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# The “Unfinished Business”: The Avoidance of King Lear by the Prequel Lear’s Daughters

Annamária Fábián

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- 1 Stanley Cavell’s *The Avoidance of Love* was first published in 1969 in Cavell’s probably best known book of essays, *Must We Mean What We Say?* and ever since it has remained one of the most frequently quoted works in the prolific discussion of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. In Cavell’s understanding, as it is discussed in the first part of his essay, the main motivation in *King Lear* that results in tragedy and the main motivation for King Lear to trigger tragedy is to try to avoid love, as to love and to be loved is equal to self recognition, self revelation and self sacrifice. This is, naturally, an oversimplified and extremely narrow reading of Cavell’s multilayered and complex essay, but can be derived as a short conclusion. As Cavell puts it, “Lear does not attain his insight until the end of the fourth act, and when he does, it is climatic.
- 2 [...] Lear’s dominating motivation to this point, from the time things go wrong in the opening scene, is to avoid being recognized” (46).<sup>1</sup>
- 3 To put it another way, in Cavell’s reading, the complete destruction and the void at the end of the play derives from the inability to accept and provide love, “avoidance of recognition and the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation.” (58) As Cavell’s argumentation points out, avoidance (of love, of recognition) has the potential to destroy and to trigger tragedy. However, *avoidance* is also possible to comprehend as a means of creation, a writing technique, so to say. This paper attempts to give a reading of the Women’s Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein’s drama, *Lear’s Daughters* through and with Cavell’s essay, examining how *avoidance* and *causality* re- and de-form, recreate *King Lear* in the prequel adaptation. Cavell’s essay will serve as a guideline, will be an ‘inter-text’ or a bridge between the two plays in question, providing all the key notions and thoughts by which the prequel’s creative art of avoidance can be examined. Through Cavell’s essay, with the help of it, the paper is trying to pin down and define the mechanisms of the

prequel and its effects on the origin. With this multilayered reading, the aim is to present how the attempts of an adaptation (*Lear's Daughters*) to avoid the origins (and mainly the character of *King Lear*) will result in a complete redefinition of those very origins in question.<sup>2</sup>

- 4 The Women's Theatre Group (WTG) in cooperation with Elaine Feinstein chose to adapt Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and *Lear's Daughters* was written in 1987 and first published in 1991 (in Griffin, G. and Ashton). Shakespeare's *King Lear* notoriously numbers among the plays which have many vague parts in their plot and are full of opaque, questionable crises and resolutions. Cavell : "We are not in Shakespeare's confidence. Now tragedy grows from the fortunes we choose to interpret, to accept, as inevitable [...]" (89). In the case of the *Daughters'* play, the group of writers chose to interpret and to accept only those 'fortunes' or aspects of *King Lear* out of which they could produce their feminist play problematizing the effects of the oppression of the patriarchal society and the father in a dominating position within the family. Their tragedy grows from events taking place *before* Shakespeare's *King Lear* actually begins, and their choices of 'roots' avoid a range of Shakespearean topics raised in *King Lear*.
  
- 5 *Lear's Daughters* has been several times referred to as a prequel,<sup>3</sup> and rightly so, as the main criteria of a prequel (the time shift, the gap-filling attitude, the backstory creation, the focal position of generational problems) are all presented in the text. Prequel adaptations (unlike fantasy prequels) do not try to provide a background for every single character or plotline of the original play. Much rather, instead of a complete backstory, by providing segmental explanations, they offer new possible interpretative strategies and paths for the original play. This means that none of the events or actions of the original play and the adaptation can run parallelly,<sup>4</sup> there is no shared time and space between the plays, and in a way this conscious pre-setting of the adaptation becomes an act of avoidance in itself: being 'primer' to the origin provides a unique possibility to avoid its oppressive presence, its 'presentness' in the interpreting process. Cavell makes the following comment about performing *King Lear*:
 

The perception or attitude demanded in following this drama is one which demands a continuous attention to what is happening at each here and now, as if everything of significance is happening at this moment, while each thing that happens turns a leaf of time. I think of it as an experience of continuous presentness. [...] to let the past go and to let the future take its time; so that we not allow the past determine the meaning of what is now happening and we not anticipate what will come of what has come. Not that anything is possible (though it is) but that we do not know what is, and is not, next. (93)
  
- 6 By 'anticipating' what *had* come of what has come the prequel adaptation turns into the very past, determining the meaning of what is happening in *King Lear*, and turns itself into past and *King Lear* into a future. "We do not know what was, and was not, before" seem to be the triggering factor for the prequel to take its shape. To 'discover' the past of Lear, and his daughters is the main aim of the prequel. "What precedes certain discoveries is a necessity to return to a work, in fact or in memory, as to unfinished business. And this may be neutral as between rereading and reseeing [...] What sends us back to a piece or a passage? – as though it is not finished with us." (85)
  
- 7 Rewriting in the form of a prequel is also a form of discovery, a very active form of returning (unlike the more passive reseeing or rereading mentioned by Cavell), and as such, it cannot be said to remain neutral, as it will produce a new interpretation with a new, settled and final textual form, to which it is possible to return to, to rewrite again.

*King Lear*, therefore, can be interpreted as "unfinished business" for the genitors of the *Daughters'* prequel, and *unfinished* in several meanings: on the one hand, it is unfinished business in Cavell's sense, namely that one must return to it because it would not let be, would not let go, urging for new understandings again and again; and on the other hand, it is *unfinished* in the sense that it is not a whole, not a complete unity of causes and effects, but there are gaps to fill in, opaque or missing parts to find out more about, to be explained.

- 8 *Lear's Daughters*, and prequel adaptations in general, return to Shakespeare's text and back to the pre-history of Shakespeare's *Lear* and his family because they find that right from the beginning of Shakespeare, the opening scene, where the division of the kingdom and the love test take place, needs to be explained; events need motivations, characters need refinement and reshaping. Cavell also has his doubts concerning this scene of utmost intensity:

The abdication scene has always been known to be extraordinary, and a familiar justification of it has been that we, as spectators, simply must accept it as the initial condition of the dramatic events and then attend to its consequences. [...] So people sometimes say that *King Lear* opens as a fairy tale opens. But it doesn't. It is not narrated, and the first characters we see are two old courtiers discussing the event of the day. The element of fairy tale then appears, centered in other characters [...] We do accept [the opening scene's] events as they come to light; [...] after which, as a consequence of which, we have to accept less obviously extraordinary events as unquestionable workings out of a bad beginning. (86-87)

- 9 However, not accepting the opening scene's events as they come to light stimulates the existence of adaptations, of prequels by any means: they want to *create*, to shed light on the events of that past, the past which "erupts into the present, in which reason or emotion fail," (105) and viewed from that opening abdication scene of Shakespeare's play, *Lear's Daughters* is the very *past* which would erupt in *King Lear's* present. With the prequel at hand, the openings of *King Lear* might lose the stereotypical figures of the choleric old father and the pretending evil elder daughters as opposed to the good-hearted least one.

There is danger in the truth that everything which happens is 'contained' in these openings. For [a] postulate of 'organic form' the dominant postulate of modern analysis both in poetry and in music, may suggest that what succeeds the presence of the opening is all that could have succeeded it. (113)

- 10 The prequels, if seen as postulates of an organic form, also suggest that the prequel text – almost as a new opening scene to the play – carries the following events (including the opening scene, or, more precisely: especially the opening scene) pre-coded in itself, that the events and actions of the prequel are now 'containing' the opening scene and (necessarily, as a cause and effect chain of events) all its succeeding consequences. However, for prequel adaptations there is also truth in the opposite of what Cavell says: what *precedes* the presence of the opening scene is *all that could have preceded* it, and more naturally so, because past events are usually and normally unchangeable. And this is exactly what prequels strongly take advantage of: the audience's natural instinct of time order strengthens their interpretation of events and characters alike, and therefore the presented past becomes what *had happened* – contained in these openings.

[...] anything that goes on to happen inevitably bears marks of what has gone before. What has gone before was not inevitable, but when it has happened its marks are inevitable. What the idea of "organic structure" omits is the necessity of action, the fact of succession. 'The content' of the opening means nothing until it is

brought out. And when it all comes out and is brought to a close its content is not exhausted. We could say it has infinite content. (113)

- 11 Prequel adaptations work similarly given their somewhat paradoxical status in time (evolving the *story time past* from the original text but being composed in a *real time future* of that same original text): they 'mean nothing' until their 'content' is brought out by the original play's opening scene. Likewise, but on another level, the opening scene of Lear triggers the prequels' existence, it is part of the 'bringing out of meaning' completed by an active response of adaptation.
- 12 Paradoxically, this unique handling of time makes both plays (though again on different levels) reasons and results, causes and effects, origins and endings. *Lear* is a textual precedent for the *Daughters'* play, i.e. a pre-text, whereas the *Daughters'* is an attempt to present the past of *Lear*, to fill in its gaps, i.e. a prequel. To illustrate it with very effective examples, the *Lear* play is an origin as Lear is to his daughters: every event and action of the *Daughters'* is in a way 'genetically' imprinted in the original play as well. The *Daughters'*, however, behave as origins to *King Lear*, moulding it into being, creating its character, instructing how it should be understood, similarly perhaps to the way Goneril, Regan and to some extent Cordelia turn into the mothers and rulers of Lear in Shakespeare's drama.
- 13 As it was referred to above, *Lear's Daughters* does not investigate or prepare any of the Gloucester-plot, the political issues, the bond of service between Kent and Lear, or that of love between the Fool and Lear. It focuses on the royal *family*, provides a family history and presents the roots of the conflict and then the open clash between the familial and the royal, the private (love) and the public (duty). It is *family* as a context and *home* as a setting where all the participants of this conflict are (re)placed and (re)presented, and by this new context and new setting their identities, as they were known in Shakespeare's text, gain new dimensions and the so changed characters provide the most important aspect of recomposition for the old play anew.
- 14 In *Lear's Daughters*, as the title already reveals the main concern of the play, the focus from King Lear, shifts to his three daughters;<sup>5</sup> therefore the patriarchal beginning and the male dominated drama (mainly set in a female ruled kingdom) becomes a female oriented and female dominated drama, set in an oppressive and doubtlessly patriarchal realm. Paradoxically though, they are defined by Lear already in the title, yet the daughters in the play are striving to be independent and to be able to define themselves without Lear. Therefore, his character – not as a king but as a father – is delineated in order to provide a radical rewrite for the character of King Lear in the original play. What Shakespeare's text presents almost entirely from Lear's point of view (and it is especially true for the relationship of father and children) here gains another perspective: by the daughters' central role and their comprehensive reflections every action of every character is embedded into a net of background information, is set into a new chain of cause and effect, and by this alteration of perspective the original play's events and characters (and especially Lear) accommodate to the postmodern feminist interpretation's aims.
- 15 The first scene of *Lear's Daughters* introduces Cordelia, Regan and Goneril; they do not identify themselves by their love and relationship toward Lear, but, as Fischlin and Fortier put it: "they gain identity not in relation to a particular hierarchy, but rather, from the distinctive features with which they are identified," (Fischlin and Fortier 216) that is, Cordelia with speech and words, Regan by touch and material, Goneril with sight and colours. Their monologues also very apparently invoke the arts of writing, sculpture

and painting, and the elements of air, earth and water, respectively. They appear to be markedly different, not merely Cordelia, but the two elder sisters also gain certain distinctive features which create their own, separate identities, their 'wicked sisters' collective image is deconstructed right from the beginning.

- 16 The play is less active in action than in narration, the thoughts and experiences of all the characters are often narrated and dialogues frequently involve storytelling and recalling memories. Immediately preceding the introduction of the girls, the first scene depicts the Nanny telling stories to the girls in the nursery. This gives the play a palpable fairy-tale like atmosphere, in fact, storytelling becomes a symbolic act in the play, and tales become sources of reality to be interpreted. Here, the fairy-tale interpretation that Cavell claimed to be untrue for the beginnings of Shakespeare's *Lear* ( "*So people sometimes say that King Lear opens as a fairy tale opens. But it doesn't.*" ) becomes highlighted and indeed, the play not only begins with this fairy tale feature, but the telling of tales and trying to fathom the truth remains a key attribute to the *Daughters'* play. The storyteller is almost always the girls' Nanny, whose enigmatic figure seems to be the holder of special knowledge. The fifth character of the play, the Fool (who is not a newly introduced character to the original play but staged here in a profoundly refashioned manner) is also quite undefinable: with an emphasized androgynous character both sexes appear in/with the figure, s/he plays both Lear and his Queen with expressive props (like a crown, a veil, etc.).
- 17 Lear does not personally appear on stage. He is reduced to a character in the stories of the girls, and a figure *acted* for the girls (who become audiences and partners of the actor Fool this way), subject to an interpretation of both the Fool (the actor) and the daughters (the audience). With this method of expression, the figure of Lear is hidden, his person avoided, and his authenticity and diversity is veiled. His *presence* is denied. The *Daughters'* play diminishes their 'creator' and fails to acknowledge him. To turn to Cavell's reading:

It is a question how acknowledgement is to be expressed, how we are to put ourselves in another's presence. [...] We must learn to reveal ourselves, to allow ourselves to be seen. When we do not, when we keep ourselves in the dark, the consequence is that we convert the other into a character and make the world a stage for him. (104)
- 18 In the prequel adaptation it is Lear that is unacknowledged, being converted into a character of a play: precisely because he has no real persona, he is an *interpretation of a character* instead of a *real character* and as such cannot even attempt to reveal himself. He is placed on a stage for the girls, and on a sort of meta-stage for the audience. "The father's material absence from this scenario is one of the major ways in which the play rewrites Shakespeare's version of the story," writes Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier in their introduction to *Lear's Daughters*, and they go on to add: "The depth of characterisation that Goneril, Regan and Cordelia receive [...] along with the focus they receive as staged characters, presents a radical alternative to the way in which audiences have come to expect the telling of Lear's story" (Fischlin and Fortier 216)
- 19 This alteration alone would be substantial enough to flatten and simplify Shakespeare's Lear, but this is not the only way the daughter's play recreate the father figure. If we re-read Cavell's argumentation about Lear's motivations and the tragedy's triggering effects, we find that the prequel adaptation's Lear and, as he marches on into the original play's opening scene, Shakespeare's Lear is turned into a loud and unpleasant, insensitive and immoral, conceited, degenerate man, a holder of immense destructive powers as well.

There have been interpretations of Lear as a character of great faults, but his diversity and dignity has never been questioned: he was often referred to as the simple choleric type usual in tragicomedies, staged by Shakespeare with unusual richness of character (for example this is the interpretation Nahum Tate sticks to when he rewrites *King Lear* in 1670); Cavell gives his interpretation after quoting his predecessors: "The usual interpretations follow one of three main lines: Lear is senile; Lear is puerile; Lear is not to be understood in natural terms, for the whole scene has a fairy tale or ritualistic character." (57) All these interpretations try to comply with the expectations in connection to Shakespeare: Lear has to emerge as a hero of a Shakespearean tragedy, and as such has a positive, heroic character, though he has overtly and undoubtedly made big mistakes, but even so, he remains a likeable persona, the audience can feel compassionate and desires his relief from pain and suffering. Cavell, however, proposes a different interpretation based on a deeply psychological and language-philosophical approach:

Lear's behaviour in this scene is explained by – the tragedy begins because of – the same motivation which manipulates the tragedy throughout its course [...]: by the attempt to avoid recognition, the shame of exposure, the threat of self revelation. (57)

- 20 He goes on to investigate the reasons motivating this avoidance of recognition, of the exposure of the self, and he has a longer argumentation about how the feeling of *shame* is the trivial reason for Lear's actions.

[Shame] is the right candidate to serve as a motive. [...] It is the most isolating of feelings, the most comprehensible perhaps in idea, but the most incomprehensible or incommunicable in fact. Shame [...] is the most primitive, the most private, of emotions, but it is also the most primitive of social response. (58)

- 21 Cavell shows Lear in quite a different shade, his Lear loses all the previous interpretations: the choleric, senile, puerile, or fairy-tale-like father. His Lear is ashamed, and this feeling makes him fragile and unstable. Cavell explicitly claims that it is a hypothesis he offers, and that according to this hypothesis of shame,

[...] we need not assume that Lear is either incomprehensible or stupid or congenitally arbitrary and inflexible and extreme in his conduct. Shame itself is exactly arbitrary, inflexible, and extreme in its effect. It is familiar to find that what mortifies one person, seems wholly unimportant to another. (58)

- 22 *Lear's Daughters*, however, are not so forgiving with Lear. The Lear they avoid sight of is – by the effects he makes – depicted exactly as Cavell characterises the effects of the motivating shame: arbitrary, inflexible, extreme. More importantly, Cavell outlines the importance of the family as a background for this pernicious feeling of shame:

[...] shame is felt not only toward one's own actions and one's own being, but the actions and the being of those with whom one is identified – fathers, daughters, wives [...], the beings whose self-revelations reveal oneself. Families, any objects of one's love and commitment, ought to be the places where shame is overcome; but they are also the place of its deepest manufacture, and one is then hostage to that power, or fugitive. (58)

- 23 In the prequel of *Lear's daughters*, as it was proposed above, the emphasis is not on the royal, but on the family. In Shakespeare's *Lear*, family matters are not touched upon, family history is left intact, apart from faint hints and reader response speculations there is no information about the girls' childhood or the reasons why the bond of Lear and Cordelia seems to be stronger than that between Lear and the other girls. We know nothing of Lear's attachment to the princesses' mother(s?) and even less about her death. The fact that there is no male heir is not something to lament on but a fact resulting in



the division of the kingdom. And this family business, so carefully avoided in Shakespeare, which should be "the place where shame is overcome" and can be the "place of [shame's] deepest manufacture", is centred and acted out and upon in the prequels. And – as it can be expected – this royal family presented in *Lear's Daughters* is not one where the unconditional love of parents and children is able to offer a place where shame is overcome, but with its lonely and oppressed daughters who reveal their deepest thoughts and fears, tensions and private emotions, refusing to be presented with Lear's person, this family becomes the hotbed of "shame's deepest manufacture."

- 24 The reason for Lear's shame, what he is ashamed of, is a crucial issue here, and Cavell concludes that in *King Lear* shame is the "experience of unacceptable love" (67), and he also adds that

It can be said that what Lear is ashamed of is not his need for love and his inability to return it, but the nature of his love for Cordelia. It is too far of plain love of father and daughter. Even if we resist seeing in it the love of lovers, it is at least incompatible with the idea of her having any (other) lover. (70)

- 25 The feminist interpretations of *King Lear* from the eighties, however, did not resist reading a love of lovers, or, more precisely a relationship based on sexual desire between Lear and Cordelia. The resistance Cavell talks about was mainly due to the overwhelming critical respect for the glory and greatness of Shakespeare and his work, and the effort to read sense and heroism into each tragedy he wrote, with which an incestuous relationship could not be tolerated; besides, *King Lear* obviously cannot be said to treat the incest motive overtly. However, the gradual appearance and augmentation of psychoanalytical and feminist readings undermined this cautious approach avoiding interpretations of *King Lear* based on the possibilities of incest,<sup>6</sup> sex and lust. It is no surprise, therefore, that *Lear's Daughters* also contains these possibilities. Cavell then goes on to add (without any trace of reproach or disapproval, but with specific, sensible argumentation):

I do not wish to suggest that 'avoidance of love' and 'avoidance of a particular kind of love' are alternative hypotheses about this play. On the contrary, they seem to me to interpret one another. Avoidance of love is always, or always begins as, and avoidance of a particular kind of love: Human beings do not just naturally not love, they learn not to. And our lives begin by having to accept under the name of love whatever closeness is offered, and by then having to forgo its object. And the avoidance of a particular love, or the acceptance of it, will spread to every other; every love, in acceptance or rejection, is mirrored in every other. It is part of the miracle of the vision in *King Lear* to bring this before us, so that we do not care whether the kind of love felt between these two is forbidden according to humanity's lights. We care whether love is or is not altogether forbidden to us, whether we may not altogether be incapable of it... (72)

- 26 The prequel adaptation goes a step further than this as there is an uneasy feeling emerging throughout the play, leading to a possible explanation for Cordelia to remain the single daughter for Lear, namely that the bond between them – as opposed to the bond of nature which Gloucester refers to – can be interpreted as most unnatural, taken into consideration that Lear's behaviour toward Cordelia is to be understood in terms of child abuse and incest. Scene 10 of the play gives an ambiguous and rather peculiar dialogue of the Fool (Lear) and Cordelia, where the "spinning for Daddy" motif and the "not want to be Daddy's girl" line can support the possibility of sexual relationship involved and thus an unnatural and uncanny tie between father and daughter might also be indicated here. Moreover, it is not exclusively Cordelia who is involved in this matter,



as Goneril also recalls a childhood memory quite obviously hinting the unnatural sexual relations of Lear towards his daughter.<sup>7</sup> Not only does the possibility of an incestuous relationship in the background provide a severely different interpretation for Cordelia's reasons to remain the only one for Lear, but – and more importantly – Lear is pushed onto the deepest levels of amorality, and at this very point he is manifestly deconstructed to become a base character to be admitted into the Shakespearean drama as well.

- 27 Lear's character is reintroduced in yet another function, and that reinterpretation is formulated by the missing wife/mother figure, who is so carefully avoided in the original play, and whose absence triggers Harold Bloom's question: "Are Shakespeare's perspectives in *King Lear* incurably male?" (Bloom 475) He then adds: "what would Shakespeare have done with Queen Lear? [...] Wisely she is deceased before the play opens" Janet Adelman also focuses on the absent queen in her book on the 'motherless' nature of Shakespeare's plays: "King Lear has no wife, his daughters no mother; nor, apparently, have they ever had one: Queen Lear goes unmentioned, except for those characteristic moments when Lear invokes her<sup>8</sup> to cast doubt on his paternity." (Adelman 104) *Lear's Daughters* have a mother, a Queen, and her role is mainly to provide a counterpart to the father in relation to the girls (a loving but weak and volatile mother) and a wife to Lear, an oppressed, powerless and sick woman under rule (and, in a constant reference for their struggle for a male heir, the weighty body of) the dominant Lear. It is quite compelling though, that this queen does not have a real persona either: she is also acted out by the Fool, like Lear. With this perception, she becomes a mirror image for the King, and an equal to him. If Lear as a father is deconstructed into an immoral anti hero, it is even more prominently happening for Lear the husband. Lear's wife is doomed to die, out of the original play's potentials: a character "is fixed in the present," (106) says Cavell, and taken his sentence to the figure of the Queen, we find that she is fixedly absent, and referred to as dead in Shakespeare's play. She necessarily has to die in the prequel as well. However, as there is virtually no information about her in the original play, it is the prequel adaptation's sovereign decision to choose the circumstances and reasons for her death. Quite predictably, in the prequel adaptation the cause of her death can be traced back to Lear, who is projected as the insensitive, violent and vulgar husband, whose maniac attempts to produce a male heir prove to be fatal for the queen (as she apparently dies of her fourth miscarriage). All the background information on their relationship is again provided by the Nanny, who is witness to everything and all the qualities of the royal marriage, and predicts something similar for the daughters themselves.
- 28 *Lear's Daughters* rewrite their origin, Lear, and their *origins*, *King Lear*. To put it simply, this new figure of Lear lacks any trace of sensitivity and beauty, and contradicts Shakespeare's Lear and his versatility and subtlety. With this new light of interpretation cast upon the original play, the adaptation's father and husband figure becomes "Lear's shadow," that is a colourless, dark figure rooting in the Shakespearean character, following it everywhere. The Shakespearean question of Lear "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" is of great importance in Cavell's essay as well. "[t]he answer to Lear's question is held in the inescapable Lear which is now obscure and obscuring, and in the inescapable Lear which is projected upon the world, and that Lear is double and has a double." (79) To see the prequel adaptation's Lear as a doubling of Lear as we had perceived him in Shakespeare's play seems to be a convenient way of approach and if – as Cavell goes on to add – "doubling sets a task, of discovery, of acknowledgement" (79) – then for the readers and the audiences of this new double Lear the task of discovery is

easier than that of acknowledgement. The prequel Lear lacks the dignity, the mystery, the likeability of Shakespeare's Lear, and by preceding him in the story-line, the prequel Lear sets the Shakespearean figure's interpretation onto a specific orbit, and quite provokingly it is precisely his (Cavellian) doubleness, his integrity and his complexity *within* the original play that is lost.

- 29 The unpleasant, lustful and omnipotent man becomes an antithesis of all the surrounding women living under his oppression, but these female figures find their own definitions precisely by their marked difference, by their isolation from Lear, and find their ways out of their oppression through these new definitions: the ways which are leading to the women of Shakespeare's play, where – quite paradoxically – Goneril and Regan will take after their prequel-made, monstrous father to the extremes. Their hunger for power, their oppressive nature and their lust become motivated and therefore more acceptable after the supportive presence of the prequel.
- 30 To conclude with Cavell's words: "What has become inevitable is the fact of endless causation itself, together with the fact of incessant freedom." (112) The text and the figure of Lear remain open to endless interpretations, even to interpretations recreating them by inventing causes and histories (or her-stories), and still go on to exist freely as the "patterns of all patience."<sup>10</sup>

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## NOTES

1. All of the references from Cavell's essay are from this edition: Cavell, Stanley: *Disowning Knowledge In Six Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge, CUP, 1987. Page numbers are referred to after the quotation in brackets. As the quotations from Cavell are of special importance, all of the quotations taken from Cavell's essay are indented, regardless of their length.
2. The paper will be experimental in that two of the three works in question (the essay and the *Daughters'* play), strictly speaking, have nothing to do with each other, and yet here they will be examined parallelly; therefore, the paper offers a re-reading of Cavell's essay also, in terms of the prequel Lear-adaptations in general and *Lear's Daughters* in particular, thus the significant number and the extension of the Cavell quotes is necessary.
3. Some examples: Fischlin, Daniel and Fortier, Mark (eds.): *Adaptations of Shakespeare*. Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p. 214: "An adaptation that is a prequel to *King Lear*..." <http://www.allbusiness.com/services/amusement-recreation-services/4383671-1.html>: "this 1987 prequel to *King Lear*" <http://www.doollee.com/PlaywrightsW/women-s-theatre-group.html>: "*Lear's Daughters* is a prequel to *King Lear* which imagines the upbringing of *King Lear's* three motherless daughters".
4. As they do for example in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* or Csaba Kiss's *Homecoming to Denmark* (*Hazatérés Dániába*).
5. Similarly with the other female-centred prequel, the title of Gordon Bottomley's play *King Lear's Wife* shifts the attention from Lear to his wife, and through her portrays Lear as a husband more than a king and presents a narrower scope of the Lear-character.
6. For a more detailed discussion of the matter see Coppelia Kahn: 'The Absent Mother in King Lear' in Fergusson, Quilligan and Vickers (eds.): *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, (Chicago, 1986); Lynda E.Boose: 'The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare' in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 97 (1982), R. A Foakes's introduction to the Arden edition of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1997) and more recently Shellee Hendricks: "*The curiosity of nations*": *King Lear and the incest prohibition* at: [http://digitool.Library.McGill.CA:80/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=30173&current\\_base=GEN01](http://digitool.Library.McGill.CA:80/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=30173&current_base=GEN01)
7. Both hints are found in scene 10 of *Lear's Daughters* (in Fischlin and Fortier 228).
8. *King Lear* II. 4. 1408-10: "*Regan*, I think you are. I know what reason /I have to think so, if thou should'st not be glad, / I would divorce me from thy Mother's Tomb, / Sepulchring an Adultresse." My footnote, F.A.
9. Shakespeare: *King Lear*. I. 4. 221. All quotations of *King Lear* are taken from this edition: Shakespeare: *King Lear*. Arden Shakespeare, Thomson, London: 2002.
10. Shakespeare: *King Lear*. III. 2. 37.

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## ABSTRACTS

The essay is a theoretical approach to present the mutual reinterpretation of two plays, Shakespeare's *King Lear* and its prequel adaptation by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group, *Lear's Daughters*. Stanley Cavell's influential essay (*The Avoidance of Love*) written on *King Lear* is serving as an intertext by which the two texts can be examined. With this multilayered reading, the aim is to present how the attempts of an adaptation to *avoid* the origins will result in a complete redefinition of those very origins in question, provoking new and quite drastic interpretations to *King Lear*.

Cet article propose une approche théorique du processus de réinterprétation réciproque de deux pièces de théâtre, *King Lear* de Shakespeare et son adaptation par Elaine Feinstein et le Women's Theatre Group, *Lear's Daughters*. L'essai de Stanley Cavell (*The Avoidance of Love*) sur la pièce de Shakespeare sert d'intertexte à l'examen des deux pièces. L'objet de cette lecture superposée est de montrer le processus par lequel l'adaptation, en cherchant à *échapper* à ses origines, entraîne une complète redéfinition de ces mêmes origines, provoquant des interprétations radicalement nouvelles de *King Lear*.

Este artículo propone una aproximación teórica al proceso de reinterpretación recíproca de dos obras de teatro, *El rey Lear* de Shakespeare y su adaptación por Elaine Feinstein y Women's Theatre Group, *Lear's Daughters*. El ensayo de Stanley Cavell (*The Avoidance of Love*) en la obra de Shakespeare sirve como intertexto para examinar ambas obras. El propósito de esta lectura superpuesta es mostrar el proceso mediante el cual la adaptación, buscando *escapar* a su origen, conlleva una completa redefinición de dicho origen, dando lugar a interpretaciones radicalmente nuevas de *El rey Lear*.

## AUTHOR

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