageable maidens' (39, ch. 3) lined up according to age, trying to win the young doctor's favour by showing off their peculiar talents (38, ch. 3), induces a suspicion in the reader that their relation to their father has been one in which they too have competed for his favours.

In *Ladder of Years*, the tension between siblings is only hinted at. As the novel opens, Eliza and Linda both assert that their youngest sister was their father's favourite: Eliza points out that Delia was the '[b]aby of the family. Cute as a button. Miss Popularity in high school. Daddy's pet' (115, ch. 7). The favouring of Delia is a sore subject for Linda, too (319, ch. 20). To the elder sisters, everything indicates that being her father's favourite granted Delia more favours: '"Easy for *you*," Delia's sisters used to tell her. They said, "Naturally *you* get along with Dad. You arrived so late, is why. You don't have so much to hold against him." But they never specified just what they held against him themselves. They hadn't been able to name it even when she asked' (235, ch. 16). However, it gradually appears to Eliza that Delia's favourite-daughter status might have cost her youngest sister more than it gave her (115, ch. 7). The position as a favourite daughter left Shakespeare's Cordelia destitute, and even if the same position privileged Tyler's Delia with the best part of the father's 'kingdom' – a husband, a home, and an inheritance – the price she pays for being in her father's favour is high. In some ways, the elder daughters drew the shortest straw when Sam married the youngest, but on the other hand Delia has to pay

61 In Miner's novel the mother 'had died when Cora was eight, but had disappeared long before that'; see *A Walking Fire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 8.

back more than her sisters. The love her father gave her paradoxically restricts her freedom to develop as a mature individual in control of her own life.

When the novel opens, Delia is a forty-year-old married housewife with three children of her own. To some readers, she might come across as a contemporary Emma Bovary, 'the foolish female reader' in Flaubert's novel, whose 'dreary' existence is counteracted by her daily escape into popular novels, and whose desire is awakened by an extra-marital 'affair'.[62] The action of *Ladder of Years* begins in the manner of a comedy in a grocery store, as a seemingly flirtatious younger man pulls Delia out of her daydreaming. Delia is immediately attracted by 'the old high-school atmosphere of romantic intrigue and deception' (6, ch. 1). However, what appears as an innocent enough request to pretend that the two are together soon reveals a more sombre idea of women as objects to be used. While Adrian Bly-Brice uses Delia as an instrument to get back at his wife, she thinks he will be able to release her from her drab life, as she 'glimpse[s] some possibility that had never crossed her mind before' (42, ch. 3). Adrian offers a welcome break from the 'ragged disarray of Delia's home life' (30, ch. 3), fitting right into her fairy-tale idea of the man coming to the rescue of an afflicted heroine. As Delia pursues the relation, she fantasizes that '[m]aybe he was even now dwelling on his image of her and cruising the streets in search of her' (30, ch. 3). She hence imitates the desire of the females in popular romances to be saved by a man (in *A Thousand Acres*, Ginny's desire to be saved takes on almost religious dimensions in her faith in Jess).[63] Hence, Delia does not immediately realize that she herself enters a trap, and that Adrian uses her first to save himself and later to save his marriage; the fiction she consumes does not appear to have prepared her for her encounter with this sort of manipulation.

The traditional image of a woman who needs to be saved by a man thus comes to mind, but it is abandoned as the reader realizes that Delia does come to recognize Adrian's ulterior motive. The circumstances surrounding his living arrangements reinforce Delia's suspicion that her own husband used her as a means to accomplish his own goals:

> Delia said, 'How've you been supporting yourself all this time?'
> 'Well, Rosemary had a bit of an inheritance.'

62 Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism*, pp. 27 and 29.

63 James Bowman has pointed out that 'there is an elusive quality to Delia, a sense that she will forever be looking for the character she means to enact rather than, like most of us, enacting it'; see 'Too Cute for Words: *Ladder of Years* by Anne Tyler', *National Review*, June 26 1995, 59-61 (p. 60).

> She closed the closet door. She said, 'Did you know that before you married her?'
> 'Why do you ask?'
> 'Lately, I've been wondering if Sam married me for my father's practice,' she said. (52, ch. 4)

An image of marriage as an instrument to further men's ambition emerges, and as Delia confronts Sam with her suspicions, the reader is also invited to infer that Sam married the woman who will be able to carry him into possession:

> 'You had your eye on Daddy's practice, that's why,' she told him. 'You thought, 'I'll just marry one of Dr. Felson's daughters and inherit all his patients and his nice old comfortable house.'
> 'Well, sweetheart, I probably did think that. Probably I did. But I never would have married someone I didn't love. Is that what you believe?
> You believe I didn't marry for love?'
> 'I don't know what to believe,' she told him. (39, ch. 3)

Delia marries the man who will carry the father's 'dynasty' forward, an arrangement that secures the future of both husband and father. As Delia's father has no sons, Sam is the right man to take on the medical practice, and Sam's choice of wife would appear to be the best choice for her father: Delia is, after all, the favourite daughter. By accepting her father's inheritance, Delia participates in the preservation of her society's patrilineal structure.

Read side by side, *Ladder of Years* and *King Lear* are seen to illustrate how daughters are sacrificed for the sake of this structure. Lear's hope to rely on Cordelia's 'kind nursery' (I. 1. 124) is connected to his 'darker purpose' (I. 1. 35): to secure his own future and have his daughter carry him forward to his end. He is ready to relinquish his kingdom, but hopes to reap both filial and national rewards. However, his plan to further his dynasty by marrying his favourite daughter off to a French nobleman/ King and make room for himself in their marriage – and for France in his kingdom – is halted by Cordelia's 'disobedience'.[64] Her refusal to return 'no more nor less' (I. 1. 93) than what she owes her father as his cherished

64 B.J. Sokol and Mary Sokol remind us that 'During the past century the legal status conferred by marriage on a man and woman has been increasingly attenuated and the traditional common law rights and obligations of married people towards each other have been reconsidered and much reduced. In Shakespeare's time, by contrast, a family unified under its head (the husband/father) was considered to be of primary importance for "social order and political authority"'; see *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 117.

offspring may very well come across as a refusal to honour not only familial obligations but also 'patriotic duties':[65]

> Good my lord,
> You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I
> Return those duties back as are right fit,
> Obey you, love you and most honour you. (I. 1. 95)

In one sense, then, Cordelia becomes a barrier to England's and her father's appetite for more. While Cordelia refuses to sacrifice her integrity, Goneril and Regan pass the 'love test' as they realize something that their father and Cordelia do not: that their display of love has less to do with true devotion than with outward observation of filial obedience. Whereas Goneril and Regan's return of Lear's gift places them in the king's favour, Cordelia, who will only repay her father according to her daughterly duty, falls from grace.

According to Ann Jennalie Cook, 'The significance of matrimony to social institutions like the family, the community, the church, and the government is assumed throughout Shakespeare's plays'.[66] *King Lear* is no exception. Even so, the kind of request that is made by Lear is one which would, if granted, threaten the sanctity of marriage because it would entail a double and irreconcilable commitment: to serve and love two masters.[67] Cordelia's statement below demonstrates a sober grasp of the realities of marriage, emphasizing the observance of conjugal obligations rather than any romantic idea of perfect love:[68]

> Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
> They love you all? Haply when I shall wed,
> That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry

65 'For this dutiful daughter [David Garrick's Cordelia], familial and patriotic duties coincide; her acts of daughterly love restore a king as well as a father. Acting out of domestic impulses, she becomes a national icon'; see Marsden, 'Daddy's Girls: Shakespearian Daughters and Eighteenth-Century Ideology', *Shakespeare Survey* 51 (1998), 17-26 (pp. 23-24).

66 Cook, *Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and His Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 240. Cook also points out that '[a]s a means to bring peace by cementing political alliances, marriage fails more often than it succeeds in Shakespeare'; p. 246.

67 According to Lagretta Tallent Lenker, 'Cordelia wisely recognizes the incongruity of this scheme – that he cannot both retain her and give her in marriage – and this intuition forms the basis of her lesson as educator'; see *Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare and Shaw* (Westport, Ct and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 126.

68 Lisa Hopkins suggests that 'Cordelia conceives of love not as boundless, but as demarcated and rationed'; see *The Shakespearean Marriage: Merry Wives and Heavy Husbands* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 143.

> Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
> Sure I shall never marry like my sisters
> To love my father all. (I. 1. 99)

Traditionally, marriage is supposed to release a daughter from her commitment to her father in order for her to be able to enter into and honour a new commitment to another man who takes control of her life. Lynda E. Boose points out that the marriage ceremony 'in Shakespeare's time – as in our own – […] acknowledged the special bond between father and daughter and the need for the power of ritual to release the daughter from its hold'.[69] Cordelia puts her finger on the fact that any kind of filial obedience that entails a sacrifice of self in a married daughter undermines her marriage, impoverishing her husband, her 'lord', in a variety of ways. Marriage on Lear's terms would become a contract between three people instead of two. In *King Lear* and *Ladder of Years*, daughters who inherit under the system of patrilineality are burdened with precisely such a double commitment to father and husband.

What complicates the existing marriage alliances between husbands and wives in *King Lear* is not only a father's unsound request for a display of love, but the consequences of his eldest daughters' pledges of love to a father who is also a landowner.[70] The fact that his two elder daughters receive land as a gift binds them to their father in a debt of gratitude. In fact, they all become indebted – daughters as well as sons-in-law – not to the land or to God, but to Lear.[71] Committed to Lear, husband and wife cannot keep God's covenant in marriage. The expectations placed upon Goneril and Albany to an absolute loyalty, born of gratitude, to Lear militate against their loyalty towards each other. Goneril asks for support from her husband in response to Lear's threat:

> LEAR
> Thou shalt find
> That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
> I have cast off for ever. Thou shalt, I warrant thee.
> GONERIL Do you mark that, my lord?
> ALBANY
> I cannot be so partial, Goneril,
> To the great love I bear you –
> GONERIL Pray you, content. (I. 4. 300)

69 Boose, 'The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare', *PMLA* 97.3 (1982), 325-347 (p. 326).
70 For a further discussion of this aspect of Lear's kingship, see chapter two in this study.
71 'I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness./I never gave you kingdom, called you children;/You owe me no subscription' (III. 2. 16).

Lear's threat shows that he believes husband and wife to owe him all, and the spouses' exchange demonstrates that he has managed to create a division between them.

Lear's move into the married couple's home consolidates and highlights the divided loyalties that Goneril and Albany have already submitted to by receiving the gift of land. At one level, the presence of the rowdy knights is a thorn in the flesh of Goneril and Regan, a 'threat to their […] stability and power'.[72] At another level, the father's presence, his trespassing into the domestic space, is a threat to the stability of the daughter's marriage. Lear fails to accept that entering a new configuration means incurring new obligations. Goneril and Albany accept that a change has taken place, surrendering space to Lear in their home. Lear, however, is not willing to accommodate himself to the machinery of the household in which he seeks for an unencumbered existence; relying on Goneril's previous protestations, he refuses to dispossess himself, to surrender a number of his knights.

Tyler's Cordelia obediently gives her father all. When Delia first received her father's inheritance, she accepted a debt of gratitude which she, unlike Goneril and Regan, pays back by carrying her father to his end. Upon marrying, Delia and Sam thus become part of a triangular configuration under her father's roof which undermines the commitment between husband and wife. It is not the fact that Delia assumes responsibility for her aging father that is set up as an anomaly in *Ladder of Years* – Nat, the elderly man that Delia becomes acquainted with, later fills the empty place left by a beloved father – it is the making room for her father in her marriage that is the problem. Her debt of gratitude to her father even continues to direct Delia after his death, placing constraints on her own children: she refuses to give up his old room for her son Carroll who, at fifteen, still shares a room with his brother.

In a manner resembling the situation of the married sisters and their husbands in *King Lear*, both husband and wife become indebted to the father(-in-law) when they inherit the medical practice. Whereas Delia's debt is returned immediately through 'maternal' care of the father, Sam's will be repaid by carrying his father-in-law's practice into the future. Delia's debt means that she cannot commit wholeheartedly to herself or, later, to her husband; his means that he cannot commit himself wholly to Delia or to the medical practice. Sam is burdened with his father-in-law's interference with the progress of the practice: '"Even after he stopped seeing patients, he could pick up his receiver whenever Sam got a call; chime in

72 Foakes, 'The Reshaping of *King Lear*' in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, pp. 104-123 (p. 112).

with a second opinion. He just hated to feel left out of things, you know?"' (322, ch. 20).

Traditionally, marriage was supposed to be a safeguard against divided loyalties; but as a new kind of configuration is formed between Lear, Goneril, and Albany, marriage loses its inviolability. Whereas some loyalties are undermined, others are consolidated as new alliances are made. Seen in this light, Goneril's shenanigans with Edmund might be perceived as a continuation or an extension of the loosening of the 'true' marriage bond that has been caused by Lear's transgression: if marriage is no longer a contract between two people but an arrangement involving three, then why not bring in one or two persons more?

Having made a place for himself in what is traditionally a bond between two people, Lear attempts to move forward by means of his daughter's marriage. Edmund – barred from inheritance and hampered in any attempt at upward mobility – acquires land and then endeavours to climb to the very top by way of Goneril. He uses her violated marriage as an instrument to carry himself forward *and* upwards. Edmund fills the spot vacated by Lear and pulls Goneril out of one 'unholy' triangular configuration only for her to end up in another. In *Ladder of Years*, Adrian Bly-Brice also fills the spot that Delia's father left open. In an Edmund-like manner, Adrian pulls Delia out of her waiting mode but offers her no freedom, as she is trapped in a new configuration consisting of himself and his wife.

Ironically, Edmund repeats his father's past 'sport' as he takes up with two married women (one of whom becomes a widow), but these are relationships that come to nothing, leaving an all-male triumvirate to take over: Edgar, Kent, and Albany. These three men are, however, reluctant to form an alliance, which marks a change in the play in the sense that up to now new alliances were quickly forged between characters; when an opportunity arose to replace or remove a party, there was usually someone waiting to fill the vacated position.[73] Alone, Edgar cannot secure a future. Patriarchy cannot be restored or redeemed in *King Lear*, since the vehicles that carry men forward – offspring able to produce legitimate heirs, who inherit according to accepted rules of succession – have been sacrificed. These are the casualties of a father's desire to liberate himself from his encumbrances, moving himself forward at the expense of daughters' freedom to exercise the powers he had supposedly given them.

The dissolution of marriage in *King Lear* may partly explain why Nahum Tate's adaptation held the stage for 150 years. In Tate's version,

73 Edmund – the issue of an unlawful union – appropriated his father's name, but the title is finally assumed by Edgar – the issue of a 'true marriage'.

Cordelia and Edgar – a man and a woman who both have strong notions about what constitutes a proper marriage – survive to marry each other, securing the sanctity of marriage and the hope for procreation. As if to re-establish the correct marriage proceedings dissolved by Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Tate has Edgar save Cordelia from the father's hold (he saves both from prison), as well as making sure that the father survives to give his daughter in marriage.[74]

While the debt of gratitude that Goneril and Albany are expected to return separates husband and wife from each other, the commitment between Regan and Cornwall remains unbroken because the father was never granted the opportunity to take up residence with them. Linda Woodbridge points out that 'Cornwall and Regan arrive at Gloucester's house first, having gone there to avoid receiving Lear at their house'.[75] The two thus prevent him from becoming a presence in their home.[76] The reduction of the knights, which is a reduction of Lear's privileges, prefigures Regan and Cornwall's mutual decision to close the door on Lear. Regan's husband stands loyal behind her: 'Shut up your doors, my lord; 'tis a wild night./My Regan counsels well; come out o'the storm' (II. 2. 498). It is interesting that whereas Goneril seeks for a new political and sexual alliance with Edmund while still married, Regan does not set up a new 'contract' with Edmund until after her husband's death. This is a significant difference which invites us to recognize that bonds between spouses – irrespective of what ties them together – can only remain strong if the father remains a father and the daughter is allowed to attend to the new commitments that come with the progression from daughterhood. *King Lear* seems to say that a nation cannot be built on 'unholy' alliances, whether political or domestic, alliances of a kind which Lear himself is complicit in creating.

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74 Peter Womack offers a reading which complicates the idea that Tate 'was bringing the play into conformity with the taste of his age'; see 'Secularizing *King Lear*: Shakespeare, Tate, and the Sacred', *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002), 96-105 (p. 97).

75 Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 225.

76 In Theodora A. Jankowski's words, '[e]arly modern marriage usually meant that the wife traveled away from her family and the friends of her childhood to reside with her husband and his family'; see '…in the Lesbian Void: Woman-Woman Eroticism in Shakespeare's Plays' in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, pp. 299-319 (p. 309). Keith Wrightson argues that 'only rarely did newly married couples share the same roof as the parents of one of the partners. Such a situation existed in some aristocratic families in which children had married very young […] But unlike some European peasant societies, arrangements of this kind were not the norm in England. Indeed a strong cultural prejudice existed to discourage such living arrangements'; see *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2003; orig. published in 1982 by Routledge), p. 77.

King Lear thus explores the barriers that may inhibit the formation of a 'true marriage', and so does *Ladder of Years*. The man whom Delia expects to carry her into the future and save her from daughterhood is, in fact, instrumental in preserving it. Sam's move into the father's house turned Delia into the caretaker of her aging father as well as a helpmate and assistant to a husband fifteen years older than she. Whereas Delia installs her husband in her romantic fantasy, Sam is thus, through marriage, made part of a patrilineal pattern traditionally arranged to move men into the future. This springboard of empowerment for Sam emerges as a source of inequality and imprisonment for Delia; it becomes the means of stalling her independence and keeping her tied to the home, to the past, and to her father.

> Delia had never lived anywhere else. […] Delia had played hopscotch on the parquet squares in the hall while her father doctored his patients in the glassed-in porch off the kitchen, and she had married his assistant beneath the sprawling brass chandelier that reminded her to this day of a daddy longlegs. Even after the wedding she had not moved away but simply installed her husband among her sweet-sixteen bedroom furniture, and once her children were born it was not uncommon for a patient to wander out of the waiting room calling, 'Delia? Where are you, darlin'? Just wanted to see how those precious little babies were getting along'. (15-16, ch. 2)

The quoted passage captures the progression from daughter to wife to mother which takes place in the father's house. Similarly, Ginny and Rose in *A Thousand Acres*, although nominally moving into their own homes, in effect stay within their father's household when they marry. It also indicates how the public sphere has entered the private – an intrusion which is if not the decisive factor, then at least a contributing factor in Delia's leave-taking. In fact, Delia seems unable to regard the house she has lived in all her life as her home, since it is also her husband's medical practice, and as such it is designed to conform to his needs. Patients come and go while Delia eavesdrops on the dialogue between them and her husband, reinforcing her sense of being an outsider. In addition, shortly after her father's death, Sam surrenders even more of their privacy by undertaking 'sudden renovations' (27, ch. 3), leaving the waiting-room the 'house's only refuge' (28 ch. 3). Delia feels like a guest, invisible at times and disconnected from her husband and her children like 'a tiny gnat, whirring around her family's edges' (23, ch. 2).[77] This sense of alienation is reinforced by her regular dwelling in the waiting room, the transitory place between private and public, a position that combines to support the image of Delia as a

77 Town suggests that '[t]o be a guest is to bear no responsibility for either the noisy toilet or the dilapidated condition of her family life'; see 'Location and Identity', p. 9.

liminal figure who will soon, like a patient, wander out of it when she feels her debt has been paid.

The waiting room is where she was waiting, as a seventeen-year-old girl, for the 'young Dr. Grinstead' to come in and take her away: 'I sat behind that desk just pining for someone to walk in and save me'. '"Save you from what"', Susie asks her mother (310, ch. 20). Delia's reluctance to answer her daughter's question indicates how hard she finds it to hold her father accountable for her difficult situation. Sam cannot save Delia from daughterhood, however, because he cannot release her from the debt of gratitude. Like another child-wife, Henrik Ibsen's Nora, Delia repeats the role as daughter-wife in the relationship with her husband.[78] In fact, Sam gradually takes over the role as 'creditor', a collector of a debt of gratitude: like Nora, Delia does not possess the means to support herself and must live in a house that 'belongs' to her husband and on his terms.[79] Marriage becomes a trap, as it confirms Delia's role – and Nora's – as a debtor first to her father and then to her husband. Nora, however, is not prepared to continue paying off a debt which, she later realizes, her father and husband imposed upon her, one which has held her imprisoned in daughterhood and prevented her from growing up into an adult in control of her own life. Her marriage depends on it, though. At the play's conclusion, Nora tells her husband that only a miracle could turn their 'living together' into a 'true marriage'.[80] She is 'contracted' to both father and husband in a debt of gratitude from which she can never be freed unless she somehow manages to release herself. Torvald's desire to live completely debt-free – in more than one sense – makes him unable to accept complicity in the debt that is placed on Nora's account. As both refuse to assume responsibility for the debt – Nora thinks she has paid enough – the burden is carried forward to the next generation, three children whose welfare neither parent regards as the primary consideration.

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78 Brooke Allen notes that Delia 'has played the child all her life'; see 'Anne Tyler in Mid-Course', p. 31.

79 According to Frederick Turner, to 'possess money means that all other persons are obligated to the possessor for the past benefits that the possessor has directly or indirectly conferred upon them. Money is the stored, certified, and abstracted gratitude of one's community, gratitude that can be "cashed in" for goods and services at the possessor's desire'; see *Shakespeare's Twenty-First-Century Economics: The Morality of Love and Money* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 10.

80 According to Egil Törnqvist, '[b]y a true marriage Nora obviously means a relationship in which husband and wife love one another so much that they are prepared to sacrifice themselves for each other'; see *Ibsen, A Doll's House* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 57.

Delia, Lear, and a New Domesticity

In *Ladder of Years*, Delia seeks for an unencumbered existence in the seemingly timeless atmosphere of Bay Borough. This endeavour paradoxically places her among a tradition of American male heroes who 'light out for the territory', leaving relations, guilt, and responsibilities behind. An unexpected connection between Delia and Lear thus also arises in that both wish to live 'debt-free'. As a parent who in a sense abnegates the responsibilities which being a parent confers upon her and 'sacrifices' her children to move herself into a future in which her familial duties play no part, she paradoxically emerges as a Lear-figure: 'the West's dominant emblem of fatherhood'.[81] The operative principle here is not to assign guilt or blame to the mother for leaving her children, but to illustrate that the root of the problem is not necessarily the mother or the father, but the cultural expectation of repayment – the *quid pro quo* – that is placed on children. Delia departs when the debt of gratitude no longer keeps her tied to the home, but she also responds negatively to the fact that her own children do not give her 'all'.[82] Lear-like, she expects some kind of return from her offspring.

But what separates Delia from Lear (and from the American male hero) is that the yearning to live unencumbered is really a desire to live without the burden of gratitude. In Bay Borough, Delia sheds a past role that is connected to daughterhood. She signals her new self by 're-naming' herself: 'Miss Grinstead was Delia – the new Delia' (94, ch. 6). She has thus separated herself from a past role that has tied her to her father and husband for years of domestic service rendered as a payment for a debt of gratitude. In Bay Borough, Delia is paid for the services she provides, which means that she is at no man's mercy and in nobody's debt. As if to emphasize the importance of creating a 'working self', Delia is seen to be 'manufacturing' an 'impersonal new life' (96, ch. 6), becoming self-supportive and acquiring a sense of independence. She tells her sister Eliza: 'I have a place now, I mean a job, a position, and a place to stay. See? There's where I live' (113, ch. 7). It is when she enters new alliances and becomes entangled in

81 Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), p. 510. For a discussion of how Delia is incorporated in the Lear pattern, see chapter five in this study. Susan S. Kissel places Tyler among a tradition of 'Southern white women writers [who] have awakened to the fact that the power of the mythical, heroic father need no longer constrain and direct them'; see *Moving On: The Heroines of Shirley Ann Grau, Anne Tyler, and Gail Godwin* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996), p. 35.

82 This point is further elaborated in chapter five below.

new familial ties that she also incurs new obligations. She moves in with a father, Joel, and his son, Noah, in order to be their housekeeper and babysitter, thereby becoming a substitute mother for twelve-year-old Noah and a substitute wife for Joel. As Richard Eder writes: 'one set of family responsibilities replaces the other'.[83] Bay Borough might be able to offer her a dispossessed existence, but it does not offer complete freedom from obligations. Looking at the thoughtful preparations made by father and son before her arrival – preparations intended to tie her to them and their home – she becomes slightly restive: 'What touched her the most, though, was how they'd turned the bedcovers down – that effortful white triangle. She said, "You shouldn't have." And she meant it, for the sight made her feel indebted, somehow' (173, ch. 12).

Delia's return makes for a fresh start between her and Sam, as they both find the means to heal each other and their marriage. It is not until Delia ceases to defend her father that the possibility arises for reconciliation between the two. No longer expected to gratify her father, Delia is able to withhold judgment of her husband and provide Sam with the opportunity to step in and 'heal' Delia, not to rescue her. In her turn, Delia is able to liberate her husband from the debt of gratitude that haunts Sam. The following exchange between Delia and her husband reveals his fear of not being able to carry the practice into the future and thus return the debt of gratitude to Delia's father. The passage is worth quoting at length:

> 'I guess you think I've destroyed your father's practice,' Sam told her.
> 'Pardon?'
> 'I've run it down to a shadow of its former glory, isn't that what you're thinking?'
> 'It's not your fault if people die of old age,' Delia said.
> 'It's my fault if no one new signs on, though,' he said. 'I lack your father's bedside manner, obviously. I tell people they have plain old indigestion; I don't call it dyspepsia. I've never been the type to flatter and cosset my patients.'
> Delia felt a familiar twinge of annoyance. *I would hardly consider* '*dyspepsia*' *flattery*, she could have said. And, *I don't know why you have to use that bitter, biting tone of voice any time you talk about my father*. She stalked around to the other side of the bed. But then Sam asked, 'What is that limp you've got?'
> 'Limp?'
> 'It seems to me you're favoring one foot.'
> 'Oh, that's from a couple of months ago. It's almost healed by now.'
> 'Sit down a minute.'
> She sat on the edge of the bed, and he came over to kneel in front of her and slip her shoe off. His fingertips moved across the top of her foot with a knowledgeable,

83 Eder, 'Trying on a New Life: *Ladder of Years*, by Anne Tyler', *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*, 7 May 1995 http://articles.latimes.com/1995-05-07/books/bk-63161_1_anne-tyler [accessed 24 October 2012]

> deft precision that shot directly to her groin.
> In her softest voice, she told him, 'Your patients never minded, that I was aware of. They always called you a saint.' (305, ch. 20)

Once the debt to Delia's father is settled, theirs can finally be a 'true marriage'. Since the father is not present to extend a 'pardon' to Sam, Delia does; but she had to liberate herself first. Instead of directing their loyalties towards the father, they are now able to support each other.[84] In some respects the scene is reminiscent of that between Lear and Cordelia in Act IV; but here it is not a father who kneels in front of his daughter in order to be forgiven or a daughter who comforts her father, but a reconciliation between husband and wife, something that does not happen in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Without impediments, the Grinsteads' marriage can finally become a proper union of man and wife. Visualizing the two of them in the car side by side, Delia reflects: 'Nothing left to show but their plain, true, homely, interior selves, which were actually much richer anyhow' (324, ch. 20).

Delia is not alone in making sure that the next generation can move freely into the future unburdened by debt or guilt. Sam's reaction to the suggestion that one of their children steps into her mother's old function in the practice, towards the end of the book, reveals that he has no intention of tying his own daughter to him:

> 'Who's taking care of the office while Eliza's gone?'
> 'I am.'
> 'Maybe *that's* a job for Susie.'
> 'Never,' he said flatly. (245, ch. 17)

Delia's return is prompted by her bond to her children. She does not, however, return to tie them to her in a relationship characterized by indebtedness, but to release a daughter from the looming bondage of enduring daughterhood. If *King Lear* ends with Cordelia's union with her father in death, Tyler's novel ends with a forthcoming wedding. Whereas *King Lear* stages a father's loss of his daughter and his inability to finally let her go, *Ladder of Years* dramatizes a mother's abandonment of her family under the influence of grief at the loss of a father and a sense of redundance in relation to her children. When she returns to her daughter's wedding, it is a

84 The scene is also reminiscent of the fairy-tale scene in which Cinderella loses her shoe and the prince who finds it is the man with whom she will live happily ever after. But the Cinderella story and the popular romances which Delia previously turned to are not about healing, but about romantic escapes and living happily ever after.

return that re-establishes the mother-daughter bond which is absent from the Shakespearean family pattern. [85]

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While Lear's journey, which some have called spiritual and redemptive,[86] does not liberate either him or his daughters, Delia's is redemptive in that it renders her capable of returning to assist in the liberation of the next generation. A new pattern is created in which the 'Shakespearean' female character falls, not into debt but out of it. *King Lear* leaves the reader/audience with the image of a father carrying his dead daughter onstage; *Ladder of Years* leaves us with Delia's image of her three children 'staring at the horizon with the alert, tensed stillness of explorers at the ocean's edge, poised to begin their journeys' (326, ch. 20). Tyler's ending thus reads more like a comedy than a tragedy, one in which the mother, reconciled with her husband, returns to witness the freedom of the daughter from the father's house.[87]

85 According to Boose, '[t]he mother of the bride is a wholly excluded figure – as indeed she is throughout almost the entire Shakespeare canon. Only the father must act out, must dramatize his loss before the audience of the community'; see 'The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare', p. 327.

86 See, for example, Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*, p. 199.

87 According to Paul Bail, '[i]n form, the novel is a comedy whose main plot and subplots involve complications between couples that are resolved at the end, much like the Shakespearean comedies. But on a deeper level, the novel is also a meditation on identity, autonomy, and death'; see *Anne Tyler: A Critical Companion* (Westport, CT. and London: Greenwood Press, 1998), pp. 173-174.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sisterhood, Shame, and Redemption in *Cat's Eye* and *King Lear*

> All writers learn from the dead. As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you; you also feel judged and held to account by them. But you don't learn only from writers – you can learn from ancestors in all their forms. Because the dead control the past, they control the stories, and also certain kinds of truths.[1]
>
> This is the use of memory: for liberation.[2]

Introductory Remarks

At a first glance, *King Lear* seems to be only tenuously evoked in Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye*. The plot is not transposed to the novel, and the characters seem to have little to do with Shakespeare. The only character that appears to bear some relevance to *King Lear* is the character named Cordelia, but she is not even the protagonist of the story; this is instead Elaine, a middle-aged painter and the childhood victim of Cordelia's bullying. Cordelia is thus neither the main character nor the good and virtu-

1 Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 159.
2 T.S. Eliot 'Little Gidding' III in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001; orig. published in 1944), p. 40.

ous daughter whom generations of readers and spectators have come to know from *King Lear*. However, Atwood's Cordelia is the daughter of an overpowering father and the youngest sister of three; and, as will be shown below, this pattern, which gave rise to an examination of marriage, love, and sacrifice in the previous chapter, invites an examination of sisterhood, shame, and redemption in *Cat's Eye* and *King Lear*.

Like Anne Tyler, Atwood turns to Shakespeare's Cordelia to explore the dilemma of daughterly debt; but what I have called the 'Cordelia complex' is differently manifested in *Cat's Eye*. If *Ladder of Years* shows what happens to a daughter who returned her father's favour, *Cat's Eye* describes what happens to one who is utterly unable to compete in the love/praise game and who must thus live, much like Shakespeare's Cordelia, 'without [his] grace, [his] love, [his] benison' (I. 1. 267). The failure to pay back the father's 'interest' holds the daughter back, disturbing the relations between sisters and eventually also between female friends in *Cat's Eye*.

King Lear outlines a family dynamics which impedes the growth of good sororal bonds. The first scene in the play brings out this dysfunction in a peculiarly distinctive manner. The demand for daughterly returns (obedience, speech, and praise) renders sibling relations vulnerable, fostering a competition between them which crowds out love, compassion, and solidarity. Three daughters are invited to become opponents in the father's game:

> Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
> That we our largest bounty may extend
> Where nature doth with merit challenge. (I. 1. 51)

Goneril speaks first, and her fulsome expressions of love secure 'shadowy forests', 'plenteous rivers', and 'wide-skirted meads' (I. 1. 64). The expectation of power and material gains constitutes the impetus for Regan to top her sister, and Regan is quick to detect a flaw in her elder sister's speech: Goneril 'comes too short' in her protestation of love for Lear. Regan's pledge results in the reward of an 'ample third' of Lear's 'fair kingdom' (I. 1. 80). The full-blown conflict between Goneril and Regan will not flare up until their competition over Edmund, but it is nevertheless nurtured by Lear's attempts to pit one daughter against the other in the scenes that follow.[3]

3 Katharine Eisaman Maus points out that '[e]ven Goneril and Regan, whose competition over a man reaches a murderous pitch, seem driven more by sibling rivalry, noticeable even in the first scene, as they strive to outdo one another in the praise of their father – than by specifically sexual jealousy as the heroes experience it'; see 'Horns of Dilemma: Jealousy, Gender, and Spectatorship in English Renaissance Drama', *ELH* 54.3 (1987), 561-583 (p. 564).

An image that would probably warm any parent's heart – two sisters holding hands to express solidarity, finding support in each other – becomes, in Lear's eyes, an anomaly, since it symbolizes their union[4] against Lear and implies a threat to his power and influence over them. In disbelief, he exclaims: 'O, Regan, will you take her by the hand?' (II. 2. 383). But what keeps the sisters together – their collusion against Lear – is too tenuous to maintain the previously undermined bonds of sisterhood. When they no longer seek or need Lear's favours, they compete for Edmund's, thus playing right into the hands of a man who endeavours to extend his sphere of influence. Antagonism and division is a fact.

It is not certain that a Jacobean audience would immediately perceive Goneril's and Regan's speeches as being out of place; they might have expected such pledges to form part of a public court ceremony.[5] In the theatre of the day, however, dissimulation was often associated with the deceptiveness of women. Cordelia quickly draws attention to her sisters' double nature, but her unwillingness to use their 'glib and oily art' becomes her downfall (I. 1. 226). Before she departs for France, her last words are directed at her sisters. Even though she cannot at this point reveal their flaws, she is confident that Time will: 'Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides,/Who covert faults at last with shame derides' (I. 1. 282). As for now, positions have been reshuffled and Goneril and Regan have gained immunity. They have temporarily secured Lear's grace and favour, a position which does not, in turn, encourage any compassion on their part; instead, it promotes condescension and indifference to Cordelia's affliction. The demand for obedience prevents the elder sisters from intervening on Cordelia's behalf; instead, it encourages them to designate transgressive behaviour in the former favourite: 'You have obedience scanted,/ And well are worth the want that you have wanted' (I. 1. 280). Dissemblance – the ability to manipulate emotions, their own and others – is thus rewarded,[6] and honesty – the ability to speak only what one feels – is punished.[7]

Cat's Eye demonstrates how three daughters with Shakespearean names – the two elder girls are called Perdita and Miranda – are expected to

4 See Foakes' editorial note in *King Lear*, p. 251 n383.

5 Foakes says that Goneril and Regan have 'adapted to the court and its conventions'; see 'Introduction' in *King Lear*, p. 37. See also Leon Harold Craig, *Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 122, and Norman R. Atwood, 'Cordelia and Kent: Their Fateful Choice of Style', *Language and Style* 9 (1976), pp. 42-54 (p. 44).

6 According to Jonathan Bate, 'Shakespeare's play is itself highly critical of the inflated court language of Goneril, Regan and Lear himself before his humbling in the storm and through his madness'; see *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 148.

7 Cf. Kent in the stocks, II. 2.

conceal their feelings and speak what they ought to in order to earn their father's favour. The two elder daughters succeed, gaining as comfortable positions as a dysfunctional family allows and avoiding the shame characteristically generated by failure to measure up to expectations. Cordelia, however, fails; she does not master the linguistic and behavioural code which her sisters command with seeming effortlessness, consequently falling into shame – not only before her father, but also in the eyes of her sisters. Disgraced by her family, Atwood's Cordelia projects her shame onto her 'best friend' Elaine. Shame prevents the female characters from connecting; it works, as Sandra Lee Bartky says in another context, 'against the emergence of a sense of solidarity'.[8] The novel thus moves beyond *King Lear* in examining how the need to please the patriarch also affects the fragile bonds between female friends. *Cat's Eye* illustrates how girls oppress other girls; but the novel also suggests a way out of oppression towards a kind of sisterhood that is built not on the shared experience of victimization and suffering,[9] but on the shared experience of shame and a willingness to redeem the other person from that shame.

As we will see below, the redemptive power exercised by the vision of the Virgin Mary creates the possibility of ultimate forgiveness and reconciliation and thus a kind of 'sisterhood' in *Cat's Eye*.[10] It is also through the novel's engagement with redemption that *Cat's Eye* establishes a deeper connection to *King Lear*. Through Elaine's fall, both literal and metaphorical, in the middle of the narrative, the novel recalls Lear on the heath. Both these characters' respective falls raise the question of redemption, and both the play and the novel invoke the idea of a female redeemer or an icon – Cordelia in *King Lear* and the Virgin Mary in *Cat's Eye* – who can save Lear and Elaine.

To cultural materialist Jonathan Dollimore and to most post-1960s critics, the idea of any redemption in *King Lear* is, in the words of Sean

8 See Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*: *Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 97.

9 Felly Nkweto Simmonds says that '[f]riendship, like sisterhood, cannot be built solely on what we see as a shared experience (of womanhood, or oppression)'. She refers to Gail Pheterson who speaks about 'internalized oppression' such as 'self-hatred, self-concealment, feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness' shared experiences in oppressed groups which 'prevent[….] solidarity'; see 'Who are the Sisters? Difference, Feminism and Friendship' in *Desperately Seeking Sisterhood: Still Challenging & Building*, ed. by Magdalene Ang-Lygate, Chris Corrin, and Millsom S. Henry (London: Taylor and Francis, 1997), pp. 19-30 (pp. 26 and 27).

10 Cf. Julie Brown, 'Our Ladies of Perpetual Hell: Witches and Fantastic Virgins in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 4.3 (1991), 40-52 (p. 51).

Benson, a 'mere fiction'.[11] According to Dollimore, the reason why the Christian and humanist view appear equally misguided is because such a view 'mystifies suffering and invests man with a quasi-transcendent identity whereas the play does neither of these things'.[12] Dollimore's rejection of redemptive readings builds on a tradition of critics who have posed questions to *King Lear* which the play cannot answer. When critics have attempted to determine whether *King Lear* endorses Christian (or humanist) values, they have focused on Lear's last words: 'look there, look there', debating whether this is a promise of an afterlife or not.[13]

However, the question is not whether Lear is saved or redeemed at the end, and the answer is not that he redeems himself through suffering (the humanist view),[14] or is redeemed through divine intervention because he suffered (the Christian view) or that redemption is a mere fiction (the nihilistic view). The question that *King Lear* leaves us with is the question that *Cat's Eye* attempts to answer, a question that can be posed in both secular and religious terms: what do individuals do with the freedom that succeeds redemption – with time redeemed – when Lear and Elaine are given a second chance at life by Cordelia and the Virgin Mary? It is the answer to this question that is the real tragedy of *King Lear*; in *Cat's Eye*, the answer implies that attaining sisterhood is difficult but not impossible.

Margaret Atwood: Canadian Woman Writer

'Sisterhood' may be a concept that is essential to feminism, but feminism is not absolutely central to Margaret Atwood's creative endeavour.[15] However,

11 Benson, *Shakespearean Resurrection: The Art of Almost Raising the Dead* (Pittsburgh, Penn: Duquesne University Press, 2009), p. 108.

12 Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 190.

13 According to Katharine Goodland, 'scholars still debate the meaning of Lear's mysterious last words. Some see them as a last expression of hope, others as a statement of love, and still others, like W.R. Elton, see them as the final gasp in a despairing, pagan response to death'; see 'Inverting the Pietà in Shakespeare's *King Lear*' in *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama*, ed. by Regina Buccola and Lisa Hopkins (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 47-74 (p. 66).

14 See, for example, Stephen J. Lynch, 'Sin, Suffering, and Redemption in *Leir* and *Lear*', *Shakespeare Studies* 18 (1986), 161-174 (p. 172), and Irving Ribner, *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1969; orig. published in 1960). See especially pp. 116-136.

15 See, for example, Atwood, 'Spotty-Handed Villainesses: Problems of Female Bad Behaviour in the Creation of Literature' in *Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal*

her early novels, especially *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *Surfacing* (1972), certainly invite feminist readings. Both David in *Surfacing* and Peter in *The Edible Woman* come across as responsible for the oppression that Marian and Anna are exposed to. In *Bodily Harm* (1981), Atwood investigates violence directed at women's bodies and minds. According to Brooks J. Bouson: 'In *Bodily Harm* [...] the criminal – the man with the rope – is never specifically identified; instead, he assumes a variety of identities [...] Thus, rather than representing a particular individual, the faceless stranger comes to represent the latent potential in *all* men to brutalize women'.[16]

The 'faceless stranger' may also capture the difficulties in identifying the source of oppression. *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which constitutes a departure from Atwood's previous novels, halts the reader's desire to assign blame to any one particular person, man or woman. Instead, it directs the reader towards a system that turns everybody into a collaborator in an enterprise that enslaves women. To some extent, feminist readings that attribute blame to male characters are frustrated by *Cat's Eye* and by the novel that followed, *The Robber Bride* (1993).[17] For the female main protagonists in these novels, the source of evil is found in the behaviour of women. Zenia and Cordelia are held up as responsible for most that is wrong with the main characters' lives; but a feminist angle is opened by *Cat's Eye* in that this novel encourages the reader to suspend judgment of Cordelia and direct his or her attention to the co-responsible party in Cordelia's 'evil': her father. This emphasis on re-distributing responsibilities and complicities is also at the heart of Atwood's latest novels, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009), both of which explore the debt that humanity owes to the planet and what happens when that debt is exacted.[18]

If Atwood has expressed reluctance to be designated as a feminist writer, her identity as a Canadian writer is obviously essential to her, something

Prose, 1983-2005 (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005; orig. published in 2004), pp. 125-138.

16 Bouson, *Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 114.

17 According to Eleonora Rao, Atwood's novels, from *Bodily Harm* to *Cat's Eye*, 'show a change in attitude to the relation between the sexes, one that attempts to step beyond an anti-male position'; see *Strategies for Identity: The Fiction of Margaret Atwood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 152. See also p. 160.

18 See *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (Toronto: Anansi, 2008). According to Frances Margaret Rathburn, 'Atwood has consistently emphasized in her fiction, poetry, and non-fiction the responsibility which individuals and institutions have to protect the planet from harm and destruction'; see 'The Ties that Bind: Breaking the Bonds of Victimization in the Novels of Barbara Pym, Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Texas, 1994), p. 189.

that her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) gave early evidence of.[19] In *Margaret Atwood: A Biography*, Nathalie Cooke suggests that '[f]or Atwood, *Survival* was more than a book of criticism: it was a statement of belonging. She very firmly believed that her role was not to be just a writer; it was to be a *Canadian* writer'.[20] Canadian themes and motifs, such as survival and the victim motif, run through her novels; but in most of them, her female characters 'surface' instead of staying or going under. It is worth observing that Canada is rarely allowed to represent innocence and goodness, or to assume victim status.[21] Atwood's picture of colonialism and imperialism thus does not evince any overt bias; but she is and has always been explicitly concerned with Canada's post-colonial status – its problematic relation to the United States and its ambivalent relation to Britain.[22]

Many Canadian thinkers and writers have turned to Shakespeare to explore the country's 'colonial legacy'. According to Daniel Fischlin, '[t]he problem of Shakespeare's iconic centrality to critical thinking generally has particular relevance in a national entity like Canada, still dealing with a colonial legacy and the effects of a less-than-complete decolonization'.[23] A number of English-Canadian rewritings in the 1960s and 1970s turned to *The Tempest* to explore the contradictory position of Canada vis-à-vis Britain; in these rewritings, Miranda, as the dutiful 'daughter of empire', came to epitomize Canada's colonial predicament.[24] It is therefore

19 Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

20 Cooke, *Margaret Atwood: A Biography* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1998), p. 197.

21 See, for example, Atwood, *Surfacing* (New York: Popular library, 1972), and Atwood, *Bodily Harm* (London: Vintage, 1996; orig. published in 1981). See also David Staines, 'Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context' in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. by Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge Univesity Press, 2006) pp. 12-27 (p. 20).

22 '"It took a long time to loosen imperial ties never historically severed by revolution: becoming a nation in 1867 through the British North America Act, a British act of Parliament, Canada achieved full legal independence only in 1931 through another British law, the Statute of Westminster; amendments to the Canadian constitution were the sole preserve of the British Parliament until as late as 1982"[…]. Further, Linda Hutcheon notes that, despite the shedding of a legal colonial relation, "Canada persuaded Britain to legislate it out of one colonial situation (a political and historical one), only to realize that it was already trapped in another (an economic and cultural one)"'; quoted from Daniel Fischlin, 'Nation and/as Adaptation: Shakespeare, Canada, and Authenticity' in *Shakespeare in Canada*, pp. 313-338 (pp. 313-314).

23 Fischlin, 'Nation and/as Adaptation', p. 313.

24 Diana Brydon writes that '[w]hereas English-Canadian rewritings [in the 1960s and 1970s] identified Canada with Miranda, Quebec writers saw Quebec as Caliban'; see 'Sister Letters: Miranda's *Tempest* in Canada' in *Cross-Cultural Performances*, pp. 181-182n3. She also points out that 'there is a long tradition of Canadian rewritings that privilege Miranda's perspective'; p. 166, and that '[l]ike Miranda, Canada is the

noteworthy that Atwood turns to Cordelia, the not-so-dutiful daughter. Cordelia's initial refusal in *King Lear* to acknowledge her debt to her father may well be seen in relation to Canada's problematic post-colonial status, its conflicting loyalties, and the economic and cultural debts that go with decolonization. Julie Sanders maintains that Shakespeare is 'diffuse, debunked and subverted' in this novel.[25] But the idea of subversion is not consistent with the subtle evocation of Shakespeare in *Cat's Eye*.[26] Atwood's novel summons Shakespeare not in order to subvert his iconic status, but to explore another icon: Cordelia.

The voices of the past, historical and literary, are never ignored in Atwood's literary work; on the contrary, they constitute an essential part of her aesthetics. Her use of Shakespeare thus also needs to be understood against the backdrop of her overall turn to myths, fairy-tales, legends, and literature to bring the past to life and listen to the voices of the dead, thereby setting them free.[27] In Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), it is the hanged maids in *The Odyssey* who are redeemed. The maids come back from the dead, not to exert revenge but to be remembered and draw attention to an act of injustice:

> we had no voice
> we had no name
> we had no choice
> we had one face
> one face the same
> we took the blame
> it was not fair
> but now we're here.[28]

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daughter of empire'; p. 168. See also Chantal Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 103-127. Although a Miranda character figures in *Cat's Eye* too, it is Cordelia who, according to Susanne Raitt, 'sometimes seems to stand for Canada'; see '"Out of Shakespeare?": Cordelia in *Cat's Eye*' in *Transforming Shakespeare*, pp. 181-197 (p. 183).

25 Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares,* p. 222.

26 As Michael Neill puts it in another context: 'To cut oneself off from Shakespeare in the name of decolonizing politics is not to liberate oneself from the tyranny of the past, but to pretend that the past does not exist'; see 'Post-Colonial Shakespeare? Writing Away from the Centre' in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, pp. 164-185 (p. 184).

27 Sharon Rose Wilson, *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), p. 4. Wilson explores how the use of fairy-tales liberates Atwood's characters. She suggests that fairy tales in Atwood's *oeuvre* are used as a way to transform traditional images of women, 'images that actually or seemingly constrict women and men's roles and lives'; p. xii.

28 Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005), p. 159.

In *Cat's Eye*, memory is put to use not for subversion or vengeance, but for the summoning and potential liberation of another female character: Cordelia.[29]

Previous Research

Cat's Eye explores the artistic endeavour to bring back memories, to revive the past through art. Along with the storyline – an acclaimed female artist[30] returns to her hometown Toronto for a retrospective exhibition – the artistic dimension has occasioned many analyses of the book as a *Künstlerroman* or a *Bildungsroman* with autobiographical dimensions.[31] Many critics have drawn on psychoanalytic theories to analyse the complex identity and subjectivity of the 'divided self' that is manifested in the novel.[32] Some, like Molly Hite and Sonia Mycak, employ the concept of 'the gaze' to account for the way in which, in their view, women are

29 See and compare Greene's discussion about Margaret Laurence and that author's use of *The Tempest* in 'Margaret Laurence's *Diviners* and Shakespeare's *Tempest*: The Uses of the Past' in *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*, pp. 165-182 (pp. 177-178).

30 Laurie Vickroy discusses the effects of trauma on (artistic) identity; see 'Seeking Symbolic Immortality: Visualizing Trauma in *Cat's Eye*', *Mosaic* 38.2 (2005), pp. 129-144.

31 See, for example, Judith McCombs, 'Contrary Re-Memberings: The Creating Self and Feminism in *Cat's Eye*', *Canadian Literature* 129 (1991), 9-23. See also Ellen McWilliams, *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). For Elaine as a 'dissident female artist', see Martha Sharpe, 'Margaret Atwood and Julia Kristeva: Space-Time, the Dissident Woman Artist, and the Pursuit of Female Solidarity in *Cat's Eye*', *Essays on Canadian Writing* 50 (1993), 174-89. For a discussion of how *Cat's Eye* 'revises the structure of the traditional bildungsroman and künstlerroman', see Carol Osborne, 'Constructing the Self through Memory: *Cat's Eye* as a Novel of Female Development', *Frontiers* 14.3 (1994), 95-112 (p. 95). See, Coral Ann Howells, '*Cat's Eye*: Elaine Risley's Retrospective Art' in *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity*: *New Critical Essays*, ed. by Colin Nicholson (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), pp. 204-218. See also Verena Bühler Roth, *Wilderness and the Natural Environment: Margaret Atwood's Recycling of a Canadian Theme* (Tübingen: Francke, 1998). Roth is interested in the 'form of the novel' as autobiography; p. 137.

32 See, for example, Sonia Mycak, *In Search of the Split Subject: Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology, and the Novels of Margaret Atwood* (Toronto: ECW Press 1996). See also Shannon Hengen, *Margaret Atwood's Power: Mirrors, Reflections and Images in Select Fiction and Poetry* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1993). Susan Strehle discusses 'the nature of subjectivity' in *Fiction in the Quantum Universe* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 161.

oppressed in the novel;[33] others, for instance, Lisa Potvin, turn to other models to explain 'female oppression',[34] and still others, for example Lyn Mikel Brown, pursue the topic of internalized oppression that comes with the expectation of 'conventional femininity'.[35]

The interest in science that is so patently conveyed through characters and themes in *Cat's Eye* has led to several examinations of the novel from a scientifically oriented perspective, most recently by Janine Rogers who argues that 'Atwood is clearly constructing science as redemptive'.[36] The spiritually redemptive dimension of *Cat's Eye* is, however, most vividly expressed through the appearance of the Virgin Mary.[37] Many critics associate the Virgin Mary with forgiveness, emphasizing her divine status. According to Helen Charisse Benet-Goodman, it is via Elaine's experience of the Virgin Mary that the novel 'grounds forgiveness in a religious vision'.[38] Whether she should be seen as a projection of Elaine's mind or as a genuine apparition is a point of contention amongst critics, and even Benet-Goodman argues that the novel 'resists this religious vision and remains uncertain of the vision's ontological status'.[39] Whereas Benet-Goodman examines female friendship and forgiveness, Rebecca M. Painter explores the novel's portrayal of evil. In her reading, evil manifests itself not only in Cordelia, but also in Elaine's subsequent indifference to Cordelia's suffering.[40]

The Shakespearean name has prompted critics to point to its source in *King Lear*, but usually without discussing any deeper implications of

33 Hite, 'Optics and Autobiography in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*', *Twentieth Century Literature* 41.2 (1995), 135-159.

34 Potvin, 'Voodooism and Female Quest Patterns in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*', *Journal of Popular Culture* 36.3 (2003), 636-650 (p. 636).

35 Brown, 'The Dangers of Time Travel: Revisioning the Landscape of Girls' Relationships in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*' in *Analyzing the Different Voice: Feminist Psychological Theory and Literary Texts*, ed. by Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), pp. 27-43 (p. 38).

36 Rogers, 'Secret Allies: Reconsidering Science and Gender in *Cat's Eye*', *English Studies in Canada* 33.3 (2007), 1-26 (p. 20) *Literary Reference Center*, EBSCO [accessed 26 August 2010]. See also June Deery, 'Science for Feminists: Margaret Atwood's Body of Knowledge', *Twentieth Century Literature* 43.4 (1997), 470-486.

37 See, for example, Sonia Gernes, 'Transcendent Women: Uses of the Mystical in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*', *Religion and Literature* 23.3 (1991), 143-165.

38 Benet-Goodman, 'Forgiving Friends: Feminist Ethics and Fiction by Toni Morrison and Margaret Atwood' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, 2004), p. 111.

39 Benet-Goodman, 'Forgiving Friends', p. 114.

40 Painter, *Attending to Evil: Fiction, Apperception, and the Growth of Consciousness* (doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1998).

its presence in the novel.[41] Arnold E. Davidson says that the novel investigates 'the darkness of the human heart, which is particularly evoked by pervasive references to two of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*'.[42] Some have allowed the references to Shakespeare to result in more extensive analyses. One such example is R.D. Lane, who summons Lacan in order to pursue the connection between Cordelia's 'nothing' in *King Lear* and Atwood's Cordelia's 'nothing', arguing that the two characters figure as 'catalysts' for Lear and for the protagonist in *Cat's Eye* respectively.[43] M.K. MacMurraugh-Kavanagh's article '"Through a Glass Darkly": Fields of Vision, Identity and Metaphor in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*' offers some insights into the connection between the two texts, based on a reading that takes its starting-point in the '"eye–I" relation' found in both.[44] Finally, Susanne Raitt's 'intertextual' reading is sensitive to Canada's colonial relation to Britain. Raitt maintains that '[r]econtextualizing Shakespeare in Canada is also a way of thinking about Canada's relation to Englishness and its own colonial past'.[45] In her reading, the developing conflict between England and France in *King Lear* is comparable to the condition of Canada as a divided country. According to Raitt, 'both invoke troubled national histories shaped by invasion and

41 See Jessie Givner, 'Names, Faces and Signatures in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale*', *Canadian Literature* 133 (1992), 56-75; Sanders, *Novel Shakespeare*, p. 223; Brown, 'The Dangers of Time Travel', p. 34; Karen F. Stein, *Margaret Atwood Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), p. 93. Hilde Staëls, *Margaret Atwood's Novels: A Study of Narrative Discourse* (Tübingen: Francke, 1995), p. 181; Christina Ljungberg, *To Join, to Fit, and to Make: The Creative Craft of Margaret Atwood's Fiction* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 76; Nathalie Cooke, *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), pp. 109-110; Potvin, 'Voodooism and Female Quest Patterns', p. 643; Gayle Greene, '*Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood: Review of Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*', *Women's Studies* 18.4 (1991), 445-455 (p. 447); Strehle, *Fiction in the Quantum Universe*, pp. 170-171, and Bethan Jones, 'Traces of Shame: Margaret Atwood's Portrayal of Childhood Bullying and its Consequences in *Cat's Eye*', *Critical Survey* 20.1 (2008), 29-42 (p. 34).

42 Davidson, *Seeing in the Dark*: *Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1997), p. 18. For *Macbeth* allusions, see Greene, *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), as well as Greene, '*Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood', p. 448. See also Cooke, *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion*, pp. 102-103, and Davidson, *Seeing in the Dark*, p. 49.

43 Lane, 'Cordelia's "Nothing": The Character of Cordelia and Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*', *Essays on Canadian Writing* 48 (1992-93), 73-88.

44 M.K. MacMurraugh-Kavanagh, '"Through a Glass Darkly": Fields of Vision, Identity and Metaphor in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*', *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 12.1 (1997), 78-91 (p. 79). See also Caroline Cakebread, 'Escaping from Allegories: *Cat's Eye* and *King Lear*', *Ilha do Desterro: A Journal of Language and Literature* 49 (2005), 99-111.

45 Raitt, '"Out of Shakespeare"?: Cordelia in *Cat's Eye*' in *Transforming Shakespeare*, p. 184.

resistance'.[46] Hence, an identity 'built on conflict and division' unites the two texts.[47]

The Shakespearean Family Pattern in Toronto

Like many other appropriations of *King Lear*, *Cat's Eye* is a tale of 'survival and traumatic memory'.[48] To be able to cope with certain horrifying memories from her early years, Elaine conjures up images of a suffering Cordelia, ostensibly to gratify her wish for revenge. She imagines that 'some man chases Cordelia along the sidewalk below me, catches up with her, punches her in the ribs – I can't handle the face – throws her down'.[49] She sees herself in situations in which she is powerful and Cordelia is immovable, on the brink of death or in an iron lung, the worst punishment that Elaine could imagine as a child: 'Cordelia in an iron lung, then, being breathed, as an accordion is played. […] She is fully conscious, but unable to move or speak. I come into the room, moving, speaking. Our eyes meet' (8, ch. 2). Elaine's return to Toronto becomes a voyage into the past, a painful descent into hell which will, for all her suffering, have a redemptive dimension.

The reader soon comes to understand that Elaine's preoccupation with her girlhood 'friend' originates in the relentless and gratuitous acts of cruelty to which Cordelia and her loyal followers and accomplices, Grace and Carol, exposed Elaine as a child. In a sense, *Cat's Eye* calls forth one of the most virtuous female characters in the literary imagination and turns her into a bully, a 'bad' girl, a 'bitch';[50] but such images are gradually replaced by Elaine's interspersed memories of a Cordelia who is pained and aggrieved. The middle-aged Elaine is able to distinguish a pattern which her younger self was unable to see. An image emerges of an afflicted Cordelia who is tied to a tragic pattern in which she assumes the role of scapegoat,

46 Raitt, '"Out of Shakespeare"', p. 183.

47 Raitt, '"Out of Shakespeare"', p. 191.

48 Joughin, 'Lear's Afterlife', p. 74. According to, for example, Hite, *Cat's Eye* is about survival; see 'An Eye for an I: The Disciplinary Society in *Cat's Eye*' in *Various Atwoods: Essays on the Later Poems, Short Fiction, and Novels*, ed. by Lorraine M. York (Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1995), pp. 191-206 (p. 191).

49 Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (London: Virago, 2002; orig. published in 1988), p. 7, ch. 2. Subsequent references to the play are provided in the text.

50 For a discussion of the bitch in 20th-century literature, see Aguiar, *The Bitch is Back*.

a victim of her father's unrelenting derision and her elder sisters' taunting. Like Shakespeare's Cordelia, she is shamed for not being able to live up to her father's expectations. At one point in the narrative, Elaine wonders whether Cordelia's fate is written in her fictional name:

> Why did they name her that? Hang that weight around her neck. Heart of the moon, jewel of the sea, depending on which foreign language you're using. The third sister, the only honest one. The stubborn one, the rejected one, the one who was not heard. If she'd been called Jane, would things have been different? (263, ch. 47)

The family pattern in which Cordelia is the youngest daughter is modelled on the Shakespearean family of three daughters and a dominant father, with the addition of a present but powerless mother. As Sarah Appleton Aguiar observes, 'Cordelia's father, as a revised King Lear, is a tyrannical and implacable ruler/father'.[51] Most fathers in *Cat's Eye* are portrayed as enigmatic, intimidating, and dangerous. They 'come out at night. Darkness brings home the fathers, with their real, unspeakable power' (164, ch. 31). There is something impenetrable, nebulous, almost God-like about several of them. In *King Lear*, the majestic authority of Lear may have passed its peak, but the principles associated with kingship – power and obedience – secure the superior role of the father and the inferior roles of daughters and mothers. Similarly feudal impulses are visible in the Shakespearean family in Toronto; the family members are strenuously manoeuvred by absolute loyalty towards the father who 'sits at the head of the table, with his craggy eyebrows, his wolvish look' (249, ch. 44). Exuding power, he dictates the way the mother should conduct and display herself and their home.[52] When he is not there 'things are slapdash', but when he is there it is a different story altogether: 'There are flowers on the table, and candles. Mummie has on her pearls, the napkins are neatly rolled in the napkin-rings instead of crumpled in under the edges of the plates' (248, ch. 44). The 'tiny, fragile, absent-minded' mother (73, ch. 14) reinforces her husband's authority and comes across, as one critic puts it, as 'so shadowy as hardly to exist at all'.[53] In *A Thousand Acres* and *Ladder of Years*, the mother's absence means that the daughters are unprotected against their father's influence; in *Cat's Eye*, the Shakespearean daughter is similarly unprotected despite the mother's presence. 'Mummie' protects the father's interests and guarantees that her daughters do too. She does not move her daughters

51 Aguiar, *The Bitch is Back*, p. 91.

52 In *Margaret Atwood's Novels*, Staëls argues that '[t]he cause of Cordelia's sadistic games is her unhappiness about the way she is herself treated by adults'; p. 179. See also Strehle, *Fiction in the Quantum Universe*.

53 MacMurraugh-Kavanagh, '"Through a Glass Darkly"', p. 85.

towards independence, but leaves them in his sphere of influence where two of them secure a comparatively comfortable position thanks to their ability to please him.

The two elder daughters, Perdita and Miranda, resemble Goneril and Regan in their manner towards their father. Elaine notes that they 'have an extravagant, mocking way of talking, which seems like an imitation of something, only it's unclear what they're imitating' (72, ch. 14). In *King Lear*, the two elder sisters' similar ability to follow the script places them in a favourable position vis-à-vis their father. Goneril and Regan's adeptness at dissembling, playing along in the father's game, initially empowers them and rewards them with material wealth. It is an exchange of power, not love; and whereas the father secures his elder daughters' gratitude, or so he thinks, they receive his power, or so they think. In *Cat's Eye*, the two elder daughters' ability to play up to the father is also part of an exchange of power, though for very much lower stakes. In order to escape the scapegoat position that is Cordelia's and command a reasonably assured social and familial role, they must learn to perform and calculate the effect words will have on their father. They speak on demand, but also halt the impulse to speak their minds. By disguising themselves and their true feelings, they receive a measure of power and agency. Perdita and Miranda have mastered strategies for remaining in his good grace:

> 'I'm hag-ridden,' he says, pretending to be mournful. 'The only man in a houseful of women. They won't let me into the bathroom in the morning to shave.' [...]
>
> Perdie says, 'He should consider himself lucky that we put up with him.' She can get away with a little impertinence, with coltish liberties. She has the haircut for it. Mirrie, when hard-pressed, looks reproachful. Cordelia is not good at either of these things. But they all play up to him. (249, ch. 44)

Even when pretending to challenge their father, Perdie and Mirrie speak and act within the family power structure in which he rules supreme. The two elder daughters thus win their father's favours; but Cordelia is unable to cope with him.

Atwood's and Shakespeare's Cordelias fall out of their fathers' grace because they cannot play by the father's rules. When Elaine visits Cordelia's family as a child, she notices that the father orchestrates a game. While Elaine too learns to play along in order to earn the man's approval, Cordelia never manages to master her role. Elaine witnesses Cordelia's inept attempts to mollify her father:

> 'What are you studying these days?' he says to me. It's a usual question of his. Whatever I say amuses him.
>
> 'The atom,' I say.
>
> 'Ah, the atom,' he says. 'I remember the atom. And what does the atom have to say for itself these days?'
>
> 'Which one?' I say, and he laughs.
>
> 'Which one, indeed,' he says. 'That's very good.' This may be what he wants: a give and take, of sorts. But Cordelia can never come up with it, because she's too frightened of him. She's frightened of not pleasing him. And yet he is not pleased. I've seen it many times, her dithering, fumble-footed efforts to appease him. But nothing she can do or say will ever be enough, because she is somehow the wrong person.
>
> I watch this, and it makes me angry. It makes me want to kick her. How can she be so abject? When will she learn? (249, ch. 44)

Elaine learns the strategies of Cordelia's father's game partly by observing Cordelia's failures. The quoted passage indicates that whatever Cordelia does or says, she will never measure up in her father's eyes, and the novel illustrates how Cordelia is crippled by her inferior position in her family. Cordelia is 'less agile' than her siblings; she is less able to do what she likes than Perdita and Miranda, and generally she is 'more disappointing' than her two sisters (73, ch. 14). Her sisters are not only more successful, and more sophisticated than Cordelia; '[b]oth of them are beautiful: one dark and intense, the other blond and kind-eyed and soulful. Cordelia is not beautiful in the same way' (72, ch. 14). As Cordelia fails to maintain relationships and falls behind in school, Perdie and Mirrie 'are both more charming and beautiful and sophisticated than ever' (209, ch. 39).

The passage above also reveals how easily the suspension of pity and compassion comes to Elaine as well as to Cordelia's sisters. At this point, Elaine is too young and too emotionally damaged by Cordelia to identify the root of the problem in the father; but the sisters seem to make a mental note of Cordelia's 'weakness' and blame her for failing his standards. Not only do they not protect their younger sister from the father's abuse, they authorize it by imitating it: Cordelia's victimized position does not become a cause for empathy for the sisters, but for ridicule and mock-parental speech: '"Pull up your socks, Cordelia, or you'll flunk your year again. You know what Daddy said last time." Cordelia flushes, and can't think what to say back' (210, ch. 39). The favoured daughters thus use their privileged position to denigrate and admonish Cordelia. For Perdita and Miranda, it pays to withhold pity. Like Goneril and Regan, they have nothing to win by taking up 'what's cast away' (I. 1. 255), but they have something to win by maintaining the father's power and authority: it gives them a semblance

of power. Thus, instead of protecting their sister's interest, they look after the father's, and in the process they discharge themselves and the father from any sort of complicity in Cordelia's suffering.

In *King Lear*, the elder daughters' ability to perform according to their father's expectations keeps them within the parameters of the kingdom, but Cordelia's failure to pay lip-service to her father's power culminates in her banishment from it. The inability to calculate the effects of words on her father, and to support his own view of his position as all-powerful ruler, comes across as disobedience.

A failure at playing her role adequately in her father's game, Atwood's Cordelia pursues an acting career, as if the Shakespearean stage might offer her some kind of training ground. Her presence in Shakespearean contexts, however, only adds to her sense of isolation and inability to perform. Working as an assistant in *Macbeth*, Cordelia is in charge of off-stage matters; at the end of the play, a head of cabbage wrapped up in a towel is to be thrown on stage in order to symbolize Macbeth's death (245, ch. 44). Cordelia, however, who notices that the cabbage is rotting, exchanges it for a fresh head of cabbage which immediately cancels the tragic effect on the audience as it bounces off the stage. The 'curtain comes down on laughter' (245, ch. 44). Since Cordelia failed to understand the purpose and function of the cabbage prop, she failed in her responsibility to the joint theatrical effort. Speaking the truth is not always right, nor is acting on what is right always the right thing to do. What matters in the context of the Shakespearean family as well as in the theatre is to maintain the (theatrical) illusion. Cordelia's inability to sustain that illusion – and become recognized as a player on the stage – only makes her situation the more precarious. The misunderstanding brings shame on her: 'although Cordelia laughs and blushes and tries to pass it off lightly, I can see she is almost in tears' (245-246, ch. 44). Consequently, Cordelia's experience of the Shakespearean theatre in Toronto only adds to her disgrace.

Before, During, and After Elaine's Fall

The ability to sustain another's powerful position keeps girls in *Cat's Eye* on good terms with fathers, but with other girls as well. Elaine, whose desire to belong to the world of girls is partly due to her previous nomadic exist-

ence up in the north of the country, far from civilization, will do anything to fit in:

> Grace and Carol look at each other's scrapbook pages and say, 'Oh, yours is so good. Mine's no good. Mine's *awful*.' They say this every time we play the scrapbook game. Their voices are wheedling and false; I can tell they don't mean it, each one thinks her own lady on her own page is good. But it's the thing you have to say, so I begin to say it too. (53, ch. 10)

The survival skills necessary for a life on the road and in the natural world are replaced by other skills as Elaine moves permanently to Toronto. Although the games girls play are unfamiliar to her, she masters these games with ease and a measure of astonishment, but also with a sense of urgency. She sacrifices honesty in order to get along and play along, handing herself over to the other girls and consequently giving them power over her. Elaine's difference has an exotic appeal to Grace and Carol; but all that changes when Cordelia arrives, changing the group dynamics radically.[54] Grace and Carol become Cordelia's followers, protecting her power by helping to impose her rule on Elaine.

Before Elaine comes to know Cordelia, '[she doesn't] think about falling. [She is] not yet afraid of heights' (62, ch. 12). Before Cordelia is the time before the fall into shame: the time of innocence (33, ch. 6). The first time they meet, Elaine becomes conscious of her lack of sophistication and of her 'atypical' family. She suddenly sees herself from the outside, through the eyes of another, Cordelia:

> I feel shy with Cordelia. […] I'm conscious of my grubbiness, my unbrushed hair. […] Her eyes are measuring, amused. I can see, without turning around, my father's old felt hat, his boots, the stubble on his face, […] my mother's grey slacks, her manlike plaid shirt, her face blank of makeup. (70, ch. 14)

At this point, Cordelia provokes embarrassment rather than shame in Elaine.[55] Shame follows later, but the girls' first encounter provides the reader with a clue to what is to come: 'Grace and Carol are standing among the apple trees, just where I left them […] A third girl is with them. I look at her, empty of premonition' (69, ch. 13). Like a snake in the garden of Eden, Cordelia has entered Elaine's innocent childhood world, ready to subjugate and humiliate her:

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54 See Benet-Goodman, 'Forgiving Friends', p. 132.

55 According to Ewan Fernie, embarrassment should be looked upon as a 'weak and transient form of shame: shame is absolute failure, embarrassment failure in a given situation'; see *Shame in Shakespeare*, p. 13.

> 'There's dog poop on your shoe,' Cordelia says.
>
> I look down. 'It's only a rotten apple.'
>
> 'It's the same colour though, isn't it?' Cordelia says. 'Not the hard kind, the soft squooshy kind, like peanut butter.' This time her voice is confiding, as if she's talking about something intimate that only she and I know about and agree on. She creates a circle of two, takes me in. (71, ch. 14)

Cordelia's remark is of a kind that could have embarrassed Elaine, but she does not yet play along in the game of pretence. At this early stage, Elaine does not internalize the shame that Cordelia tries to project on her. Cordelia therefore tries another tactic by playing on Elaine's desire to fit in and belong.[56]

The kind of shame that Cordelia induces in Elaine will gradually have less to do with embarrassment and more with a profound sense of shame manifested, in Bartky's words, through 'a pervasive sense of personal inadequacy' – a feeling that the self is in some important way flawed, inferior, and unworthy.[57] Cordelia projects shame onto Elaine by diminishing and denigrating her to the point of making her totally disempowered and helpless: 'I worry about what I've said today, the expression on my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement. I am not normal, I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me' (118, ch. 22).[58] Cordelia provokes and sustains shame in Elaine, and once Elaine has internalized it, the only way for Elaine to free herself from it is by striving to improve herself and to please Cordelia. The young Elaine does not realize that Cordelia is responsible for her imprisonment in shame, for inducing those feelings that Cordelia makes a show of liberating her from. To Elaine, Cordelia holds the key to her liberation from disgrace. Redemption is in the power of Cordelia, who is thus both her persecutor and her saviour:

> She puts an arm around me, gives me a little squeeze, a squeeze of complicity, of instruction. Everything will be all right as long as I sit still, say nothing, reveal nothing. I will be saved then, I will be acceptable once more. I smile, tremulous with relief, with gratitude. (117, ch. 22)

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56 To Davidson, the rotten apple brings the Fall to mind: '[a] fallen rotten apple evokes another story of an apple, a fall, and a supposed source of rottenness in the world, and thus reminds us of a long-standing Western tradition for blaming a particular woman and holding her personally responsible for all that is generally wrong with life'; see *Seeing in the Dark*, p. 44. For a different discussion of women's 'fall', see Katarina Gregersdotter, 'Watching Women, Falling Women: A Reading of Margaret Atwood's Friendship Trilogy' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Umeå University, 2003).

57 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, p. 85.

58 See Rathburn, 'The Ties that Bind', p. 226.

The contradictory urge to stay within Cordelia's control despite her cruelty cannot be sought in Elaine's early childhood[59] or explained with reference to the 'female gaze' or 'controlling gaze',[60] because what keeps her there is a warped form of gratitude. Elaine is tied to Cordelia by the necessity of placating her, winning her approval: 'Cordelia is my friend. She likes me, she wants to help me, they all do. They are my friends, my girlfriends, my best friends. I have never had any before and I'm terrified of losing them. I want to please' (120, ch. 22). Elaine's temporary sense of empowerment which comes with the reward of intermittent and grudging acceptance and belonging is an illusion, because it is sustained by the continuing empowerment of Cordelia, which thus keeps the power balance intact. Elaine looks to her 'friends' to avert the risk of guilt and shame that may attend erroneous behaviour, but the power structures in the quartet only heaps more of both on her.

Cordelia, who has never managed to be acceptable in her family, now attempts to keep Elaine from violating proper codes of conduct by way of mock-parental discipline and authority. Expressions such as: 'You should have your mouth washed out with soap' and 'Wipe that smirk off your face' (see, for example, 252, ch. 52) are copied verbatim from her father's disciplinary repertoire. Cordelia thus uses her father's very words to place Elaine in a position of dependence. She 'saves' Elaine from her greatest fear: that she might find herself 'cast out for ever' (120, ch. 22). Elaine's sense of gratitude and her fear of expulsion subdue any stirring of rebellion against Cordelia's rule. It is, however, in response to Cordelia's demand for more than what Elaine feels able to give back to Cordelia that her hold over Elaine is finally threatened.

It is one of Cordelia's 'friendly days', and Elaine relaxes as Cordelia has temporarily ceased exercising control over her 'friend' (185, ch. 35). However, the situation suddenly becomes fraught with tension as Cordelia accidentally falls down a hill. In the belief that Cordelia's fall is part of the 'performance' of play and friendship, the other girls laugh, but they quickly fall silent as they realize that Cordelia did not fall on purpose. To ward off attention from herself, she targets Elaine:

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59 Bouson wonders why the novel really never addresses what it is in Elaine's 'early childhood' that inclines her to take on the victim's role; see *Brutal Choreographies*, p. 164.

60 See, for example, MacMurraugh-Kavanagh, '"Through a Glass Darkly"', p. 80, and Nicole de Jong, 'Mirror Images in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*', *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 6.2 (1998), 97-107 (p. 98). Wilson also speaks about the patriarchal gaze; see 'Blindness and Survival in Margaret Atwood's Major Novels' in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, pp. 176-190 (pp. 182-183).

> Cordelia says, to me, 'Were you laughing?' I think she means, was I laughing at her because she fell down.
> 'No,' I say.
> 'She was,' says Grace neutrally. Carol shifts to the side of the path, away from me.
> 'I'm going to give you one more chance,' says Cordelia.
> 'Were you laughing?'
> 'Yes,' I [Elaine] say[s], 'but…'
> 'Just yes or no,' says Cordelia.
> I say nothing. Cordelia glances over at Grace, as if looking for approval. She sighs, an exaggerated sigh, like a grownup's.
> 'Lying again,' she says. 'What are we going to do with you?' (186, ch. 35)

Silent and driven into guilt, Elaine saves Cordelia from the humiliation of her fall and confirms her rule.[61] However, when Cordelia asks for more than what she is accustomed to giving, by throwing Elaine's hat into the ravine and asking her to fetch it like a dog, she introduces a new element to the game, which is temporarily suspended: 'She's never done anything like that before, never hit or pinched, but now that she's thrown my hat over there's no telling what she might do'.[62] As Cordelia is suddenly the transgressor, it occurs to both that '[m]aybe [Cordelia has] gone too far, hit, finally, some core of resistance in [Elaine]'. When Cordelia tells Elaine to descend into the 'forbidden and dangerous' place, the place where 'the bad men are, where we're never supposed to go', Cordelia exhorts Elaine to transgress invisible boundaries, instead of – as before, parentally – punishing her for transgressing them.[63]

Elaine's urge to retain her safe place within Cordelia's grace is at this point stronger than her fear of transgression or of the dangerous ravine: 'Usually I'm afraid to go so near the edge of the bridge, but this time I'm not. I don't feel anything as positive as fear'. Encouraged by Cordelia's promise of forgiveness, Elaine descends into the ravine in the hope of being saved or redeemed by Cordelia: '"Go on then," she says, more gently,

61 Here the distinction between guilt and shame becomes significant. According to Georgia Brown, there have been numerous attempts to define and separate the two concepts; see *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 15. The most basic difference is that one feels shame over that which one is and guilt over something which one has done – such as violating a code of conduct. See, for example, Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*.

62 Hite suggests that it is 'to reverse the direction of the gaze and thus the threat of attack' that Cordelia throws Elaine's hat into the ravine shortly after the 'mock-trial'; see 'Optics and Autobiography'; p. 140. But the 'threat of attack' was averted prior to the hat incident, and Cordelia does not fear Elaine's gaze; she wants to make sure that Elaine confirms her position of power.

63 A connection between death, sexuality, shame, and the unspeakable is present here as a young girl is found murdered in the ravine. Elaine points out that it is 'as if this girl has done something shameful herself, by being murdered'; see *Cat's Eye*, p. 241, ch. 44.

as if she's encouraging me, not ordering. "Then you'll be forgiven"' (187, ch. 35). 'Owing' Cordelia for her 'fall', Elaine must pay back the debt in 'humiliation'.[64] Elaine's descent into the ravine is thus a figurative as well as a literal one. Crushed, Elaine incorporates Cordelia's shame into her own being and perception of herself, but projects it onto the hat: 'My blue hat is out on the ice of the creek. I stand in the snow, looking at it. Cordelia is right, it's a stupid hat. I look at it and feel resentment, because this stupid-looking hat is mine, and deserving of ridicule. I don't want to wear it ever again' (187, ch. 35).

Elaine has been ridiculed; but it is the hat that comes to epitomize the shame she feels. As she reaches for the allegedly silly hat, Elaine falls through the ice of the creek. As cold water embraces her, she realizes that Cordelia and the others will not come to her rescue but that she has been abandoned in the ravine, possibly to freeze to death. Tearful, wet, and cold, she feels as if life drains from her, as '[n]othing hurts any more' and her 'body feels weightless, as it does in water' (189, ch. 35). Pushed towards – indeed over – the edge of what can be endured, she gives up and lets go, laying herself open 'to [feeling] what wretches feel' (III. 4. 34). It is completely still, but Elaine is hypersensitive to touch, to sight, and to sound. The snow makes a 'rustling noise', there is a greenish-yellow light, and the 'pellets of ice' are 'caressing' her face 'gently' (189, ch. 35). It is precisely at this moment of utter exposure and mortification that a vision of a woman appears:

> She holds out her arms to me and I feel a surge of happiness. Inside her half-open cloak there's a glimpse of red. It's her heart, I think. It must be her heart, on the outside of her body, glowing like neon, like a coal.
>
> Then I can't see her any more. But I feel her around me, not like arms but like a small wind of warmer air. She's telling me something.
>
> *You can go home now,* she says. *It will be all right. Go home.* (189, ch. 35)

It is when Elaine has lost everything – even the desire to be saved – that she experiences the out-of-the-ordinary event: 'I know who it is that I've seen. It's the Virgin Mary, there can be no doubt' (190, ch. 36).[65] Shamed to the point of death, Elaine rises up towards the divine power and hands herself over, not to her 'friends' but to something wholly other. The Virgin Mary represents an intervention from another sphere – a direct communication between a divine and a mortal power – which also implies that

64 See and compare Atwood's discussion of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* in *Payback*, p. 120.

65 This event will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

any barrier of shame that normally exists between humans is absent. The Virgin Mary is herself immune from shame. When she saves Elaine in the ravine, she 'isn't falling, she's coming down towards me as if walking' (189, ch. 35). Cordelia could not have saved Elaine even if she had wanted to, because Cordelia is herself vulnerable to disgrace. The Virgin Mary, 'vessel of grace', redeems Elaine's life and liberates her from the debt of false gratitude that has tied her to Cordelia.

Some critics have associated the Virgin Mary with motherhood or with Elaine's own mother.[66] However, Elaine's mother may be different from Cordelia's (and Grace's) in that she does not attempt to move her daughter into the sphere of a father's overpowering influence, but neither does anything she does move Elaine towards redemption. The incident in the ravine is an important moment not least because it manifests the redemptive power of an icon – the power of an image – to save a person on the very brink of death,[67] but only because that image/icon is humanized and turned into a means of contact and communication.[68] Elaine Risley's endeavour to revive the icon mirrors the novel's endeavour to transform art into life.[69]

The perilous ravine thus becomes a site of resurrection. Whereas the Biblical fall is linked to shame and the desire to hide oneself from the eyes of others, Elaine's fall into disgrace becomes an affirmative and redemptive experience as she lets herself be seen and saved by the Virgin Mary. Elaine's 'fall' is reminiscent of Lear's naked and 'bareheaded' moment on the heath.[70] Cast out and shamed, Lear is driven to the bottom of the pit, towards realizing that what remains when divested of royal robes and

66 See, for example, Chinmoy Banerjee, 'Atwood's Time: Hiding Art in *Cat's Eye*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 36.4 (1990), 513-522 (p. 517). Earl G. Ingersoll, 'Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*: Re-Viewing Women in a Postmodern World', *Review of International English Literature* 22.4 (1991), 17-27 (p. 24); Strehle, *Fiction in the Quantum Universe*, p. 184.

67 Before the Virgin Mary comes alive to Elaine she sees a 'piece of paper with a coloured picture on it. I pick it up. I know what the picture is: it's the Virgin Mary'; p. 182, ch. 34.

68 Despite the fact that the novel presents a pungent critique of the power of the picture/image to control the lives of the characters, this episode indicates a trust in it, however momentary. Lorraine M. York calls *Cat's Eye* a 'consciously iconographical novel' and says that 'Elaine, like Atwood, moves from iconoclasm to a renewed, reformulated desire for the iconic'; see '"Over All I Place a Glass Bell": The Meta-Iconography of Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*' in *Various Atwoods*, pp. 229-252 (p. 243).

69 Roberta White speaks about Elaine's ability to transform life into art. See *A Studio of One's Own: Fictional Women Painters and the Art of Fiction* (Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), p 154.

70 Sanders compares the incident in the ravine to the Dover Cliff scene in *King Lear*; see *Novel Shakespeares*, p. 226. For a more extensive consideration of the resemblance between the 'falls' in *King Lear* and *Cat's Eye*, see chapter five.

kingly privileges, and stripped of all human dignity, is only a 'bare, forked animal' (III. 4. 106).[71] When he has lost the idea of himself, lost all hope and the desire to be saved, Cordelia, who appears to him as 'a soul in bliss', returns to revive and redeem a reluctant father (IV. 7). Cordelia's redemptive quality lends peculiar weight to the dimension of potential salvation in *King Lear*. Although the play is set in pagan times, the reference to her Christ-like status could not possibly escape a Jacobean audience: 'Thou hast one daughter/Who redeems nature from the general curse/Which twain have brought her to' (IV. 6. 201). Like the Virgin Mary in *Cat's Eye*, Lear's Cordelia incorporates an element of the divine as, all forgiveness, she brings hope of redemption. But Cordelia is not Christ; she is only human.[72] She might be driven by a saint-like desire to release her father from blame and guilt, but as Lear is incapable of resuming the responsibilities he renounced, no good effects spring from her return.

After Elaine's redemptive moment in the ravine, Cordelia no longer has any power over her life and mind, and Elaine is now able to walk away from a situation that almost drove her to death. In the ravine Elaine is, as Helge Normann Nilsen writes, 'confronted with her naked self […] where she also confronts her own possible freedom'.[73] After years of unremitting harassment, Elaine sees it for what it is: 'It was always a game, and I have been fooled. I have been stupid' (193, ch. 36). Elaine becomes indifferent to Cordelia's ridicule; she stops playing the fool before Cordelia. Elaine's refusal to give the girls what they need exposes the foundation on which Cordelia's rule was based and also the fact that nobody kept her under her rule but herself in her effort to play along: 'I can hear the hatred, but also the need. They need me for this, and I no longer need them' (193, ch. 36). She cuts herself off from others and becomes untouchable: 'There's something hard in me, crystalline, a kernel of glass' (193, ch. 36): a cat's eye.[74]

Nevertheless, although Elaine gains freedom from 'oppression', she is not truly free. Saved by divine intervention, she uses her newly found lib-

71 Fernie suggests that shame constitutes an enabling power in *King Lear*. See *Shame in Shakespeare*, especially pp. 173-174.

72 As was discussed in chapters two and three, if Shakespeare's Cordelia emerges as a Christ figure, it is not because she redeems the world or the kingdom but because she releases someone who is clearly guilty: Lear. But Lear cannot finally be redeemed because he does not release Cordelia.

73 Nilsen, 'Four Feminist Novels by Margaret Atwood', *American Studies in Scandinavia* 26.2 (1994), 126-139 (p. 129).

74 According to Gregersdotter, the cat's eye is 'new eye, a third eye so to speak', and to have that is 'a strategy to return the gaze'. She also argues that '"The Virgin of Lost Things" holds the cat's eye next to her heart, and in this manner she approves and blesses a use of the eye'; see 'Watching Women, Falling Women', pp. 111 and 110.

erty to exert revenge. According to Atwood, in another context, 'to revenge yourself upon someone is to reliberate yourself, because before doing the revenge, you aren't free'.[75] No longer bound to Cordelia by a debt of harassment-induced gratitude, Elaine becomes 'bound to [her] by the chains of vengeance'.[76] Elaine almost paid for Cordelia's fall down the snowy slope with her life; now Cordelia is made to pay her back. But just as in *King Lear*, '[a]n eye for en eye', as Elaine puts it, 'leads only to more blindness' (405, ch. 71).

After the incident in the ravine, the roles are thus reversed as 'energy has passed between [them]', and from then on it is Elaine who 'use[s] [her] mean mouth on […] Cordelia. She doesn't even have to provoke me, I use her as target practice' (233, ch. 42 and 235, ch. 43). Elaine does not discipline Cordelia; she shames her into silence: 'Sometimes Cordelia can think of things to say back, but sometimes she can't. She says, "That's cruel." Or she sticks her tongue in the side of her mouth and changes the subject. Or she lights a cigarette' (236, ch. 43). Rebecca M. Painter captures the conflicting emotions that a reader may experience as Cordelia and Elaine change places:

> We are gradually apprised of Cordelia's victimization and weakness, and her desperate need to reach out to Elaine for understanding and saving compassion, while at the same time we grow to understand Elaine's unexpressed rage and desire for vengeance that prevent her from being compassionate with Cordelia.[77]

As Cordelia sinks further and further into disgrace, letting herself go, her desire to be seen and saved by Elaine grows more and more desperate. She tries to reach out to Elaine time and again, but Elaine cannot or will not see her. At one point, Cordelia tells Elaine how, as a young girl, she dug holes in her backyard to disappear into:

> 'I guess I wanted some place that was all mine, where nobody could bug me. […] I used to think that if I kept very still and out of the way and didn't say anything, I would be safe.'
> […]
> 'When I was really little, I guess I used to get into trouble a lot, with Daddy. When he would lose his temper. You never knew when he was going to do it. "Wipe that smirk off your face," he would say'. (252, ch. 45)

The mention of the hole in the ground brings back terrible memories to Elaine, though, as she was once placed in one of those very holes and left

75 Atwood, *Payback*, p. 150.
76 The expression is borrowed from Atwood's *Payback*, p. 159.
77 Painter, *Attending to Evil*, pp. 119-120.

by her 'friends' to be almost buried alive (107, ch. 20). The shame attached to these memories comes to the surface, and her fear of showing weakness renders her incapable of taking in Cordelia's confession about her difficult childhood. She must control herself, so that Cordelia will not perceive her disgrace: 'A wave of blood goes up to my head [...]. There's the same flush of shame, of guilt and terror [...]. She's noticed nothing' (253, ch. 45). Here, the feelings of shame and the effort to hide these clearly keep Elaine isolated from Cordelia, preventing any possibility of connection from coming about.

When the two girls next meet, Cordelia 'is a wreck' (256, ch. 46). She has failed her year, which probably means, Elaine believes, that she will be barred from university studies (256, ch. 46). Elaine does not appreciate the full extent of Cordelia's yearning to connect with her. Elaine still has a need to protect herself from the pain of her memories and also from the shame connected to them. Her fear that something 'embarrassing' will happen renders her unresponsive to Cordelia's affliction. To fend off the risk of shame, Elaine assumes a protective shield and silently rebukes Cordelia for her 'lack of will-power' in the same terms as Cordelia's sisters employed: '*Smarten up*, I want to tell her. *Pull up your socks*' (258, ch. 46). By putting the blame on Cordelia for having ended up in a wretched state, Elaine is able to liberate herself from feeling any responsibility for Cordelia in her present condition (259, ch. 46). Elaine cannot recognize that Cordelia's condition originates in her unhappy family situation, the scapegoat role that generated Cordelia's need to compensate for her suffering by tormenting Elaine. It takes years before Elaine realizes that both her own suffering and Cordelia's ultimately derived from the same quarter: Cordelia's father's failure to love and accept his daughter for what she was.[78]

Unburdened Daughters: Redemption and Forgiveness

When, after eight or nine years, Elaine is contacted by Cordelia who has now been committed to a mental institution, she does not recognize her

78 This circumstance lends a measure of irony to Elaine's resistance to feminist groups. What keeps these groups together is their shared experience of victimization and suffering at the hands of men, and Elaine does not identify with this experience; see pp. 378-379, ch. 66.

friend at first. Elaine describes the sight of Cordelia's body in almost obscene terms. She sees a 'bewildered animal' on whom '[f]lesh has been added, but it has slid down, towards the middle of her body, like mud sliding down a hill' (356, ch. 63). Though Cordelia begs her for help to escape from the institution, Elaine is unable to set her free from imprisonment:

> 'Elaine,' she says, 'get me out.'
> 'What?' I say, brought up short.
> 'Help me get out of there. You don't know what it's like. You have no privacy.'
> This is the closest to pleading she's ever come. […]
> 'I can't, Cordelia,' I say gently. But I don't feel gentle towards her. (358, 359, ch. 63)

Seeing Cordelia's suffering – a 'bewildered' if not a 'bare, forked animal'– does not secure a connection between the two young women; rather than bridging the gap between them, Cordelia's misery facilitates Elaine's detachment from her. Elaine is reminded of her own suffering, and suffering, just as in *King Lear*, does not generate any redemptive impulses, towards oneself or others; it merely keeps one fixated on the desire to liberate oneself.

On the heath, though, Lear, whose suffering compels him to abnegate responsibility, seems momentarily to take pity on other people's helplessness and feels a stab of responsibility for the suffering in his former kingdom:

> O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
> And show the heavens more just. (III. 4. 32)

However, as Lear comes face to face with one of these wretches (as he thinks), he only sees his own suffering mirrored in him, instead of involving himself in the poor 'beggar's' misfortunes:[79]

> LEAR Didst thou give all to thy two daughters? And art thou come to this?
> EDGAR Who gives anything to Poor Tom? […]
> LEAR
> Have his daughters brought him to this pass?
> Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst thou give 'em all? (III. 4. 48)

Lear hence liberates himself from complicity in 'Poor Tom's' wretchedness by persuading himself that it must be the work of 'Tom's' daughters. 'Poor Tom's' counter-question: 'Who gives anything to Poor Tom?' is thus left

79 See Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 193.

hanging in the air, and Kent's sane reaction to Lear's delusion, 'He hath no daughters, sir', is quickly subdued by Lear: 'Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdued nature/To such a lowness but his unkind daughters' (III. 4. 70). Instead of rousing Lear's sense of responsibility, the sight of 'Poor Tom' nurtures an impulse towards vengeance.[80]

In *Cat's Eye*, the spectacle of the misery of a 'fallen' homeless woman on the street rouses Elaine's compassion at first. Like a modern Gloucester, however, she extends charity, not grace; and, Lear-like, she is eventually reminded of her previous suffering at the hands of her tormentors:

> 'I have to go now,' I say. 'You'll be all right.' Lying through my teeth. She opens her eyes wide, trying to focus. Her face goes quiet.
>
> 'I know about you,' she says. 'You're Our Lady and you don't love me.' […] 'No,' I say. She's right, I don't love her. Her eyes are not brown but green. Cordelia's.
>
> I walk away from her, guilt on my hands, absolving myself: I'm a good person. She could have been dying. Nobody else stopped. (153, ch. 28)

Elaine cannot help the homeless woman, or the pleading Cordelia; she cannot become the Virgin Mary to either of them, because her impulse to liberate others is halted by the impulse to liberate herself from suffering, shame, and guilt. Elaine thus walks away, and continues to walk away, from people: 'I walk away from [Josef]. It's enormously pleasing to me, this act of walking away. It's like being able to make people appear and vanish, at will' (322, ch. 57). The 'spectacle' of her lover's pain does not, as Elaine says herself, 'make [her] compassionate, but ruthless' (322, ch. 57). Obviously, Elaine's ability to abandon responsibility for others has to do with her troubled past; and the problem with vengeance is the same as the problem with the debt of gratitude: it is never quite clear when the other has paid enough.[81]

The middle-aged Elaine's obsessive longing to see Cordelia, to come face to face with her childhood tormentor, is initially frustrated by her inability to shed her yearning for retribution. Cordelia will remain absent until Elaine revisits the ravine where redemption was once possible. In the threshold space – the space in which the worlds of the dead and the living, of the past and the present, of the spiritual and the material meet – Elaine and Cordelia suddenly exist in the same 'space-time dimension', finally bringing about 'that easy flow between dimensions' which makes

80 Rosenberg says that 'the emphasis is on the agony of the father for his guilt in siring the children, for his guilty wishes, for his folly – so much so that the focus on his suffering obscures the revenge outline of the play's structure'; see *The Masks of King Lear*, p. 335.

81 The remark about vengeance is indebted to Atwood's *Payback*.

such meetings possible (387, ch. 68). Similarly to the day on which she was saved by the Virgin Mary, it is when Elaine least expects anything to happen, 'as if there's nothing more to come' (417, ch. 74), that Cordelia comes into sight:

> I know she's looking at me, the lopsided mouth smiling a little, the face closed and defiant. There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were. (419, ch. 74)

The sense of Cordelia looking at her produces the recognizable feelings of shame in Elaine, but now she can see that she has carried Cordelia's shame all along, and is finally able to liberate herself from those crippling emotions.[82] The freedom from shame – the recognition of a shared experience – liberates Elaine to the extent that she is able to extend grace to Cordelia: 'I reach out my arms to her, bend down, hands open to show I have no weapon. *It's all right*, I say to her. *You can go home now*' (419, ch. 74). The comforting words that Elaine offers to Cordelia are the same words that were spoken by the Virgin Mary to Elaine herself; they are also the words that could not be spoken to the homeless woman.[83] By becoming a bearer of grace instead of shame, Elaine is thus able to release somebody who was guilty: Cordelia, but also herself.[84] *Cat's Eye* demonstrates how the socialization of shame and guilt in the young female characters creates an urge to be liberated from those emotions, a yearning that keeps them locked in their own desire for freedom so that they cannot reach out to each other in a redemptive mode of forgiveness. Through their 'meeting' – through Elaine's two visions – the novel imagines a sisterhood built on the understanding and acceptance of a shared experience of shame and guilt and a subsequent commitment to extending forgiveness. But as Elaine muses at one point in the narrative: 'Forgiving men is so much easier than forgiving women' (267, ch. 47). *King Lear* may be one of the foremost literary examples of the truth of that statement. As pointed out repeatedly above, Shakespeare's play has invited generations of readers and audiences to forgive or redeem the father. *Cat's Eye* appropriates the possibility of forgive-

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82 Cf. Banerjee, 'Atwood's Time', p. 517.

83 Cf. 'I have to go now,' I say. 'You'll be all right'; p. 153, ch. 28. Many critics have read forgiveness into the last scene between Elaine and Cordelia. See, for example, Stein, *Margaret Atwood Revisited*, p. 94; Roth, *Wilderness and the Natural Environment*, p. 148; Greene, '*Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood', p. 453; Benet-Goodman, 'Forgiving Friends', p. 163; and Davidson, *Seeing in the Dark*, p. 24.

84 Cf. Wilson, *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*, p. 313.

ness that *King Lear* offers and invites its readers to extend grace, not to a father, but to a daughter.

When Atwood brings Cordelia into the reader's present, the worlds of past and present, of fiction and reality, which we are so often encouraged to keep separate, are fused. During a brief moment, we exist – like Elaine and Cordelia in the ravine – in the same 'space-time dimension', possessing a common place, but also a shared condition with the characters: we are human.[85] When literature is able, and allowed, to bring about such a meeting, the reader – like Elaine – can become a redeemer. The next chapter will illustrate how the reader is invited to redeem Shakespeare's female characters from *King Lear* in order for them '[t]o become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern':[86] the pattern of nothingness.

85 Cf. the following passage from Eliot's *Four Quartets*: 'Here the impossible union,/Of spheres of existence is actual,/Here the past and future/Are conquered, and reconciled'; 'The Dry Salvages' V.

86 Eliot, 'Little Gidding' III in *Four Quartets*, p. 40.

CHAPTER FIVE

Something Will Come of Nothing in *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye*

> LEAR: what can you say to draw
> A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.
> CORDELIA: Nothing, my lord.
> LEAR: Nothing?
> CORDELIA: Nothing.
> LEAR: How, nothing will come of nothing. Speak again. (I. 1. 85)
>
> Descend, that ye may ascend.[1]

Descent

Lear falls. Divested of power and property, stripped of his knights, and dissociated from his sense of himself, he is gradually reduced to 'nothing', to 'an O without a/figure' (I. 4. 183). Gloucester jumps. Blinded, betrayed, and turned into a shadow of his former self, he throws himself off the imaginary cliffs of Dover. Overcome by guilt and regret, both men fall into

1 Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, ed. by Michael P. Foley, trans. by F.J. Sheed, 2nd edn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), p. 66.

darkness, into nothingness.[2] However, for neither of them is the fall into nothingness their final fall. Having reached the bottom of the pit, they are redeemed, saved by their children. As Marjorie Garber puts it, 'Both Lear and Gloucester "die" in the play – indeed, each dies not once but twice, and each is "reborn"'.[3] When it seems that absolute darkness has been reached, life continues – at least for some time.

It is from Cordelia's 'nothing' that the tragic action of *King Lear* unfolds, or rather from Lear's conviction that 'nothing will come of nothing'.[4] But, as James L. Calderwood points out, '[s]omething frequently comes of nothing in *King Lear*'.[5] Nothingness is not inevitably associated with pessimism or nihilism in the play; it also figures affirmatively, in a manner reminiscent of what mystics call the *via negativa*.[6] In the midst of darkness and despair, the possibility of ascension offers some hope. With the assistance of their children, Lear and Gloucester rise towards redemption. Edgar literally leads the way for someone who has no eyes, and Cordelia guides a fallen father and king towards the possibility of redemption. The lost daughter returns to raise Lear from the 'grave', in the hope that he will rise to bless a 'fallen' daughter:

> CORDELIA [*Kneels.*] O look upon me, sir,
> And hold your hands in benediction o'er me!
> [*She restrains him as he tries to kneel.*]
> No, sir, you must not kneel.

2 Critics have examined the nature of nothingness in *King Lear*. See, for example, Darryl Tippens, '"Can You Make No Use of Nothing": Nihilism and Meaning in *King Lear* and *The Madness of King George*' in *Performance for a Lifetime: A Festschrift Honoring Dorothy Harrell Brown: Essays on Women, Religion, and the Renaissance*, ed. by Barbara C. Ewell and Mary A. McCay (New Orleans: Loyola University, 1997), pp. 159-180, and Jagannath Chakravorty, *King Lear: Shakespeare's Existentialist Hero* (Calcutta: Avantgarde, 1990).

3 Garber, *Shakespeare after All* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), p. 662.

4 Lear's belief that 'nothing can be made out of nothing' originates in the Classical tradition of *ex nihilo nihil fit,* literally, nothing comes from Nothing; see Juan Carlos Rodriguez Aguilar, 'The Nothing that from Nothing Came: From Epicurean to Heideggerian Nothingness in Shakespeare's *King Lear*', *Anuario de Letras Modernas* 7.1 (1995), 109-123 (p. 111). For a discussion of *ex nihilo, nihil fit* in Shakespeare, see Howard Caygill, 'Shakespeare's Monster of Nothing' in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. by John J. Joughin (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 105-114. Christopher Pye says that '[w]hereas Lear falls because he imagines "nothing can come of nothing", that is, from a literality that fails to conceive a beyond to his signifying universe, Gloucester falters precisely because he imagines there must be such a beyond'; see *The Vanishing Shakespeare* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 96.

5 Calderwood, 'Creative Uncreation in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37.1 (1986), 5-19 (p. 6).

6 See Tippens, '"Can You Make No Use of Nothing"', p. 164.

> LEAR Pray do not mock me.
> I am a very foolish, fond old man (IV. 7. 57)

This scene can certainly be read as a 'mutual offering of love and forgiveness and a desire on the part of both to bless and be blessed by the other'.[7] However, the scene does not show us such a mutual blessing actually occurring. What the above passage, as well as the reunion in prison, tells us is that Lear's desire to be redeemed himself is stronger than his desire to extend grace to Cordelia. Edgar too asks for his father's blessing (V. 3. 195). Having received it, he is able to embark on the competition, with Edmund, for his title and identity. The balance between father and son that was upset owing to Gloucester's transfer of guilt onto Edgar is thus restored: 'Grace go with you, sir' (V. 2. 4). However, the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia does not restore the equilibrium of debts and responsibilities between father and daughter. Rather than granting his daughter her wish to 'see these daughters and these sisters' (V. 3. 7), Lear stays within his own scheme of things and demands that she join him there:

> LEAR: Come, let's away to prison,
> We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage.
> When thou dost ask me blessing I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness. (V. 3. 8)

Cordelia is yet again asked to demonstrate her obedience to her father; Lear suggests that he will withhold his blessing from her until she comes with him to prison. This time the King of France is in his own kingdom and thus cannot come to Cordelia's rescue. Right to his end, Lear is asking for favours instead of extending them to others. His fallen condition makes ascension to another level – a level of insight – possible, but his fall to nothing does not open the door to any kind of knowledge that might have saved Cordelia or himself. He fell and rose only to fall again, this time together with his daughter. Lear is 'emptied' and 'humiliated', reduced to 'nothing'; but he does not 'gain something' from it.[8] Unable to divest himself of the urge that drove him to 'unburden' or free himself in the first place, he loses all.

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7 Bruce W. Young, '*King Lear* and the Calamity of Fatherhood', p. 57.

8 Tippens reminds us that 'the "emptying" of an earthly king or a godlike hero has long been a familiar literary pattern. Classical male heroes and protagonists (like Oedipus, Kreon, and Jesus Christ) undergo a trial in which they lose their royal status, are emptied and humiliated, reduced to "nothing," and as a result gain something (wisdom, honor, glory, understanding, and so forth)'; see '"Can You Make No Use of Nothing"', p. 162.

The motif of descent into nothingness that is so central to *King Lear* can also be found in the three novels of concern to this study: Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years*, and Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. The female protagonists – Ginny, Delia, and Elaine – are moved into the position occupied by Lear in that they all fall, empty themselves, and descend into a state of nothingness which becomes a preliminary to renewal. Such 'gender-switching' is common in creative responses to Shakespeare.[9] Female Calibans and Prosperos, and occasionally female Lears, feature in a number of appropriations and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.[10] According to Philippa Kelly:

> If feminist approaches challenge the gendered assumptions that contain, or constrain, *King Lear*'s interest for contemporary women, it seems useful – if not inevitable – to ask why the play's great journey should be the prerogative of a man. Gender-switching has at times been used to stage this question, moving a woman into pole position on the heath and, in the process, reinforcing the thematic architecture that insists on *King Lear*'s universal relevance.[11]

Visualizing the female characters as moved into a Lear-like position gives the reader an idea of how difficult it is for Ginny, Delia, and Elaine to surrender control. Although none of them is invested with royal power, they all inhabit positions which are difficult to let go of in that they entail various kinds of gratification and even an amount of power over others.

Lear responds to the loss of power by falling into madness; he ascends, but not in order to let go of his daughter. In contrast, Ginny and Delia are able to 'rise' to release the next generation in *A Thousand Acres* and *Ladder of Years*. They may abandon their responsibilities – one as landlord, the other as a parent – but they gain something from their fall, something that turns them into redeemers of the third generation. They go to the bottom of debts – resetting themselves to zero – and emerge to assume responsibility. For Delia, it was a 'time-trip that worked' (*LY* 326, ch. 20). The reconciliation between mother and daughter (and between husband and

9 See, for example, Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare*, and Lisa Laframboise, '"Maiden and Monster": the Female Caliban in Canadian Tempests', *World Literature Written in English* 31.2 (1991), 36-49. According to Novy, '[s]ome contemporary feminist rewritings of Shakespeare make their points partly by placing women in central roles Shakespeare gives men'; see 'Introduction: Women's Re-Vision of Shakespeare: 1664-1988', p. 9.

10 See, for example, Sarah Annes Brown, 'The Return of Prospero's Wife: Mother Figures in *The Tempest*'s Afterlife', *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003), 146-160. See also Teresa Dobson, '"High-Engender'd Battles": Gender and Power in "Queen Lear"', *New Theatre Quarterly* 14.2 (1998), 139-145.

11 Kelly, 'Performing Australian Identity: Gendering *King Lear*', p. 221.

wife) in Tyler's novel restores the equilibrium of debts and responsibilities that was disrupted by the inability of the previous generation to let the next generation go. At the end of *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's return to the ravine establishes a kind of 'reconciliation' between the two 'friends'. The female characters' descent thus opens the door to a kind of knowledge that saves them and provides them with the tools they need in order to be able to extend grace.

The pattern of descent that the novels evoke is a structure upon which many plots of 'awakening', madness, and/or spiritual quests are based. As Potvin points out, '[d]escent is common to many works on female identity'.[12] Some of the best-known examples range from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wall-paper* (1892) through Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) to Doris Lessing's short story 'To Room Nineteen' (1978) and several of her novels.[13] Atwood's novel *Surfacing* appears to some critics to be a prototype of this kind of narrative.[14] The pattern of descent that emerges through a reading that takes *King Lear* as its point of departure is different from the traditional quest pattern, though, at least to the extent that it illustrates that the female characters are not completely powerless prior to their fall; rather, the difficulty in letting go testifies to the fact that they have quite a lot to lose.[15] In addition, the desire to liberate themselves from burdens that are not their own urges them forward and downward, away from relations and responsibilities. Nevertheless, something is gained from their fall: they are ultimately able to extend grace to another.

According to Marianne Novy, '[o]ne of the main reasons that many women novelists in the English-speaking world use Shakespeare today is to stress the limitations of his plots as well-known cultural myths about women's possibilities'.[16] This chapter illustrates the extent to which the use of Shakespeare serves to emphasize the possibility of liberation that is

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12 Potvin, 'Voodooism and Female Quest Patterns', p. 646.

13 According to Rubenstein, 'Delia Grinstead's retreat to a bare room that signifies psychological as well as physical escape from the comforts of home allusively suggests Doris Lessing's story, "To Room Nineteen"'; see *Home Matters*, p. 84.

14 Monika Kaup writes that 'Christ and Pratt take the archetypal quest pattern, a heavily ritualized procedure of "descent" and "surfacing," a plunge into the unconscious and return to rebirth, as the structure upon which *The Four-Gated City* and *Surfacing* are modelled'; see *Mad Intertextuality: Madness in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1993), pp. 129-130. However, Nathalie Cooke claims that *Surfacing* does not fit the typical model of the quest pattern, but is rather a 'subversion' of the 'quest for identity'; see *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion*, p. 74.

15 Cf. Carol P. Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980), p. 18.

16 Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare*, p. 7.

contained in his plot. Through the process of appropriation, Shakespeare's female characters are redeemed from a plot that drives them into debt and death as they are placed in another which does not make them into victims of debt and death. These novels thus provide readers with something which Shakespeare could not give them: the experience of seeing a woman survivor walk away from a life-situation rendered oppressive by guilt and shame. She is even able to exercise a liberating influence on other women.

As was pointed out above, *A Thousand Acres* and *Ladder of Years* have much in common.[17] The main characters, Ginny and Delia, depart from home and family when they feel that they have paid enough. When their function in the household no longer gives them the kind of sustenance that it once did, they stop providing services of a kind that binds them to self-sacrifice. But in the process of the loosening of familial bonds, they also lose their main source of satisfaction in life. To please may be to place oneself under the control of another – of a husband and/or father – but the caretaking role also offers fulfilment for these characters, particularly for Delia, who is a mother. In addition, although their positions only grant them limited power, both Ginny and Delia lose a status which has provided them with a certain standing in life, one as a farmer's daughter and later as a landowner, the other as a doctor's wife.[18] However, their losses are followed by gains.

In the city/town to which Ginny and Delia move, they both become self-supportive. Granted, both of them continue with domestic chores made into paid occupations: Ginny is a waitress at Perkins, mostly serving male truckers; Delia is a typist with the domineering Mr Pomfret, who snaps his fingers at her. But they hold these unglamorous jobs in order to earn their livelihood, not to earn another's grace or favour.[19] In addition, the money Ginny receives in return for her 'chores' is used to pay off a debt that threatens to make the third generation – Pam and Linda – burdened by responsibilities to the past which would blight their lives. But it is not primarily the move to the public world that offers the kind of transformation they both seek. Delia and Ginny may be seen to 'light out' for the unknown, a familiar theme in American fiction. As was observed above, one of the distinctive features of American literature is the forward movement towards freedom which originates in the westward expansion; it is fuelled by Huck Finn's 'lighting out for the territory' and the subsequent 'on the

17 See chapter three in this study.

18 Kissel argues that 'Anne Tyler's characters want to feel needed – to be useful to others'; see *Moving On*, p. 82.

19 Leslie thinks that Ginny's job 'seems to be the numbing replication of the caretaking role she has always played'; see 'Incest, Incorporation, and *King Lear*', p. 47.

road' motif of numberless novels and films.[20] However, the female characters in Smiley and Tyler's novels do not escape in order to go to the woods, take to the open road, or go down the river or to the sea; they depart for a room of their own, a room that does not, like the road, entail escape from responsibilities.

Even so, in a manner similar to that of the conventional male protagonist who is (as Leslie A. Fiedler points out) 'in flight from his guilt, the guilt of that very flight',[21] the female characters are also 'in flight' – not from their own guilt, but from a debt of gratitude that has tied them to daughterhood and sacrifice.[22] They may free themselves; but whereas the guilt of the male protagonist drives the narrative forward, that movement is halted by Ginny and Delia's descent into nothingness, in the course of which desires for escape are suspended. These female protagonists find an alternative space, a sanctuary, which provides the opportunity for both to come to terms with loss: the loss of a place, a position, and an identity. Away from the demands and competition of the outside world, they let go and give in to nothingness, cherishing the darkness and emptiness that lie within and beyond.

The previous chapter discussed how the competition for a father's favour in *King Lear* and *Cat's Eye* prevents siblings from extending their hands to each other.[23] In *Cat's Eye*, the struggle for Cordelia's favour similarly thwarts any sense of solidarity between the competing followers, Elaine, Grace, and Carol (*CE* 121, ch. 23). However, like Ginny and Delia, Elaine suddenly stops playing along in a game that turns her into a player under another's power. She walks out of an oppressive relationship when she is no longer willing to return Cordelia's 'favour' or play the 'fool'. It was Elaine's fear of losing a favourable position in relation to Cordelia (a position which is, paradoxically, that of the victim) that tied her to oppression. When the fear of expulsion no longer guides Elaine, she is free from the punitive rule of her 'friend' (*CE* 193, ch. 36).

20 Fiedler points out that 'the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat – anywhere to avoid "civilization," which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility'; see *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. edn (New York: Stein and Day, 1966; orig. published in 1966), p. 26. In *The Escape Motif in the American Novel: Mark Twain to Richard Wright* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), Sam Bluefarb discusses the escape motif as a perennial theme in the American novel. Fiedler, *Love and Death*, p. 26.

21 Fiedler, *Love and Death*, p. 26.

22 See chapters two and three.

23 It is only when Goneril and Regan no longer seek Lear's power that they reach for each others' hands.

Whereas Ginny and Delia leave home in order to free themselves, Elaine does not have to go very far; the place which possesses the potential for liberation is within the city itself.[24] It is in one of Toronto's ravines that Elaine is able to jettison that warped sense of debt to Cordelia that drove her into the chasm in the first place. Atwood may not, as Shannon Hengen points out, be considered a spiritual writer,[25] but the narrator is clear on one point: it was the divine intervention of the Virgin Mary that guided her towards redemption.[26] Elaine's physical descent into the ravine is a figurative fall into nothingness followed by a metamorphosis.[27] The mystical experience saved her from untimely death and subsequently freed her from a relationship that drove her towards despair, but Elaine is not free from indignity. Previously driven by the desire to be accepted by Cordelia and liberated from feelings of shame, she is from then on driven by a desire for revenge and for putting Cordelia to shame.[28] For most of the novel, these conflicting urges militate against any notion of redemption. It is not until Elaine's second descent into the ravine that liberation can be realized. Significantly, Elaine's trip back to Toronto for her retrospective exhibition is initially understood in terms of a descent: 'I do not rise, I descend', she says (*CE* 13, ch. 3).

The descent motif is crucial to all three novels, but it is most conspicuous in *Cat's Eye*.[29] On the very first page, the reader is invited to descend with Elaine rather than move forward: 'You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away' (*CE* 3, ch. 1). The

24 Elaine does not escape to the wilderness in search of herself, like the unnamed protagonist in *Surfacing*; the wilderness is already in Toronto by way of the ravines. For a remark on the connection between wilderness and the ravines, see Myles Chilton, 'Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Toronto as the Urban Non-Place' in *The Image of the City in Literature, Media, and Society*, ed. by Will Wright and Steven Kaplan (Pueblo: University of Southern Colorado, 2003), pp. 154-160 (p. 157).

25 See Hengen, 'Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, pp. 72-85 (p. 84).

26 Atwood has said the following: 'If I were going to convert to any religion I would probably choose Catholicism because it at least has female saints and the Virgin Mary. It does have a visible set of sacred female objects, whereas Calvinistic Protestantism doesn't'; see Karla Hammond, 'Articulating the Mute' in *Margaret Atwood: Conversations*, ed. by Earl G. Ingersoll (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 1990), pp. 109-120 (p. 115).

27 Carol Christ discusses women's spiritual quest which, she suggests, 'begins in an *experience of nothingness*'. She describes it as a mystical experience that leads to a transformation of the self or to 'wholeness'; see *Diving Deep and Surfacing*, pp. 13 and 26.

28 See chapter four.

29 See Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, 'Multidimensional Time-Space in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Viivi Luik's *The Seventh Spring of Peace*', *Interlitteraria* 3 (1998), 248-266 (p. 262).

frequent occurrence of the word 'nothing' has occasioned a few critics to perceive a connection to *King Lear*.[30] Davidson points out that '[i]n both [*King Lear*] and the novel that "nothing" is hard to plumb, to measure, to map'.[31] According to Lane, the concept of nothing possesses a 'dual nature'; it is both 'generative' and 'destructive'.[32] 'Out of nothing', Lane argues, 'can come absence and presence, negation and knowledge, denial and acceptance, lack and fulfilment'.[33] Elaine's faintings, her regression into silence, and her attempted suicide are occasioned by her reduction of herself to nothing in order to escape. The pursuit of self-effacement that sometimes takes hold of her is mainly destructive. It may bring a temporary rescue from shame and suffering, but the relief from pain is not lasting.

'You faint when there's something you don't want to see, you can't bear to see', says the narrator in the short story called 'Fainting' in Atwood's collection *Murder in the Dark*.[34] The first time Elaine faints is at the 'Conversat' to which her father takes her and her brother on a Saturday afternoon. In response to the sight of a turtle that has been cut open to see how long the heart beats after its death, Elaine falls to the floor. Witnessing such a dissection may pose a challenge for the most resilient child; but concerned as the novel is with Elaine's inability to look beyond the surface – to the 'real thing' – it is not entirely unexpected that fainting becomes a mode of escape and concealment.[35] To Elaine, this experience consequently has its uses, in that it prompts the realization that she can urge herself into a state of nothing(ness): 'I hold my breath and hear the rustling noise and see the blackness and then I slip sideways, out of my body, and I'm somewhere else' (*CE* 172-173, ch. 32). Elaine thinks she has 'discovered something worth knowing': 'There's a way out of places you want to leave, but can't' (*CE* 171, ch. 32). She thus finds a way to avoid the pain and humiliation that Cordelia exposes her to; but when she regains consciousness, she finds that nothing has really changed: nothing has come out of reducing herself to nothing. Rather, she imprisons herself in silence and shame and ties

30 See Raitt, '"Out of Shakespeare?"', p. 184.

31 Davidson, *Seeing in the Dark*, p. 19.

32 Lane, 'Cordelia's "Nothing"', pp. 73-74.

33 Lane, 'Cordelia's "Nothing"', p. 81.

34 Atwood, *Murder in the Dark: Short Ficions and Prose Poems* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1983), p. 16.

35 According to Gregersdotter, fainting 'is a desperate sign of powerlessness and hopelessness when it appears as if nothing else can be done. It is simply a strategy to deal with the never-ending Watchbird supervision'; see 'Watching Women, Falling Women', p. 160. Gernes says that Elaine's fainting is one of several 'out-of-body experiences', providing 'relief, but not empowerment'; see 'Transcendent Women', p. 146.

herself even closer to the 'false' redeemer, Cordelia, who seems committed to saving the 'sinner', Elaine.

If Cordelia's 'nothing' in *King Lear* takes her out of the competition staged by her father, Elaine's 'nothing' keeps her in the game: '*What do you have to say for yourself?* Cordelia used to ask. *Nothing*, I would say' (*CE* 41, ch. 8). According to Suzanne Raitt, 'Lear's demand for a form of ritual speech echoes throughout many of the encounters in *Cat's Eye* between fathers and daughters, and between Elaine and Cordelia'.[36] The ritual speech uttered by Cordelia herself ('wipe that smirk of your face', 'you should have your mouth washed out with soap', and 'what do you have to say for yourself') can be traced back to her father, as she reproduces his overbearing reproofs in order to control Elaine's response and to check her loyalty. As Cordelia is well aware, there is no reply to such ritual speech but one: saying nothing.

Elaine's regression into silence and inertia in response to Cordelia's demand for speech and obedience is another way to escape: 'Everything will be all right as long as I sit still, say nothing, reveal nothing. I will be saved then, I will be acceptable once more' (*CE* 117, ch. 22). But what happens when silence will no longer save her? As a punishment for lying – for 'saying nothing' – Cordelia throws Elaine's hat into the ravine. Having 'nothing' to offer her accuser, she must thus offer herself. Significantly, the incident in the ravine occurs in 'the middle of March' when 'Easter tulips are beginning to bloom' (*CE* 185, ch. 35). In a Christian context, the time before Easter is a time of sacrifice, in preparation for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The ravine is not only the place for a sacrificial fall, but also for rebirth. Realizing that Cordelia will not come back for her, Elaine relinquishes control. Stripped of her dignity and her desire to live, she surrenders to darkness and nothingness: 'My head is filling with black sawdust; little specks of darkness are getting in through my eyes. It's as if the snowflakes are black' (*CE* 188, ch. 35). Expecting nothing, desiring nothing, feeling nothing, she has an experience in the course of which something comes of nothing. The moment when Elaine surrenders all desires and the hope of being saved is the moment of liberation (*CE* 189, ch. 35).

With its unexpectedness, its transient quality, its sensory stimulation and transformative potential, Elaine's experience in the ravine conjures up similarities with traditional accounts of mystical experience.[37] Almost immediately, Elaine ascribes divine power to her rescuer: 'I know who it is that I've

36 Raitt, '"Out of Shakespeare?"', p. 183.
37 See Gernes, 'Transcendent Women', p. 154.

seen. It's the Virgin Mary, there can be no doubt. Even when I was praying I wasn't sure she was real, but now I know she is' (*CE* 190, ch. 36).

Placed beyond Cordelia's influence, Elaine becomes responsive to the power of a female deity, one in whom she can place her trust.[38] Gernes points out that '[t]he effect of her encounter with this compassionate and empowering female is lasting';[39] but it is worth keeping in mind that although Elaine is saved, she ascends to exercise the kind of power that Cordelia was possessed with, the power over other people's minds, and her prime subject is the 'friend' who was the tormentor, Cordelia: 'I'm surprised at how much pleasure this gives me, to know she's so uneasy, to know I have this much power over her' (*CE* 233, ch. 42). Instead of 'becoming' the Virgin Mary to Cordelia and drawing energy from that rescue, Elaine draws energy from Cordelia: 'Cordelia wants to point out Lumplump Family cars, but I'm tired of this. I have a denser, more malevolent little triumph to finger: energy has passed between us, and I am stronger' (*CE* 233, ch. 42).

Ginny and Delia may inhabit inferior positions before they walk away from their earlier lives, but what keeps them tied to such positions until early middle age is similar to what kept Elaine under Cordelia's thumb: the semblance of power and influence. Even if it only offers her a limited kind of power, Delia's position as caretaker of her father and her children grants her influence and control over other people's lives. Up until the moment of her father's death, Delia has been the hub around which everyone has revolved. When that function is disrupted by her father's death, her children's continuous progression into adulthood, and her husband's arthritis, her power and control – over life and death – seems to be waning. As was discussed in chapter three, her father's death had freed her from daughterly debt; paradoxically, the continuous 'instalments' on that debt obviously encompassed an element of gratification too.

No longer under an obligation to a father, and about to lose the 'prerogative of parenthood', Delia is losing her status in her home. Expecting something from her children, she gets nothing (*LY* 19).[40] It hurts her

38 For a discussion of madness as a 'subversive strategy' and as a 'gateway to renewal' in women's writing, see Kaup, *Madness in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing*, p. 127.

39 Gernes, 'Transcendent Women', p. 147.

40 Many of Tyler's female characters seem to have difficulty letting go in general and letting go of their children in particular. When Maggie endeavours to remain in control over her daughter, her friend Serena (who has just experienced her husband's funeral) tries to dissuade her: '"Oh, Maggie, let her go," Serena said. "Let it all go"'; see *Breathing Lessons* (London: Vintage, 1988), p. 80. Similarly, on her own death-bed, Pearl Tull complains that 'she'd never learned to let go, to give in to float on the current of a day'; see *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (London: Vintage, 1982), p. 12.

that her children do not look to her for sustenance any more: 'They used to think she was so important in their lives' (*LY* 72, ch. 5). Delia is not equipped with the tools to deal with this loss. She departs, expecting something in return; instead, she gets nothing: 'She had been checking the Baltimore newspapers daily, morning and evening. There was nothing in either paper Tuesday, nothing Wednesday, nothing Thursday morning' (*LY* 99, ch. 6).

Wives and Daughters

Like Delia, Ginny is the caretaker of both husband and father. Although she moved out of her father's house on marrying Ty, she stays on, like Delia, within the perimeter of her father's influence, and thus under his rule and in his service. As long as she performs her part – which is 'to give him what he asked of me, and if he showed discontent, to try to find out what would please him' (*TA* 123, ch. 16) – her father is appeased. Although that ritual brings her no power in the form of authority or control over other people, it offers her some gratification: her father's approval. However, attempting to win his approval – his favour – is what keeps her under his rule, in that it ties her to daughterhood and debt, but also to ritual speech: 'My father was easily offended, but normally he was easily mollified, too, if you spoke your prescribed part with a proper appearance of remorse. This was a ritual that hardly bothered me, I was so used to it' (*TA* 35, ch. 6). Ritual speech is a form of sacrifice; just like her cooking and cleaning, it is an offering of herself, done to satisfy and pacify the one in power. Like Sam in *Ladder of Years*, whose approval Delia has 'spent more than half her life trying to win'(*LY* 137, ch. 9), Ty assumes the role of 'collector' of a debt of gratitude. The ritual of cooking and cleaning for Ty is part of her service to her father. Being a Cook offers Ginny some gratification, but once she is invited to be ruled by her own appetite instead of others', that position will no longer be worth her while.

Though their living arrangements are similar, Ginny's position of power is not under threat like Delia's; on the contrary, her influence is strengthened by her new status as a landowner. When Larry offers the farm to his daughters, Ginny does what she has always done; she gives him what he asks for in order to please him: 'In spite of that inner clang, I tried to sound

agreeable. "It's a good idea."' (*TA* 19, ch. 4). If life as a farm-wife afforded Ginny the semblance of power, life as a property-owner offers her 'real' power. Being a farm-wife in Zebulon County means being a debtor whose role it is to gratify others by way of serving, cooking, and cleaning; to be a property-owner means being a creditor with the right to gratify herself. To some readers it might seem peculiar that Ginny does not leave the farm after she has confronted the memories of the incest. Ty is obviously not the reason why she stays on the farm; what keeps her there is the power she holds over her father, the sense of gratification that comes with domination and keeps her tied to Larry:

> It was exhilarating, talking to my father as if he were my child, more than exhilarating to see him as my child. This laying down the law was a marvelous way of talking. It created a whole orderly future within me, a vista of manageable days, clicking past, myself in the foreground, large and purposeful. It wasn't a way of talking that I was used to – possibly I had never talked that way before – but I knew I could get used to it in a heartbeat, that here I had stumbled on a prerogative of parenthood I hadn't thought of before (I'd thought only how I would be tender and affectionate and patient and instructive). (*TA* 159, ch. 20)

As Ginny gains more influence over the lives of others – most notably over her father – the dynamics between spouses, siblings, and others also changes. The experience of empowerment that Ginny finds so 'exhilarating' is described in terms that would be appropriate for an instant addiction: Ginny is obviously 'hooked', and an addition, recent or entrenched, is not one that is easily renounced. In *King Lear* we witness how hard it is for a king to let go, not so much of his kingdom, but of the power that comes with it, the power over others; but we also witness how his eldest daughter, once she has felt such power, refuses to surrender any part of it to her sister. Goneril is not afraid to lose the battle against France (she is not interested in winning more influence); she is afraid to lose influence over Edmund. She wants him to 'serve' her, not her sister: 'I had rather lose the battle than that sister/Should loosen him and me' (V. 1. 18).

What sustains the power balance between Ginny and Larry is her continuing empowerment of him, an empowerment predicated on the fact that Ginny has accepted her indebtedness to her father. However, triggered by his embarrassment after the drinking and driving incident, she confronts him instead of, as so many times before, liberating him from guilt and responsibility:

> 'You've got to take this to heart. You simply can't drive all over creation, and you especially can't do it when you're drinking. It's not right. You could kill somebody.

> Or kill yourself, for that matter.'
> He looked at me.
> 'They're probably going to revoke your license, but even if they don't, I will, if you do it again. I'll take away the keys to your truck, and if you do it after that, I'll sell it. When I was little, you always said that one warning ought to be enough. Well, this is your warning, and I expect you to pay attention to it.'
> […]
> He held my gaze, and said in a low voice, as if to himself, 'I got nothing.' (*TA* 159, ch. 20)

This confrontation is profoundly disempowering for Larry. The 'creditor' is dependent on the 'debtor' to empower him, which is why Larry will later remind his daughter of her debt: '"You know, my girl, I never talked to my father like this. It wasn't up to me to judge him, or criticize his ways. Let me tell you a story about those old days, and maybe you'll be reminded what you have to be grateful for"' (*TA* 189, ch. 22). Larry perceives that Ginny no longer adheres to the ritual speech of earlier times but has acquired a way of using language which nullifies their former relationship, subjugating him to her authority. Similarly, Lear's attempt to confirm Goneril's continuing submissiveness to him fails to elicit the kind of ritual speech from her that originally caused him to invest her with half his kingdom (I. 4). Having tasted the prerogative of power herself, Goneril will not succumb to her father's influence. Like Goneril, Ginny refuses to be her father's fool. The control which Ginny had exerted over herself and her emotions gives in to the fulfilment she finds in controlling others. No longer tied to ritual speech, emotions are out of control. The family friction is a fact and, just as in *King Lear*, it culminates in a storm midway through the work.

Although the placatory behaviour of Ginny, Delia, and Elaine pays off, it is detrimental to relationships because the creditor – the father, the husband, Cordelia – is empowered through their submissiveness. The way to rid themselves of their sense of indebtedness is to place themselves beyond the creditor's control. It is not until it is clear that Ginny has won the battle against her father in court – when she is no longer afraid of coming back under his power – that she departs. She has nothing to lose by staying on the farm – in fact, she is the one who proposes some kind of future together with her husband – but as she realizes from Ty's response, she has nothing to gain either:

> I said, 'One new thing we could get would be a range. This one is a menace.'
> He was back in the room. He said, 'I don't necessarily think this is the right time to get a new range.'

> 'Well, maybe it will just blow up, then, and put us out of our misery.'
> He heaved an exasperated sigh, then said, 'I'll bring the range over from your father's place tomorrow. That's pretty new.'
> 'Or we could move over there. I'm the oldest.'
> 'That house is too big for us.' He said this as if he were saying, how dare you?
> 'Well, it was built to be big. It was built to show off. Maybe now I've inherited my turn to show off.'
> 'I think you've shown off plenty this summer, frankly.'
> Steam rose from the boiling potatoes and the simmering brussels sprouts. (*TA* 356-357, ch. 41)

Ginny's reaction to Ty's attempt to pass on blame to her is too heated for words; instead it is manifested through the sudden steam rising from the vegetables.[41]

It is significant that it is the kitchen Ginny inhabits during the time preceding her departure. The kitchen is the place in which she is in charge. Not only is it the only place of which she is in total control; it is also the place in which she can afford to lose control over herself and let herself go. When things become unendurable, she feels a 'palpable sense of relief' 'g[iving] up and let[ting] [herself] fall away from the table and [winding] up in the kitchen getting something' (*TA* 109, ch. 14). The kitchen has been a last resort; but when she no longer finds gratification in being a Cook, it cannot function as a sanctuary for her. Refusing to continue a life of domestic subservience, she leaves the food boiling on the stove:

> With a feeling of punching through a wall, I said, 'I need a thousand dollars.'
> Ty widened the opening. 'I have a thousand dollars in my pocket, from the rent of my place. […]
> I held out my hand. […] and with the meat broiling in the oven and the potatoes and sprouts boiling on the stove, I walked out the door. (*TA* 357, ch. 41)

Ty obviously holds his wife responsible for the 'family fracas'. By refusing to see his own part in the tragedy, Ty must literally pay for her departure with a thousand dollars, but also, in the end, with his part of the thousand acres. As Ty is not given any more loans from the bank, he eventually has to sign everything over to Rose – the new queen of the thousand acres (*TA* 368, ch. 43).

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41 See Jeannette Batz Cooperman, *The Broom Closet: Secret Meanings of Domesticity in Postfeminist Novels by Louise Erdrich, Mary Gordon, Toni Morrison, Marge Piercy, Jane Smiley, and Amy Tan* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 92. For additional remarks on the significance of the kitchen, see Cooperman, p. 115, and Minrose C. Gwin, *The Woman in the Red Dress: Gender, Space, and Reading* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 110.

In all three novels, those who are left behind lose all. Sam's patients let him down, his children leave him, and he is left wondering what he did wrong: 'you get to believing you did it *all* wrong. Your whole damn life. But now that I'm nearing the end of it, I seem to be going too fast to stop and change. I'm just…*skidding* to the end of it' (*LY* 307, ch. 20). Ty is a loser, too: he loses his wife and his position in the grand narrative of the farm, and in contrast to Ginny, he has not gained an awareness of what that narrative is based on. He hits the open road, a road that seems to offer neither satisfaction nor freedom: 'I don't understand living like this, this ugly way. But I guess I'm gonna be getting used to it' (*TA* 372, ch. 43). In *Cat's Eye*, Cordelia, no longer empowered by Elaine, loses power over her own life and falls. While the main protagonists in the three novels, Ginny, Delia, and Elaine, also fall, they manage to liberate themselves from the tragic pattern. The male characters – and Cordelia – are tied to that same pattern, a pattern that turns them into 'sacrificial victims' when the female characters have had enough. For two of the three losers, descent is hence absolute; it is not followed by ascent, whereas Ginny, Delia and Elaine pass through the respective nadirs of their lives in order to gain something.[42]

Emptiness

For Delia, that 'something' is gained in the Spartan room on George Street in the small town of Bay Borough to which she moves. The van that takes her away from her family gives her a redemptive vision of herself travelling forever, 'unentangled with anyone else' (*LY* 80, ch. 5). Unencumbered, to all appearances, and dispossessed, Delia walks out on her family during their annual beach vacation, wearing little but a bathing suit. As she is 'traveling farther from civilization' she sees only '*empty* country, so cardboard flat and desolate' (*LY* 84 and 83, ch. 5). The room becomes her sanctuary. She appreciates its 'sterility' and 'revel[s] in its starkness, now that she had it completely to herself' (*LY* 98, 93, ch. 6). The room contains no unnecessary furniture and gadgets, so temptations that might otherwise have prompted material desires are reduced. Lack of money impels a changed lifestyle; she begins to borrow Russian and American classics

42 Sam, Delia's husband in *Ladder of Years*, is not destroyed, but rather brought low. But insofar as he ascends again, his ascent is dependent on Delia's supportiveness and their reconciliation.

at the town library instead of filling her time with the romantic fiction which had previously nurtured her escapist desires. She thus deprives herself of worldly things as if preparing herself for a phase in life in which she is not conscious of anything but emptiness and silence: 'Delia unlatched the front door and felt a thin, bare silence all around her' (*LY* 96, ch. 6). Dispossession and the concurrent reduction to silence and stillness seem to be a preparation for the purification of the mind: 'She had always known that her body was just a shell she lived in, but it occurred to her now that her mind was yet another shell – in which case, who was "she"? She was clearing out her mind to see what was left. Maybe there would be nothing' (*LY* 126-127, ch. 9).

It is not only the room, and her mind, that Delia tries to keep as empty as possible but also her life, as she sheds past relations and avoids new ones. Striving for a condition of anonymity, she is 'unreachable by phone' (*LY* 106, ch. 7) and refrains from taking up close contact with other people (*LY* 106 and 108, ch. 7). In a manner similar to Shakespeare's Edgar, she reduces herself to near-nothing in order to become 'Miss Grinstead'. The newly constructed identity is like a garment which she puts on in order to face people in her new surroundings. According to Caren J. Town, the room is 'an empty space in which to fashion a new identity'.[43] However, although Delia does indeed create a new identity, it is outside the room that the need for a new identity is manifest; inside it, she encounters her self, and the 'Miss Grinstead' garment affords her no protection. Realizing that her husband will not come for her, Delia creeps into bed, and with chattering teeth she wraps her 'arms […] around her ribs, hugging her own self tightly' (*LY* 125, ch. 8). With nobody and nothing but herself to rely on, she enters the 'heath' with nothing.

Clearly, then, the female protagonists in both *Ladder of Years* and *A Thousand Acres* empty themselves of desires and walk away from human relations. Like Delia, Ginny deprives herself of possessions and is able to reach a vacuity of space, in which she is free from the past and from the desire for ownership. When Ginny moves away from the farm, she also moves away from an economy of uncompromising competition, where she was taught from childhood to vie for the same space and give in to her desires. From the very beginning of the novel, that covetous competitiveness has been in evidence:

> I recognized the justice of Harold Clark's opinion that the Ericson land was on his side of the road, but even so, I thought it should be us. For one thing, Dinah

43 Town, 'Location and Identity', p. 12.

> Ericson's bedroom had a window seat in the closet that I coveted. For another, I thought it appropriate and desirable that the great circle of the flat earth spreading out from the T intersection of County Road 686 and Cabot Street Road be ours. A thousand Acres. It was that simple. (*TA* 4, ch. 1)

In Zebulon County, the desire to top others in the accumulation of more land does not yield to the preservation of friendly or familial bonds. Sibling rivalry is fuelled by the fact that Ginny and Rose become landowners, with the right to stake out their territory: 'creditors' with the right to exact payment. Rose is 'poisoned' to death for the sake of profit and increased productivity; but before that, she is almost made to pay with her life for taking something that Ginny feels belongs to her: Jess. Like a pioneer, Ginny asserts her prior claim. Ironically, poisonous plants become Ginny's intended murder weapon. With crude exactitude, Ginny stages her revenge on her sister: 'The perfection of my plan was the way Rose's own appetite would select her death' (*TA* 339, ch. 39). No longer willing to sacrifice herself and unconscious of any need to exculpate herself, she passes on the blame to her sister.

Ginny attributes almost divine qualities to Jess, whose name bears a resemblance to 'Jesus' and whose function in Ginny's life initially seems to be that of someone who will lead her into the new Jerusalem of fertility. To Ginny, his face possesses 'a promise of meaning, or even of truth', and she refers to 'the coming of Jess Clark'.[44] Even his brother's words about the return of the 'prodigal son' evoke biblical resonances: 'I notice he waited till we busted our butts finishing up planting before staging this resurrection' (*TA* 6, ch. 2). But Jess is not the gateway to salvation. Instead, Ginny's rescue becomes a room in which she is free from desires, from possessions, and from competition. In St Paul, Ginny enters a state resembling that of Lear on the heath in which there is no need to protect her power because she has none: having taken herself out of competition, she has nothing to win or lose. In a space all her own, she confronts not only emptiness and nothingness, but also acknowledges, as will be shown below, that thing of darkness, her own self.

Ginny's new home is as Spartan as Delia's, consisting of a

> toothbrush, a beat-up sofa bed, a lamp [she] found in a trash bin, shaped like a palm tree but perfectly functional, and a cardboard carton to set it upon, a hot-water ket-

44 For other discussions of the importance of Jess Clark see, for example, Strehle, 'The Daughter's Subversion', p. 225n8; Catherine Cowen Olson, 'You Are What You Eat: Food and Power in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*', *Midwest Quarterly* 40.1 (1998), 21-33 (p. 25); Keppel, 'Goneril's Version', p. 113.

> tle, a box of teabags in the refrigerator, two bath towels from a J.C. Penney white sale, a box of bath-oil beads. Pajamas. (*TA* 362, ch. 42)

Just like Delia, Ginny tries to create an impersonal life, severing every tie with her old existence. The former mistress of a farm kitchen, and the elder Miss Cook as was, even stops cooking her own meals: 'Since seeing Ty, I had reduced my links to the old life even more by investing in a microwave oven' (*TA* 376, ch. 44). She isolates herself; a colleague thinks she is 'without living relatives' (*TA* 365, ch. 43). Like Delia, she avoids getting entangled in human relationsships; only small talk appeals to her (*TA* 362, ch. 42). Ginny thus disconnects herself not only from her roots and her past but also from the outside world and from the present.

Like Delia's timeless existence in Bay Borough, the condition which Ginny enters is characterized by an arrest of time and desires. Detached from the rest of the world, she withdraws into an 'afterlife'. There is nothing, as she calls it, 'time-bound' about her life in the city; she feels as if she has 'entered upon the changeless eternal' (*TA* 361 and 362, ch. 42). Just as for Delia, life for Ginny is what is going on outside. In her life of stillness, she appreciates that she does not even have to generate light herself: the 'intersecting orbs of lights' from neighbours and the restaurant take care of that (*TA* 361, ch. 42). This can be compared to Delia, who finds that 'the light from outdoors was enough to read by' (*LY* 108, ch. 7).

Elaine in *Cat's Eye* also comes to find that the dark is light enough when lit by stars, '[e]choes of light, shining out of the midst of nothing' (*CE* 421, ch. 75). Her journey to the scene of her past suffering has led her to a kind of redemption, albeit not to an express reconciliation with a real-life Cordelia – the sort of reconciliation that would have enable the two 'friends' to evolve a carefree, childlike companionship like that of the two giggling old women on the plane at the very end of the book. Cordelia has vanished from Elaine's adult life, but the shame and inadequacy that she provoked take hold of Elaine from time to time, finally bringing her to the point of suicide:

> I lie in the bedroom with the curtains drawn and nothingness washing over me like a sluggish wave. Whatever is happening to me is my own fault. I have done something wrong, something so huge I can't even see it, something that's drowning me. I am inadequate and stupid, without worth. I might as well be dead. (*CE* 372, ch. 65)

Immediately prior to her attempt to take her life, Elaine's 'body is inert, without will'; but instead of letting go, she 'force[s] [herself] to stand up', urging herself into action. Feeling out of control in life, she attempts to

take control of her life in choosing to end it;[45] but this is also a way for her to punish herself for her 'inadequacy'. Despite the fact that Cordelia is no longer a physical presence in Elaine's life, the feelings of worthlessness she used to foster in Elaine still haunt her, and in order to purge herself of those emotions, she attempts to annihilate herself. With nobody but herself to blame, Elaine prepares to sacrifice herself in order to appease something beyond her power and vision: 'This is when I hear the voice, not inside my head at all but in the room, clearly: *Do it. Come on. Do it*' (*CE* 373, ch. 65). It is not Elaine's own voice; it is the childhood voice of Cordelia – '[t]he voice of a nine-year-old child' (*CE* 374, ch. 65) – but at this point Elaine does not realize that the emotions she acts upon are also, and indeed originally, Cordelia's. She escapes the city instead; '[i]t's the city that's killing me. It will kill me suddenly' (*CE* 375, ch. 66).

It is when Elaine does not attempt to exercise any kind of control, when she least expects anything to happen, that something comes of nothing. The realization that she will become an artist rather than a biologist comes to her 'like a sudden epileptic fit' (*CE* 255). One day when 'nothing has changed, nothing has been done or happened that is any different from usual', she discovers that she is pregnant, a discovery that takes her through another spell of feeling 'at the centre of nothingness' (*CE* 336). Elaine has a way of looking for rescue in the wrong place (in Cordelia, in church, in feminist groups); but grace comes to her when she expects nobody and nothing – as in the ravine, head uncovered.[46]

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Like King Lear, the three main protagonists of *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye* fall. When the burden of debt, guilt, or shame becomes too heavy to carry, Ginny, Delia, and Elaine attempt to release themselves from it and fall into nothingness. Stripped of possessions in places of darkness, Ginny and Delia reset themselves to zero. They get to the bottom of the debt that has driven them forward, empty themselves, let go of it, and rise or return to balance the account. As a consequence of this suspension, they see to it that those who come after them – the younger generation –

45 Elaine, like Yvonne in 'The Sunrise', sees the instrument used for suicide as a means to 'control her death' and therefore achieve some sort of control in her life; see Atwood, 'The Sunrise' in *Bluebeard's Egg and Other Stories* (London: Vintage, 1996; orig. published in 1983), pp. 241-261, p. 260.

46 Mrs Smeath, significantly the mother of a daughter named Grace, undertakes to rescue Elaine from 'heathendom', as if she can be instrumental in the distribution of grace. In addition, in many religious contexts, the removal of a hat signals that you make yourself vulnerable or humble yourself and accept another's power. For a different interpretation of the hat, see Davidson, *Seeing in the Dark*, p. 56.

are not left to pay the price for their liberation. In a similar manner, Elaine is driven by an urge to free herself, partly from shame but also from guilt. It is only at the very end of *Cat*'s *Eye*, as she descends into the ravine once again, that she experiences another vision there and is finally able to liberate both herself and Cordelia. The novel ends with Elaine in an aeroplane, suspended in space.[47]

In their very different ways, Ginny, Delia, and Elaine all become instruments of redemption and agents of liberation. Whether the novels which contain their life-stories encourage readers to look back to *King Lear* and withhold judgment of Lear's daughters cannot be asserted in general terms; that is a question which every reader must answer for himself/herself. One thing is certain, however: if *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye* do have this effect on at least some of their readers – inspiring a sense of responsibility towards Goneril and Regan, and towards Cordelia, instead of 'awe' or 'sympathy' – [48] the modern works of fiction that are variously indebted to Shakespeare's play have the power to point us in the direction of a new ethics of literary appropriation.

47 According to Coral Ann Howells, 'The flight may also be a metaphor for her spiritual ascent, because in the airplane, Elaine is both up "here" as a solid "I" and down "there," united with the spirit of the land', see '*Cat's Eye*: Creating a Symbolic Space Out of Lost Time' in *Margaret Atwood*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000), pp. 173-189 (p. 188).

48 Cf. Marsden who suggests that 18th-century adaptations of *King Lear* were an 'attempt to bring Shakespeare into the realm of sympathy, to recast his tragedies in a form that inspired not awe but "fellow-feeing"'; see 'Shakespeare and Sympathy', p. 30.

Conclusion

> The proof of [Shakespeare's] greatness is in its effects, in the reactions and actions it brings about. […] This, it seems to me, is the only way we can satisfactorily answer the question of why the works of Shakespeare are indisputably greater than the collected cartoons of Bugs Bunny.[1]

'[T]he way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back'.[2] T.S. Eliot's poetry has reverberated throughout this study, which makes a quotation from 'The Dry Salvages' a fitting introduction to the conclusion of this exploration of backward-, downward-, and forward-looking perspectives. Three North American female writers direct their readers towards the source of their literary debt: to Shakespeare and *King Lear*, inviting them to consider various dimensions of daughterly obligation. In *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye*, Jane Smiley, Anne Tyler, and Margaret Atwood carry Shakespeare's play forward to future readers at the same time as providing them with instruments that enable them to modify conventionally censorious attitudes to Shakespeare's female characters.

With the experience of the post-texts at the back of their minds, readers are given the option of recognizing an injustice in *King Lear*. The injustice that this study brings to light is not the one that Lear himself finds reprehensible, namely filial ingratitude; rather, the post-texts enable their readers to discern a degree of injustice done to the daughters, who are driven into a debt which they are not entirely responsible for. *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye* examine the consequences of being expected to pay for an act which one did not originate and whose consequences one does not control, becoming compelled to carry a burden that 'belongs' to someone else. The reader is thus invited to move towards *King Lear* to redistribute responsibilities between a father and his three daughters. The ways in which this is achieved constitute the bulk of chapters two, three, and four in this study.

1 Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, p. 321.
2 Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages' III in *Four Quartets*, pp. 21-31.

Chapter five illustrates how Shakespeare's *King Lear* supplies the three novels with a pattern that is nevertheless altered as it is made to fit them. All the main female characters fall and 'rise' to assume responsibility for someone other than themselves. Elaine in *Cat's Eye* can be understood as an agent of redemption, whose descent ultimately provides her with the tools needed to liberate Cordelia – something Lear never could. Lear-like, Ginny and Delia may escape their responsibilities – one as a landlord, the other as a parent – but both are able to resist the urge to free themselves from more than their daughterly debt. They both play an important part in making sure that the next generation is able to move into the future with as little as possible that ties them to a warped form of daughterhood or to debts that do not belong to them.

Some forty years ago, Leslie Fiedler said that Hamlet and Caliban are figures that feature in America's 'deep imagination'.[3] Hamlet, he asserted, represents the American people – especially American writers – who look upon themselves as 'wronged or dispossessed sons. Hamlet's melancholy, his sense of grievance, is internalized as "an unanswerable revolt against inherited obligations"'.[4] As the preceding chapters have shown, the imagination of another America contains different figures: the wronged daughters of Lear who are compelled to carry a burden that ties them to the past, to their fathers, and to eternal daughterhood, and who are thus compelled to rebel against 'inherited obligations' of their own. Lear's daughters may never be able to escape the plot that they are inscribed in; but Smiley's and Tyler's daughter characters are finally able, unlike the dominant male of much American fiction, to face up to their responsibilities for what they pass on to coming generations.[5]

At one level, all three novels remind their readers of what is missing in *King Lear*: mothers, strong bonds between generations, spouses, and siblings, and the open acknowledgment of Lear's complicity in and responsibility for the 'cracked' domestic as well as public bonds. A king unwill-

3 Julian Markels places *King Lear* and Melville's *Moby-Dick* side by side to analyse how they are 'intimately related moments of ideological self-awareness in Anglo-American history'; see *Melville and the Politics of Identity: From King Lear to Moby-Dick* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 1.

4 Quoted from Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare*, p. 212.

5 See also Smiley, '"Say It Ain't So, Huck"'. The function of the 'Cordelia complex' in the works of other late-20th-century female writers may be worth pursuing; cf. Nancy F. Sweet, who discusses the 'function of the disobedient daughter-heroine' as ' a model of rebellion' in antebellum literature, see 'Chaste Rebellion: The Disobedient Daughter in Antebellum Literature' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2005), pp. 18 and 17. According to Sweet: 'In caring and providing for their decrepit progenitors, the daughters of these works simultaneously exhibit autonomy and filial loyalty'; p. 5.

ing to bear the burden of stewardship, including the defence of his land against corrupting influences, is also a father who is unable to liberate his daughter: the readiness of generations of readers and spectators to exonerate him – at least partly – from blame bespeaks the power of *King Lear* to move readers to 'forgive' somebody who is far from blameless. Instead, blame has been attributed to Goneril and Regan who may also be far from blameless but are not wholly to blame either; even Cordelia has been made to carry responsibility for the disastrous consequences of her father's actions. *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye* invite the reader to suspend his or her desire to assign blame to a female landlord who refuses to pass on a poisonous inheritance, to a mother who escapes her parental responsibilities, to sisters who are unable to extend grace to each other and, by extension, to Shakespearean daughters who are unable or unwilling to express daughterly gratitude. 'Forgiving men is so much easier than forgiving women', the narrator of *Cat's Eye* reflects (CE 267); but as new patterns are formed, making room for the female Lear characters, a more sensitive response to the Shakespearean daughters may be generated in modern readers.

The endeavour to alter the harmful effects *King Lear* may have on female readers clearly formed part of Jane Smiley's motivation to rewrite *King Lear*. In turn, Smiley's writerly responsibility for what is carried forward prompted this study towards the development of an ethics of literary appropriation, and towards a way of reading that moves away from the question of whether Shakespearean appropriations embody oppositional or celebratory dimensions. The reading model proposed in chapter one in this study thus challenges the method that dominates appropriation and adaptation studies to date. This currently prevailing method is governed by the metaphor of debt which locks the precursor and the successor in a state of tension, promoting a binary logic that compels the question: what does it mean to come after Shakespeare; how does the successor deal with being a successor to a cultural icon? The answer is couched in similar terms: the successor is either seen to pay back her literary debt (celebrate and affirm Shakespeare) or to deny it (subvert, destabilize, and oppose Shakespeare). The new approach suggested in this book is based on the idea that appropriation is transacted in relation to a reader-recipient, as it is always a reader – who may, in addition to being a recipient, also be a writer or a critic with obligations to other recipients in his or her turn – who activates the debt relation between a precursor and a successor.

When the reader activates Smiley, Tyler, or Atwood's debt to *King Lear* when it comes to tracing daughterly guilt to its source, Shakespeare is

also established as the originator of his work. Obviously, though, this does not mean that the appropriating writer is freed from responsibility for the choices he or she makes. While the successor cannot be held accountable for the effects and reactions that his or her text brings about, the question 'who is responsible' will assert itself if the text induces guilt about, for example, 'proper daughterhood'.[6] The act of appropriation as understood in this study does not disconnect any author, be it the originator, the successor, or the successor's writer recipient, from his or her work; rather, responsibilities are distributed. The method developed in chapter one above attempts to confer a degree of responsibility on the original author by illustrating how Lear, Antonio, and Huck are placed in a pattern that invites readers/audiences to exculpate them at the expense of the Other (Goneril, Shylock, and Jim).

This study agrees with the idea that 'appropriation will lead to a "new" understanding of both the contemporary text and the original',[7] but it also agrees with the idea that appropriation can sensitize the reader to the historical context of Shakespeare's plays. In the words of Richard Proudfoot:

> Stage productions and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays are established areas of research and investigation. As is increasingly apparent derivative fictions can also offer historical commentary on the text from which they derive. Novelists too can be interpreters: their work constitutes a potentially important resource that is at last receiving something of the attention it deserves.[8]

In their very different ways, *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye* call on the reader to understand *King Lear* as a domestic tragedy, summoning him or her to imagine Lear's daughters as individuals who are driven by more than just daughterly loyalties and obligations.[9]

Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, in particular, may also be able to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of what happens during great shifts of power, as new opportunities arise for equality but also for new 'creditors' to claim payment for past wrongs. *King Lear* brings up what happens when individuals who have previously been excluded from different forms of power, owing to favouritism, the principle of primogeniture or illegitimacy, suddenly accede to power. When Goneril and Regan obtain power, they use it to destroy others and each other. Their role as creditors grants

6 Smiley, 'Shakespeare in Iceland', p. 173.

7 See Erica Hateley, *Shakespeare in Children's Literature: Gender and Cultural Capital*, (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). p. 15.

8 Richard Proudfoot, 'Some Lears', *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002), 139-152 (p. 152).

9 In *The Masks of King Lear*, Rosenberg claims that if Goneril and Regan 'were not thought of only as Lear's daughters, the play might be their tragedy'; p. 50.

them the power to exact payment from each other, but also to withhold what they were previously compelled to pay as 'debtors' to Lear: gratitude. But above all, taken together, the novels present an alternative to critical perspectives that have dominated 20th-century scholarship on *King Lear*. Read through the lens of *A Thousand Acres*, *Ladder of Years*, and *Cat's Eye*, *King Lear* is neither a play of redemption nor a play of despair/nihilism, but rather a play that shows what happens when an originator – as a father, a king, and a landlord – abandons responsibility for what he has created.

By providing 'new' paths into canonical works, literary appropriation looks set to develop as a genre in its own right.[10] As understood here, it depends on the idea that readers can be moved by literature,[11] but also that they can be moved outside the text they are reading towards other texts, prompting a 'palimpsestic' experience. As in the present case, that experience may be ethical, encouraging a response that activates the reader's sense of justice. In a time when a reluctance to admit literature's ability to move its audience/reader is still evident in much scholarly writing, literary appropriation stimulates engagement with affective elements in writerly-readerly communication. In any event, literary appropriation stimulates an approach that is neither singularly historicist nor altogether presentist, but rather serves to illuminate both the past and the present in order to explore which Shakespeare his successors want to carry forward to what readers. Jane Smiley, Anne Tyler, and Margaret Atwood have helped to ensure that *King Lear* continues to offer something for everyone, not least for the female reader.

10 Cf. Lynne Bradley, who sees 20th-century theatrical adaptation as a 'unique genre'; see 'Meddling with Masterpieces', p. 3.

11 Post-colonial appropriations of *The Tempest* that shift focus from Prospero to Caliban depend on the reader to 'humanize' Caliban, just as *A Thousand Acres* as understood in this study depends on the reader's willingness to 'humanize' Goneril and Regan.

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