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Janice Valls-Russell is a Principal Research Associate, employed by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), and a member of 'Institut de Recherche sur la Renaissance, l'âge Classique et les Lumières' (IRCL, UMR 5186 CNRS) at the University of Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3. She is project coordinator and a member of the editorial board of *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Classical Mythology* and the Early Modern Mythological Texts Series (www.shakmyth.org), for which she has edited canto II of Thomas Heywood's *Troia Britanica*. She has edited and translated into French Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* (2012) and guest-edited two special issues of *Cahiers Élisabéthains* (with Peter J. Smith and Paul Prescott, 2007 and 2014), of which she is reviews and managing editor. She is a contributor to the Stanford Global Shakespeare Encyclopedia, and co-editor of *Enfants perdus, enfants trouvés: Dire l'abandon en Europe du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle*, with Florence Magnot-Ogilvy (2015) and *Interweaving Myths in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, with Charlotte Coffin and Agnès Lafont (Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2017).

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When French television viewers settled down at prime time on Boxing Day 2009 to watch part 1 of Harry Cleven's *Les Héritières* [The Heiresses], they knew they were going to watch a cast led by one of their favorite actors, Jacques Weber, known for his energy and physical acting on stage and screen. They knew from the opening shots that the two-part film was set in Corsica, in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. What they were unaware of was that they were going to watch a melodrama closely fashioned on Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Shakespeare has been a source of inspiration and a challenge for public radio and television in France since the late 1940s. Right into the 1970s, radio and television productions adapted his works in a context of technical and aesthetic innovation that simultaneously sought to democratize access to the arts. The screening of stage productions began as early as 1960, with a *Hamlet* performed in the medieval city of Carcassonne, and developed into increasingly sophisticated interactions between stage and screen, as in Don Kent's 2007 production for the public service European channel Arte of André Engel's *King Lear*, which was performed at the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe in 2006.

This essay examines Cleven's adaptation in the context of French television's prior engagements with *King Lear* and the politics of public service channels, particularly the national and cultural remit of France 3, which screened *Les Héritières*. The film explores the intergenerational conflicts of two families, the Della Rocca and the Caponi, which correspond to the Lear and Gloucester households. While the title – and the framing of the film – invite the audience to focus on the three daughters, their father, an overbearing landowning patriarch played by Weber, is a central, powerful figure. The period, World War Two, is analogous to Shakespeare's depiction of a world torn apart from within while subject to external pressures, and the Corsican setting in which it is intimately embedded provides an ambience as powerful as the heath and cliffs. My contention is that, in re-scripting one of the world's most powerful (and certainly best-known) tragedies of disrupted family loyalties into a melodrama for household audiences and anchoring it in an environment that is both identifiable and 'other', Cleven seeks to reconcile French public television's tradition of quality entertainment with its need to respond to the competition of popular series that draw on family sagas and locations in telegenic, culturally significant regional environments. Turning to Shakespeare without saying so may be a way not to deter audiences, but the title also implies a shifting of the balance onto the next generation, part of what François Jost calls a process of 'rejuvenation' through adaptation and a widening of reception, an opening onto a present where Shakespearian drama remains relevant even when, paradoxically, it is not directly acknowledged.[1]

[1] See below for a discussion of Jost.

POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION, THE SMALL SCREEN AND SHAKESPEARE

The state-controlled Radiodiffusion et Télévision Française (RTF) was set up in 1949, in a context of intense post-war energy and a national drive for reconstruction and reconciliation after the Vichy regime and Nazi occupation. Reconstruction was viewed as cultural as well as economic and social. In 1951, Jean Vilar, who had founded the Avignon Festival in 1947, became director of the Théâtre de Chaillot and promptly restored the original name, Théâtre National Populaire (TNP), taking the company into working-class districts around Paris to seek out new audiences.

As Jost notes, in the 1950s 'television played the same role as Jean Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire, the [paperback series] Livre de poche, which ha[d] just been launched, and the Maisons de la culture invented by André Malraux' and created in 1959.[2] Gilles Delavaud and others have retraced the history and aesthetics of television productions in France in the 1950s and 1960s, and uncovered the underlying 'ambition of a cultural project' ('*ambition d'un projet culturel*'): young directors invited to work for television had 'the feeling of participating fully in the explosion of creativity that characterized the period of the Liberation'.[3] As Jean d'Arcy, who directed the programs of French television from 1952 to 1959, explained: 'From the outset, I considered that television was in itself a form

[2] F. Jost, 'Peut-on parler de télévision culturelle?', *Télévision*, 1:2 (2011), 14. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are my own.
[3] G. Delavaud, *L'Art de la télévision. Histoire et esthétique de la dramatique télévisée (1950-1965)* (Paris: De Boeck, 2005), 11: 'sentiment de participer pleinement au mouvement d'explosion de la création qui caractérise la période de la Libération'.

of expression, and not just a way of transmitting pre-existing shows'.[4] Significantly, Pierre-Aimé Touchard, *administrateur* of the Comédie-Française, who saw in television 'a new artform to be invented, neither quite theater nor quite cinema', referred to the 'Télévision nationale populaire' when introducing Claude Barma's adaptation of *Macbeth* in 1959.[5]

Fitting into a small box the novels of Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo or the plays of Jean Racine and William Shakespeare was viewed as a challenge that invited experimentation – even while André Frank, one of the program directors, acknowledged the risk there was in turning to the classics as one would reach for 'a fine old bottle from the cellar'.[6] Leading actors of their time, such as Jean Marais, Jean Vilar, Maria Casarès and Daniel Sorano, lent their aura. Bringing those voices and faces into homes meant sharing culture more widely, even though television owners remained a minority: France had 60,000 TV sets in 1953 against one million in the UK or Germany and 25 million in the USA.[7] Nonetheless, d'Arcy's awareness of those audiences and their impact in turn on the works being produced ran parallel to Vilar's concern to reach out to, and engage with, spectators who were not regular theater-goers: showing a play on television, d'Arcy argues, changes it because the audience is 'no longer the restricted audience of Parisian theaters … but the whole country, its working classes as well as its ruling classes':[8] and changing the

[4] 'Dès le départ, j'ai considéré que la télévision était un moyen d'expression en soi et non pas simplement un moyen de transmission de spectacles préexistants', quoted in Gilles Delavaud, 'Télévision et culture selon Jean d'Arcy', *Télévision*, 1:2 (2011), 26.

[5] The first quotation is from Delavaud, *L'Art de la télévision*, 26. Touchard's echo of the Théâtre National Populaire may be heard online, www.ina.fr.

[6] Quoted by G. Delavaud, 'Dramaturgie du télévisuel: *Le Rouge et le Noir*, une dramatique de Pierre Cardinal', in J. Bourdon et F. Jost (eds.), *Penser la télévision: actes du colloque de Cerisy* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1998), 135. Touchard introduces Barma's *Macbeth* as part of 'une série d'expériences auxquelles se livrent actuellement les émissions dramatiques de la télévision', www.ina.fr.

[7] Delavaud, *L'Art de la télévision*, 24.

[8] Jost, 'Peut-on parler de télévision culturelle?', 14: 'le fait de diffuser une pièce de théâtre à la télévision suffit à la modifier parce qu'elle transforme son auditoire, « qui n'est plus l'auditoire restreint des théâtres

audience entails, according to Jost, a 'process of rejuvenation, or rather, *actualisation* of the diegesis and staging' that affects television as well as the stage and opera.[9] As we shall see, it is this further stage in the renewed missions and challenges of state television that a film like Cleven's seeks to address.

Shakespeare ranks twelfth among the 15 authors whose works were most frequently adapted to television: top of the non-French authors, he comes just behind Victor Hugo.[10] And audiences could hear him even before he made it to the small screen: from 1949 to 1951, RTF ran a radio series, 'Tout Shakespeare en 18 émissions', broadcasting 25 plays in 18 monthly slots, in adaptations by major authors such as Jean Cocteau and André Gide, and with leading actors of the time.

Television provided viewers with what Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin describe as 'a substantial cycle' of Shakespeare right up to 1980.[11] Hatchuel and Vienne-Guerrin suggest that French television's engagement with Shakespeare then changed tack, broadcasting the BBC Shakespeare series on FR3, since renamed France 3; they speculate that the success of the series may have left producers with the feeling that 'only the Brits could do Shakespeare "right" and respect the "true" spirit of his plays', or that Shakespeare may have lost his 'bankability and power of attraction for French TV producers' in an

parisiens qui faisait le succès ou l'échec d'une pièce suivant, bien souvent, des critères propres à son mode de vie, alors qu'il s'agit cette fois *du pays tout entier, de ses classes dirigeantes comme de ses classes laborieuses* », dit le directeur des programmes de la télévision française, Jean d'Arcy, en 1958.'

[9] Jost, 'Peut-on parler de télévision culturelle?', 18: 'Ce processus de rajeunissement ou, plutôt, d'actualisation de la diégèse ou de la mise en scène touche aussi bien la télévision que le théâtre et l'opéra'.

[10] P. Lavat and B. Papin, 'Les stratégies de la distinction télévisuelle au fil du temps: 60 ans d'adaptations littéraires à la télévision (1950-2010)', *Télévision*, 1:3 (2012), 41, 47.

[11] S. Hatchuel and N. Vienne-Guerrin, 'Remembrance of Things Past: Shakespeare's Comedies on French Television', in S. Hatchuel and N. Vienne-Guerrin (eds.), *Shakespeare on Screen: Television Shakespeare. Essays in honour of Michèle Willems* (Rouen: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008), 171.

increasingly market-driven environment.[12] This, however, may be offset to some extent by the screening of stage productions and interactive projects that seek to bring together stage, television and digital audiences. In 2016, a stage adaptation of *Richard III*, directed by Jean Lambert-wild, Lorenzo Malaguerra and Gérald Garutti, was co-produced by the Centre Dramatique National du Limousin and France 3, which produced a television documentary and a webdocumentary, hosted a blog on the making of the show and broadcast a screening of the play. Such initiatives reconnect with the need to address the complementarity of theater and television in novel ways that Frank was already advocating in 1957, against critics such as the Nouveau Roman novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet who anticipated to some extent Pierre Bourdieu and his perception of television as a 'major danger for the different spheres of cultural production'.[13]

Owing to what Frank termed 'excess which produces unease in the theater and even more on a small screen' that acts as a 'magnifying glass',[14] a tragedy like *King Lear* certainly offered directors and actors a creative challenge. In 1965, Jean Kerchbron directed a television adaptation, using Yves Bonnefoy's verse translation. Opting for approaches that did not seek to 'imitate' theatre, Kerchbron explored the oscillations between proximity and distance, the balance between the more theatrical sweep of wide shots and close shots that brought character and spectator face to face.[15] This seems to have been the only French adaptation for television of *King Lear* until *Les Héritières*. The production shown on

[12] Hatchuel and Vienne-Guerrin, 'Remembrance of Things Past', 185, 173.
[13] On Robbe-Grillet's debate with André Frank, see Delavaud, *L'Art de la télévision*, 65–6; 'Je pense en effet que la télévision […] *fait courir un très grand danger aux différentes sphères de la production culturelle*, art, littérature, science, philosophie, droit'. P. Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision* (Paris: Liber édition, 1996), 5.
[14] A. Frank, 'La dramaturgie et l'image à la télévision', in G. Marsolais (ed.), *Théâtre et télévision* (Paris: Organisation des nations unies, 1973), 17–57: '*Le Roi Lear* est fondé sur une sorte de démesure qui le rend mal à l'aise au théâtre, et plus encore au petit écran' (31); 'le petit écran est une loupe; il grandit ou amenuise. Shakespeare en sort grandi' (25).
[15] Delavaud, *L'Art de la télévision*, 136, 134.

TF1 in 1981 and directed by Jean-Marie Coldefy was an adaptation of Daniel Mesguich's staging for the Avignon Festival, a screen version that has endured since it was shown during the Avignon Festival in 2015, parallel to Olivier Py's production of the play, itself screened live on France 2, in a kind of two-way tribute to theater and television that seeks to reinforce the ties between the two genres in a twofold mission of 'public service' and 'popular culture'. For his television production of Engel's *King Lear*, in which Michel Piccoli played the king, Don Kent 'associat[ed] himself very early on with the project, achieving the right audiovisual transposition of the show'; and Arte screened a documentary directed by François Ede, *Citizen Lear*, on the making of the play as well as Kent's production.[16]

KING LEAR AND *LES HÉRITIÈRES*

When the essayist Gaéton Picon presented Kerchbron's *King Lear* on television in 1965, he suggested that viewers would 'hear [in the play] the echo of a most recent period' – referring, of course, to Vichy and the Nazi occupation. It is the immediate aftermath of the liberation of France that Harry Cleven revisits through *King Lear* in *Les Héritières*. The artistic director, Jean-Pierre Alessandri, describes the film as 'a powerful family drama, very freely inspired by Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a universal story with two timeless detonators, love and power'.[17] Jacques Weber describes the patriarch Ottavio Della Rocca

[16] 'S'associant très tôt au projet, le réalisateur Don Kent a su trouver la juste transposition audiovisuelle du spectacle. Sa réalisation est sans fausses notes'. M. Lafond, '*Le Roi Lear*', *Le Monde*, 24 September 2007, TEL27. On the documentary, see 'Citizen Lear', directed by François Ede (Medici Art International, France, 2006), www.docandfilm.com (accessed 31 January 2018).

[17] '*Les Héritières*, c'est un puissant drame familial, très librement inspiré du *Roi Lear* de Shakespeare, une histoire universelle avec deux détonateurs intemporels: l'amour et le pouvoir.' Jean-Pierre Alessandri, 'Note d'intention', presentation brochure of *Les Héritières* (France 3, November 2009), 3. Alessandri co-produced the film with Olga Vincent.

as 'a kind of Corsican King Lear', 'a magnificent role inspired by King Lear and Gattopardo, very moving to play'.[18] Héléna Soubeyrand's description of her role as Della Rocca's youngest daughter seems to conflate Cordelia with a Juliet-like figure:

> Vanina is a powerful figure of a woman in love. She is the equivalent of Cordelia in *King Lear*. She is rejected by her family and defies everyone, in order to be reunited with the man she loves.[19]

A number of reviewers such as Géry Brusselmans in *Le Soir* and Véronique Cauhapé in *Le Monde* have noted similarities with Shakespeare's play.[20] The script (by Lorène Delannoy and Daniel Tonachella, on an original idea of Olga Vincent) does not have a single line lifted from Shakespeare's text. The influence is structural, almost instantly recognizable to all those who 'know the story' without having ever read the play. The title immediately suggests a family saga, poised at the fulcrum moment when the balance of power tilts, or would appear to tilt, from parents to children – in the main plot, a widower and patriarch, Ottavio Della Rocca (Jacques Weber), and his three daughters, Antonia (Amira Casar, whom Olivier Py appropriately cast as Goneril in his 2015 production for the Festival d'Avignon), Flavia (Hélène Seuzaret) and Vanina (Héléna Soubeyrand), his youngest and favorite who, like Cordelia, proves the most independent and the most loving. The shift in the title from the patriarch to the younger generation is indicated in the opening shots of Vanina

[18] Interview with Nathalie Simon, 'Jacques Weber: "Je fais encore des progrès"', *Le Figaro*, 4 December 2009, 32; quoted in É. Bureau, 'Jacques Weber: "Ce rôle m'a marqué"', *Aujourd'hui*, 26 December 2009, np.
[19] 'Vanina est une grande amoureuse. Elle est l'équivalent de Cordélia dans *Le Roi Lear*. Elle va être rejetée par sa famille, va braver tout le monde pour retrouver l'homme qu'elle aime.' Héléna Soubeyrand, quoted in I. Inglebert, 'Téléfilm: *Les Héritières*', *Telecablesat.fr*, 26 December 2009, www.telecablesat.fr (accessed 31 January 2018).
[20] G. Brusselmans, 'Jacques Weber en riche propriétaire', *Le Soir*, 15 October 2008, np; Véronique Cauhapé, 'Les Héritières', *Le Monde*, television supplement, 21 December 2009, TEL16.

returning to Corsica from Marseilles, where she has been studying music. She is met by her sisters, whose jealousy, recalling Goneril's 'He always loved our sister most' (1.1.281–2), transpires even before the family reunion. Flavia, the younger, seemingly weaker of the two sisters, says 'I don't want to be there when she announces it to our father' ('*Je ne veux pas être là quand elle l'annonce à notre père*'), but Antonia gleefully says 'I do' ('*moi, si*'), anticipating the consequences of Vanina's intention to stand up to her father. Sure enough Della Rocca greets his daughter with an affection that is evidently mutual – as shown in their ride on horseback and their smiles (smiles are rare in this film). Yet he disinherits her after she rejects the marriage he has arranged for her and she escapes to mainland France – choosing exile in the face of what she experiences as emotional banishment by her father.

Unlike Cordelia, Vanina chooses to speak; like Cordelia, she can only go so far in what she can say. She tells her father that she loves someone called Charles. And when he replies that he is ready to forget what she has just said, she simply replies 'I have spoken' ('*J'ai parlé*'), whereupon he shouts and raises a hand as if to hit her. He reminds her that she is born into a dynasty where she cannot enjoy that kind of freedom. Vanina gone, Della Rocca shares out the family estate between her sisters, even though he openly despises them: 'the land, owing to my stupidity, belongs to you, but you are neither respected nor loved' ('*la terre, dans ma stupidité, t'appartient, mais tu n'es ni respectée ni aimée*'). Like Lear, he thinks he can go on ruling by proxy, to his daughters' exasperation. Antonia's 'I'll reply but I don't owe you any explanations any more' ('*Je vais te répondre, mais je n'ai plus de comptes à te rendre*'), when Della Rocca questions her about a banker interested in the land, echoes Goneril's 'Idle old man, / That still would manage those authorities / That he hath given away!' (1.3. Q1).

As in *King Lear*, a secondary plot focuses on the relationship between another father and his two sons, introducing a romantic twist that creates an additional link between the two families. Ange Caponi (Jean Benguigui), Della Rocca's tenant, is the father of Barthélémy (Thibault Vinçon), a World War Two hero in love with Vanina who chooses to live as a recluse in the mountain, away from the madness of the world. Caponi has a second, illegitimate son, Massimo (Daniel Lundh): like Edmund, who 'hath been out nine years' (1.1.27), he reappears after a long absence in Indochina and although his father, Gloucester-like, wishes that 'away he shall again' (27–8), he stays, bent on revenge against his father and the Della Rocca family, who despised and ill-treated his mother, Luchesa, an Italian immigrant. Episode 1 ends with Massimo swearing to avenge his dying mother. Episode 2 is informed by his deliberate seduction of the two elder Della Rocca sisters and his final revenge, which he achieves through their mutually destructive rivalry. Just as Goneril's reaction to Albany's death is to look forward to her affair with Edmund, Antonia's reaction, on the death of her husband Pascal (murdered by a tenant whom he has cuckolded), is that she is free to pursue her infatuation for Massimo.

The otherness of Shakespeare's France, from which to organize hopes of return and reconciliation, is here represented from a Corsican perspective by the mainland, more specifically Marseilles, of which we are given glimpses in shots of streets and the harbor from which ferries leave for or arrive from Corsica. Situated at the margins of the plot (the way France is in *Lear*), Marseilles is also the locus that enables a resolution which veers away from tragedy into melodrama. To Vanina, it is a place of hope (that is where she meets her husband, Charles, a jazz musician), grief (he is murdered at the instigation of one of her brothers-in-law) and renewal (her baby is born there, she starts a musical career and

is reconciled with her father, moments before his death). As in *King Lear*, threats of war hover: the long conflict out of which Europe is painfully emerging – 'the war is over' ('*La guerre est finie*') are the first words spoken in the film – gives way to the war in Indochina, to which young men who survived World War Two are being sent, unless they desert and seek refuge in the wilderness, like Edgar, like their fathers and older brothers during the Nazi occupation, like Barthélémy.

Caponi shares Gloucester's insensitivity to his illegitimate son and has something of Polonius's 'foolish prating knave' (3.4.216) in his concern about his (legitimate) son's reputation. This takes a comedic turn when he discovers that Barthélémy has deserted and is hiding in the mountains, secretly coming to his mother at night for food and for milk to feed Vanina's illegitimate baby, which he is caring for with the aid of Barberine (Jacqueline Donno), the elderly nurse of the Della Rocca household. Barberine is the equivalent of the clown, Della Rocca's conscience, speaking her thoughts out loud in a manner that recalls the cryptic language of Shakespeare's fools. Although loyal to him, she secretly helps Vanina. In a memorable scene, Della Rocca goes up to the attic in which he has locked up his daughter, to find her gone and Barberine in her place. Unlike the clown in *Lear*, however, she remains until the end of the story, combining some features of Kent's role as a mediator between Della Rocca and Vanina and, beyond, the Corsican community.

Madness corrupts relationships and threatens even to contaminate Vanina, whom Barthélémy finds in her dingy Marseilles hotel, running her fingers compulsively over a lace mat on a chest of drawers, her music sheets spread out before her, as if playing a piano. Della Rocca is one of the few characters to be seen close-up in the open air, in scenes of near-folly. His fury transforms him into one of Lear's 'oak-cleaving thunderbolts' (3.2.5): in

an abrupt change of scene after his discovery that Barberine has taken Vanina's place in the attic, we see him out of doors, roaring as he uproots a tree, Ajax-like. Later on, a high-angle shot zooms in on him standing in a marsh, his white shirt and hands stained with blood, and it comes as a relief to the viewer to discover in the next shot that he has merely killed a boar. Dressed in a white, open-necked shirt, face distraught, grunting or roaring from the effort, Weber repeatedly seems on the verge of folly although, unlike Lear, he never slides into total disconnection with immediate reality. He comes close to striking his eldest daughter, Antonia, in a scene that recalls Lear's cursing of his daughters (2.4) and the scene in which he hits the slight, elderly Barberine has the shocking impact of productions where Lear manhandles and sometimes even kills the Fool.[21]

As in *King Lear*, contact with nature can provide moments of solace. Driven from his home by his conflict with his daughters – emotionally, rather than physically, since he never lives elsewhere and the impression is rather that the daughters and their husbands live under *his* roof – he turns to his shepherds for companionship, sitting with them in the night around an open fire. They are his knights, draped in dark capes, loyal to him as their fathers were to his father.

CORSICA: A LOCUS AND A PERSONA

[21] '[The Fool's] relationship with Lear was clearly one of intimacy and genuine concern; the two were old friends. … This was why when the mad Lear suddenly went for the Fool on "False justicer, why hast thou let her scape?" (scene 13.51), grabbing his throat with both hands and near-throttling him, the unexpected assault was so shocking.' P. J. Smith, '*King Lear*, directed by Michael Buffong for Talawa Theatre Company, Birmingham Rep, Birmingham, 24 May 2016', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 91 (2016), 118.

A setting in a telegenic region of France is one of the keys to the success of French television productions such as the two crime-fiction series, *Meurtres à…* [Murders in…], currently into its fourth season, and *Le Sang de la vigne*, which ran for seven seasons on France 3, from 2011 to 2017. Daniel Tonachella, who co-scripted *Les Héritières*, co-authored some of the episodes of *Le Sang de la vigne*, which is set in wine-growing areas. Both series combine household tragedies and tap into local legends with wider issues bringing pressure to bear on traditional family structures, such as financial speculation, property interests, development projects or, more recently, environmental issues. This recipe is not devoid of financial considerations, insofar as local authorities are eager to promote their regions. Add Marseilles as an urban contrast that is popularly associated with the Mafia, and the recipe begins to interest producers in search of prime-time homespun stories that can compete with American crime series. As Corsica's (ambivalent) point of entry into continental France, Marseilles carries a reputation almost as sulfurous as that of Renaissance Venice, Naples or Milan for the Elizabethans: we catch glimpses of prostitutes and decrepit hotels in dark, unsavory backstreets and Corsican clannish patterns cast their long shadows over the city from across the sea, as when Vanina's husband is murdered.

While Marseilles may be viewed as 'other' from Corsica, Corsica itself is powerfully connoted as 'other' in mainland French representations. As a setting, it carries high dramatic and aesthetic potential and its physical separation is emphasized in *Les Héritières*, through the framing device of the sea during the titles and before the final credits. When shooting began on *Les Héritières*, Corsica was providing the setting and inspiration for a highly successful television series, *Mafiosa*, for which Tonachella co-scripted the episodes

of the first season. *Mafiosa* was produced by the pay channel Canal+ and filmed in Corsica, with a significant economic fallout – to the extent that one might speculate whether *Les Héritières* was not a response of French public television.[22] Geographically self-contained, with a preserved environment of high mountains, beaches, the *maquis* and stone-built villages, Corsica presents a timeless, rocky setting well suited to the cosmic dimension of *King Lear*. The village is dominated by the square stone house of the aptly named Della Rocca family, which first appears filmed in a low angle shot, to emphasize its massiveness and domination of the geographic, social and family landscapes. The cast brings together (mainland) French and Corsican actors as well as Corsican extras.

Close-ups of faces are often shot in interiors: parallel scenes focus on Antonia and Flavia in their respective bedrooms, looking away from their husbands, their features suggesting that dissatisfaction is also sexual, thereby anticipating their eagerness to pursue Massimo – in Flavia's case, right into the hovel where his mother used to live, while Antonia's dreamy expression seems to capture Goneril's 'Oh, the difference of man and man' (4.2.27). Such scenes emphasize that storms are internal rather than elemental; shots of snowy landscapes, grey mountains and a dark, choppy winter sea glimpsed in the opening sequences give a chromatic range of blacks and whites that suggest both a world that people like Della Rocca would like to freeze in a pre-war past, refusing the promise of a Technicolor future in which young people may celebrate their own forms of culture, and, perhaps an indirect tribute to the earlier television productions in black and white and Peter Brook's 1971 film version of *King Lear*. Cleven seems to have attempted to counterbalance the picture-postcard views of Corsica even as the film lingers on telegenic

[22] I wish to thank Sarah Hatchuel for sharing her thoughts with me on these concomitant productions.

mountain landscapes and preserved coastline, and he acknowledges the support of the local Corsican authority in the production credits.

Corsican interest in promoting the island through cultural initiatives, especially when there are financial spinoffs, is evident. The web journal *L'Informateur Corse nouvelle* announced the airing of the film with information about its economic impact – alongside news about the shooting of season 3 of *Mafiosa*.[23] Corsicans have defended *Les Héritières* against 'disgruntled critics who seem to prefer a bad American series to a homespun TV film … a family saga well suited for this festive period'.[24]

Local pride turns on the film's use of the island's landscapes, but also its history and traditions, to the extent that Corsica is viewed as the central persona of the film: 'a leading role for Corsica', notes one journalist, who quotes the actor Jean Benguigui (Ange Caponi): 'The rhythm of the film owes a lot to the rhythm of the country [Corsica]'.[25] With her black clothes, black headscarf and dark eyes, Barberine, the old nurse, who weaves in and out of the film right up to the final shots, when she is entrusted with the keys of the Della Rocca homestead, seems to emblematize the island, at once rooted in an archaic past and a mediator of fertility and renewal.

[23] The local Corsican authority, the Collectivité territoriale de Corse, allocated a subsidy of 230,000 euros (the total budget for the film being 4,362,000 euros). The economic benefits for Corsica amounted to approximately 1 million euros, with 50 technicians recruited locally, 2000 hotel nights and 5000 meals. *L'Informateur Corse nouvelle (hebdomadaire regional)*. www.corse-information.info and www.corse.fr (both websites accessed 31 January 2018).

[24] 'J'avoue que j'ai du mal à comprendre les critiques grognons qui semblent souvent préférer une mauvaise série américaine plutôt qu'un téléfilm bien de chez nous. En cette période de fêtes cette saga familiale valait bien, notamment par la qualité de ses reconstitutions, les habituels nanars que l'on retrouve tous les ans à pareille époque.' C. Guelfucci, http://racines-corses.fr (posted 7 October 2015) (accessed 31 January 2018).

[25] '… un rôle de taille pour la Corse. … *La respiration du film tient beaucoup à la respiration du pays….* C'est Jean Benguigui … qui le dit.' Article in *Corse Matin*, 26 December 2009, www.corsematin.com (accessed 31 January 2018).

This sea-encompassed 'O' is much more than a setting; it is also a 'confine of blood and breath' (*King John*, 4.2.246), harboring a self-enclosed community attached to traditional modes of life and cultivating a fiercely idiosyncratic cultural and linguistic identity that was confirmed when the local elections in 2017 returned an overwhelming majority of pro-autonomy regionalists to the Corsican assembly. The intricacies of local politics, largely unfathomable to those who live on the continent, have contributed to preserve representations of Corsican otherness in the collective French imagination, even as tens of thousands of mainland and foreign tourists flock to the island every summer in search, paradoxically, of a form of pre-mass-tourism Arcadia. Without alienating local pride, *Les Héritières* meets French (continental) representations of Corsica as fashioned and handed down by Prosper Mérimée's novellas (*Mateo Falcone*, *Colomba*): an archaic world seemingly as remote as Lear's Britain or Macbeth's Scotland, where magic, legends and the ritualization of revenge merge, with patriarchs – a law unto themselves – ruling over their households and settling differences, but where women also participate in the preservation of honor.

Hence it is culturally, and indeed, politically significant that Corsicans seeking to appropriate the depiction of their island as screened in *Les Héritières* should turn to Shakespeare for legitimacy, in much the same way as *Mafiosa* has been linked to the worlds of Greek tragedy, Shakespeare and the Western.[26] *Corse Matin* links Corsica and Shakespeare: 'Corsica, a land of history. Great and small. Daily and universal. The setting of *Les Héritières* – a free adaption of *King Lear* – is the postwar period. Between tradition and

[26] See for instance K. T., 'En Corse, l'exception "Mafiosa"', La Loi des séries, http://laloidesseries.blogs.lalibre.be (accessed 31 January 2018).

modernity'.[27] The official website of the local Corsican authority, the Collectivité territoriale de Corse, links memories of anti-Nazi resistance on the island (a moment of historical pride) and Shakespeare: 'A free adaptation of *King Lear*, set in post-World War Two Corsica'.[28] Acknowledging the Shakespearean dimension of the production enables Corsicans to shore up their sense of identity by inscribing it in a wider cultural heritage that carries no connotations of subservience to Paris. At the same time, a mainland critic like Véronique Cauhapé in *Le Monde* acknowledges the appropriateness of the setting:

Because this is a land of bonds and pride, because the notion of honor and revenge, and the importance of the clan, are more powerful there than elsewhere, Corsica provides the ideal setting for this family tragedy performed by a range of actors who are moved by the strong, unyielding, harsh and violent characters they play. In harmony with some of the landscapes of this island that the sea separates from the rest of the world.[29]

Cleven creates a larger-than-life picture, even while playing with stereotypes. Barberine could almost be a character out of a Mérimée novella. Della Rocca's status as a patriarch whose family has ruled over the village for several generations is illustrated by the massive stone house and the paintings of ancestors hanging on the walls as a recurring backcloth in several sequences, their faces gazing in from the past. Weber plays up the overbearing psyche, which is visually signaled by his massive stature, his wine-colored riding-coat, the fact that he is often seen on horseback, and the protocol that he imposes on

[27] '… La Corse, terre d'histoires. Petites et grandes. Quotidiennes et universelles. *Les Héritières* – libre adaptation du *Roi Lear* – plante un décor d'après-guerre. Entre tradition et modernité'. www.corsematin.com (accessed 31 January 2018).
[28] 'Libre adaptation du *Roi Lear* dans la Corse de l'après-guerre', www.corse.fr (accessed 31 January 2018).
[29] V. Cauhapé, 'Les Héritières', *Le Monde*, television supplement, 6 February 2012, TEL14: 'Parce qu'elle est terre d'attachement et d'orgueil, parce que le sens de l'honneur et de la vengeance et l'importance du clan y sont plus forts qu'ailleurs, la Corse fournit le décor idéal à cette tragédie familiale servie par une panoplie de comédiens habités par les caractères forts, intransigeants, rudes et violents qu'ils interprètent. À l'image de certains paysages de cette île que la mer sépare du reste du monde'.

his household, as in the formal family dinner that follows Vanina's return to the island, gathering three generations like a submissive court. And yet, however much he may bang his fist on a table and curse his daughters, his power, like Lear's, is no longer what he thinks it is: in spite of the loyalty of a handful of shepherds, he loses the local election. Like Lear, Della Rocca considers that he can continue to wield authority even though he has shared out his estate. Challenging this, Antonia jeers at him: 'Everything is changing, the world is changing, everything is changing, except you. And we Della Roccas go on feeding bunches of good-for-nothings who spend their time singing in the mountains' ('*Tout change, le monde change, tout change, sauf toi. Et nous les Della Rocca on est là à entretenir des troupeaux d'inutiles qui chantent dans les montagnes*'). Intergenerational, gendered tensions are established from the outset as the film opens with shots of Vanina on the Corsica-bound ferry, followed by those of Della Rocca: Cleven inverts the order in which Lear and Cordelia appear in the play; so doing, he anticipates the film's final framing shots of Vanina and her young children. In those opening moments, though, we are not quite sure whether she is looking ahead, towards Corsica, or back, towards Marseilles. Her trajectory frames the story, with the promises and uncertainties of change blowing in from across the sea; and although Della Rocca tries to resist the changes which his daughters, each in her own way, seek to impose on him, he slowly comes to realize that redemption lies with the youngest.

RECONSTRUCTION VS. BARRENNESS OF REVENGE

The film opens in the winter of 1945, in the wake of an intensely complex period and on the threshold of major social transformation: 1945 was the year in which French women first obtained the right to vote – a right that is exploited to dramatic purposes in the film. The issue of inheritance acquires a wider significance: what is to be handed down, preserved, discarded, refashioned? To what extent do heirs (especially when they are women) have leeway over the legacies of which they are the recipients?

Social and political tensions underscore the generational issue, which is probed through the role of the third daughter and the placelessness of the illegitimate son. Della Rocca's resistance to his daughters is dependent upon the loyalty of the shepherds Antonia so despises. Their attack, led by Della Rocca, to prevent a development project also signals a last-ditch attempt to resist emerging, postwar interest in Corsica as a touristic destination. Directorial choices thereby create a setting that is clearly anchored – geographically, historically and culturally – whilst conveying a timeless, out-of-this world atmosphere.

One might argue that transposing *King Lear* as the story of a Corsican clan caught in historical change is reductive, as regards the poetic breadth and wide compass of the play: structurally and socially, the distance is less than it might seem, if one chooses to follow Brecht, who suggested that Lear tear up the map of his kingdom in the opening scene of the play (as in Peter Brook's 1953 production for CBS's Omnibus, starring Orson Welles, and several productions since): 'Thus it would not only direct the gaze onto the empire but, in that Lear is so clearly treating the empire as his own private property, he throws light onto

the fundaments of feudal family ideology'.[30] While the format and the targeted audience are not conducive to an ideological challenging of expectations, a film produced for domestic consumption can adequately hold up to viewers a probing dissection of family dynamics, as in a kind of *mise en abyme*.

The revenge motif further complicates the patterns of 'family ideology' and intergenerational conflict, sharpening the contrast between the two brothers. Barthélémy's war experience raises him above traditional Corsican values, even though he remains attached to the island: as such he is a figure for the future, in harmony with the country's post-war reconstruction. Massimo taps into traditional codes of honor to compensate for his mother's suffering and his own humiliation: he remains trapped in the rhetoric of the past, and it is his loss.

As in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, revenge is never very far from magic and witchcraft, which in Cleven's Corsica as in Mérimée's always seems to lurk round the corner. *Macbeth*'s witches and Lady Macbeth seem to hover in the background too: Luchesa (Anne Canovas), Massimo's mother, is a healer, whom women like Flavia turn to in the hope of finding a cure for barrenness even while they despise her. The idea of barrenness resonates in the curse Lear hurls at Goneril:

> Lear. Hear, nature; hear, dear goddess, hear:
>
> Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
>
> To make this creature fruitful.
>
> Into her womb convey sterility,
>
> Dry up in her the organs of increase,

[30] D. Barnett, 'Brecht as Great Shakespearean: A Lifelong Connection', in R. Morse (ed.), *Hugo, Pasternak, Brecht, Césaire. Great Shakespeareans*, vol. 14 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 117.

> And from her derogate body never spring
>
> A babe to honour her. (1.4.230-60)

In *Les Héritières*, Lear's curse becomes a leitmotiv running through the story. Like Lear, Della Rocca has three daughters and no son, which in archaic societies carries something of a stigma, the ability to father a son being considered as a yardstick of virility. In this respect, he is outdone by Caponi, with his two sons, although the fruitlessness of Massimo's revenge is an ironic coda to the lustfulness he unleashes in the two sisters, one of them (Flavia) barren, the other (Antonia) mother to three daughters, in a self-perpetuating pattern of heiresses and absent heir. The issue of a male succession is discreetly indicated in the early moments of the film, through a detail of a painting visible just behind Flavia's husband even as he asks when Vanina is returning. The painting, which is viewed only partially, shows hands holding a large old book, with a document in the left-hand lower corner on which is written the legal formula 'NEPOS ET HAERES', 'grandsons (descendants) and heirs'. Immediately after that, Della Rocca announces, 'The last daughter shall marry Caponi's son' ('*La dernière fille épouse le fils de Caponi*'). When he discovers later on that his daughters have given some land to Caponi, he is seen looking at a map of his land, then, banging on the table, he shouts, 'you forget that you represent a lineage, that rests on the land, on heirs, on male heirs that neither of you have been able to produce' ('*vous ignorez que vous représentez une lignée, qui repose sur des terres, sur des terres et des héritiers, des héritiers mâles que ni l'une ni l'autre vous n'avez réussi à faire*'). As he speaks, the camera focuses on the daughters' faces, with Antonia, mother of daughters, turning to glance at the childless Flavia, both daughters of a sonless father.

The birth of Vanina's child, a boy, further exacerbates the sisters' jealousy and Flavia's madness partly finds its source there. Jealousy, revenge and magic are a potent brew for madness that wells from frustrations linked to issues of property, succession and sexual frustration. Della Rocca and Antonia mutually accuse each other of folly, but, unusually, it is her words that seem to hit their mark:

> Della Rocca: 'Mad'.
>
> Antonia: 'Mad? Who produces mad people? Who produced me? Who's mad in this room?'
>
> (*Della Rocca: 'Folle'.*
>
> *Antonia: 'Folle? Qui est-ce qui fait les fous? Qui est-ce qui m'a fait, moi? Qui est fou dans cette pièce?'*).

The camera focuses on her smooth, clear skin, her necklace and carefully arranged hair (the film shows her growing sophistication in clothes, hairdo and makeup) as she speaks softly. This is followed by a silence as the camera moves to Della Rocca's face, capturing an expression of doubt and fear. For once, he is silent. The film then cuts to an outdoor scene, a landscape, the sound of a wounded cry, panting and gasping as the camera turns and Della Rocca comes in view, his shirt, arms and hands stained in blood, then a bleeding boar that he drags on the ground before wading into a pond. But the two elder sisters are not exempt from folly either. Near the end of the film, in final close-up shots, they seem to metamorphose into black, flapping crows, a powerful moment of storytelling achieved by non-verbal means.

The question '*Qui est fou dans cette pièce?*' retroactively reads as a probing both of the script and *King Lear* ('*cette pièce*', meaning both 'room' and 'play'): whilst pointing to her father, the film's equivalent of Lear, as the mad character in the story, Antonia's question and smooth demeanor seek to deflect attention from her impending folly, as if both hoping to ward it off and announcing it. Simultaneously, she points to Goneril and Regan's folly in the play, a folly that is a manifestation of cumulative frustrations. '*Qui est fou dans cette pièce?*' invites a reassessment of the locus and nature of folly in the play while subtly acknowledging a debt to Shakespeare.

The outcome centers not on death, but on transmission, as Vanina, the reluctant heiress, is faced with the burden of preserving a difficult legacy for the next generation. Her children's games on the beach in the closing long shots suggest an ongoing process of renewal and flux, leaving and returning. The visual motif and symbolic significance of the sea are extended in the surging musical theme composed by Stéphane Moucha. Towards the end of the play, it merges with diegetic piano-playing, as Vanina turns to Chopin to write the score of her own future, even as her father, finally reconciled with her, his eyes on her face as she plays on the stage below, collapses and dies from a heart attack. Not a word is spoken; the music provides the bonding: 'nothing' need be said. The final scene between father and daughter inverts that between Lear and Cordelia, with Vanina weeping over her father, and is closer in spirit to the reconciliation of Gloucester and Edgar: 'his flawed heart – / Alack, too weak the conflict to support – / 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, / Burst smilingly' (5.3.187–90).

The fundamental differences between *King Lear* and *Les Héritières* lie in 'performance space' and in a generic shift from tragedy to a melodrama which draws on different traditions. Dark moments are lightened by occasional comedic moments featuring Caponi, who acknowledges the metaphoric blindness of his relationship with his two sons. When he understands that Massimo has betrayed Barthélémy to the police, the camera closes in on his face as he says quietly, 'So, I'm the fool' ('*Alors c'est moi le bouffon*'), before turning away over the mountain, swaying – and not only owing to the wind sweeping across his hair and clothes. Like Antonia's '*Qui est fou dans cette pièce?*', Caponi's '*Alors c'est moi le bouffon*' draws attention to the displacement of some of the Fool's features onto Barberine, as we have seen, and onto Caponi, inviting us to return to Shakespeare's play and wonder who the Fool is, and where he is, after he seems to have left the stage.

Unlike *King Lear*, *Les Héritières* holds out hopes for the future through the birth and healing presence of a child – hopes for sons and daughters, for the Della Rocca family and Corsica. In the opening moments of the film, the sea is a choppy expanse that needs to be crossed to reach Corsica from Marseilles. In the final shots, the long, powerful rollers are charged with energy rather than danger; the sea is viewed from a beach on which children run, with mountains in the distance, around an open bay: these expanses contrast with the previous locations of interiors, narrow streets and abrupt mountains that closed up the horizon, in keeping with an atmosphere made claustrophobic by issues of lineage, barrenness, fear of change and rampant folly.

Les Héritières is not a tragedy sounding out unbearable depths of suffering, nor does it aim to be so. It can move and startle, but it avoids plunging viewers into a vortex of folly and the void of 'nothing' and 'never'. The reverberations of *King Lear* are toned down,

rather than contained, in the format of a television production, almost as if the director sensed that this marketing niche was not suited for such an intensely profound tragedy. As Stanley Wells has noted, 'the clear-eyed intensity of Shakespeare's tragic vision in *King Lear* has been too much for some audiences'.[31] Nonetheless, in the ways in which, through an interplay of proximity and otherness, this production addresses a period of change after a period of upheaval, probes collective and individual loss and holds out hopes of redemption, *Les Héritières* succeeds in bringing to French households some of that intensity that lies at the heart of *King Lear*.

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