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Laura Tosi

- 1 Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) was the first English attempt to mediate and remediate Shakespeare in fictional form for children, a form which relies on a narrator who often appropriates the characters' words as their own and intrudes with comments and interpretations, so that out of the multitude of (often contradictory) viewpoints offered by the plays, a unified version of character and plot is presented to the child reader (Riehl 78-80). Of course remediation from drama to prose narrative has an enormous impact on plot, time-place coordinates, character/setting presentation, and perspective¹; it entails making a number of critical decisions about compression and expansion, and, especially in the case of inexperienced readers, trying to explain what in the Shakespearean text is (intentionally) left ambiguous or obscure. I argue in this article that trying to 'make sense' of the characters' actions, words and decisions is the most subtly manipulative of all the strategies devised by authors who wish to simplify and offer Shakespeare's plays for the entertainment of their young readers. This lack of complexity may be reassuring to the child reader but is the opposite, roughly speaking, of the way in which Shakespeare operates. As Lynne Bradley has argued, 'At the same time that Shakespeare adds complexity and the dimension of growth to his characters, he excises background and motivation from their actions' (Bradley 17). In the same vein, Stephen Greenblatt argues that by deliberately withdrawing motivation, the dramatist created a 'strategic opacity' that 'released an enormous energy that had been at least partially blocked or contained by familiar, reassuring explanations' (Greenblatt 324).

- 2 The *Tales from Shakespeare* were reprinted many times in the decades that followed and new collections in the Lambs' tradition were at the peak of their popularity in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods—often given as prizes in school examinations. In the second half of the nineteenth century, knowledge of Shakespeare's plays became a subject for examination in England (first in 1855, for the Indian Civil Service), and then part of the curriculum when schooling became compulsory in 1870 (Taylor 194-95). One should not underestimate the impact of periodicals in the dissemination of Shakespeare in Victorian and Edwardian society; as Prince has shown, 'the popularity of the Lambs' tales contributed to periodical publishers' confidence that Shakespeare could appeal to children' (154). Periodicals that published Shakespeare's adaptations (like the *Boy's Own Paper*, for example) addressed a wider range of readers and 'helped to shape a nascent sense of national identity among England's youth' (Prince 153). This was also the time in which England was experiencing an unprecedented flowering of the literary fairy tale for children (Zipes 111-13). Adaptations² and literary fairy tales shared an omniscient narrator, much simplification of characters and style, as will be discussed later, as well as a common visual experience—artists such as George Cruikshank and Charles Folkard, for example, illustrated editions of narrativizations from Shakespeare and of literary fairy tales.
- 3 My essay focusses on the special, multifaceted and often ambiguous relationship that the narrator establishes with the child reader in these collections, by making Shakespeare's plays available to a child audience in a way they may find congenial and relevant, and yet at the same time controlling the child's interpretation of the plays. An ambivalence is established between a narrator that allies himself with the reader and his or her perceptions, but occasionally coerces him or her into reading and understanding the plays *in the right way*, implicitly agreeing with the narrator's suggested interpretations. As far as presentation of characters is concerned, for example, the neat good/bad polarization much favoured by the Lambs, is definitely an adult power-move, a move which may reflect contemporary critical orientations as well as the adaptors' personal interpretations of the plays, and the desire to control the *children's* interpretations of controversial and ambiguous characters.
- 4 Then as now the implied reader is a child who *is supposed to* recognize the importance of Shakespeare and *is supposed to* enjoy reading his stories in a shortened or 'simplified' version, long before he or she can read the source texts or is allowed to see the plays staged. Today we would say that Shakespeare has become cultural capital that children can accumulate for their future education: Ken Ludwig, for example, in his *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare* (2012), on the back cover makes the claim that 'To know some Shakespeare provides a head start in life'.
- 5 From the Lambs to the Edwardian adaptors, the most popular remediations of Shakespeare were prose narrative—narrators, as in many texts of the Golden Age, appear to assume that they are addressing highly acculturated children, recognizing that 'the act for writing children was informed by their own desire to captivate, influence, educate' (Gubar 209) young people. At a time in which the Canon of the classics of English literature was being institutionalized in a context of rising literacy rates (see Richardson 45), one could argue that the child reader may have been under some pressure to learn to appreciate such adult texts as Shakespeare's plays, especially when they had been made ostensibly easier and more entertaining.

- 6 The representation of the child in need of acculturation in the national poet's work is approved and reinforced by a number of Prefaces that address adults as well as children. Nesbit, for example, stages a storytelling situation in which the narrator gives in to the child's request of hearing the 'stories' from Shakespeare, in an attempt to produce what Gubar has referred to as 'the trope collaboration' (Gubar 7) (meaning adult-child collaboration, in relation to much of the children's literature of the Golden Age):

In truth it was not easy to arrange the story simply. Even with the recollection of Lamb's tales to help me I found it hard to tell the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' in words that these little ones could understand. But presently I began the tale, and then the words came fast enough. When the story was ended, Iris drew a long breath. 'It is a lovely story', she said; 'but it doesn't look at all like that in the book'. 'It is only put differently', I answered. 'You will understand when you grow up that the stories are the least part of Shakespeare'. 'But it's the stories we like', said Rosamund.

'You see he did not write for children'.

'No, but you might', cried Iris, flushed with a sudden idea. 'Why don't you write the stories for us so that we can understand them, just as you told us that, and then, when we are grown up, we shall understand the plays so much better. Do! Do!'

'Ah, do! You will, won't you? You must!'

'Oh, well, if I must, I must', I said.

And so they settled it for me, and for them these tales were written.

(Nesbit 1997, 8-9)

- 7 As has been noted, '[Nesbit's] idiosyncratic dominant narrators are possible teller-surrogates' (Wall 149). Here in particular the adult is *speaking* to children, who are placed in the position of listeners rather than readers:³ the use of 'must' may indicate that Nesbit places her audience in an apparent position of power (pretending to submit to her listeners' will). In this Preface to *Shakespeare's Stories for Children*, the mother-narrator assimilates her readers to her own children, assuming that *all* children want to hear Shakespeare's stories: Nesbit's implied reader appreciates Shakespeare and is the reason for the retelling experience (Hateley 45). A similarly friendly, 'family' voice is that of the author of *Phoebe's Shakespeare* (1894), Adelaide Gordon Sim, who addresses her niece Phoebe in the Preface: 'Mr Shakespeare wrote some stories that even children can read and understand; and I have written these down for you, and made them into this book, because I want you to learn to love them, while you are still a little girl' (Sim iv). Other collections (by E. W. Macauley 1852, Ada Stidolph 1902, Mary MacLeod 1902, and Alice Spencer Hoffman 1908) display different degrees of formality in the way they address their readers in the Preface, mostly adults (parents, teachers, librarians) who will give the book to children or read it to them.
- 8 Hoffman is one of the very few who addresses the Preface to *child* readers. After a brief summary of Shakespeare's life and achievements, she ends with this:
- When you grow older, you will read all the great plays from which these stories have been written, and they will be to you like old friends who have lived with you all your lives, whose very thoughts you know and whose delights and sorrows you have shared. Like old friends, too, they will, in their turn, give of their best to you—their words of comfort or of strength: of joy or peace. (Hoffman vi)
- 9 There is a marked contrast between Hoffman's two-way empathetic bridge that the stories have built to connect with their readers, and MacLeod's introduction, clearly addressed to an adult audience, which must be persuaded that

the full appreciation of Shakespeare's sure and illimitable insight into character can never be reached until we have made ourselves thoroughly familiar with the plot. . . . When the youthful mind has grasped the manner and matter of the plots, it will in adult age be in a far better position than it could be otherwise to comprehend all the excellences, all the subtleties of character. . . . It only remains to express the wish that the knowledge here conveyed to young readers of Shakespeare's plots may lead them to become in future years loving students of the text in his plays. (MacLeod)

- 10 Once again, the emphasis is on the plot, as in Nesbit's Preface, and on the enjoyment derived from a proper acquaintance with Shakespeare that is projected onto the future—for Hoffman, based on sharing emotions; for MacLeod, on intellectual pleasure. The narrator appears like a spokesperson for the author, the supervisor of a top-down experience of reading, which is validated by justifications which must persuade adults as well as young readers; these adaptations construe an adult controlling narrator who speaks from a position of experience and knowledge. Nodelman, who has discussed colonialist tendencies of children's literature, argues that the voice of many adult narrators of texts for children is 'the voice of the benevolent colonial officer' (Nodelman 2008, 211-12): this would describe the voice of most narrators of Shakespeare adaptations for children of the period.
- 11 Other adaptors, in the tradition of the Lambs' Preface, reassure the adult reader that the most important object of such an endeavour 'has been to render the whole strictly obedient to the most refined ideas of delicacy, subservient to the best purposes of morality, and conducive to the highest sense of religious awe and love for a beneficial Providence' (Macaulay 6). While the Preface, therefore, providing a paratextual liminal space of mediation between the heights of English literature and the child's need for an enjoyable reading experience, is addressed primarily to adults, the narrator's voice in these collections makes a definite effort to speak in a manner that would be understandable to a child reader and relevant to his/her experience of the world. A surrogate for the playwright, the third-person narrator is most conspicuous in these adaptations: a benevolent personality that stimulates thought, tries to involve the child in the educational experience of reading stories set in unusual places, or in the distant past, but also makes very clear that all the knowledge is on the side of the adult, and the child should feel like a privileged recipient of such knowledge.
- 12 Elizabethan dramatic openings, and especially Shakespeare's incipits, most famously condense, anticipate and highlight, visually as well as rhetorically, the topics and the dilemmas that will be displayed in the scenes that follow. Beginnings are as important in fiction as in drama (see Nuttall); as Said has argued, 'A beginning immediately establishes relationships with works already existing, relationships of either continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both' (Said 3). In the case of adaptations, adaptors and their stand-ins, the narrators of the adaptations, rely over the unquestionable authority of the playwright. Thus, in this 'authorized' act of narration, the *real* author, Shakespeare, is the powerful force behind the whole introducing/retelling/facilitating operation, and the act of beginning is informed by the presence of this past author that has to be resurrected: a place of a negotiation between an author and an adaptor, in which the voice of narrator overtly intervenes. Forster, arguing that all incipits in fiction rely on a form of 'opening seduction', writes that the voice of the narrators invites readers 'to come inside and play' (Forster 22): in the case of child readers this tendency is even more explicit.

13 As Stewart has noted, ‘the vocative case of Victorian narrative’, the ‘dear reader’ (which here translates into something like ‘my dear little readers’) ‘marks the structure of participation’ (Stewart 19), a device of much realist fiction of the period (like the famous opening of chapter 30 of *Jane Eyre*: ‘Reader, I married him’). This is all the more important in fiction addressed to children, as this strategy involves and includes the child reader in order to secure his or her attention.

14 Stidolph’s narrator starts with a friendly, familiar voice that addresses her readers directly. It is, as Chambers has put it, ‘the tone of friendly storyteller who knows how to entertain children while at the same time keeping them in their place’ (Chambers 5). This is the beginning of her version of *The Merchant of Venice*:

Once upon a time, on a warm sunny day, such a day as you little children love, when you can play about in the green fields and enjoy yourselves to your hearts’ content in the brilliant sunshine—on just such a day as this, in a beautiful street in a city called Venice, a little group of men might have been seen talking and laughing together. Very strange they would seem to you, could you have seen them—not at all like gentlemen nowadays, for this story is about people who lived nearly four hundred years ago! See what gorgeous velvet robes they are dressed in, and what a handsome cloak that tall dark man is wearing, and see, they have bright feathers in their hats! What fine-looking fellows they are, to be sure!

Let us draw near, and hear what they are talking about so eagerly. The little group consists of three men—Antonio, who is a merchant, and his two friends, Salarino and Salanio. Rather difficult names to remember, are they not? but you will soon get to know them quite well. (Stidolph 1)

15 – The Venetian setting is brought to the foreground: Stidolph’s adaptation starts, like the play, with the conversation between Antonio and two Venetian gentlemen and the repeated invitation to ‘see’: readers are warmly invited to imagine the scene, in the position of readers as well as witnesses. This strategy of focussing on the foreign setting (after all, most Shakespeare’s plays are set ‘abroad’) is also typical of Gordon Sim’s retelling of *The Merchant*, which opens with a comparison between English cities and Venice (‘it is wonderful because instead of the houses all being built as they are in London or Brighton, with long straight streets that stretch away as far as you can see, they are all built on numbers of little islands close to each other’ (Sim 80)) and thinks with nostalgia of a time in which ‘there were no railways or telegraphs, or steam-boats’ and therefore people did not need to ‘hurry and scurry, and they had plenty of time to build their houses and ornament them’ (81). The beauty and decorated houses of Renaissance Venice would be impossible to exist within ‘the horrid fogs’ of present England, but in Venice ‘there was nothing to spoil the paintings, and a great many have lasted till now’ (81).

16 – Stidolph’s choice of starting, like the plays, *in medias res*, is unusual: narrators generally rearrange events in their chronological order so that the Lambs’ *Tempest*, for example, does not start with the storm and the anguished cries of the sailors, but with Prospero and Miranda arriving on the island while Nesbit gives the reader the story of the usurpation of the Dukedom of Milan by Prospero’s brother. Hoffman starts *Hamlet* with the older generation of Scandinavian rulers: the war between Hamlet’s father and old Fortinbras, which precedes Hamlet’s birth. With the Roman or the History plays the incipit poses the problem of introducing readers to the context of historical Rome or England. In the case of the play *Julius Caesar*, for example, we are introduced in *medias res* to the exchange between Marullus and Flavius and the cobbler, followed by the scene of the Lupercalian (1.2) which includes Cassius’ ‘temptation scene’ and Casca

telling Brutus and Cassius about Antony offering Caesar the crown. In Victorian and Edwardian retold versions, Marullus and Flavius are generally cut: in most cases the narrator replaces their dialogue with information about the civil war with Pompey—a prequel to Caesar’s triumphal entrance—and tends to be quite explicit and controlling about the way Caesar or the conspirators should be regarded (see Tosi 2018). In these versions the tone tends to be slightly less conversational—possibly because it was felt that history required a more serious voice (or perhaps because adaptors did not have the Lambs as an example to follow in retelling the History or the Roman plays). While Shakespeare appears to be systematically playing with his audience in *Julius Caesar*, exciting a craving for understanding that he teasingly fails to satisfy, with the impossibility of arriving at an adequate understanding of the motivations of either Caesar and the conspirators, in the children’s versions of this period, narrators confidently distribute among the main characters of the play various degrees of power and responsibility. Jeanie Lang’s version (1910), for example, presents an unequivocally positive Caesar: the tale opens with the birth of Julius Caesar, and possibly an unexpected comparison:

One hundred years before the shepherds of Bethlehem heard the angels’ song of peace and goodwill, there was born in Rome a baby boy who afterwards became a very great ruler, and whose name was Julius Caesar. From the time when he was quite young, Julius Caesar had wished to do good to the Roman people. When he grew up and became a governor he did all he could to get others to pass laws that were for the good of the poor, as well as for the rich, for the workman, as well as for the ruler. (Lang 97)

- 17 – After this initial portrait of an ideal ruler who cares about the rich and the poor alike, it may not come as a surprise that for Lang, ungratefulness is the biggest sin in Rome: Caesar’s friends, instead of appreciating his generosity, ‘met together to plan their evil deeds’ (103). With children’s adaptations, added explanations (of the historical context, for example) are extremely significant, as in most cases the adaptation is accessed before the source is read or experienced at the theatre, especially as narrators cannot rely on children having specific cultural knowledge.
- 18 – The narrator of Shakespeare adaptations for children, then, introduces, describes, cuts and censors, speculates, often fills the gaps with invented material or descriptions of what happens off-scene, patronizes and moralizes, and gives motivations and reasons for actions and behaviours. Most of these interventions operate together, but it is interesting to analyse the way the narrator handles the Shakespearean material in specific examples, and the way in which he enables understanding while guiding (forcing?) readers along predetermined critical paths.
- 19 1. *The narrator introduces and describes.* The Lambs in particular tend to separate characters into good and bad according to the logic of the fairy tale: each character is introduced through a descriptor which immediately clarifies his or her moral traits. For example, in the Lambs’ *Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is described as a ‘hard-hearted man’, and Antonio, ‘the kindest man that lived’ (Lamb and Lamb 2009, 82). They used this coercive presentation strategy extensively, and it was much favoured by later authors as well. In the tradition of the Lambs, in Victorian and Edwardian times Shylock is generally portrayed negatively: in Mary Seymour’s version (1889), for example, ‘No-one liked Shylock, he was so hard and so cruel in his dealings’ (Seymour 63). In Carter’s retelling of *Julius Caesar* (1910), Brutus is described as unambiguously ‘honest, loyal, simple-minded and patriotic’ while Cassius is ‘envious, ambitious, jealous, and

sarcastic' (179). Narrators occasionally offer physical descriptions of the characters: in Spencer Hoffman's retelling of *King Lear* the presentation of the king's daughters relies on a 'Cinderella'-like opposition between the beautiful and elegant yet cold and haughty sisters and the modestly dressed but good Cordelia (see Tosi 2014):

Goneril and Regan were very beautiful, but when they had passed you remembered only their proud and haughty bearing, their rich robes and flashing jewels. And you forgot them altogether when Cordelia entered. . . . Her fair hair floated around her, and shone brighter than the golden circlet that rested upon it. From her wonderful eyes beamed such brightness of love and goodness that you forgot her jewels. (Hoffman 282)

- 20 2. *The narrator appropriates the character's words as their own.* This strategy (once again, typical of the Lambs, but borrowed by later adaptors) consists in the narrator using the character's words and incorporating them as their own. For example, King Lear's defense of his retinue ('My train are men of choice and rarest parts that all particular of duty know' [1.4.264]), which in performance is often visually as well as aurally counterpointed and contradicted by his knights' riotous behaviour, becomes a statement of fact in the narrator's description: 'by far the hundred knights were all men of choice behaviour and sobriety of manners, skilled in all particulars of duty, and not given to rioting or feasting as she said' (Lamb and Lamb 2009, 114). If Lear's words can be interpreted as a defence against his daughter's accusations—deriving from the desire not to give up his regal authority—the appropriation of King Lear's words by the narrator has the effect of making them sound unquestionably true, as the narrator never explains that this is just what Lear says, and not necessarily the truth. The consequence of this appropriation is that the daughters have no cause for complaint, as their father's knights are, quite simply, well-behaved gentlemen. Similarly, Constance and Mary Maud's narrator in *King Lear* provides a context and an explanation to Cordelia's scanty words of reply to her father's request for a declaration of love in the play ('Love and be silent'): 'Her love was too true and deep to be bargained for: she determined to love and be silent' (Maud 212). It is not only that the dialogical, multivocal world of the play is transformed into a monological narrative voice: in these cases of line appropriation, the narrator actively takes the side of one character and uses his/her perspective on events as the only reliable one against those of other characters. Once again, the narrator actively encourages the reader to interpret the character's behaviour in the 'right' way: what Chambers has written about the book's point of view, can easily apply to the narrator of these retellings, who 'works powerfully as a solvent, melting away a child's non-literary approach to reading and reforming him into the kind of reader the book demands' (Chambers 7).
- 21 3. *The narrator cuts, censors and moralizes.* The Lambs were the first of many generations of adaptors to cut substantial portions of the plot, especially subplots, single characters as well as bawdy talk and double-entendres. In the Lambs' adaptations, incidents that were imagined to pose a moral danger to the child reader are removed: in their version of *All's Well That Ends Well*, for example, Helena is a proper lady who knows her place, meets Bertram in Florence by chance (and not by scheming) and there is no bed trick (Helena's success has to depend entirely on her art of conversation and modest personality, as is shown by Wolfson 31). In *Measure for Measure*, Mariana is married, not simply betrothed, to Angelo (another successfully averted morally questionable bed trick), and in *Cymbeline* Imogen's distinctive mole is not placed on her breast, but on her neck. In the same line, problematic endings like Katherina's final speech of

submissiveness in *The Taming of the Shrew*, which may be hard to explain and turn into educationally valuable reading experiences for nineteenth-century readers, tends to be cut in Victorian and Edwardian retellings for children, and replaced by a paragraph that anticipates happiness for the couple (after the violence of the taming has been downplayed). But there are exceptions. For example, in Sim's retelling, Katherina's final speech is quoted in full and the story closes with the matter-of-fact remark that men are stronger and that, consequently, women's attempts to rebel are fruitless:

If women are gentle, and sweet, and loving, they get all their own way in the world, and men are ready to work and do everything to protect and help them. But if they are rough and ill-tempered, and want *what they call their rights*, [my emphasis] they will always find that men are the stronger, as did Katharina the Shrew. (Sim 79)

22 It seems obvious here that Sim is 'using' Shakespeare to uphold conservative norms and gender roles and force them on his child readers: the interpolation of the anachronistic reference to woman's rights (not an expression that could have been used by Shakespeare) reminds us of the Victorian and Edwardian public debate about the 'Woman Question' which was raging in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth (Sim's collection is dated 1894). Similarly, Nesbit's version, first published in 1900, reinforces the patriarchal ideology of Shakespeare's play by suppressing Katherina's rebellious (New Woman-like?) tendencies through marriage. Her version appears to be more concerned with condemning the character's bad behaviour and showing 'how unbeautiful a thing ill-temper was' (Nesbit 1912, 67). Nesbit's narrator simplifies and trims everything that can be considered unsuitable for children, or difficult to explain to them (Shylock's Jewishness is not mentioned, and neither is the question of Macduff's caesarean birth in *Macbeth*, for example), and often takes on a patronizing manner, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, when s/he comments on Romeo's foolish choice ('the fact was that he wanted to love *somebody*, and as he hadn't seen the right lady, he was obliged to love the wrong one' (Nesbit 10-11) or when s/he remarks that young people should always ask their parents' consent to marriage (15).⁴ Inevitably, every adaptation is a bridge between a past work and a contemporary audience: these snapshots of Victorian/Edwardian assumptions and prejudices typically convey the concern to protect and educate the nineteenth-century child; in this respect they are more Victorian than Shakespearian.

23 4. *The narrator speculates, fills the gaps, and may even invent.* Even in short collections in the Lambs' tradition which are close to the original plots and tend, if anything, to abridge, the narrator may offer a slightly different version of events from the play. Mary Seymour's version of *Macbeth*, for example, has Lady Macbeth ('a bad and ambitious wife' (Seymour 117)), plot Banquo's death with her husband (unlike Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, who is left in the dark about Banquo's murder): 'both he and his queen resolved on another murder—the murder of Banquo and his son' (Seymour 119). This has the effect of emphasizing the wickedness of Lady Macbeth. Similarly, the Irish soldier Williams's quarrel with the king in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and his refusal to be pacified when offered a reward ('I will none of your money' 4.8.69) is one of the forces that undermine the authority of the king in this ambiguously celebratory play. In Victorian/Edwardian adaptations this crucial conflict is easily settled; for example, in Townesend's version:

'It is with goot [sic] will,' said Fluellen, 'it will serve you to mend your shoes, which are none so good.' And in the end they shook hands upon it and parted the best of friends. (Townesend 370)

- 24 Similarly, Hoffman's narrator settles the quarrel with these words:

Henry was so pleased with the man's answer that he bade Exeter fill the glove with crowns and return it to him, that he might keep it and wear it as an honour. You may be sure that the plain-speaking soldier was a very proud man that day.
(Hoffman 247)

- 25 Such changes were part of a strategy to articulate an unreservedly positive vision of King Henry V, to arouse patriotism, in order to promote imperial sentiments, in line with other examples of muscular Christianity and empire building stories to be found in boys' literature of the period.
- 26 But there were adaptors, notably Mary Cowden Clarke, who deliberately introduced extra-textual information, described what happens off-scene, or imagined prequels or new endings in her *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850–1852), a collection of 15 fictional prequels which address mainly female readers. Her stories reconstruct the childhood and teenage years of a number of Shakespeare's female characters, and most notably moved female characters from the margins to the centre, validating their perceptions and experiences. Ever since the Preface to the *Tales* ('for young ladies too it has been my intention chiefly to write' Lamb and Lamb 2007, 4) and even more in the 'Advertisement' to the second edition (1809) ('the style in which these tales were written, is not so precisely adapted for the amusement of mere children, as for an acceptable and improving present to young ladies advancing to the state of womanhood' Lamb and Lamb 1809, iii) young female audiences have always been an essential part of the history of narrative adaptations of Shakespeare. Girls were thought to require a safe 'mediation' much more than boys, who, as the Lambs observed in the Preface, 'are generally permitted the use of their fathers' libraries at a much earlier age than girls are' (Lamb and Lamb 2007, 4). Victorian girls first came to know about Shakespeare mainly through the home: rarely, if ever, except in the case of girls' theatrical families, did they discover Shakespeare first through the theatre (Marshall 13).
- 27 Cowden Clarke's novellas are defined by massive use of addition and expansion devices: new characters and new incidents and episodes are interpolated into the fixed world of the plays. In these novellas, the heroines' future choices appear to be determined primarily by the kind of family environment they were born into, from what they learned (or did not learn) from their mothers first and secondly from their masters, friends, nurses and mentors. Clarke's 'The Shrew and the Demure', a narrative prequel to *The Taming of the Shrew*, is possibly the novella that is most concerned with the effects of emotional as well as formal education in the whole collection. While later adaptations (like Gordon Sim's, in 1894) will blame absence of punishment for Katherina's shrewishness, Clarke's recreation takes the opposite view: Kate has been punished *too frequently* and no attempts have been made on the part of her ineffectual mother to understand her: 'There was no judicious mother, to train the insolence into sprightliness . . . to soften the character, by teaching her to mingle gentleness and kind-meaning with her native vivacity—which might thus have been mere pleasant and winning playfulness' (Clarke 104). When her mother dies, her deep sorrow is not believed and she is spoken to very harshly by her father, which provides the narrator with an opportunity to address parents on this specific educational point:

Words of reproach, lightly let fall, yet yielding poisonous blessings! Words of reproach, dropped unheeded, yet bringing forth deadlier fruit! And no soil so fatally sure to nurture them into this baleful maturity as the domestic hearth. Let

those who would preserve home in peace and happiness beware of even the shadow of reproach. . . . It is gone with a breath . . . it scatters mischief, and generates evil. Her father's reproach roused all that was bad in Katharina's disposition. (Clarke 113)

28 If we agree with Clarke's narrator that 'through reasoning affection alone, is genuine compliance obtained' (125), then Petruchio's 'future' methods in Shakespeare's play have very little chance of achieving 'genuine compliance', as the novella amply demonstrates the utter inadequacy of strong-arm tactics to subdue Katherina. This is Clarke at her most subversive, as the prequel resists the movement of erasure by the master text and produces a teaching lesson that is directed at parents (in the way it illustrates how *not* to behave when raising a highly spirited girl) as well as girls. We should not forget that adults were also the recipient of these tales, which were suitable for reading aloud in family gatherings, providing guidance through examples as well as counter-examples.

29 Fay Adams Britton's *Shakespearean Fairy Tales* (1907) is the collection that relies most unambiguously on fairy-tale structure, the purpose of the whole collection being 'to introduce in fairy tale fashion plots and characters from several Shakespearean plays, and by so doing familiarize the childish mind with the work of the great English poet' (Britton, Author's note). In her retelling of *The Winter's Tale*, for example, she introduces a fairy who is responsible for most of the action: she brings comfort to Queen Hermione locked in her room (and not thrown in prison as in the play) and produces out of nowhere a baby that the Queen offers to her husband, King Leontes (in the play Hermione is pregnant with her husband's baby and then the baby is taken away from her) and later arranges for the baby (Perdita) to be adopted by shepherds. There is no friendly and protective Paulina—it is the fairy herself who shows Leontes the statue which she will then, 'with the wave of her sparkling wand' (Britton 61), change into Hermione. The tragic events of the play are heavily underplayed, and the narrator takes every opportunity to use Leontes's behaviour (far less objectionable than in Shakespeare) to teach its readers lessons in politeness and how not to treat friends:

I am afraid Leontes acted as many spoiled little boys and girls do over imaginary wrongs. (Britton 52)

When we feel we have been naughty we always want to be forgiven, don't we? That was the way King Leontes felt. (Britton 55)

30 Adams Britton's version turns Shakespeare's romance into an uncomplicated cautionary tale:

How perfectly happy the King *must have been!* For it really was his beloved Queen Hermione. Was not the Fairy very kind to bring her back to life?

This little story proves to us that we must be kind and gentle to those we love, doesn't it? Else some fairy may visit our dear ones and take them away. I know my little readers would be sorry indeed to have that happen. (Britton 62, my italics)

31 The wide use of negative interrogatives has nothing to do with questioning; on the contrary, they operate as vehicles for assertions (see Heritage)—agreement is required/expected of the reader. A similar effect is produced by the use of 'must' in Adams Britton's passage: the narrator's intervention imposes his/her interpretation of Leontes's feelings.

32 5. *The narrator gives motivations and interpretations for actions and behaviours.* I think it must appear clear from all the examples discussed above that the narrator's main

contribution to the operation of retelling Shakespeare's stories for children is that of giving reasons and interpretations, actively guiding its readers in the intricacy of plot and character and often telling them what they should think about characters and events. Regular intrusions by the narrator about the way certain actions must be regarded and judged, are characteristic of a narrator who uses Shakespeare's plots to provide moral teaching for the child. Ambiguity must be avoided at all costs (and this is possibly the main difference between nineteenth-century adaptations and contemporary ones, which do not always simplify things for child readers).

- 33 All narrators in these adaptations try to avoid opacity. Cowden Clarke's narrator, in particular, by speculating on the heroines' past or future lives, and supplying motivations according to the logic of realism that was characteristic of the novel (Fleming 13) works as a sophisticated focalizer who enters the young characters' minds and finds there the seeds of their future behaviours in the plays (the novellas typically end with the first words of the characters in the play in which they feature). A classic example of crossover fiction which addresses parents as well as children, suitable for family reading, *The Girlhood* was the forerunner of contemporary Young Adult novels based on Shakespeare's plots. But even in abridgments which follow Shakespeare's plots quite closely, dispelling ambiguity is the price that is often paid in order to ease the child's entrance into the adult world of canonical literature, so we should not be surprised if these nineteenth-century narrative retellings for children take major interpretative efforts to produce meaning—even if this is achieved through narrators that clarify, explain and often quite explicitly pass not very nuanced judgements. Fiction requires some form of perspective on events, and often, as I have shown, in children's versions it is the narrator who is entrusted with the task of connecting the dots that are scattered in the plays into a coherent, simplified, albeit inevitably biased, picture.
- 34 If in these texts on the one hand the child reader is guided by the narrator and allowed to enter one of the richest imaginary worlds of literature, on the other, the world that is accessed has been expunged of its rhetorical, linguistic, moral, philosophical (and many other levels of) complexity. I suspect that the dilemma of whether children should be given adaptations as a bridge to adult literature, or whether they should wait until they can access the unabridged source texts, is probably conditioned, like many other aspects of children's literature, by the question of the imbalance of power between adult and child, and the adult desire to control the way the child encounters, makes sense of and appreciates the milestones of world literature. As I have argued, there is an unresolved paradox at the core of the whole enterprise: the child reader is gently coerced by narrators for his/her own good, although this control/coercion might deprive children of the possibility to develop their abilities to understand characters' motivations or actions. It appears the stakes were too high—Shakespeare occupied too crucial a position in Victorian childhood pedagogy to give young readers the freedom to try and resolve (or simply make sense of) textual and moral ambiguities in an uncontrolled way: 'The moral weight given to the supervision in the childhood teaching of Shakespeare points to the necessity of intervention and mediation' (Ciraulo 4). It may be a consolation to think that if the adaptors become in a way co-authors with Shakespeare and even dare fill the gaps he left for the child's sake (a very subversive operation in itself, one could argue), the child is nevertheless placed in the middle of a dialogue between the adaptation and the source, in an intertextual space that he or she can appropriate, in order to share with adult readers one of the most

rewarding reading experiences in the English language. Paraphrasing Julia Kristeva, we could say that ‘intertextuality is mostly a way of making Shakespeare go down in us’ (Kristeva 8).⁵

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NOTES

1. Shakespeare's plots appear to work extraordinarily well when they are transposed into a prose narrative form: narrative remediations of Shakespeare's plays are ubiquitous in contemporary culture (such as fiction for Young Adults, see Lynn Isaac, Hateley and Tosi 2014) and recently they have attracted considerable critical attention. One only needs to mention the collection of essays *Shakespeare and Millennial Fiction* (2017), which investigates the pervasive presence of Shakespeare in the contemporary novel and its subgenres, and the launch, in 2015, of the Hogarth Shakespeare Project—a series of (adult) novels that update and refashion the language and socio-historical-geographical settings of the original plays.
2. I am using Linda Hutcheon's broad definition of 'adaptation' as 'both a product and a process of creation and reception' (Hutcheon 14).
3. Unlike the rest of Nesbit's output, which often features child characters who are passionate readers, her adaptations of Shakespeare and those by her contemporaries, do not offer the child the possibility of identifying with child characters, given the scarcity of children present in the plays.
4. Stidolph's narrator, as we have seen, takes the little readers by the hand and shows them new magnificent places and people. However, the voice of the friendly storyteller also blocks every possibility for the child reader to intervene, given his lack of experience, as in this description of the courtroom in which Antonio is facing Shylock:
I do not suppose any of you, my dear little children, have ever been inside a court-room, have you? Well, I am going to take you to a court today for the first time in your life. How beautiful! How wonderful! You almost hold your breath with amazement as you look round this great room. . . . Have you ever seen any place like this before? I think not. (Stidolph 34) (my italics)
 And at the end of the story, the narrator even puts the little ones to bed:
 And now, little ones, you must hurry away to bed and get to sleep before the rosy sunlight wakes you up in the morning. Thank you so much, dear little ones, for listening so quietly to the story of the 'Merchant of Venice'. I only hope that you have enjoyed hearing it as much as I have enjoyed telling it to you. (Stidolph 47)
5. The original quotation has 'History' instead of 'Shakespeare'.

ABSTRACTS

Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) was the first English attempt to mediate and remediate Shakespeare in fictional form for children, a form which relied on a narrator who often appropriates the characters' words as their own and intrudes with comments and interpretations, so that out of the multitude of (often contradictory) viewpoints offered by the plays, a unified version of character and plot is presented to the child reader. As well as reprints of the Lambs' *Tales*, collections of tales taken from Shakespeare were at the peak of their popularity in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. In these narrative retellings, motivation

is constantly offered to a child in need of acculturation in the national poet's work (in other, more contemporary words, in need of cultural capital). My essay focuses on the special, multifaceted and often ambiguous relationship that the narrator establishes with the child reader in these collections, by making Shakespeare's plays available to a child audience in a way they may find congenial and relevant, and yet at the same time controlling the child's interpretation of the plays. I argue that there is an unresolved paradox at the core of this retelling enterprise: the child reader is gently coerced by narrators for his/her own good, although this control/coercion might deprive children of the possibility to develop their abilities to understand characters' motivations or actions. It appears that Shakespeare occupied too crucial a position in Victorian childhood pedagogy to give young readers the freedom to try and resolve (or simply make sense of) textual and moral ambiguities in an uncontrolled way.

Tales from Shakespeare (1807) écrit par Charles et Mary Lamb constitue le premier texte de langue anglaise à destination d'un public jeunesse médiant Shakespeare sous une forme fictionnelle. Ces réécritures reposent sur un narrateur qui s'approprie fréquemment les mots des personnages et propose ses commentaires et interprétations. De ce fait, si les pièces originelles proposaient des points de vue multiples (et souvent contradictoires), les réécritures présentent à l'enfant lecteur une version unifiée des personnages et de l'intrigue. C'est à la fin de l'époque victorienne et à l'époque édouardienne que les rééditions de *Tales from Shakespeare* ainsi que des recueils de contes adaptés de Shakespeare furent les plus populaires. Dans ces réécritures narrativisées, le narrateur donne constamment les raisons motivant chaque acte au lecteur enfant, qui a besoin d'assimiler l'œuvre du poète national (en d'autres termes, et sous un angle plus contemporain, qui a besoin de capital culturel). Mon article porte sur la relation particulière et souvent ambiguë qu'entretient le narrateur avec l'enfant lecteur au sein de ces recueils, en rendant les pièces shakespeariennes accessibles et agréables à lire pour un public jeunesse tout en contrôlant dans le même temps l'interprétation de ces pièces que l'enfant peut en faire. J'argue que cette entreprise de réécriture est fondamentalement paradoxale : les narrateurs contraignent, dans l'intérêt de l'enfant, sa lecture du texte, mais ce contrôle/cette contrainte pourrait le priver ou la priver de la possibilité de développer ses propres capacités à comprendre ce qui motive les personnages et leurs actions. Il semble que Shakespeare occupait une position trop cruciale au sein de la pédagogie victorienne à destination de la jeunesse pour donner aux jeunes lecteurs la liberté de tenter de résoudre (ou simplement faire sens) des ambiguïtés textuelles et morales, sans contrôle aucun.

INDEX

Mots-clés: adaptation, narrateur, Shakespeare, narrativisation, littérature jeunesse, *Tales from Shakespeare*, littérature victorienne, littérature édouardienne

Keywords: adaptation, narrator, Shakespeare, narrativization, children's literature, *Tales from Shakespeare*, Victorian literature, Edwardian literature

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