

Weird and Queer on TV:
The Taming of the Shrew
between William Shakespeare
and Sally Wainwright
by Bianca Del Villano

What is authentic [...] is something that is not in the text.
S. Orgel

Storytelling is always the art of repeating stories.
W. Benjamin

Abstract

The Taming of the Shrew produced by the BBC, written by Sally Wainwright and directed by David Richards is the last of a very long series of screen adaptations of the Shakespearean *Shrew* and was broadcast in 2005 together with three other rewritings – *Much Ado about Nothing* (David Nicholls), *Macbeth* (Peter Moffat) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Peter Bowker) – under the umbrella title of “ShakespeaRe-Told”. This label not only makes the series very snappy, but also gives an idea (consciously or not) of the kind of connection, still persisting between “original” texts and their rewritings, through the smart linguistic joke offered by last syllable connecting the two words and by the use of the hyphen. Whether and how Shakespeare is told or re-told through and by Wainwright’s *The Taming of the Shrew* will be the main focus of this paper, which will also discuss in the first part some stages of the history of Shakespearean adaptations since its eighteenth-century origin.

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The Taming of Shakespeare

The umbrella title of the last BBC production of Shakespeare may be re-phrased on a general level in the following terms: is an adaptation a “telling” or “retelling” of a past story? The question has been treated at length from a twofold perspective, considering an adaptation both as the rewriting of a recognizable original (which therefore remains with a ghostly presence lingering over it) and/or a text that can be analyzed independently from its source. As Linda Hutcheon writes: «When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works. [...] This is not to say that adaptations are not also autonomous works that can be interpreted and valued as such»¹. Hutcheon also puts forward the relevance of adopting a perspective which does not obliterate their substantially hybrid form: «Although adaptations are also aesthetic objects in their own right, it is only as inherently double- or multi-laminated works that they can be theorized *as adaptations*»². What emerges from this first enquiry on the nature of rewritings is that part of their literary interest is due to their relationship with the source. The key-concepts, in this respect, are “transposition”, “creation”, and “reception”:

First, seen as a *formal entity or product*, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This “transcoding” can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation. [...] Second, as a *process of creation*, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective. [...] Third, seen from the perspective of its *process of reception*, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation³.

I would like to further investigate the “palimpsestous” nature alluded to in the quotation and the relation between hypertext and hypotext, by focusing on the way adaptations found themselves implied in the establishment of a modern idea of authorship and in the very creation of a notion of Authority (with capital A), dated to the dawn of Modernity that, especially in Shakespeare’s case, still affects the critical reception of rewritings. In particular, I suggest that adaptation contributed to the construction of authority as a trans-historical, transcendental entity at the price of becoming a victim of the same authorial mechanism it had helped to create. It is, in fact, at the end of the seventeenth century (and until the 1740s) that adaptations started spreading and being recognized *as adaptations* as a response to the necessity of “adjusting” old and foreign works for the current English audience after the *Interregnum*. In that case, they were also part of a wider erudite, scholarly project of reconfiguration

of the English cultural identity as a consequence of the Ancients versus Moderns *querelle*. Adapting was an *authorial* operation that had to show English literati's standard of neoclassical *decorum*, through the emendation of those texts which had not been written according to classical, Aristotelian rules. This effort, which was in line with the Neoclassical aesthetics of the "creation by imitation", was later depreciated when the notion of art as *inventio* (the rediscovery and re-usage of past literary elements) changed into art as *invention*, the creation out of nothing, connected to the idea of genius, later developed as a central point of the Romantic poetics⁴. As a consequence, adapters, initially valued as "full authors", ended by being despised, as their non-original works were seen as derivative and therefore secondary⁵. Although undermined by the new conception of originality, in fact adaptation represented the first stage of the process bringing on its advent, this process being, in my perspective, a passage from a form of *appropriation* of literary models to the *possession* of the text on the part of a unique author who, along with the establishment of a literary marketplace, had become the only legal responsible and the only aesthetic and financial beneficiary of his product.

In this transition, the role of Shakespeare was all the more pertinent. As Gilberta Golinelli highlights:

Una delle caratteristiche degli scritti su Shakespeare composti nella prima metà del Settecento è infatti l'esaltazione della sua ingenuità per legittimare la presenza di errori all'interno delle sue opere e renderle così un autentico patrimonio culturale nazionale, non influenzato dalla tradizione greco-latina. Ed è significativo come i critici inglesi della prima metà del Settecento, così interessati allo studio dei classici, alle traduzioni ed alle riscritture delle loro opere, non abbiano mostrato un forte interesse nei confronti del problema delle fonti utilizzate da Shakespeare, ma abbiano invece insistito sulla sua ignoranza, e fornito in questo modo una idea poco oggettiva del drammaturgo inglese e della età elisabettiana⁶.

The quotation reveals the dynamics at work beneath the myth of the Genius: by obliterating or neglecting Shakespeare's use of the sources, eighteenth-century critics *constructed* his originality as an ahistorical quality, precisely a kind of authority that would have an influence on later literature, but which did not have many debts to the past. It is on the ground of this ideological appropriation that Shakespeare was nearly concomitantly seen both as a "barbarous" poet to be raised to the level of the classics through learned rewritings and erudite editing, and the Bard of the Nation, pure expression of the English spirit, whose growing authority caused the flourishing, especially in the second half of the century, of a philological (incessant and never concluded) recovery of his authentic plays.

What seems remarkable, approaching the subject of this paper, is that in order to acquire a full canonization, Shakespeare went through a "taming", an objectification that made him "material" for ideological and critical manipula-

tions. He received authority from rewritings which were in turn legitimized by that very authority; his own manipulative use of sources of any sort was eradicated in the name of an originality that soon combined with authenticity, giving “original” Shakespeare a transcendental value with which the adaptation had to measure up: «It is the (post-) Romantic valuing of the original creation and of the originating creative genius that is clearly one source of the denigration of adapters and adaptations. Yet this negative view is a late addition to Western culture’s long and happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing stories”⁷. The first phase of the history of adaptation ended with a negative halo persisting until the postmodern turn.

Telling *as* retelling

A brief analysis of the first phase of the adaptation history has displayed its controversial role in contributing to the myth of Shakespeare, with whom it has established (and still does today), in fact, a “circular” relationship in which authority does not follow a linear movement from hypo- to hypertext or vice versa, but presents itself as a dialectical circuit. At the same time, the derivative nature declared by adaptations has been enough to make them appear as aesthetically inferior products.

The concept is resumed and further discussed by Monique Pittman in relation to the passage from plays to films and TV movies, in which she makes it clear that despite the dialogical relationship between Shakespeare and the adapters, the former can be identified with a “master” and the latter with a “servant”:

[A] paradoxical crosscurrents of authority [...] characterize the adaptive transaction when film and television creators choose to re-present the drama of William Shakespeare for contemporary audience. [...] [T]he servant-director attributes authority to the master-poet as a means of validating the adaptive project and in the process not only underscores the master-poet’s authority but also asserts the modern creator as independent agent with the power to configure Shakespeare’s status anew”⁸.

However, in the postmodern times to which the quotation refers, we have witnessed the return of a re-combinative vision of creation, very close to that working beneath the Augustan aesthetics; indeed, in the aftermath of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism between texts and after Julia Kristeva’s re-elaboration of it, theories of textuality have been informed by an idea of *intertextuality*, intended as a transposition of sign systems exceeding the subject enunciating them⁹. Nonetheless, as Pittman indirectly suggests, the function of adaptation as a way to nurture the “presence” of Shakespeare at any level of criticism and art industry is still persisting. What kinds of changes, then, have intervened between modern and postmodern times, respectively the dawn and

the sunset of Modernity? Is Shakespeare's authority still based on surviving (pre-) Romantic premises or it is founded on new assumptions?

To some extent, theories of the origin continue to endure through a "Darwinian" reading of the notions of "source", "influence" and "derivation": accordingly, texts are virtually located on a genealogical tree from which the authority of a text is given (also but not only) by its "presence"/influence on later works. In this view, Shakespeare's authority would be given by aesthetic qualities proved by centuries of textual stratifications, responses, appropriations, and so on. There is, though, also another possible perspective to account for Shakespeare's "mastery" (to use Pittman's words), and grounded on the most sophisticated evolutions of poststructuralism, for which he gains authority no longer from the critical and ideological efforts of constructing or demonstrating the strength of his "presence" – by assuming that "authentic Shakespeare" constitutes the very premise of what has come after him – but for the opposite reason. The Bard is regarded as the symbol of the absent origin *à la* Derrida, i.e. a missing centre, authoritative as a haunting ghost, a *revenant* that returns from an afterlife, that is no longer visible but in its spectral apparition. The ghost bears the *trace* of what cannot be considered the presence of the origin, but which characterizes itself for being elusive, perceivable *because of* its absence. The metaphor of the ghostly nature of Shakespeare has been developed by Maurizio Calbi on the basis of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*:

To Derrida, Shakespearean textuality works as "spectro-textuality". It «moves in the manner of a ghost». It is an ensemble of "indeterminate" and elusive ghostly marks which «*engineers* [s'ingénie] a habitation without proper inhabiting», and is thus always in excess of itself. As a ghostly "Thing" it "inhabits" the translations – and, by extension, the adaptations and appropriations – through which it survives «without residing». Therefore, "Shakespeare" is not the name for a self-contained corpus of works. It is, rather, a locus of spatial and temporal "dis-location" of marks "out of joint" with itself [...]. Adapting "Shakespeare" (or inheriting from it) is, by definition, being/coming after, but in relation to a "Thing" that not only continually crosses boundaries but also works [...] in terms of an uncanny spatio-temporal logic°.

In this deconstructionist conception, any form of textuality is marked by the non-recoverability of the original sense, but in Shakespeare's case, it is all the more relevant, for the complicated modality of inheritance and survival of his material texts; on the one hand, the loss of authentic written manuscripts, the collaborative nature of his writing, the transmission of printed quartos and folios already corrupted by the interference of first non-professional editors and publishers and, on the other, the lack of any visual document or indication about his own stagings". Thus, assuming the poststructuralist perspective, it is precisely the lack of the origin/authenticity that founds the very possibility of re-telling Shakespeare by filling the gap of his elusive trace: the points of resistance to interpretation that his works offer (due to the instability of his

textuality) becoming the sites of new views, of possible deconstruction and reconstruction of a meaning that, as we have seen, results from centuries of criticism. It is in this framework, and with the awareness that adaptations say more about the moment in which they are produced and less about Shakespeare, that I situate my analysis of Sally Wainwright's *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Retold Shrew

In presenting *The Taming of the Shrew* directed by David Richards and broadcast in 2005 as a BBC production series, its scriptwriter Sally Wainwright, during an interview, responded to the question, «Do you think people will watch it to spot the Shakespeare references?»:

I hope so. They're the ones that you're really writing it for – the ones that will be interested in what you've done but won't be snobby about it, and go, "Oh they shouldn't do this", because of course people do it all the time. Shakespeare did it. *The Taming of the Shrew* was taken from a play called *The Taming of a Shrew*. It was a popular genre, the wife-taming genre, back in the sixteenth century. I don't know how interesting it will be to people who aren't interested in Shakespeare and haven't seen the original. But I'm always surprised by how many people are very interested in Shakespeare – you think it's a specialised area, but it's amazing how many people are very interested in it and conversant with it, people you wouldn't have expected¹².

The reply provides some interesting ideas related to adapting Shakespeare. The exposition of being derivative as the very prerogative of adaptations; the challenge of contravening a consolidated idea the audience may have of the play; the dignity of a textual operation that sounds similar to that made by Shakespeare in creating the drama; finally, the success of the Bard that is a cultural point of reference even for non-specialized people. In line with the postmodern status of the adaptation, Wainwright boasts the imitative nature of her work, an imitation that does not mean to be secondary, but rather to enter and become part of a collective imaginary, in which the play is a matter already stratified. In this respect, the choice of the TV medium seems suitable to recall the kind of home entertainment meant by comedy and, at the same time, to vehicle, on a large scale, disruptive ideas and visions that invite the audience to review established concepts and positions (a task that at Shakespeare's time was entrusted to theatre).

In the movie, the elements of novelty are various. *Retold* (I will use this label to distinguish the TV version from Shakespeare's text hereafter called *The Shrew*), in fact, is set in contemporary London and Katherine Minola, the protagonist, is a successful and ambitious politician. Her closest relatives, her mother and her sister Bianca, appear to be very similar to each other and very different from Katherine. Indeed, whereas the latter is beautiful (she is a supermodel) and has everybody at her feet, the former is considered unbear-

able because of her aggressiveness and austere style. One day, the leader of the party suggests to Katherine that her career is at a turning point: she needs to soften her eccentric and somewhat masculine image through marriage, in order to fuel her run to the premiership. Here Petruchio enters, an unemployed aristocrat, who is looking for a rich wife in order to have his debts paid. Though Petruchio and Katherine both have a practical reason for marrying, they eventually, genuinely fall in love with each other and arrange the wedding.

A real *coup de théâtre* occurs when, on the wedding day, Petruchio steps into the Church dressed as a woman, opening a new space of interpretation in the traditional pattern that saw Katherine as the one in search of a female subjectivity and Petruchio as a monolithic “macho” deprived of any sensitiveness. As a consequence of the cross-dressing, however, Katherine becomes upset, afraid of losing her career, which induces Petruchio to stage the “taming” to make her kind to him. In the end, the couple find a common ground where they can build their relationship. Katherine remains an aggressive woman, self-confident and in control of the situation, who manages to earn her premiership and, at the same time, to give birth to three babies, while Petruchio becomes a “househusband”, happily looking after his kids and taking care of his wife.

So, gender relations and the characterization of the two main characters are the points where Wainwright has been sharper and more incisive. Katherine and Petruchio are both resistant to conservative male/female roles (their union is based on inverted roles of the bourgeois family), but they find in marriage a complicity that help them heal their personal diseases in both cases originated within their non-traditional families: the movie, in this respect, presents a range of family models, which are discussed and put at issue as possible choices, without presenting any of them as absolutely “good” or “bad”.

The first example is represented by the Minolas, a mother with two daughters who replicate the triangular family scheme of *The Shrew* with the exception that Baptista is significantly replaced by a mother-figure. Whereas the early modern shrew strives first to resist, and then to find, a satisfactory collocation within a patriarchal structure (and the play is eventually ambiguous about her success in this regard), postmodern Kate seems to feel anxious because she does not embody the same female models she finds within her matriarchal family.

When the movie opens, we witness at once her ill temper – she even slaps her assistant’s face for not having informed her about issues she would discuss in a TV talk show – but, simultaneously, we see how the aggressiveness that marks her as an odd woman (*as a woman*) makes her successful in politics. Her boss, John, expresses appreciation and approval for her manners:

John: Last night, you were delightful.

Kate: Sod off.

John: No, really. Threatening to rip Paxman's balls off and airmail them to Zimbabwe. It was inspired.

Kate: It was beneath me.

John: You were angry.

Kate: I was inadequately informed.

John: These things happen¹³.

Yet, he advises her to get married, if she wants to be a candidate to premiership:

John: Whilst I've every faith in your talents and energy and commitment, whilst the electorate often appreciates a certain eccentricity in its leaders, to get the support you'd need within the party, there may be the odd lifestyle issue [...] Have you ever contemplated marriage?

Kate: Who to?

John: Anyone.

From John's words it comes out that Katherine's lifestyle is perceived as "weird"; though clever at work, she needs to be somehow "normalised" by displaying her femininity and this can happen only through marriage. Thus, as in *The Shrew*, marriage is connected to a form of patriarchal inheritance by which women gain a certain acceptability/respectability in becoming wives. As anticipated, however, Katherine will find her own way to stay within that institution.

This scene, presenting the public face of the protagonist and suggesting the ambivalent effect of her "shrewness", is followed by a family reunion where her bad manners emerge as a reaction to the complicity between Bianca and Mrs Minola, neither of whom she has anything in common with. Recounting John's suggestion about marriage, Katherine provokes Bianca's sarcastic reply: «Who the hell's going to want to get shackled to a gorgon like you?». The reference to the Gorgon identifying Katherine as a negative female stereotype establishes and fixes her to be opposite of what Bianca thinks of herself. What follows makes this point clear and offer further hints at reflection:

Bianca: Mmm! Mummy!

Mrs Minola: Darling! How was Milan?

Bianca: Mmm. Sizzling. [...]

Bianca: Katherine's getting married.

Mrs Minola: Really? Good Lord. Who to?

Bianca: We haven't decided yet. (Laughs)

Mrs Minola: I have spent so much money!

Bianca: Good! That's what it's for. Rich people have a duty to throw it around. It keeps the economy moving. Doesn't it, Katherine? Katherine's going to be Prime Minister.

Mrs Minola: Is she?

Kate: No.

Bianca: She's got to become Leader of the Opposition first. And for that, she needs to get married, apparently.

Mrs Minola: You should get married, Katherine. People think you're so frumpy and peculiar.

Kate: Did you see me on Newsnight last night?

Mrs Minola: Oh, no, you should have told me.

Kate: I did, I left a message.

Mrs Minola: Oh.

Bianca: I've had six proposals this week...

The exchange reveals immediately the complicity between Bianca and Mrs Minola, a complicity that disappoints Katherine inasmuch as she feels neglected by her mother, who pays no attention to her activity (as the last cues show). In addition, the definition «frumpy and peculiar» softly replicates the kind of sarcastic criticism put forward by Bianca, whose final shift to her proposals, instead, not only aims at bringing back herself as the focus of the conversation but indirectly re-traces and highlights the difference between the two sisters. The scene ends with Katherine overturning the table to have been annoyed by some admirers of Bianca, a fact that is eloquently described by a local TV station as «sibling rivalry amongst the rich and influential».

Unlike Shakespeare's protagonist, *Retold's* shrew is fully realized as a public character, but appears split, for her capacity of being sharp-tongued is a prerogative that makes her winning in politics but that condemn her to solitude in her private life. Indeed, her agenda, when her sister invites her to the party in which she will meet Petruchio, shows her lack of after-job commitments of any sorts. Conversely, Shakespeare's Kate is reactive towards a male world in which she has no standing and in which she feels subjected (to her father, then to her husband) but not a full subject able to take her own decision. Her "shrewness" is a defensive reaction to the institution of the household, whose power over gender definition and regulation is described by Valerie Traub as follows:

The beginning of an understanding of gender and sexuality during Shakespeare's life is the patriarchal household. Patriarchy in the late sixteenth century referred to the power of the father over all members of his household – not only his wife and children, but also servants and apprentices. The father was likened to the ruler of the realm, and a well-ordered household was supposed to run like a well-ordered state. Early modern culture was resolutely hierarchical, with women, no matter what their wealth or rank, theoretically under the rule of men. [...] Legally, a woman's identity was subsumed under that of her male protector [...]⁴.

Shakespeare's Katherine, as a consequence, represents the kind of subversion that the system recognizes, condemns and regulates – «Condemning women as shrews or scolds was a useful tactic for men wary of losing their

authority»¹⁵ – through derision and spite used as weapons to neutralize dissent: Bianca's suitors makes fun of her and the following step is Petruchio's taming. When he states that «I will be master of what is mine own. / She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house, / My household stuff, my field, my barn, / My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything... (3. 2. 228-232)», he is objectifying his wife¹⁶. Thereby, paradoxically, Katherine acquires a proper status as a woman only at the cost of having her subjectivity objectified. In the end, she shows she has learned her lesson through the closing speech of obedience to her husband, a speech that though ambiguous, signals that for a woman a certain agency is possible only by finding a way *within* the household rules. Shakespeare, thus, delineates the household as pressured by «women pushing against patriarchal strictures»¹⁷, whose disruptive potential has to be violently tamed in order to be counteracted. Obviously, the presence of Sly's frame powerfully debunks the seriousness of the issue but also the efficacy of Petruchio's strategy. Everything is non-naturalistically treated by the author, resulting in the reinforcing of the hypothesis that Kate's final obedience is but a parody. She finally acts *like* an obedient wife just as her character is a fake (she is in the play an actor interpreting the role of a woman), so that the strength of her representation of femininity lies in what is not said and only obliquely exemplified.

The movie resumes and plays on Katherine's ambiguity, which is not a strategy of survival but her way of imposing her view on the others or dialectically obtaining what she wants. For example, her decisions about marriage, though clearly driven by love, are also functional to her career and her objectives, in life. After Petruchio proposes to her, while keeping in mind she needs a husband to be supported by the leader of her party, she definitely accepts the marriage only when discovering that Petruchio is the 16th Earl of Charlbury. In that occasion, the shot of her thoughtful facial expression is more eloquent than any word.

Analogously, during the honeymoon in Italy, when Harry, the best friend of Petruchio, tries to comfort her about her husband's cross-dressing on the wedding day, she affirms that her career (and her personal, individual success) is more important than anything else, except she contradicts herself a second later:

Kate: My career's ruined.

Harry: What makes you say that? Come on! Look, if you're as big a fish as everybody reckons you are, well, you being married to an eccentric aristocrat is hardly gonna throw a spanner in the works, is it? Well, not in your party, anyway. Why did you marry him. Because it'd look good? Or do you actually love him? And is your career really more important than that?

Kate: Well, yes, of course it is.

Harry: OK. Is it?

Kate: No.

A similar circumstance is presented when Bianca decides to ask her fiancé Lucentio for a prenuptial agreement. It is here that Katherine, once happily married, takes her little revenge on her sister and mother by pronouncing a rewriting of the famous final discourse of Shakespeare's shrew, in which she proclaims her complicity with Petruchio and not with them:

Bianca: Katherine, seriously, is it so wrong in this day and age for a successful woman, any woman, to try and protect herself by asking the man she marries to sign a little legal document?

Kate: I think you should frown less to begin with, otherwise you'll put him off.

Bianca: (Gasps) Well, that's priceless, coming from you.

Kate: I think that your husband is your lord and your life and your keeper.

Bianca: Excuse me?

Kate: He's the boss. Day in, day out, he submits his body to painful labour.

Bianca: Er, no, he doesn't.

Kate: And all we do is sit in front of the telly all day, eating chocolates. I know I do, when I'm not running the country.

Bianca: What's she talking about? What are you talking about?

Kate: I've been like you argumentative, obnoxious, bad-tempered. And what good did it do me? Eh? I think you should do whatever he tells you to do whenever he tells you to do it. I mean, good Lord, how could we ever be equal to them? They're big, noisy and opinionated. And we're little and noisy and opinionated. It's all so obvious, I'm surprised I'm having to spell it out.

Bianca: Yeah. However, back in the real world...

Kate: Back in the real world, I think you should be prepared place your hands below your husband's feet in token of your duty to him and not ask him to sign any bloody silly agreements. And if you don't feel that you can do that, you shouldn't be marrying him, frankly.

Bianca: Go on, then. You do it. You place your hands beneath his...

Kate: I would... if he asked me to. But he won't ask me to, because he feels exactly the same way about me and he wouldn't expect anything from me that I wouldn't expect from him.

Katherine's rhetoric uses irony to deal with gender differences: while stating that men and women are not the same, she describes them as having the same characteristics; after affirming the male prerogative of working to support the family, she denies it by recurring to her own example; finally, she takes her little vengeance on her sister by assuring that her feelings are shared by her husband too, thus concluding with the argument of love that re-establishes an equality between husband and wife. When later, once alone, Petruchio asks her «D'you really not regret signing the post... natal thing... thingy?», she replies:

Kate: No. Besides which, they're not worth the paper they're written on. The judiciary keep trying to persuade the Government to pass some legislation to make them more binding, but they've got better things to worry about.

Petruchio: But if they were more binding, would you?

Kate: No.

This dialogue confirms that Katherine has always a double reading of events: one proclaiming her true love for Petruchio, the other defending her rights and protecting her interests. The conclusion of this scene is all the more eloquent in this respect:

Kate: I'm pregnant.

Petruchio: What? That's amazing!

Kate: However you'll have to look after them because I'm not giving up my career.

Next shots show the couple living at 10 Downing Street.

Cross-dressing Petruchio

If Katherine's characterization problematizes issues relating to female subjectivity – cutting off, however, the female submission to a patriarchal system that was the main theme of Shakespeare's *The Shrew* – not less problematic and “fresh” is Petruchio's representation.

In the beginning, when he arrives at Harry's place from Australia, he appears like a boorish man very similar to the “other Petruchio”; the identification between the two is encouraged by an open quotation from the play – «So, “I've come to wive it wealthily in Padua”»¹⁸ – that synthesizes his projects for the future.

Later, his personality begins to show rifts that move him away from the monolithic image he gives of himself at the beginning, as happens when he tells Katherine, during their first date, the story of his family and shows her his ancient manor:

Petruchio: I grew up here. So did my ancestors, bless 'em. There have been Cricks at Hazlingdon for 300 years. 15, 16 generations, each one more feckless than the last. It's a wonder we've survived. But we have. And I don't want to sell it.

Katherine: But you can't afford to keep it.

Petruchio: Well, no. Not unless I marry extremely well. Used to play football in here. One spring, my dad filled it with pigs.

Katherine: Pigs?

Petruchio: He bought these pigs. He was drunk. He'd had a win on the horses. He was going to make millions with these pigs. Exactly how, he never said. Then when he got bored with 'em, I think we ate them in the end.

Katherine: What about your mum?

Petruchio: No, we didn't eat her. She cleared off.

Katherine: When?

Petruchio: When I was six.

The description of his ancestors' way of living, the close reference to his father's crazy financial behavior and the abandonment on the part of his mother, make him appear a sort of social relic, unable to find his own place in the world. Katherine becomes his anchor but his way of playing the role of husband is far from embodying traditional male clichés. Cross-dressing is one way of interpreting it and to paradoxically show Katherine he is honest with her. In contrast with the wife's smart ambiguity, which makes her silent about the convenience of marrying him, Petruchio reveals at once that he was initially interested in her money but that later he has deeply fallen in love with her. The evidence of this love is exhibited through his attire (high heels, miniskirt and makeup) on the wedding day, as he suggests to Harry while dressing up before the ceremony:

Harry: You can't do that! Not even to her. Especially not to her! She's a politician! She's almost the Leader of the Opposition, for God's sake!

Petruchio: I'm not going to lie to her!

Harry: I thought you were serious about this woman.

Petruchio: I am. There's things about me she needs to know.

The cue reveals that unlike *The Shrew's* Petruchio, here, the male protagonist does not want to humiliate Katherine by wearing strange clothes – «with a linen stock on one leg, and a kersey boot-hose on the other, gartered with a red and blue list; an old hat, and the humour of forty fancies pricked in't for a feather; a monster, a very monster in apparel... (3. 2. 65-69)» is the description given of him in the play. His cross-dressing seems to be a way to open to Katherine and show that he is “different”. When on their honeymoon in Italy, Katherine asks Harry about the clothes, he answers:

Harry: He has these tendencies.

Kate: But why not talk to me about it before? Or after? Just not there, on the day, in front of everybody.

Harry: He didn't want to lie to you. I know the timing was crap but maybe he was worried that if he did everything properly, you might mistake him for one of the grown-ups. Because he isn't one. And he never will be. He's probably no more than about six, I should think, bless him. But he does think the world of you in his own strange way.

At the crucial point of the wedding day, Petruchio takes off the mask of Shakespeare's character he had evoked at the beginning and exposes the contradictions and vulnerabilities of manliness. The strangeness embodied by *The Shrew's* male protagonist, appearing as buffoonish and mocking, is translated in the movie into a totally different kind of strangeness, intended as a form of individual response to events. Petruchio is more afraid of looking conventional than queer or weird. In this case, Wainwright repeats the cross-dressing device we find in *The Shrew*, when the male protagonist presents himself in unusual

and ridiculous clothes at the wedding, but gives it a new meaning, so as to suggest that just as Katherine can be feminine in being aggressive and shrewish, Petruchio can be masculine in dressing as a woman. The very concept of what can be considered as masculine or feminine is here put at issue, with the result of leaving single characters a chance to find their own way in respect to the society they live in. In *Retold*, the household is replaced by a system that still shows pressure about gender relations, but the solution found by the main characters aims at challenging conventionality and proposing fluid, alternative ways of embodying codified female and male social roles.

Moving into a more abstract dimension, in reference to the general frame on adaptation discussed in the first part of this paper, the need to emphasize their own peculiarity and individuality (their being weird and queer) on the part of Petruchio and Katherine, may symbolize what rewritings in general aim at doing: finding a new, particular signified in relation to an old signifier surviving *in virtue of and despite* it. In the specific case considered here, notwithstanding the ideological constructions that have affected and still affect both the status of the Shakespearean adaptations and that of their authoritative source, it seems that nowadays as in the eighteenth century and later, the practice of adaptation emerges as an act of appropriation characterized by a continuous switching of the positions of who appropriates and who is appropriated. An act of appropriation that can be re-read, in terms of a poststructuralist aesthetics, less as a definitive possession/attribution of meaning and more as a gesture of hospitality, an invitation for new and different interpretations to come.

Notes

1. L. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Routledge, London-New York 2006, p. 6.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ivi*, p. 8.

4. For a detailed discussion on eighteenth-century authorship and adaptation, see B. Del Villano, *Dramatic Adaptation, Authorship and Cultural Identity in the Eighteenth Century. The Case of Samuel Foote*, in "Journal of Early Modern Studies", 1, 1, 2012, pp. 175-91. On the myth of the genius see G. Moretti, *Il genio. Origine, storia, destino*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2011.

5. Robert MacFarlane suggests how these opposite, aesthetic views also inform later perceptions of textuality and keep on being polarised as follows: «On the one hand, so-called "Romantic" theories of literary creation have assumed an analogy, if not an equality, with divine creation, whereby the literary work is created from beyond the material or phenomenal context. Originality is treated by such theories as an immanent or transcendent value which inheres in the text, rather than being ascribed to it [...]. At the other end of the spectrum, clustered around the verb "to invent", are those theories of literary creation which refuse to believe in the possibility of creation out of nothing, or in the uninfluenced literary work. These inventorial or recombinative theories [...] such as those espoused by the imaginative logic of literary postmodernism, or by Augustan aesthetics, [...] privileged the act of making out of extant material». R. MacFarlane, *Original Copy. Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 2, 3-4.

6. G. Golinelli, *La formazione del canone shakespeariano tra identità nazionale ed estetica*, Pàtron Editore, Bologna 2003, p. 43.

7. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, cit., pp. 3-4.
8. M. Pittman, *Authorizing Shakespeare on Film and Television: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity*, Peter Lang, New York 2011, p. 1.
9. See M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, trans. by C. Emerson and M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin 1981; J. Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. by A. Jardine, T. Gora and L. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York 1980.
10. M. Calbi, *Ghosts, Burgers and Drive-Throughs: Billy Morrissette's Scotland, PA adapts Macbeth*, in "Anglistica", 12, 1, 2008, pp. 39-40.
11. The only visual document referring to Shakespeare's performances is notably constituted by the so-called "Longleat drawing" (1595) by Henry Peacham, reporting a scene from *Titus Andronicus*.
12. S. Wainwright, *Interview*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/tamingoftheshrew/writer1.shtml> (last access on 15th June 2013). For a further comment on this interview see also Pittman, *Authorizing Shakespeare*, cit., pp. 155-6.
13. All the quotations from *Retold* are taken from the movie.
14. V. Traub, *Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare*, in M. de Grazia, S. Wells (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, pp. 129-30.
15. Ivi, p. 130.
16. W. Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by B. Hodgdon, The Arden Shakespeare, London 2010. Subsequent quotations from the play will refer to this edition.
17. Traub, *Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare*, cit., p. 131.
18. The quotation is taken from Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, vv. I. 2. 74.

