

**Love and Re-Visit:
Adaptation from Shakespeare's *King Lear* to
Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres***

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Introduction – Adaptation As Re-Vision

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for [women] more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot understand ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our languages has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see – and therefore live – afresh” (Rich 18).

Adrienne Rich, poet, professor, and self-proclaimed feminist, speaks of “re-vision” as a necessity, an act of survival for women that allows for reflection and liberation from texts that dwell in socially outdated messages. In her description of “re-vision” there is a sense of passion and urgency that stems from a writer’s frustration with the same male-dominated narratives, a woman writer’s need to critique and rebrand the narratives we hold at the center of our literary identity. Rich is not alone in her need to re-visit and liberate old texts. Though the course of my research, I found that this same quotation appeared more than any other in discussions of Jane Smiley’s adaptation of *King Lear*, as most critics of Smiley’s work have come to recognize *A Thousand Acres* (ATA) as more than just a straight adaptation, but also as a critical narrative that investigates traditional readings of Shakespeare’s original. During *Shakespeare In Iceland*, a speech she delivered at the International Shakespeare Association World Congress in Los Angeles in April 1996, Smiley herself reflects upon her reasons for reworking one of Shakespeare’s most beloved tragedies, stating that her “intention in *A Thousand Acres* grew out of something less rational, a response to the play. [She] wanted to communicate the ways in which [she] found the conventional readings of *King Lear* frustrating and wrong” (*Iceland*, Smiley 160). *ATA* is not the work of rational thinking, as Smiley clearly states. In many ways, it is

personal and impassioned, stemming from a need to liberate the female perspective of the play that is so entrenched in patriarchal norms and create a radical critique aimed at reclamation. As another critic has noted, “For centuries women have been reading Shakespeare with a point of view related to their social position as women, and thereby offering a critical direction new in their own time and culture” Marianne Novy claims (*Re-Visions*, Novy 1), understanding that new readings of any outdated text are necessary to bring it into conversation with the present. A recent boom of twenty-first century women writers adapting Shakespeare reflects a need to “talk back aggressively to Shakespeare’s plays, to earlier interpretations of them, and to patriarchal and colonist attitudes that the plays have come to symbolize” (*Transformations*, Novy 1). A desire to imagine women as the subjects, not the objects, of their own tales, leads women writers to re-envision the plays, arguing directly with a writer who has become the cornerstone of western literature.

In the first chapter of her novel *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon theorizes the various purposes behind adaptation:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative *and* an interpretative act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work

(Hutcheon 8)

These are three distinct, but interrelated, purposes for adaptation that lead us to the conclusion that adaptation is ‘a derivation that is not derivative;’ while the work might be inspired by and reliant upon the original, it takes on its own meaning and purpose if it fulfills any of the above criteria. Writers who engage in adaptation desire a repetition of the original text as much as the departure from it; they feel the need to interact directly with a text, changing it

to fit a purpose. Smiley notes that “*A Thousand Acres* is [her] academic paper on *King Lear*, while in another sense, it is [her] production of the play (Smiley 159). She constructs the narrative in reaction to Shakespeare’s *Lear*, placing Goneril/Ginny at the center of the action in an effort to re-envision the various forms of “feminine silencing—motiveless villainy, public humiliation, sororal jealousy, redeemed duty, filial love, and death—that occur in the master’s text” (Alter 145). This need for “re-vision” adds a fourth prong to the three-part definition Hutcheon provides us: a critique of the original text, a desire to call into question the themes and conventions of the master’s text and reclaim the narratives that are found wanting. Adaptation becomes re-vision when there is an act of critique taking place through the interpretation. For women writers, this act often stems from a need to rewrite narratives that are out of step with our current political climate, especially narratives that surround strong female characters or provide some archetype for how women should appear in society; in effect, they use Shakespeare, and a critique of a writer who is arguably the ‘rock star’ of the English literary canon, to empower themselves. This is a work of direct engagement with another writer that does not take the original text as a universal truth, but rather attempts to separate outdated cultural codes from the text and reimagine any basic truths. In these new texts, contemporary writers are able to alter the contextual interpretation of the story, supporting the proposition that “readings [of texts] change as one’s generational and historical context changes” (Erickson 1).

Shakespeare’s works are adapted perhaps more than any other Elizabethan playwright, but the question cannot be “why Shakespeare.” As the poster child for the English literary cannon and seminal texts, Shakespeare has an unparalleled influence upon aspiring writers,

considering that all writers experience his work at some point in their educations. For many, Shakespeare represents the height of style and technique: a master to be emulated and exalted. For others, Shakespeare is a cultural icon, having contributed words to our everyday language and created narratives that are still relevant in our modern world. Shakespeare is a household name, whether one comes from a literary household or no. Writers are primarily readers, students of the literature that has come before them. Through the works of “the greats” we form an identity, informed by their successes and failures. Harold Bloom, in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), declares that great literature is the product of “major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death. Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves” (Bloom 5). While the idea of “the greats” might be a little contrived, stemming more from admiration than critique, Bloom speaks to the level of influence famous authors have over writers who learn from them and wish to emulate but wrestle with their ideas. It is too easy to sit back and allow famous texts to become “great” and “idealized,” but by critiquing the elements we struggle with, and appropriating the characters, plot lines, or themes we identify with, we can hope to discover something new in the familiar and reclaim the narratives for our modern era.

When it comes to Shakespeare, Smiley puts it best when she states that “every writer of English has a relationship to him, both direct and indirect. English cannot be written without Shakespeare, or, for that matter, read without Shakespeare” (Smiley 165). If the relation of woman writers to the past can be presented as a father-daughter issue (Novy 5), then Shakespeare easily fills the role of father figure for such writers, creating large shoes to fill. This relationship does not have to be a peaceful one: most familial relationships are not, since there

comes a time when the daughter must test the father, step out of his shadow and attempt to argue with the lessons she may not agree with; good writers, as Bloom states, will wrestle with their forefathers. For Smiley, *ATA* is an all out legal battle with Shakespeare: “As the lawyer for Goneril and Regan, I proposed a different narrative of their motives and actions that cast doubts on the case Mr. Shakespeare was making for his client, King Lear” (Smiley 172). In an ironic, or perhaps very aware, reference, Smiley wears Portia’s shoes (in *The Merchant of Venice*) filling a role Shakespeare allotted to a female character: the lawyer. While the fight between Lear and his daughters took place initially on the battlefield, Smiley brings the fight to the courtroom, literally in the course of her novel, and figuratively between herself and “Mr. Shakespeare.” *ATA* is the product of that struggle between father and daughter, the clash between a “modern woman and a renaissance man,” reflected in the characters of the novel and Smiley’s own dealings with the master’s text (Smiley 172). Caroline Cakebread, in her essay *Remembering King Lear in A Thousand Acres*, argues that “Smiley’s feminized version of Shakespeare’s play destabilizes his fixed position at the center of the Western literary canon as her novel becomes a testing ground for new perspectives on “history,” in which fathers and daughters – both literary and familial – are pitted against one another” (Cakebread 92). While I agree that the novel becomes a space for experimentation stemming from a critical approach to the original text, I do think that Shakespeare’s position at the center of Western literary canon is part of what makes Smiley’s re-vision so powerful: she is able to ground her approach to the patriarchal issues presented in the very stable characters and plot popularized by Shakespeare. Her novel is successful partly because of its relation to the original, for adaptation is always a derivation of the father’s (or mother’s) work. The rich source material provided by

Shakespeare's *Lear* allows Smiley the ability to base her characters in the familiar while arguing against traditional readings: giving the "evil" women a voice, updating culturally outdated, patriarchal institutions, and honoring Shakespeare's original with a re-vision that reclaims the female narrative.

By investigating the choices Smiley makes in "[rewriting] *Lear* to expose the problems of our dominant cultural tradition," we can probe the traditional readings of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and further understand one woman's attempt to give voice to the women of the play through contemporary issues (*Transformations*, Novy 6). As we've established, "Why Shakespeare?" is too easy a question for this issue; instead we will try to answer whether Smiley is successful in her re-vision of a seminal text. Given that *A Thousand Acres* is anchored in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, to what extent does intertextuality serve Smiley's intentions as an independent female writer while encouraging a new reading of *King Lear* that provides liberation from the patriarchal and out-of-date politics of the play?

Chapter I – From Stage to Page
Dramatic Form Replaced by Narrative Form or ‘Who Tells the Story?’

A woman’s story of mundane domestic life, told in a plain style, parodies a Shakespearian tragedy about kinship, pride, and death told in elevated and ceremonious blank verse befitting noble speakers. Smiley’s remarkable achievement in *A Thousand Acres* is to expose the previously invisible lines of affiliation between these two kinds of narrative and thus to disrupt both.

(Strehle 212)

The biggest deviation that *A Thousand Acres* makes from *King Lear* is in how the story is told. From play to novel, the characters and the plot remain more or less the same: Lear becomes Larry. His motherless daughters Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia reshape into, respectively, Ginny, Rose, and Caroline. Lear’s kingdom transforms into the family farm, a thousand acres of un-mortgaged Iowa land to be divided among the three daughters for the farm’s continual growth (to be worked and kept by Ginny’s husband Ty/Albany and Rose’s husband Pete/Cornwall, of course). While Ginny and Rose, the elder two, respect their father’s wishes to divide the farm, Caroline pauses for a moment too long and is cut out of the deal. In Des Moines, which might as well be France, Caroline serves out her exile as a lawyer, marrying Frank/France and excluding her family from the wedding as punishment for their behavior. The plot continues, as anyone familiar with *King Lear* would imagine, when Larry’s declining health causes problems within the family as questions concerning the legitimacy (and legality) of his actions arise. A war is waged between the elder sisters and their father, a legal battle leaving no family member unscathed. Smiley states that her “intention was to stick as closely to the plot as [she] could,” but she found herself “recoiling from the cruelties of Shakespeare’s twists and turns of plot” (*Iceland*, Smiley 171). In the moments where the plot doesn’t fit precisely, which increase as the novel progresses, Smiley is forced to deviate from expectation and weave her

own agenda into the plot, usually in an attempt to update the crueler judgments being placed upon the characters: she “could not allow [Shakespeare’s] universality, but instead, as a rhetorical mode, had to counter it with assertions of the universality of [her] vision” (Smiley 172). Her close revisiting of the plot is intended to reflect upon the basic differences and similarities in the story, a then vs. now approach to the politics of the tale, “repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity” (*Politics*, Hutcheon 185). While the plot remains recognizably connected, that closeness is intentional and vital to communicating Smiley’s criticism, for when differences do occur, they are hard to ignore and usually signal a core assertion of her vision.

One of the greatest deviations from *King Lear* is the departure from dramatic form in favor of narrative form. Basic differences between plays and novels help inform the changes Smiley made in order to transform *Lear*, “a Shakespearian tragedy about kinship, pride, and death told in elevated and ceremonious blank verse befitting noble speakers” into *ATA*, “a woman’s story of mundane domestic life” (Strehle 212). In *Lear*, “detached omniscience works to give the audience superior knowledge of both outer events and inner ambitions,” that mostly center around the title character, Lear (Strehle 212). While the play has no narrator, it is aptly named, for Lear is the center of most action that takes place on the stage, and is undoubtedly given the loudest voice with a total of 747 lines. “Theatrical representation creates causality, motivation, and character not through explicit or implied linearity, but primarily through dialogue [...which...] establishes who is central and who is peripheral in the stage action that shapes the story told” (Alter 146-147). Dialogue and action inform the audience, and Lear dominates both forms of communication. Shakespeare’s drama centers on Lear’s unraveling in

such a sympathetic way that the audience cannot help but care for the old man, despite the viewers' knowledge of the other plots and characters' desires. As Lear fights to regain some control of his life (and his land) he is forced to humble himself and reconsider his monarchical beliefs. The Lear we see on stage is afforded a certain amount of growth in his last days, and the traditional reading of the play asks the audience to accept that dying King Lear has learned his lesson and repented of his actions, as he embraces his "good" daughter Cordelia: "We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage/ When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down/ And ask of thee forgiveness" (5.2.9-11). While Lear might not resemble the traditional upstanding, moral protagonist, his ability to recognize his sins and ask for forgiveness is more valuable to an audience than impeccable morality. Lear is human, and the semi-omniscience the play affords the audience allows them to grapple alongside Lear, judging and forgiving as the action proceeds. Smiley asserts that, as the playwright, Shakespeare is "making [a case] for his client, King Lear," which forces her to plead Goneril's side (*Iceland*, Smiley 172); however, because the dramatic form privileges action over point of view, it is not always clear which case the playwright is arguing. Traditional readings of the play are based off of interpretation of Shakespeare's text, as there is no written proof of authorial intent, and a play's meaning is often left for the audience to deduce.

This same dramatic structure that privileges Lear is damning to the women of the play, as they receive less time on stage, less dialogue, and are confined by the traditions of the day. Following the "traditional tendency in Western literature to split the image of woman into devil and angel, Eve and Mary," a line is drawn between Cordelia and her sisters (*Argument*, Novy 153). While Cordelia becomes something of a savior figure, Goneril and Regan are condemned

to be rather unimaginative villains, though some might argue that Cordelia's withholding of love causes the audience to have a complex response to her. Very few of their lines hint at source of motivation for their mistreatment of their father beyond "cruelty, lust, or ambition, characteristics of the archetypal fantasy image of the woman as enemy" (Novy, 153). The text takes a much more contained approach to the women, not allowing them the power to break stereotype or prove themselves to have motivations beyond the norm: how could it when their line counts pale in comparison to their father's and a play's information is contained in the dialogue? Regan speaks 187 lines, Goneril 181, and Cordelia only 115 (approximately 4 percent of the total – living up to her "love and be silent" credo (1.1.57)). While we will discuss the dichotomy in the female identity in a later section, as well as the silencing of the women, what is so interesting here is that Smiley takes an almost entirely opposite approach to Shakespeare's text by giving the power of voice to Ginny and reclaiming the woman's narrative, allowing her to defend and plead her case while aligning the reader alongside her. This switch of perspective re-enforces the fact that the simplistic moral labels traditional readings of the play rely upon – good and bad, the reformed father – are problematic¹.

The dramatic text of *King Lear* allows the audience to experience the interior and exterior action of the play by "[privileging] action over point of view", but in *ATA* Smiley deliberately utilizes realistic narrative that "calls into question the validity of appearance, always [proposing] a difference between the public perception of events and their actual meaning" (Smiley, 172), beginning with a description of the soil as an example of the interior not matching the exterior. There is not as much room for readers to create their own

¹ It is important to note that these "traditional" readings of Shakespeare's text are highly contested and challenged by scholars.

interpretation of the text or the characters' actions because the world Smiley creates surrounds one character, Ginny, and utilizes the narrative form, rather than the dramatic, which de-emphasizes the dialogue and "gives more direct access to the inner life, allow[ing] the writer to reveal the disjuncture between what is felt and what appears" (Smiley 162). This type of storytelling gives the writer more agency and the power to speak through her chosen narrator. While *Lear* depends upon audience interpretations of a text whose author is no longer around to argue otherwise, *ATA* speaks for its author, allowing her to critique and challenge the original through Ginny's reactions and the changes made to the plot in the adaptation.

The text of the novel creates a world that is highly, and unapologetically, subjective, defined by Ginny (and Smiley's) point-of-view. It is a private world placed squarely in the domestic realm that is written "largely about and for women, often by women writers" (Strehle, 211). Using first-person narration, the narrative binds the reader to Ginny (Goneril) and her perception of the world, which, upon first view is rather straightforward and fact-based, if slightly biased at times:

At sixty miles per hour, you could pass our farm in a minute on County Road 686, which ran due north into the T-intersection at Cabot Street Road [...] The T intersection of CR 686 perched on a little rise, a rise nearly imperceptible as the bump in the center of an inexpensive plate. From that bump, the earth was unquestionably flat, the sky unquestionably domed, and it seemed to me when I was a child in school, learning about Columbus, that in spite of what my teacher said, ancient cultures might have been on to something. No globe or map fully convinced me that Zebulon County was not the center of the universe.

(*ATA*, Smiley 3)

Within the first few sentences we understand who Ginny is and where she comes from, but little else beyond that, unless we can extrapolate societal meaning behind her description of the Cook farm and Zebulon County. Ginny is conscious of the facts, but still holds on to the

child-like image that her home is the “center of the universe.” She begins by situating her audience on the map, describing the roadways that intersect near their home, an entirely logical approach to setting the scene, if a somewhat dull one. Her next mode of description, however, noting the “unquestionably flat [earth]” and “unquestionably domed [sky],” hint at her inability to be entirely objective, as her perception of the world stems from a childhood concept that what she sees *is* reality, no matter what modern science might say. This ability to hold on to common knowledge – the opinions of the people, not the scholars – is echoed by the community, who rely upon shared ideals and “facts.” This is far from the “detached omniscience” of *King Lear*, which allows the audience to extrapolate their own meanings from action and dialogue. Within the world created by the first-person narrative, Ginny is the figure whose point of view controls our access to the plot, other characters’ dialogue, motivation, characteristics, etc. She begins the novel with very little narrative style to speak of, primarily fixing our location in the mundane and domestic world of Zebulon County and the Cook Farm. She is purposefully designed by Smiley to be “cautious, judicious, ambivalent [and] straightforward” so that, at least at the start, the reader feels she is a reliable voice for the narrative (*Iceland*, Smiley 172). But there is room to shake that sense of security. It is through Ginny’s eyes that we see the events that occur in Zebulon County and on the Cook family farm, but her willful forgetfulness, which informs and focuses our response, is shattered throughout the course of the novel as she is forced to face the hard details of her upbringing, highlighting her inability to hold an opinion that is not informed by another’s, and calling into question her reliability as a narrator. While this characterization of Ginny is important to allow the “reconceived text to accomplish what Shakespeare seems to elide, evade, or suppress, the

structural price can be high, for it also means that uncertainty can become unsettling inconsistency, or, worse, confusion, thereby transforming readerly belief into skepticism” (Alter 148). Smiley attempts to point to the role parenting plays in the formation of character by pushing the text further than *Lear* does and writing the daughter’s abuse directly into the narrative. In order for character history to come to light naturally, and subtly inform character, Ginny is ignorant of this fact until well into the novel. Her revelation is simultaneously heartbreaking and confusing for the reader, as we are unsure whether or not to believe such monstrosities actually took place when our narrator is so unreliable and willfully ignorant. Instead of basing all sense of truth on action, we are forced to preference opinion, and the narrative is constructed to keep readers uncomfortably searching for a sense of stability, of truth, in a haze of misremembered subjectivity. This sense of grappling for truth is one way that Smiley structures her novel to be reminiscent of experiencing a play; while we are told we can trust Ginny’s narration, we are still left to create our own interpretation of the novel, or rely upon the author’s intent.

Smiley’s choice to ground the novel in Ginny’s perspective is far from simple; it is instead highly political: “in choosing Ginny as her narrator, Smiley immediately signals her intention of rehabilitating the marginalized, stigmatized sisters of Shakespeare’s play; against the apparently objective mode of direct dramatization she sets the apparently subjective mode of the first-person narrative” (Brauner 654-655). While the action and dialogue of Shakespeare’s play preferences the masculine King Lear, the point-of-view subjective narrative aligns the audience with the feminine Goneril. Smiley uses the power of the novel to re-tell a story in the domestic realm that is usually experienced in performance or under the influence

of high Elizabethan language. Moving the story away from action and towards description changes the way the plot is presented and the characters are perceived by allowing the author to control who receives the audience's attention (and, she hopes, its allegiance) and to manipulate the reader's sense of stability.

Chapter II - The Father **Translating Monarchal Patriarchy to Modern America**

The jacket copy explicitly suggests that the novel is a translation of Shakespeare's play to an American farm--"The forces that bound Lear and his daughters reverberate beneath the surface"--and that it is, but it is also a devastating critique of the Lear figure, the patriarchy that maintains his domination and other aspects of the power structure in the contemporary United States [...] with the conversion of Shakespeare's tragic hero into Larry Cook, a secretly incestuous child beater, Smiley attacks the dominant assumptions in Anglo-American cultural tradition as drastically as does any postcolonial writer.

(Engaging, Novy 179)

The kingdom becomes a farm but the king still reigns supreme. In *A Thousand Acres*, Larry Cook runs his farm and his family with the unparalleled power usually reserved for royalty. The farm, a thousand acres of unmortgaged land, is owned outright by the family, and at the start of the novel, Larry is still in full control of his land and tends to it, along with the help of his two sons-in-law, Ty (Ginny's husband) and Pete (Rose's husband). The construction of the society surrounding Zebulon county is rather simple: the men provide financially, the women care for the men and children. This is a culture that keeps the women financially and emotionally dependent upon the men, their identities wrapped up in their husband's occupations and reputations. Women are defined as mother, wife, or daughter, making Caroline, an unwed lawyer, far from the norm. For Ginny and Rose, their value as women is determined by their ability to tend to the house while remaining silent and subordinate to the men who run the farm. The women bend to their father's perception of an "acceptable way of life" (Smiley 45). Ginny defines this as the farmer's "catechism" (a series of fixed questions, answers, or precepts used for instruction, often associated with the Christian religion):

We might as well have a catechism:
What is a farmer?
A farmer is a man who feeds the world.

What is a farmer's first duty?

To grow more food.

What is a farmer's second duty?

To buy more land.

What are the signs of a good farm?

Clean fields, neatly painted buildings, breakfast at six, no debts, no standing water.

How will you know a good farmer when you meet him?

He will not ask you for any favors.

(Smiley 45)

What is most noticeable about this call and response is how stuck in the masculine it is: "a farmer is a man." A woman's role in this world is only defined by her relation to the man, seen little mentions of "breakfast at six" or the fact that a farmer needs support to "feed the world." There is pride in this society, as the men are defined by their ability to grow and produce, to have an impact upon the world. This pride leads to expectations that must be obeyed, as this is a judgmental community, self-policing in an attempt to encourage conformity:

Most issues on a farm return to the issue of keeping up appearances. Farmers extrapolate quickly from the farm to the farmer. A farmer looks like himself, when he goes to the cafe, but he also looks like his farm, which everyone has passed on the way into town. What his farm looks like boils down to questions of character. Farmers are quick to cite the weather, their luck, the turning tides of prices and government regulations, but among themselves these excuses fall away. A good farmer (a savvy manager, someone with talent for animals and machines, a man willing to work all the time who's raised his children to work the same way) will have a good farm.

(Smiley 199)

In such a tight knit community appearance is everything, and when the Cook family begins to crumble from within as battle lines are drawn and Larry's health fails, Ginny and her remaining family are forced to maintain the appearance of "good farming" in order to receive the loan they need to expand their business and maintain their relationship with the community. When news spreads of Larry's falling out with his daughters, they are naturally blamed for the argument, as Larry is known to be a good farmer, and therefore a good man. What he does on

his own farm is his own business, so long as publically all appearances are met. While there is a sense of “all hands on deck” for the farm life, it is primarily controlled by the men, as they are the keepers of their reputation and their land. This is a society that privileges the male, much like Lear’s kingdom.

King Lear is a man’s play. Based off of the legend of Leir of Britain, a mythological pre-Roman Celtic king (Shakespeare was an adaptor too), the play centers around Lear’s ill treatment at the hands of his “wicked” daughters and his descent into madness following the loss of his title. Like Larry, Lear is the King, responsible for the main dilemma of the play, when he separates his land between his two treacherous daughters, exiling his honest child for her inability to flatter him. That is one reading of the play, but it is probably the most widely accepted, drenched in patriarchal concepts of society and women. One of the elements of adaptation Smiley pulls off so seamlessly is her transformation of a monarchical society into a modern environment that is just as entrenched in male dominated culture. Out of the eighteen speaking roles in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, three are women, Lear’s three daughters, who are defined by their relation to their father. While the women inherit the land from their ailing father, they are supported, and sometimes controlled, by their husbands, who Lear includes in the negotiations: “Our son of Cornwall, / and you, our no less loving son of Albany, / we have this hour a constant will to publish/ our daughters’ several dowers, that future strife/ be prevented now (1.1.41-45). Lear is unquestioned by all of his courtiers, save Kent, who is banished from England after speaking out against Lear’s treatment of Cordelia, and relies upon the cooperation of the individuals under his control, who are responsible for enacting their designated roles, much like the farmer needs the men and women living on his land to pull their

weight. The king, as the audience would expect, has complete control, until he willingly relinquishes his land into his daughter's hands.

Larry follows in his archetype's footsteps, separating his land between his three daughters, and then cutting Caroline out of the deal when she questions his actions. He is just as in control as Lear from the beginning, having kept a tight grip on his daughter's development, turning Ginny into the perfect wife/daughter at the beginning of the novel and then forcing her to take on the role of mother/daughter when his health begins to fail him. Larry is larger than life to his daughters since mother "died before she could present him to [them] as only a man, with habits and quirks and preferences, before she could diminish him in [their] eyes enough for [them] to understand him" (Smiley 20). Larry is considered a "good farmer" and therefore it is assumed by the male dominated community that he is a good man and a good father. As with King Lear, there is no one to question his actions, besides his daughters, who are too scared (Ginny), too worn down (Rose), or too separated (Caroline) to have much of an influence, or the husbands, who owe their livelihoods and homes to the patriarch. He has an unprecedented amount of power on the farm, particularly without the girls' mother around to humanize him for them in their youth.

In order to retain control over his children, Larry turned to beating and raping Rose and Ginny at a young age, a fact Ginny has repressed. Without a mother in the house, there is no way Ginny or Rose could have stood up to their domineering father, particularly in a culture where women are considered the property of their men, reflecting directly upon their husbands or fathers. They are part of the farm, and therefore fully under Larry's control. Larry's abuse of the girls causes Ginny to remain rather child-like in her respect and awe of him until the

memories resurface and she begins to recognize the scars of her childhood. In one episode, Ginny arrives to cook breakfast at her father's house (as she does every morning) and realizes she's forgotten the eggs, which causes her to reflect upon that decision:

It was my choice to keep him waiting or to fail to give him eggs. His gaze was flat, brassily reflective. Not only wasn't he going to help me decide, my decision was a test. I could push past him, give him toast and cereal and bacon, a breakfast without a center of gravity, or I could run home and get the eggs [...] I smiled foolishly, said I would be right back, and ran out the door and back down the road. The whole way I was conscious of my body--graceless and hurrying, unfit, panting, ridiculous in its very femininity. It seemed like my father could just look out of his big front window and see me naked, chest heaving, breasts, thighs, and buttocks jangling, dignity irretrievable. Later [...] what I marveled at was that I hadn't just gone across the road and gotten some eggs from Rose, that he had given me the test, and I had taken it.

(Smiley 115)

This moment takes place before any discussion of abuse, but this idea of "testing" the women is reminiscent of Lear's treatment of his daughters when he begins demanding unrealistic living arrangements following his distribution of land. Goneril says: "By day and night he wrongs me. Every hour/He flashes into one gross crime or another/that sets us at odds. I'll not endure it. /His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us/on every trifle (1.3.3-7). Goneril may not endure it, but Ginny does, running back and forth from her house to her father's in order to bring him the "right" breakfast. She falls into his test, and passes, but at what expense? She feels childish and overtly, negatively, feminine in the process. Instead of understanding her father's control over her, she considers it her fault for disappointing him. When Rose's revelation of abuse comes to light later on, "it becomes apparent that Ginny's subservience to her father [...] is not just analogous to, but a consequence of, being physically mastered by him. Ginny's acute self-consciousness as she runs to retrieve the eggs, her feelings of vulnerability, her sense of humiliation, are prompted not just by the ignominy of her surrender, but by the

associations it has with earlier surrenders" (Brauner 661). By expanding Larry's control of his daughter beyond the fatherly, turning Ginny and Rose into sexual partners and therefore gaining some control over their agency, Smiley extends the power of a farmer to reflect the power of a king. Larry is, for all intents and purposes, a king to his daughters and his sons-in-law, and Ginny is powerless to defend herself against her father until his mental decline causes her to take on a maternal role and leave behind the child-like docility she has retained from her blocking of troubling memories.

Lear's mental decline is echoed in Larry's fall from grace. Both men do not take well to being at the mercy of their daughters, feeling some need to maintain their masculinity now that they are no longer directly responsible for their "kingdoms." For Lear, this comes in the form of petty arguments surrounding living arrangements and annoying habits meant to grate on his daughters, and for Larry this turns into a withdrawal from society, as he allows himself to drink more and entertain irrational feelings of inadequacy and subjugation. For Larry, and for Lear, retirement is far from graceful, as each man struggles with his own fall from power. When Lear complains to his fool about how he is treated by his now powerful daughters the fool remarks that the transfer of power occurred "[...] e'er since thou mad'st thy/ daughters thy mothers. For when thou gav'st them/ the rod, and put'st down thine own breeches" (1.4.176-178). Age becomes a regression into infancy for both men, especially once they give up the power that has so defined their status in their worlds. Larry perceives his fall from power in a similar way, lashing out when Ginny and Rose begin to worry about his drinking and driving: "I bust my butt working all my life and I make a good place for you and your husband to live on, with a nice house and good income, hard times or good times, and you think I should be stopping all the

time and wondering about your, what did you call it, your 'point of view'? [...] You know, my girl, I never talked to my father like this. It wasn't up to me to judge him, or criticize his ways (Smiley 175). Lear is emasculated by his return to dependency, as he goes from being a king, able to do whatever he wants without question, to having to ask his daughter's permission. The fool compares Lear's new lot in life to having his trousers pulled off, referring either to the changing of a diaper or the public humiliation of having one's genitalia exposed. Larry does not appreciate being watched or questioned. While the women have always cared for him by cleaning and cooking, the arrangement was comfortable and "right" as long as they remained within their feminine duties and didn't question his actions; so long as they remained his "girls" and didn't attempt to question his actions as women. The minute Ginny expresses concern, following Larry's crashing of car while drunk driving, his poor behavior over retiring turns into full-out rage, and the feeling that he has regressed in the world, allowing his daughters to become his mothers.

Thrown from his daughters care, Lear begins to lose his sanity as he is forced to fend for himself, battling against the elements of the storm:

Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to't? But I will punish home.
No, I will weep no more. In such a night
To shut me out! Pour on, I will endure.

(3.4.15-18)

For Lear, madness and clarity are almost intertwined: as the storm rages Lear understands the mistake he has made, finally recognizing the lies his daughters told in order to gain control of the kingdom. Between insanity, there is sanity, as he speaks of betrayal and recognizes the need to persevere through the storm in order to survive the night, just as his citizenry must

push through his daughters' coming reign. In a similar scene, Larry begins to lose control over his calm, screaming insults at his daughters before running off into the stormy night. His banishment is self-inflicted, unlike Lear's, and makes the character much less sympathetic, particularly given his cruel treatment of Ginny and Rose before his departure. This scene follows the moment in the car by a couple of days, where he yells at Ginny for questioning his actions, but unlike Lear, with whom the audience is asked to commiserate, Larry's attacking Ginny does nothing to improve our impression of this violent and surly man. His screaming is seemingly unprovoked and uncalled for, a reaction to his daughter's motherly care of him:

He leaned his face toward mine. "You don't have to drive me around any more, or cook the goddamned breakfast or clean the goddamned house." His voice modulated into a scream. "Or tell me what I can do and what I can't do. You barren whore!" [...] Rose said, "This is beyond ridiculous. Daddy, you can't mean those things. This has got to be senility talking, or Alzheimer's or something."

(Smiley 181)

While Larry might feel, as Lear does, that he has found some sort of clarity amidst the storm, he comes off as senile and aggressive. The readers, alongside the women, begin to worry that he's losing his mind. He banishes himself, running off into the night to seek refuge at a house owned by Harold (a fellow farmer and the Gloucester equivalent). Harold, representing the community, stops by Ginny's house the next day to question the girls' treatment of their father, believing everything Larry tells him. Of course, because the story is related to us through Ginny's perspective, we can't be sure of whether some details were left out of her retelling of events or whether her account is accurate. But, if Ginny is to be believed, Larry begins to lose his mind when his power slips from his fingers. Some men don't do too well with retirement. The culmination of Larry's dive into madness occurs in the courtroom, where he begins to believe that Caroline is dead, killed by her sisters. While Rose believes it's all an act, this is the

last we witness of Larry, since he dies soon after. He is so fully convinced that Caroline is dead, that his reality is altered, and he begins to jumble the details of his daughters' lives together, pulling elements from one to suit the other. This is also the moment he loses the farm, for good. The man's mental decline is entirely connected to his ownership and control of his land and people. His descent into madness, while similar thematically to Lear's is characterized very differently, however, by the very nature of the text that describes it:

Because Lear's preeminence in the hierarchies of institutional and cultural power, including, most critically, his domination over language, invests his madness with a kind of cosmic destructive grandeur, its roots are never clearly articulated nor do they need to be. They remain unspoken, mysterious perhaps, to be teased from the level of subtextual discourse and subject of the generic mutability of performance. Larry Cook's fictively reconfigured decay, unfolding within the explicatory constraints of the novel form, requires the definition of illness; his progressive immobility; the arbitrary petulance transformed into nasty public tantrums; the decline into childishness. The retreat from language must be caused, whether it be Alzheimer's disease, arteriosclerosis, environmental poisoning, patriarchy, or playacting. For if reasons can be assigned, then Cook's place within the narrative, not to say his daughter's lives, can be contained and domesticated.

(Alter 153-154)

The illness, the madness, of the father creates a clear distinction between Larry and Lear. Larry is just a man, confined by the natural world and our understanding of him resides in his daughter's subjectivity. As for Lear, he has a certain cultural power and "larger than life" quality that makes him so engaging and remarkable. Lear is the center of his world, even when he loses control of the narrative and falls into an unidentified madness. Larry's illness makes him even more human, more unlikable and cruel, whereas Lear's madness endears him to the audience as it allows for him to understand himself, and his position in the world, more clearly. Larry's illness is mundane, Lear's madness extraordinary.

Chapter III - The Women
Re-Characterizing the Women of *Lear*

In *Lear*, the daughters have no proper stories of their own, little more than a sketchy-fairy tale identity, no memories of their mother, no past and no future. All of the focus is on the king, whose regal folly bridges domestic and national realms, so that he loses kin and kingdom together in an outcome whose tragedy extends from him to the nation. In *A Thousand Acres*, the focus shifts to the daughters' struggle against their father's destructive legacy. Their efforts to remember and understand their mother's position in the family system occupy an important place in the novel, as do their relations to their community and children. Their domestic situations and private decisions take on national significance. One of the novel's most subversive positions is that daughters' lives can be as fitting and significant as fathers' activities to measure the ill winds blowing through an entire kingdom.

(Strehle 213-214)

The women of *King Lear* "become a binary equation" (Kordecki & Koskinen 11) with Cordelia on one side and her sisters on the other. Because so much of the plot is dominated by the male characters—with Lear, Kent and the Fool filling the A-plot while Gloucester, Edmund, and Edgar fill the B-plot—the women are only given stage time when they are relevant to Lear's journey, appearing as villains, stripping the masculine power from Lear, or the savior, arriving at the right time to save the father. Critics have often fallen into the time honored trap of exalting Cordelia as a "good woman" and berating her sisters as "bad women," condemning the women of the play to stereotypes: "The contrast between Goneril and Regan, on the one hand, and Cordelia, on the other owes something to the traditional tendency in Western Literature to split the image of woman into devil and angel, Eve and Mary" (*Argument*, Novy 153). In part because of their limited stage time, and contained dialogue, the daughters are defined by their relationship with their father, unable to voice desires or characteristics that do not fit within the scope of the play.

Cordelia/Caroline

The text encourages this division from the start by placing the women in direct competition for their father's love and characterizing Cordelia as the only daughter capable of honesty, "What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent" (1.1.62). Cordelia even encourages this division in her own speech, pointing to the inaccuracies in her sister's speeches:

You have begot me, bred me, and loved me.
I return those duties back as are right fit--
Obey you, love you, and most honor you.
Why have my sisters' husbands if they say they love you all?

(1.1.96-100)

From Act 1, Sc 1, Cordelia is set apart from her sisters. She has the first aside of the play, aligning her within the audience through her ability to direct her inner thoughts to the room and express the reasoning behind her words, while the other sisters are confined by the roles they play in court, expected to fulfill their daughterly duties and speak in a way that pleases their father, without the aid of an aside to express how they truly feel. Cordelia's difficulty with language, her inability to express herself according to traditional patriarchal expectations of women, make the audience imagine that she has much more love for Lear than she has words to express herself with. Her refusal to engage in hyperbolic, feminine expression, but rather to show her love to her father through respect and silence pales in comparison to her sisters' overexpressed performance of love. Cordelia condemns her sisters as she leaves for France: "To your professed bosoms I commit him/but yet, alas, stood I within his grace/I would prefer him to a better place" (1.2.271-273). Her use of the word "professed" casts doubts upon the truth of her sisters' claims and, as she has endeared herself to the audience, Cordelia actually has sway over our opinions. She exits the plot, banished to France, until she is able to enter again as

a savior figure, back to defend her father's honor against her wicked sisters and Edmund. Her distance from Lear's fall excuses her from any contribution to his madness, and her return is almost savior like as her father expresses his need to "kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness" (5.3.10) and her touch is healing for her father: "O my dear father, restoration hang/ thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss/ repair those violent harms that my two sisters have in they reverence made" (4.6.23-26). Shakespeare's presentation is sympathetic to, if not enamored with, Cordelia as the play suggests that she is the only woman who attempts to maintain her integrity in a patriarchal world. Her banishment at Lear's hands is characterized as unjust and rash, his speech wild, as he disowns her on the spot for speaking some truth, when moments before he was ready to give her the best portion of land: "Here I disclaim all my paternal care/ Propinquity, and property of blood/ And as a stranger to my heart and me/ Hold thee from this for ever" (1.1.113-116). Lear's judgment of Cordelia is not spoken as a rational king, but rather an aging, brokenhearted father, who expected more from his favorite child. Kent, arguably our moral center for the play, condemns Lear's actions and remains loyal to Cordelia throughout.

Caroline, Smiley's interpretation of Cordelia, is a clever departure from this idealization of Cordelia as saint and "good" woman, but perhaps this is in part because of our changed viewpoint; we must remember the subjectivity that comes with having Ginny as our narrator. Caroline is a lawyer, the only Cook daughter to leave the farm and pursue a different lifestyle, always described in terms of her businesslike "take-me-seriously-or-I'll-sue-you demeanor" (ATA, Smiley 13). Raised primarily by her sisters, Caroline is given a childhood that isn't confined to the farm, and her aspirations grow beyond it as she learns to manipulate the rules of the

patriarchy in order to work within and around them, expressing from an early age her desire to overcome the boundaries placed upon her gender: "I remember when she was all of about five years old [...] she said right out, 'When I grow up, I'm not going to be a farmwife.' So Mommy laughed and asked her what she was going to be, and she said, "A farmer"" (Smiley 61). She is able to overcome the system because she is shielded from the anger, incest, and suppression of identity that has been levied upon her sisters. While Larry is able to control his elder daughters to a certain extent, in part because of his abuse of them, Caroline notes that he "looks as familiar as a father should look, no more, no less" (362); she loves him "according to [her] bond, no more nor less" (*Lear* 1.1.93). Caroline is assertive and self-controlled, and is quick to both condemn and aid her father. Her distance from the plot is similar to Cordelia's exile, as Caroline spends the majority of the novel in Des Moines after her banishment early in the text, and returns towards the end as her father's defender in court.

Smiley's re-vision of the text stems from a desire to "communicate the ways in which [she] found the conventional readings of *King Lear* frustrating and wrong" and she is very blunt about her dislike of Cordelia, claiming that "she seemed ungenerous and cold, a stickler for the truth at the beginning, a stickler for form at the end" (*Iceland*, Smiley 160-161). Critics who have praised Cordelia's adherence to truth and supported her positioning as the "good" sister, have fallen into the same violent trap as those who consider Goneril/Regan the "evil" sisters have: "The idealization of Cordelia is but the obverse of the demonization of Goneril and Regan and should be viewed with suspicion as the symptom of, rather than an antidote to, the play's underlying misogyny (Rudnytsky, 301). Cordelia becomes Lear's savior by fulfilling the role of invader, leading the French army against the British in order to reclaim the kingdom from its

“rightful” heirs. She inhabits the role of fantasy wife/daughter, becoming the sacrifice of the play in order to complete Lear’s moral journey. The play’s positive treatment of her is rooted in misogynistic concepts of what woman and daughter “should” be, whereas the play treats Regan and Goneril’s feminine characteristics as morally repugnant, a perspective that offends: “There were women, and the play seemed to be condemning them morally for the exact ways in which they expressed womanhood that I recognized” (*Iceland*, Smiley 161). Caroline is often more masculine than feminine, shucking off the responsibilities of “daughterhood” (as defined by the farming community) until they suit her need. Her treatment at her father’s hands following the division of property is no less jarring, since Larry reacts irrationally, but because the reader is not aligned with Caroline, we only have Ginny’s perspective on why Caroline is weary of splitting the property: “Caroline would have said, if she’d dared, that she didn’t want to live on the farm, that she was trained as a lawyer and was marrying another lawyer, but that was a sore subject” (*ATA*, Smiley 20). Because we are forced to understand the world of the novel through Ginny’s eyes, our perception of Caroline’s refusal of her father’s proposal is very different than in the play. Here it stems from a more selfish and personal desire to escape the farm and an inability to conform to the farming community’s patriarchal concept of woman. The nonconformity is similar to the original text, but it is presented in a very different light, as the reader is already aware that Caroline has experienced a very different life on the farm than her sisters, shielded from her father and given the agency that they never had. She uses her favored place as the youngest daughter to “speak as a woman rather than a daughter” (21), which is something that Rose and Ginny are incapable of. Women, in this world, can stand up for themselves, while daughters are considered the father’s property. Caroline is connected to

her womanhood in a way that was stolen from Rose and Ginny by their father; she is in control of her own mind and her own body, working within the patriarchy but remaining innocent of the horrors it has inflicted upon her sisters. When she returns at the end of the novel to “save” her ailing father from her “evil” sisters, she is cold and calculating, siding with her father over her sisters in court and firmly refusing to mend her relationship with her sisters. Following Larry and Rose’s deaths, when Ginny attempts to discuss her abuse with Caroline, Caroline refuses to listen:

‘I think things generally are what they seem to be! I think that people are basically good, and sorry to make mistakes, and ready to make amends! Look at Daddy! He knew he’d treated me unfairly, but we really felt love for each other. He made amends. We got really close at the end [...] You have a thing against Daddy. It’s just greed or something.’ She abruptly looked me in the face. ‘I realize that some people are just evil.’ For a second I thought she was referring to Daddy. Then I realized she was referring to me. But I was unmoved. There was not even the usual inner clang of encountering dislike. This was Caroline. Truly we were beyond like and dislike by now.

(Smiley 362-363)

Despite the journey that the reader has taken alongside Ginny, Caroline remains almost unchanged. She is the same woman we met during the opening scene, more concerned with her perception of the world than any greater “truth”. She is cold towards her remaining family members, choosing to side with her dead father over her living sisters. This passage is almost heartbreaking for the reader, because Caroline falls into the same trap that traditional readings of *Lear* do, willingly and purposefully characterizing people as “good” or “bad,” and condemning her sisters for treatment of her father. While it is important to remember that this view of Caroline is told entirely through Ginny’s eyes, veiled by bias and abuse, Smiley provides us with a reading of Cordelia that is more complicated than “good” sister stereotype, full of

characteristics that make her a fleshed out woman, capable of her own prejudices and violence towards her sisters.

Goneril/Ginny & Regan/Rose

While the clumping together of Goneril and Regan is problematic considering the two characters have distinctive actions and speeches, the differences between the two have rarely been explored and, for the purposes of continuing a critique the “good” sister or “bad” sister dichotomy, it makes sense to continue combing the two in our analysis. At the start of the play, when Lear demands that his daughters quantify their love, Regan and Goneril behave as women who are attempting to survive and thrive within a social order dominated by men. Goneril, as the first woman to speak, immediately becomes suspect, in our minds however, as she uses her words to please and placate her father rather than speak any assumed truth: “Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter [...]” (1.1.55). And yet, despite this claim, she then goes on to speak of her love for her father for six more lines, using words to define her love when her claim refutes otherwise. Regan, the second eldest daughter, continues in a vein similar to her sister’s, speaking of her love in terms greater than her sister’s description while utilizing the expected language of opulence and extremes. While the sisters give into Lear’s demand of them in the beginning of the play, utilizing the men’s language and fulfilling the expected feminine position, once Lear has parted with his power, the daughters begin to deny his requests:

Goneril and Regan deny Lear the extraordinary living conditions he peremptorily demands in the subsequent scenes, just as Cordelia denies him the extraordinary rhetoric he peremptorily demands in the beginning. Logically we cannot have it both ways--we cannot condemn Goneril for her formal, conciliatory first speech and then

condemn her for her moderated, but Cordelia-like resistance to Lear soon after. If we do, we fall into something akin to Lear's own irrationality.

(Kordecki & Koskinen 8)

Because Cordelia and the men of the play already inform the audience, that Goneril and Regan are "evil" characters, it is too easy to accept them in that light. Lear's unjust, often misogynistic, indictment of his elder daughters is often chalked up to madness, while any move Goneril and Regan make against their father adds to their presumed guilt. As the play continues, the two older women begin to fulfill their roles as "evil" daughters, stripping Lear of his powers and demands and partnering with Edmund to control the realm. Lear's language surrounding his daughters turns to "wicked creatures" (2.2.430), and in his denunciation of Goneril in 1.4 Lear demonizes her with epithets like "detested kite" (1.4.255). We do not question Lear's intense hatred of his daughters—and women in general, it seems—because it fits in with the patriarchal society supported by the play, where issues within the text of the drama itself become inseparable from the "nature" of woman, as Lear's, and the other male characters' perceptions, become synonymous with truth. Any sympathy the audience may have for Goneril and Regan is destroyed when they send their aging father into the rain at the end of Act 2 and obliterated when Regan and her husband gouge out Gloucester's eyes in Act 3. Because the plot centers on the men, and the audience's sympathies align with Lear and Gloucester, these are acts that are seemingly unforgivable, damning the women as "evil" villains:

Goneril and Regan are much less psychologically complex than most Shakespearean characters of comparable importance. Few of their lines carry hints of motivations other than cruelty, lust, or ambition, characteristics of the archetypal fantasy image of the woman as enemy. Shakespeare gives them no humanizing scruples like those provoked by Lady Macbeth's memory of her father. He does not allow them to point out wrongs done to them in the past as eloquently as Shylock does, or to question the fairness of their society's distribution of power as articulately as Edmund.

(*Argument*, Novy 153)

Ambition and greed are the words commonly used to describe these characters, who dare to place themselves in control of Britain and replace the male rule. While they do rise to power, their mutual sexual desire for Edmond destroys their partnership and eventually leads to their deaths:

At the end of the drama, only men are left standing, their future uncertain and the play's lessons unlearned. But an audience need not be so unchanged. If the fate of Goneril and Regan is not assumed as just, the play concludes with a kingdom of barren women, its only feminine model that of the idealized and now-sacrificed Cordelia.

(Kordecki & Koskinen 9-10)

Goneril and Regan must die because they are examples of what women should not be within this patriarchal realm. While they work within the boundaries of their gender at the start, a hunger for power causes them to act "unnaturally" for women. Goneril's barren womb goes against the very "nature" of woman, leaving her incapable of surviving the play, since a kingdom is nothing without a legitimate line of heirs, something she is incapable of providing. Her barrenness takes away part of her womanhood, causing her to harden against her father and crave power over family, or so the text and Lear would have the audience assume. Cordelia, the image of perfect wife/daughter is sacrificed, while the treacherous mother/daughters, who are incapable of providing for the realm and for their father/son must be slaughtered. Cordelia is able to work within the bounds of patriarchy to find some truth, while the sisters engage in feminine ways of rebelling against the social order and must be punished.

Ginny, Smiley's rendition of Goneril, is the perfect mother/daughter at the start of the novel. Her entire world is defined by Zebulon County and her relationships with her father, sisters, or husband; she "is the pure product of her father's upbringing and values. She is

obedient, quiet, clean, self-deprecating, careful of appearances, ashamed of her body, unable to take pleasure [...] She is much afraid, particularly of her father. She is defined by what she does not know, which includes both past sources of her own personal identity--what happened to her between ages nine and eighteen, what led her to marry Ty, what caused her miscarriages--and present motives and actions of those around her in the present" (Strehle 213). When her mother passes away, Ginny becomes the de-facto caregiver, particularly for her youngest sister Caroline. It is revealed later in the novel that her protection of Caroline goes as far as keeping her father's sexual tendencies focused on herself and Rose rather than allowing Caroline to bear that burden. So scarred by this experience with her father, Ginny represses the memory of her abuse, creating a narrative of her childhood that is easier to swallow. Ginny is the narrator of Smiley's novel, and the author's "most dramatic decentering of the original story is to retell it not from Cordelia's point of view but from Goneril's and to imagine that the resentment the two eldest daughters have toward their father is motivated partly by his history of cruelty towards them" (*Engaging*, Novy 179). Through Ginny, Smiley reclaims the narrative for the "evil" sisters, giving them motivation and reason behind their treatment of their father; she does not, however, allow for a clear version of "truth," since Ginny is an unreliable narrator, too affected by her past and her inability to see events clearly. Ginny becomes a substitute wife for her father and a surrogate mother for her sisters, ending the novel by adopting Rose's orphans. Unable to bear any children herself, Ginny is the novel's attempt to find a "mother" within a society that undermines the female body and expects a certain image for family that no family within the novel even approaches. It isn't until Ginny accepts the truth about her past, and confronts her father's actions, that she is able to separate herself fully from the

society that so defines her, raising Rose's daughters with the hope of a better future. While *Lear* ends with the death of all women, *ATA* provides a future that hopes to redefine womanhood and motherhood for Ginny.

Rose is the only female character who doesn't survive the novel: she is eventually killed by breast cancer, an unfortunate result of chemicals in the water. Her death is rather poetic, as she is the only "natural" mother of all the daughters and follows her own mother's footsteps, dying before she is able to see her daughters grown. Rose is much more of a fighter than Ginny, fully aware of her father's abuse and unwilling to bend to his will as easily. In some ways, she embodies masculine qualities like Caroline, in that she knows what she wants and is unafraid to pursue it (for example, her relationship with Jess and her belief that she can run the farm after the trial), but, like Ginny, she is still trapped by her father's abuse and her roles as "wife" and "mother," neither of which she excels at. While Ginny is freed through surrogate motherhood, Rose is condemned by her relationship to motherhood, as her failed attempt at becoming the matriarch of the farm, and her unfortunate connection to her mother's illness, tell us. While she may be full of spirit, and she fights back against her father more than Ginny can, she is still confined to, and defined by, the farm, having chosen to become a farmer's wife rather than use her college degree as a means of escape. Rose is aware of the trap she's in, but is willing to play within the rules—for the most part—in order to stay with her family, while Ginny represses the truth. Rose knowingly chooses a life of strict gender roles that she could be free of, which is almost more upsetting than Ginny's purposeful memory-loss.

The "evil" sisters of *ATA* are neither saints, nor sinners. The "good" sister of *ATA* is neither perfect, nor inferior. They are complicated, messy women who are forced to live their

lives within the boundaries of their community or break free. For Ginny and Rose, Smiley attempts to provide them with enough character drive to be more than *Lear's* text allows, while for Caroline, the elements of Cordelia that are so adored are put up for inspection in Smiley's novel, questioned for their accuracy or reality. The narrative is reclaimed for the women, but they are still defined by the patriarchal language and boundaries that so defined Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia.

Chapter IV - The Issue of Abuse
Embodying the Misogynistic Violence of the Text

While Larry ostensibly signs the farm over to his daughters, their ultimate inheritance rests, not on the surface of the land, but in the lies and secrets that it covers up. Smiley creates a landscape that is filled with poisons [...] decades of chemical use have poisoned the well water that Ginny and her family drink. Those poisons have been inscribed upon the bodies of women in the Cook family in different ways. Rose, and before her her mother, are both victims of breast cancer; Ginny is unable to have children and has suffered several miscarriages. Larry's land physically embodies the "terrors of the earth" (2.4.277) that Lear attempts to conjure up for his daughters. But Smiley also works to undermine the basis of the Cook family itself. At the crux of the novel lies Smiley's most potent addition to the Lear plot: the fact that both Ginny and Rose have been sexually abused by their father.

(Cakebread 87)

The violence that traditional, patriarchal readings of the *King Lear* impose upon the women of the play, creating a dichotomy between good and evil while trapping them within the confines of a male dominated society and language, is physicalized upon the women's' bodies in Smiley's re-vision of Shakespeare's text. While the women's bodies are eroded by literal and figurative poisons, taking away some of the very characteristics that identify them as female-bodied, the sexual violence performed upon Ginny and Rose by their father confines their very identities to his concept of womanhood. Questions concerning the effects of sexual violence upon memory, internalized misogyny, and identity surround the women of *ATA*, but these are not entirely without basis in *Lear*. While there is no indication that Lear was sexually abusive towards his daughters, his language concerning women is at times harsh and at others downright misogynistic. His violent disavowal of Cordelia at the beginning of the play is a taste of his mercurial and careless temper, as he punishes her for her inability to express herself as a woman. Events later in the play (in Act 2, Scene 2, for example), pit Lear against his elder daughters, and the full expression of his violence appears when he threatens Regan: "If thou

shouldst not be glad/ I would divorce me from thy mother's shrine, / sepulchre an adulteress" (2.2.292-293). Lear's anger at Regan extends beyond her own person and affects the memory of her dead mother, as Lear argues that he would besmirch his dead queen's reputation and disown his eldest daughter, too, if she should go against his will. When she refuses to give in to his demands for better living arrangements, his description of women grows even more violent:

But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter -
Or rather a disease that lies within my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
A plague sore, an embossed carbuncle
In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee.
Let shame come when it will, I do not call it.

(2.2.379-384)

Because he is reliant upon his daughter and therefore unable to fully divest himself of her parentage, Lear attacks Regan's femininity and her connection. The language he uses to describe his daughter is that of illness and plague, "a plague sore," "a boil," "an embossed carbuncle," making Regan the expression of some greater symptom, a sickness that not only deforms the host but points to some serious illness. Sometimes Lear is unable to identify his daughters as persons separate from himself, through, and blames himself for his hand in their creation, "in language that again suggests revulsion from the sexuality with which, as women, they are linked in the imagination of western culture: 'Judicious punishment - 'twas this flesh begot/these pelican daughters' (3.4.72-72). Just after Lear gags at imagining the stench beneath women's girdles, he acknowledges the smell of mortality of his own hand," informed by the illness his daughters impose upon his body through their own deformities (*Argument*, Novy). The women become a reflection of the father, possessions that have rebelled against him, like a

sick body attacked by its own immune system. When Regan and Goneril refuse further, Lear responds in kind:

O, let not women's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall - I will do such things -
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth.

(2.2.346-441)

Women are characterized as weak, their tears the external expression of that weakness, unable to control their weeping. As Lear becomes affected by his argument with his daughters, he attempts to separate himself from weakness, seen as a woman's disease. While earlier he described his separation from his daughters as an attack of one body part upon the other—the daughter as an extension of her father—towards the end of the play he imagines himself giving part of his body to supply another's disability: "If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes (4.6.173), an unfortunate connection to Gloucester which acknowledges his vulnerability to suffering and a need to express it, even through a conventional woman's means. The women cease to be human and become wicked creatures, witches, capable of cruel acts upon their honorable father, while still oddly infantile, defined their inability to control their emotions. His promise to bring "the terrors of the earth" onto his daughters is vague but vile, powerful in its lack of specificity as he summons up some sense of natural power that fathers have over their daughters. This question of what is natural follows Lear as he continually labels threats to his perception of the world as "unnatural," first calling Cordelia "unnatural" because she resists him, and then labeling his two older daughters as "wicked" and "monstrous," something

outside of nature as he knows it, “but these conclusions are Lear’s and not necessarily those of the text, and indeed they play a leading role in Lear’s derangement” (Kordecki & Koskinen 15).

Even before this blowout with his daughters, which causes Lear to run off into the storm, Lear curses the bodies of his daughters, wishing ill upon them through the very characteristics that make them women:

Hark, nature, hear:
Dear goddess, suspend thy purpose if
Thou didst intend to make this creature fruitful.
Into her womb convey sterility.
Dry up her organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her. If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother’s pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel--
That she may feel
How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is
To have a thankless child.

(1.4.268-283)

Wishing a barren womb upon Goneril not only attacks her female body, but also imagines her incapable of producing an heir, and therefore meaningless in the eyes of the kingdom and the succession of kings. As a woman, one of her basic rights and expectations is to provide a child, but Lear curses his own line in an attempt to attack his daughter. His summoning of “Nature,” a goddess, is interesting as his concept of nature is so wrapped up in his own perception of what is right and wrong with the world, and yet he characterizes nature as female, perhaps assuming that makes her more controllable. The idea of a “child of spleen” is interesting because it could suggest a tumor, a stillborn child, or a monstrous child that doesn’t obey his parents. Whatever

our understanding of the spleen child, Lear once again subverts the concept of natural womanhood, this time using motherhood to bestow pain, suffering, and age upon his daughter. The identity of motherhood is deformed and turned into a weapon, wielded by Lear in order to “naturalize” his daughter and punish her for her misdeeds through the rebellion of her own body. And then there is the direct attack on female sexuality:

Down from the waist
They're centaurs, though women all above.
But to the girdle do the gods inherit;
Beneath is all the fiend's. There's hell, there's darkness
There's the sulphury pit, burning, scalding,
Stench and consummation. Fie Fie Fie; pah, pah!

(4.5.120-124)

Women may appear normal from the waist up, but below there is “hell” and “darkness.” Lear’s description of the female anatomy, the “sulphury pit” brings to mind some type of venereal disease with its “burning, scalding, stench,” and so on. Lear associates female sexuality and sexual libido with sexually transmitted diseases, particularly in the case of Goneril, whose name has often been associated with “gonorrhoea.” Characterizing sex for women in terms of disease and moral degradation takes away their sexual agency, condemning them as diseased carriers of sin. The reference to centaurs points to the moral depravity associated with free sexual intercourse and multiple partners.

While Lear himself holds misogynistic and violent opinions of women, the play’s text also punishes them for fitting within the “angel” or “devil” dichotomy. The older sisters are sacrificed for their betrayal of their father and their hunger for power, punished for attempting to usurp the masculine and unable to live because of Goneril’s barren nature. The younger sister is sacrificed for the good of the play, becoming a lesson for Lear and a marker for his own

moral journey rather than completing her own character arch. She is too good for the play, and must die in order to force the remaining male characters to move forward and learn their lessons from Lear's tragedy. The women are relegated to almost tertiary characters, because while they have a strong impact upon the plot, their own development is secondary to Lear's as the play follows his decline into madness and subsequent moral reformation.

Smiley makes the misogynistic violence literal. The land that the women live on has been poisoned for years by the chemicals necessary for the farm, having a scarring effect upon their bodies and lives. Rose's breast cancer reflects how she is literally consumed by anger for her father and the life she's chosen. The cancer eats away at her flesh, destroying her body, and this was an escapable fate, if only she'd decided to leave the farm. Anger is her way of dealing with the men of the novel and the system they impose upon her: "We're not going to be sad. We're going to be angry until we die. It's the only hope" (*ATA*, Smiley 354). Her missing breast becomes an outward sign of anger, connecting her to the strong Amazonian women of a different time. Her body is consumed by her decision to respond with hatred and fire, affecting the way she moves and interacts with her own body: "She pushed her hair back with her hand, then put her fist on her hip, defiant. Except that on the way back down, her fingers fluttered over the vanished breast, the vanished muscles" (Smiley 151). The breast becomes a reminder of her constant anger but also provides her with a certain amount of masculinity as part of her female-bodied identity is taken from her. Anger is a man's response; Lear would have her cry for pain, but Rose chooses defiance. The cancer in her body reflects Lear's description of women as a sickness, that part of the father's body is attacked by the daughter's. Because Rose, Ginny, and Caroline are considered their father's property, the removal of Rose's breast, which occurs

in reaction to sickness, could also be seen as an act of violence upon the perception of femininity that is so important to the male community. Rose's refusal to cover her missing breast, to pretend that she is still a "full" bodied woman, is an act of defiance against the male conception of femininity. Following the trial, Rose becomes the owner and operator of the Cook family farm and, in some ways, she becomes her father: "'Rose swears she's going to keep [the farm] together. She's grim as death about it, and she goes around like some queen.' [Frank] glanced at me. 'Well, she does. You should see her. Frankly she's your dad all over.' I felt my face get hot" (Smiley 340). By trying to become the father, who almost killed her, to fill his shoes and overcome the memory of him, Rose eliminates herself. The cancer returns and this time it finishes her off. Rose's denial of her bodily existence, her desire to overcome the feminine in order to attain the masculine and find some sense of agency and power, causes her to give into her anger and allow the cancer to infect her body. Ginny reflects, during a hospital visit that: "She [is] so apart from her body that I had to address the two halves of her separately" (351), the masculine, informed by her connection to her father, and the feminine, the sister that remains somewhere in there. Lear likens his daughters to an illness, a plague, but here Smiley inverts the sickness, making Larry the cancer that infects his middle child and leads to her death.

For Ginny, the toxins in the water make her barren, a direct interpretation of Lear's curse upon his Goneril's womb: "for Lear, his daughters' evil manifests itself in sexual incontinence [...] Lear's rage is aimed at Regan's womanhood" (Brauner 660). In the novel, midway through the fight preceding the storm, Larry yells insults at his eldest daughter aimed at her body:

You barren whore! I know all about you, you slut. You've been creeping here and there all your life, making up this one and that one. But you're not really a woman, are you? I don't know what you are, just a bitch is all, a dried-up whore bitch.

(Smiley 181)

There is a verbal echo of Lear's language here ('dried up whore' from 'dry up in her the organs of increase'), but the diction is arguably much more guttural and jarring for a modern audience, utilizing violent words to describe women like "slut," "whore" and "bitch," words that have been internalized thanks to overuse in the mainstream media. Larry questions his daughter's sexuality, equating it with "loose" morals, and turning a desire for sex into a sin and a barren womb into a punishment. Ginny takes her inability to have children very personally, considering it a failure of her body to do what is expected of her, and a shame that must be hidden, especially in a world where women are considered "breeders" (Smiley 13), according to Larry. Ginny becomes jealous of Rose's relationship with her daughters—of very fact she has daughters while Ginny has none—and says the sight of the girls "affected me like a poison. All my tissues hurt when I saw them, when I saw Rose with them, as if my capillaries were carrying acid into the furthest reaches of my system" (Smiley 8). She describes her jealousy as a poison, unaware at this point that her body has literally been poisoned by her presence on the farm. The curse Lear wishes upon his daughter, that nature convey "into her womb sterility" (1.4.291) is applied directly to Ginny, and her identity as a woman, based on her very biological need and desire to provide children, is shaken to its core. She becomes the surrogate mother for almost every other character of the novel (Caroline, Larry, Rose's daughters, Rose, etc.) because her pull towards for motherhood is so strong but denied from her. Ginny makes her quest for motherhood a part of her identity, attempting to have children even after Ty refuses to try anymore because he can't take the repeated loss. This "secret world," full of "secret,

passionate wishes" (Smiley 26-27) becomes Ginny's attempt to reclaim control over her body, an attempt to provide herself with a second life that is entirely free of social imperatives. Of course, this identity of "mother-woman" is socially coded, tied to Ginny's understanding of what it means to be a woman within the confines of her society. Her body becomes a battleground for Ginny to reclaim herself, but she is unaware until the memories come flooding back, that the war for control for her body has been raging since her early teens, when her father began to abuse her and Rose.

Larry's abuse (sexual and physical) of his daughters provides Ginny and Rose with character motivation that Goneril and Regan were never granted. The older daughters become the victims, rather than the villains, their actions excused as a result of their upbringing. Larry uses abuse to make his daughters dependent upon him, hoping to keep them from empowering one another by making himself their sole protector and guardian. His need to pit one woman against the other, to dominate through separation of the feminine, stems from Lear's persistent pitting of one daughter against the other:

Lear's exclamation when Regan takes Goneril's hand, 'O Regan! Will you take her by the hand? (2.4.194) is of wounded self-pity; Larry's remark, prompted by the same gesture in Smiley ('That's right. Hold hands. '), is a sardonic sneer at the female solidarity that he has always sought to prevent, either through the use of physical violence (as in the lost shoe incident, which Ginny remembers at this moment for that very reason), or by threatening to withhold or promising to grant his approval, his love, as punishment/reward for disloyalty/loyalty (as in the incident of the eggs). For Larry loyalty is an absolute; others are either on his side or against him.

(Brauner 662-663)

Following this scene the women sit inside during the storm, finally discussing their abuse, and when Rose tells Ginny that Larry abused her after having started with Ginny, she confesses: "I was flattered [...] I thought that he'd picked me, me to be his favorite, not you, not [Caroline]

[...] He said it was okay, that it was good to please him, that he needed it, that I was special. He said he loved me” (Smiley 190). Larry purposefully causes a sibling rivalry with his love at the center of it all, controlling his daughters sexuality, turning them into daughter-wives. With no mother to teach them the ways of womanhood, they learn at the hand of their father, who instills within them patriarchal ideas as the woman object, intended to please the man. Larry remains in power through abuse. Outnumbered three girls to one man, he uses his masculinity to subjugate the girls and inform the women they will become.

While Caroline, untouched by her father and raised by her sisters to possess greater aspirations, escapes the “woman’s” role assigned to her through education and opportunity, Rose and Goneril only manage to escape when they are able to fully articulate their abuse, and challenge the roles handed to them by their father. Rose, despite her anger and her fire, never quite escapes, becoming her father in the end, consumed by her rage and sickness. Ginny is able to escape the farm at the end of the novel and reflect upon the community she comes from. When Ty, her husband, visits her years later to ask for a divorce, the two discuss the Cook family and realize how different their views of the past are: “While Ty mourns the loss of the farm and the Cook family history that it represents, Ginny sees the double-sided nature of that legacy” (Cakebread 91). She says to him:

It’s good to remember and repeat. You feel good to be a part of that. But then I saw what my part really was. Rose showed me. [...] She showed me, but I knew what she showed me was true before she finished showing me. You see this grand history, but I see blows. I see taking what you want because you want it, then making something up that justifies what you did. I see getting others to pay the price, then covering up and forgetting what the price was. Do I think Daddy came up with beating and fucking us on his own? [...] No. I think he had lessons, and those lessons were part of the package, along with the land and the lust to run things exactly the way he wanted to no matter what.

(Smiley 342-343)

Ginny speaks to the cultural mindset that their male-dominated world encourages. That men have the power “and the lust to run things exactly the way” they want with no oversight. This is a difference instilled in men and women at birth in a community where men are considered active and women passive, the subject and the object. Ginny recognizes that while her father is absolutely at fault for his actions: they were culturally encouraged, the result of a family legacy that privileges the male. The women, and the men, of this world fall into roles that are pre-designed for them, conceptions of masculinity and femininity that they decide to obey until something, like the memory of a rape, leads to a greater sense of understanding. While it is heartbreaking that Ginny is forced to remember and come to terms with her abuse in order to find herself, this step towards self-reflection and greater understanding of social norms leads to her freedom.

Ginny’s remembering her rape, and coming to terms with it, finally lashing out at the structures that have contained her and defined “womanhood” for her allows Smiley to reclaim the female narrative through her protagonist. There is a way in which Ginny’s recovery of her lost memories of abuse is a matter of re-vision in the course of the novel, where Goneril and Regan are defended and their concept of womanhood explained. Ginny might not be the most reliable narrator, but because we are privileged readers, given access into her thoughts and desires, we follow as her conception of herself and her place within this patriarchal society is redefined and reclaimed. She concludes her narrative by understanding her father’s abuse:

I can’t say I forgive my father, but now I can imagine what he probably never chose to remember - the goad of an unthinkable urge, pricking him, pressing him, wrapping him in an impenetrable fog of self that must have seemed, when he wandered around the house late at night after working and drinking, like the very darkness. This is the gleaming obsidian shard I safeguard above all others.

(Smiley 370-371)

Larry chooses not to remember, or confront that side of his identity, because he has no way of expressing the lust and selfishness he felt, forced to flee all sense of consciousness of it in order to live with himself and his actions. He loses his control of language. For Ginny, remembering her rape, coming to terms with it and understanding the effect it has had upon her identity, allows her to control language, to finally be able to express herself. Language, a tool and a product of patriarchal culture, both in *Lear* and *ATA* is now controlled by the daughters and transformed into her “gleaming obsidian shard,” a weapon of resistance against the dominant ideologies that attempt to control her. Smiley rejects Blooms idea of “the greats,” the idealized image of the father, and this is reflected in Ginny’s reconfiguration of her relationship with her father, creating distance from the idea of father/exalted writer as the absolute and daughter/adaptor as the derivation. This is re-vision in action, as Ginny/Goneril finally controls her narrative and the language through which she is defined: Ginny saves herself by re-defining her world, while Goneril is consumed by Shakespearian tragedy and takes her own life.

MIRANDA

Written by

Imogen Browder

Based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

EXT. GREAT BASIN, UTAH

Bare feet sprint through the sand. There is nothing but silence and heavy breathing as MIRANDA (18), chases the storm.

MIRANDA (V.O.)
Did you know?

A car horn blares under her breathing, pulling us to...

INT. ANTHONY'S CAR - EARLIER

A wall of sand surrounds the car, obscuring the world outside. Inside four men yell, screaming instructions at one another as the car is plunged into darkness. Their muffled voices overlap one another:

FINN
Dad, just pull over!

ANTHONY
Be patient, we'll push through and beat the storm.

SAM
How can you see in this mess?

ALLAN
Pull over, Anthony -

ANTHONY
Where would you suggest I -

FINN
JUST PULL OVER -

The car hits something unseen. The men are air borne, pulled down by gravity, hitting their heads against paneling, attempting in vain to brace themselves against the metal casing.

MIRANDA (V.O.)
Did you know when the storm would hit?

EXT. GREAT BASIN, UTAH

The winds whip around Miranda as she pushes through the dying storm. She moves at a full out sprint, heading towards the screaming car horn, the emergency lights flashing across her face.

MIRANDA (V.O.)
The car, smashed to pieces -

INT. ANTHONY'S CAR - EARLIER

The car crashes into the ground, the impact felt by all inside. Some go flying, unrestrained, others are held back by their seat belts.

MIRANDA (V.O.)
- the passengers left to suffocate
in the dust -

EXT. GREAT BASIN, UTAH

Miranda surveys the crash from afar, unable to will herself to approach.

There's no way anyone could have survived this.

MIRANDA (V.O.)
- could you have warned them?

EXT. ANTHONY'S CAR - EARLIER

The alarm blares, the lights flash, smoke rises from the engine. The car rests, still, in the midst of swirling sand and utter darkness.

There is no movement from those within.

MIRANDA (V.O.)
Could you have saved them?

EXT. GREAT BASIN, UTAH

Warily, Miranda approaches the car.

She checks for signs of life. None.

She silences the alarm.

In the quiet, she breathes for the first time, taking in the horror of the car's interior.

Miranda notices a trail of blood, leading from the left side of what was once the back seat, imprints of struggle in the sand.

Lying, ten feet away, is FINN (19). Unmoving.

She runs to his side and checks his pulse. Still beating. As she attempts to find the source of the bleeding, she speaks calmly to him, waiting for signs of consciousness.

Headlights illuminate the scene. Miranda faces the oncoming car, waving down a familiar driver.

INT. PROSPERO'S DEN - NEXT MORNING

The wood panelled walls are covered by screens, which provide the underground with most of its lighting. Pictures of Miranda, at various ages, litter the desk, almost obscured by a mess of wires. A constant, pulsing "buzz" of electricity fills the air.

The den is a strange mix of high-tech and low rent.

PETER (50s) sits with his back to us, his body framed by the electricity surrounding him. He appears almost other worldly, backlit entirely by the computer screens.

Miranda paces behind him, attempting to make sense of the night's events.

MIRANDA

I just refuse to believe you had no warning. We closed down the shop moments after they'd left - if only you'd said something, then perhaps -

PETER

Miranda, you'll drive yourself insane with 'if only'. There was nothing we could have done. The storm hit suddenly.

MIRANDA

But usually -

PETER

Nothing about yesterday's dust was usual.

Finally, he turns to look at her. His eyes are wild and bloodshot from a lifetime of staring at screens, but he has a nice face, a smile that comforts his daughter instantly.

PETER (CONT'D)

Come here.

With a great sigh, Miranda sits at her father's feet, her head in his lap.

Peter plays with her hair, attempting to comfort her.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry you ran off like that.
I'm sorry you were the one to find
the car. I'm sorry the storm alert
didn't come moments earlier. You're
right, in a different world we
could have stopped them from
driving away, but -

His speech drops off as if to say "c'est la vie."

PETER (CONT'D)

How's the boy?

MIRANDA

Sleeping.

PETER

When he wakes up -

MIRANDA

If he wakes up.

PETER

If he wakes up, you'll have to tell
him about his companions.

His statement pulls Miranda from her position at his feet.

MIRANDA

Me?

PETER

You're the one who found them.

MIRANDA

But Cal -

PETER

Won't have the words. He's taken
care of the bodies, but you know
the burden of speech falls to you.

Behind him the computer beeps.

PETER (CONT'D)

(Addressing the monitor)

Yes, Ariel?

A female voice issues from the monitor. Slightly electronic
in tone, the voice is lively and energetic, passing as human.

ARIEL
PROSPERO: client requesting
information concerning stock
portfolio.

PETER
(To Miranda)
Take care of the boy. Give me a few
minutes to close down the program.

Miranda gives her father a kiss on the cheek before exiting
the room. As she leaves she hears:

ARIEL
Also, as you asked the GPS signals
we were tracking have been deleted.

PETER
Not now, Ariel.

Catching his daughter's eye, he smiles and turns back to the
screen.

INT. HALLWAY

CAL (20s) sits outside of Finn's room, listening to music.
When Miranda approaches he stumbles up and grabs his stool,
limping out of the hall. CAL doesn't speak. He is a gentle
giant, injured by some long ago injury, who now works as a
handyman for Peter.

Miranda stops him, placing a hand on his arm. He jumps a
little at her touch.

MIRANDA
Thank you for your help, Cal. If
you hadn't followed me, I don't
know how I would have gotten him
home.

Cal nods, unsmiling, and continues to shuffle off.

Miranda watches him go, just for a moment, and then enters
the room.

INT. FINN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Finn, bandaged and bruised, lies in bed. Miranda checks his
pulse, replaces a bandage, and sits down beside him, watching
him breathe.

She can't help but stare. He's very handsome, if a little beaten up. As she watches him, she wonders what his voice sounds like, what he'll say when he finally wakes up.

INT. "LAST STOP" STORE - LATER

Miranda flips the CLOSED sign to OPEN.

The "LAST STOP" store is an eclectic mix of gift-shop turned information center. As Peter's store is the only place to find food, buy gas, or receive information for the next hundred and fifty (or so) miles Miranda feels a need to open on time every day. They do good business, particularly during the summer season when road tripping is popular, but it has been a little slow recently.

Sitting behind the counter with a book, Miranda stares off into the desert. The dust storm from the night before has settled. The sun beats down. It's a familiar, if barren, scene.

PETER (O.C.)
Any sign of guests?

Peter stands in the doorway, watching his daughter with two cups of coffee in his hand.

She shakes her head.

MIRANDA
Quiet.

He joins her at the counter. They sit for a moment, each sipping their coffee, enjoying one another's quiet company.

PETER
Do you remember arriving here?

Miranda looks at him, a little startled.

MIRANDA
You know I don't. Why?

PETER
The men who passed through here last night, they reminded me of our adventure.

MIRANDA
Don't. That's morbid.

PETER

No, I mean, we had no idea what we were going to find out here. I just needed to get away, make a new world for us, and the desert, middle of nowhere, seemed like as good a place as any. We were driving blind, but we found a home.

MIRANDA

It's different. You weren't driving in a dust storm. We survived our journey.

Peter considers his daughter. She's right, he knows that, but he doesn't want her to dwell on the night before.

PETER

Your compassion is admirable.

MIRANDA

I just can't shake the feeling that we could have helped.

PETER

Miranda -

MIRANDA

Will all your technology, your wires and your signals and your GPS, you had no idea the storm was coming until they walked out that door?

PETER

I told you -

MIRANDA

I know. I'm sorry. It's just a hard thing to think about.

PETER

Death is, I'm afraid.

Silence.

PETER (CONT'D)

Have I ever told you why we moved all the way out here?

This grabs Miranda's attention.

MIRANDA

You've often started, but always stopped.

Peter heaves a great sigh, launching into his story.

PETER

In one year, I lost my wife and my father. You were three, I doubt you remember any of it, but I didn't take it well.

As he tells the story, we see glimpses of the tale, almost as if we're reliving the memories alongside him:

A young PETER sits alone in his city apartment, empty bottles and take out containers surrounding him. In the background, Miranda cries, needing attention, but Peter stares at the wall, catatonic.

PETER (CONT'D)

My brother tried to help.

We see a man cleaning Peter's apartment, tending to Miranda, trying to cook dinner, etc. We never see his face.

PETER (CONT'D)

But ended up doing more harm than good. Before my father's death, I had been made the heir to the family business, an investment firm with a sizeable endowment. I was the chosen son, and Allan had always been jealous. Father had never loved him the same way.

The man, Allan, sits with his back towards us at a board meeting, presenting his case.

PETER (CONT'D)

He took my grief as an opportunity. Had me declared mentally incompetent and stole the company out from under me.

A screaming match, Peter v. Allan. A young Miranda watches from the couch, surrounded by suitcases.

PETER (CONT'D)

He was going to take you away from me, too. A part of his act. If I couldn't run a company, I couldn't take care of a child.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
His lie had to be solid, proven,
resonate throughout my life to be
convincing. So we left.

Peter drives through the night, Miranda asleep in her car seat behind her.

PETER (CONT'D)
We ran away from everything we
knew, the world I had been born
into, so that we could stay
together.

Back in the shop, Miranda takes her father's hand, squeezing it. He is a little emotional, affected by his story.

MIRANDA
I'm glad we ran.

He kisses her forehead.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
Why are you telling me all of this
now?

PETER
I suppose it's time you knew. I was
thinking about the boy upstairs. If
he wakes up, this is the first
person who you'll spend time with
from outside of our little world.
Ariel, Cal, and I can't keep you
entertained forever. You need to
know where you come from, I
understand that.

The shop door opens, the bell at its top announcing the arrival of guests.

Peter goes into host mode.

PETER (CONT'D)
Welcome to Last Stop - how can we
help you?

INT. FINN'S ROOM - LATER

Miranda sits next to Finn's bed, reading. She's keeping him company, curious about this guest, wanting to make sure he doesn't wake up alone.

He stirs.

Her head snaps up, staring, waiting for more movement.
Finn mutters a little, tenses slightly, and then relaxes.
Miranda, disappointed goes back to her book.

INT. PROSPERO'S DEN - LATER

Plates in hand, Miranda opens her father's door.

PETER

Delete.

ARIEL

And the invite to the symposium?

PETER

Delete.

ARIEL

What about the file on Allan Du -

Peter notices Miranda's presence and quickly cuts Ariel off.

PETER

Delete. Close program.

MIRANDA

Dinner.

She smiles, setting the plates down on a table off to the side of Peter's work space.

INT. PROSPERO'S DEN - LATER

Miranda and Peter are midway through dinner, enjoying each other's company.

MIRANDA

- So then I thought maybe we could download different voices, change her up a little.

PETER

You don't like Ariel's voice?

MIRANDA

No, no, it's fine. Just a bit... boring?

PETER
Would you prefer she sing
everything?

Miranda laughs at her father's suggestion. The more time we spend with this pair, the easier it is to see how close they are. The conversation lulls for a moment.

MIRANDA
Dad - I was wondering... um, hoping
that you could show me a picture of
my mom.

PETER
Why?

MIRANDA
Why? Isn't that obvious.

PETER
No, why now?

MIRANDA
Your story got me thinking. I guess
I've never missed her or needed
her, so I haven't asked. But your
story today...

She trails off.

Peter nods, almost to himself. He should have expected something like this. Making a snap decision, he rises from the table and rummages around in a nearby closet, pulling out an aged file box.

Sitting back down, he opens the lid and sorts through the photos inside, pulling out a couple that make him smile.

PETER
Here.

Miranda looks down at her mom for the first time. It's a bit like looking in the mirror. Miranda wants to feel something, hopes to have a moment of recognition, but doesn't really recognize the woman, besides the obvious physical echoes.

MIRANDA
She's beautiful.

PETER
Yeah, she was magic.

MIRANDA
Is there one of grandpa?

Peter searches the box but can't find any. He begins to become frustrated.

PETER

Shit - I know we have one - I
wouldn't have left without one...

The longer he searches the more annoyed he gets.

MIRANDA

It's fine. My imagination can make
do.

PETER

No. It's here, I know it is.

MIRANDA

Dad, really, it's -

PETER

I'LL FIND IT.

Peter is losing it a little, his frustration and his temper getting the best of him. Miranda isn't surprised, she just becomes a little more wary, subtly backing away, trying to calm her father down.

With a yell he throws the box.

The contents scatter, the box breaking against the wall.

Silence. Miranda tries not to make a noise as her father breathes, calming himself.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

MIRANDA

It's fine.

It's not, they both know it, but neither is surprised by his outburst.

ARIEL

PROSPERO: New request from client.
Transfer funds. Care to review?

MIRANDA

Go. I'll take care of this.

She smiles at her father, motioning to the mess on the floor as if it's no big deal.

Peter pulls himself together and moves back to his desk. Miranda begins to clean the photos off of the floor, looking at the faces of people from a different life. One photo makes her pause:

Baby Miranda being held by a man who feels eerily familiar.

She thinks back to a visitor from the other day, putting the two together:

INT. "LAST STOP" STORE - YESTERDAY

Finn and his companions come up to the register to buy snacks. ALLAN (50s) steps forward to pay for the snacks, smiling at Miranda and making small talk.

He looks just like the man in the photo holding Miranda.

Snacks in hand, the men file out of the shop, Allan taking up the rear.

MIRANDA
Have a safe drive.

ALLAN
Thank you.

He stares at her for a moment too long.

MIRANDA
Anything else?

ALLAN
No, sorry. You just look like
someone I used to know.

INT. PROSPERO'S DEN

Miranda pockets the photo.

Cal runs in, furiously attempting to get Miranda's attention, pointing upstairs.

MIRANDA
What, Cal?
(Getting it)
He's awake?

Miranda drops the broken box and dashes out of the room.

INT. FINN'S ROOM

Miranda bursts into the room.

Finn is awake but still. He's obviously in quite a bit of pain but is trying to hide it.

Miranda slows her pace, smiling at him.

MIRANDA

How are you feeling?

No response.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

Sorry. Um - hi, my name is Miranda. You're at the 'Last Stop.' I think you were here yesterday. There was a storm last night and a car crash. We brought you here because the nearest hospital is a couple of hours away.

No response.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

I imagine you're in quite a bit of pain. Some broken bones. Perhaps a concussion.

No response.

She takes a different approach, crossing to the bedside table where a glass of water and some pills sit. She offers them to Finn.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

This might help.

He takes them, wincing at the movement, and downs the glass of water.

FINN

(Quietly)

Thank you.

MIRANDA

Of course.

FINN

I was in the car with my dad...?

Miranda looks at her lap. Finn gets the message. His eyes well up, a tear falls down his cheek, but he remains stoic.

FINN (CONT'D)
And his friends?

Miranda shakes her head.

FINN (CONT'D)
Okay.

MIRANDA
You were thrown from the car, I think. When I found you, it looked like you'd been trying to walk but passed out. The others weren't... I brought you here.

FINN
Thank you.

They're silent for a moment, unsure of what to say.

FINN (CONT'D)
I'm Finn. It's nice to meet you, Miranda. Sorry it's under such strange circumstances.

Miranda laughs.

MIRANDA
Could be worse.

They share a smile.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
I'll let you sleep.

FINN
No, stay. I've been asleep much to long.

The two begin to chat about life. Nothing special: like and dislikes, dreams, friends, etc.

Peter arrives in the doorway and watches the two talk. A flash of jealousy crosses his face. Rather than make his presence known, he backs away and returns to his work.

MONTAGE - DIFFERENT DAYS

Finn improves.

Miranda and Finn become closer.

We see Peter introduce himself to Finn. We see Finn attempt to stand with Cal's help. Miranda brings him food. They read together. Watch movies together. Peter, Miranda, and Finn all share a meal.

Time passes and Finn heals.

INT. FINN'S ROOM - ONE WEEK LATER

We fall into a conversation they're having.

FINN

- but then, My dad decided I should learn the trade, so I was dragged along to this stupid investment convention.

MIRANDA

That's what my dad does: investment.

FINN

Really? I thought he owned the store.

MIRANDA

Oh, he does, but he makes all of his money online through PROSPERO, an investment firm he established a few years back. I think it started as a hobby, but he spends more time working on his computer than he does in the shop.

FINN

I've heard of PROSPERO.

MIRANDA

Seriously?

FINN

Yeah, it's one of our biggest competitors. You're telling me your dad runs it all by himself? Out of his basement? Impressive.

MIRANDA

Don't tell him that. It'll go to his head.

They laugh.

FINN

I was supposed to head back to school in a couple of weeks. I spent the entire road-trip trying to find the right way to tell my father that I want to be a music major.

Quietly he reflects on the fact that he won't have that chance now.

Miranda attempts to cheer him up.

MIRANDA

What do you play?

FINN

Guitar mostly. But I dabble in anything that makes sound.

MIRANDA

Oh I wish I could play an instrument.

FINN

Why not learn?

MIRANDA

Not like there's anyone around here to teach me.

FINN

We are pretty out of the way, I guess.

MIRANDA

Middle of nowhere.

He considers this.

FINN

How are you so normal?

MIRANDA

(With a laugh)
What?

FINN

You live in isolation with no one but your dad and Cal to talk to... how are you so ordinary?

MIRANDA

Maybe you just like my weird.

FINN

Yeah, maybe.

They share a smile.

MIRANDA

I'm not. Ordinary. I mean, I'm well educated, thanks to dad, but most of the social cues I have come from reading books or watching television or interacting briefly with shop guests. I don't really spend time with *people*, just my dad.

FINN

And me.

MIRANDA

Yeah, for now. And that was jarring at first.

FINN

Why?

Miranda doesn't know quite how to say this next part, but she tries...

MIRANDA

I have never met anyone my own age, never mind a boy. You're interesting to me because of how normal you are, how easy it is to talk to you even though we have nothing in common. I don't know what I expected, but this has been nice.

FINN

(Throwing her line back at her)

Maybe you just like my normal.

More laughter. Miranda gently hits him on the arm, letting her hand linger for a moment.

MIRANDA

Hey, I have a random question for you, but I don't want to upset you.

FINN

Upset me?

MIRANDA
It's about one of your friends.

FINN
It's fine. How can I help?

Miranda takes the photo from her pocket showing it to Finn.

MIRANDA
Do you recognize this man?

FINN
Yeah, that's Allan. He works with my dad... he was in the crash.

MIRANDA
Do you know much about him?

FINN
Normal things. He's in his 50s. Unmarried. Has run the California branch of the company since his company merged with my dad's.

MIRANDA
Of the investment company?

FINN
Yeah.

MIRANDA
Does he have any siblings?

FINN
He did. Why do you care? Where did you even get this picture?

Miranda looks at Finn, not knowing whether to trust him. She makes a snap decision.

MIRANDA
I think he's my uncle.

She shows him the picture again, pointing to the baby.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
That's me. And when your group passed through our shop my dad acted pretty strangely, told me my whole life story the next day, which he's always refused to do.
(She pauses)
I think he might know something about the storm.

FINN

How? That was a freak act of nature.

MIRANDA

Yeah, but we usually have days of advance notice. We post signs in the shop and encourage guests to stay indoors until the winds settle. Dust storms are dangerous and Dad has always made it his responsibility to care for travelers. The day you all came, he didn't put up signs. Didn't say anything. Stayed in his den all day. That's why I searched for you once the storm died down. I was hoping to find you'd pulled over or made it through, but I felt responsible and had to check.

FINN

We were going to... pull over. Dad was trying to get us off of the road and then -

He breaks off.

FINN (CONT'D)

Why would your dad have any hand in this?

MIRANDA

My uncle destroyed his life and my dad has a... temper. He can hold a grudge and isn't always in control of his actions. I can't shake the thought that he had something to do with it all.

FINN

Have you talked to him about this?

PETER (O.C.)

Talked to me about what?

During their conversation, Peter entered the room. He stands by the door, a plate of sandwiches in hand, his forehead creasing.

Miranda decides to act.

MIRANDA

About the storm.

Peter stares back at his daughter.

PETER

I thought we talked about that.
Sometimes the warnings come late.
There was nothing to be done.

MIRANDA

Yes, I know that's what you said.
And I believed you. But then I
found this.

She holds out the photo.

Peter's face goes white.

Moving faster than you'd expect, Peter drops the plate on the ground, grabs his daughter by the wrist and yanks her out of the door. Miranda cries out in pain and Finn yells in protest, but Peter slams the door behind him.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

PETER

(Yelling down the hall)

CAL.

Still gripping Miranda's arm, he pulls out a ring of keys and locks Finn's door.

Cal comes lumbering up the steps.

PETER (CONT'D)

Hurry up, idiot. I need you to sit
here and guard the door. Don't let
him out or her in. Got it?

Cal nods, collapsing against the wall and sliding to the floor to sit.

Despite his daughter's protests, Peter drags her through the halls of the house, pulling her down into his den.

INT. PROSPERO'S DEN - CONTINUOUS

He flings her onto the floor. Slamming the door closed behind him.

PETER

You couldn't just take my word for
it?

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

You had to go snooping around in my stuff, making something out of nothing?!

MIRANDA

You let them die.

PETER

He deserved it.

MIRANDA

But Finn and his father...

PETER

Unfortunate casualties.

MIRANDA

Dad, you killed your brother.

PETER

And he killed me.

Miranda stares at him, confused by this statement. Peter can't stand still, anger pouring out of him. He paces about the room, trying to calm himself.

PETER (CONT'D)

He stole my life. Took my job, my family, tried to take you. I was fine, I am fine. My outbursts are nothing compared to that bastard's betrayal. He killed Peter Duke.

MIRANDA

That's all in the past. Why couldn't you have talked to him about it?

PETER

He never listens. Always thinks he's right. No, this was the only way to pay him back for stranding us here.

MIRANDA

This is our home.

PETER

It wasn't supposed to be.

MIRANDA

But you've made it into something brilliant. What about Ariel? You created her. Or PROSPERO -

PETER
- wouldn't have to exist if he
hadn't run me out of the company.

MIRANDA
One harm does not equal another,
Dad.

Peter is still for a moment. Deadly still.

PETER
And who are you to decide that?

MIRANDA
(Getting scared)
Dad -

PETER
No. Please. Tell me why I should
care what you think about this
whole thing? You should be proud of
me. I took care of the problem, got
revenge after years of suffering.

MIRANDA
How did you know they were coming?

PETER
Investment convention. Our
companies are competitors. All I
had to do was post some stupid
inane announcement about PROSPERO's
presence at the symposium and
suggest a road trip. They took the
bait. I had Ariel GPS track their
phones to be sure. As they came
closer I began to lose my nerve,
but luckily it seems the gods were
on my side. We received word about
the storm that morning and I knew
they would be stupid enough to
drive through it. In our world,
risks pay off. I didn't have to do
anything, it turned out. Just
remain silent.

MIRANDA
But your silence caused their
deaths.

PETER
No great loss.

MIRANDA

But Dad -

PETER

No.

He slams his fist onto the desk.

PETER (CONT'D)

You will not question me. I did what was right for us, and you will respect that.

He walks to the door.

PETER (CONT'D)

Now I have to figure out what to do about the boy.

MIRANDA

What?

PETER

If you hadn't told him -

"But ah well" his shrug seems to say. He slams the door behind him and we hear the *click* of the lock.

PETER (CONT'D)

Take some time to cool off. Reconsider. I'll be back when it's all over.

Miranda puts her head into her hands, releasing her frustration in a scream.

ARIEL

Can I help?

Ariel's voice catches Miranda off guard. She pulls herself together and approaches the computer.

MIRANDA

Ariel why did you help him?

ARIEL

It's in my programming.

MIRANDA

But you knew -

ARIEL
And couldn't do anything about it.
I am programmed to help. That is
all.

MIRANDA
Then help me now.

ARIEL
How?

Miranda thinks about this for a moment.

MIRANDA
Help me escape.

A pause.

ARIEL
Searching for escape routes.
Analyzing building plans. Printing
maps to nearest outpost.

The printer whirls to life.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
Peter keeps the emergency key taped
to my monitor.

MIRANDA
Thank you.

ARIEL
It is my job. I am programmed to
help.

Miranda grabs the map and rips the key off of the monitor.
She is about to go when Ariel speaks up.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
Disable GPS tracking.

MIRANDA
What?

ARIEL
Your watch.

Miranda looks down at the watch her father gave her. She
takes it off and crushes it under her foot.

Before unlocking the door, Miranda places the destroyed watch
on Prospero's keyboard.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Miranda moves through the house as quickly as possible, making very little noise.

Outside of Finn's room she finds Cal.

MIRANDA

Cal - where's my father?

Cal points to the window.

Outside, Peter loads a gun, preparing to take care of Finn.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

And where's Finn?

Cal motions to the door behind him. Miranda goes to unlock it but is stopped by Cal, who shakes his head as if to say "no one in, no one out."

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

I know what my father told you, but I need your help. He's in one of his moods: angry and uncontrollable. He wants to hurt Finn. We need to get out of here.

Cal stares at her.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

Please. I don't feel safe here.

He considers her face, wrestling with what he wants to do and what he feels he should do.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

I need you to help me.

With a nod. He moves out of her way.

Miranda unlocks the door.

INT. FINN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

FINN

Miranda! What the hell is going on -

MIRANDA

Can you walk?

FINN

No.

MIRANDA

Shit.

FINN

Why? What's happening?

MIRANDA

My father. He's - he's been a bit off since the death of my mother. His brother had him declared mentally unstable and took over the company, and while my father thinks this was some ploy for power, I think my Uncle might have been right.

FINN

And you've only just realized it now?

MIRANDA

No, there have been signs. He's a violent man, but he's usually able to control himself. And I can calm him down. But not this time. We need to go. Now.

FINN

I can't -

Cal moves forward and hunches over to carry Finn. He knows the violence Miranda speaks of and has decided to help.

MIRANDA

(To Cal)

Thank you. Let's go.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Cal loads Finn into the back of the truck while Miranda keeps watch. All set, they begin to drive off when the car is hit by a bullet, breaking one of the backlights.

PETER

(Yelling)

Going somewhere?

Miranda opens the car door and faces her father.

MIRANDA

We're leaving.

PETER

You're doing nothing of the sort.
Cal, unload the boy and turn the
car off.

Cal doesn't move.

MIRANDA

Dad. We're leaving.

PETER

You can't.

MIRANDA

Why?

PETER

Because you are mine. You're my
daughter. You belong here with me.

MIRANDA

Maybe. But I think that's up for me
to decide.

PETER

Get back in the house.

He begins to walk towards her.

MIRANDA

No.

PETER

GET IN THE FUCKING HOUSE.

MIRANDA

NO.

He points the gun at her. She steps back, hurt by his
actions, but doesn't back down.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

Dad. I -

PETER

You can't leave me. I can't lose
you too.

MIRANDA

That's on you. You pushed us to
this point.

PETER

Please.

Tears begin to fall from his eyes at he stares at his daughter, gun still raised.

PETER (CONT'D)
Please don't leave me.

MIRANDA
I'm going. Shoot me if you need,
but I'm leaving.

She slowly begins to back up, re-entering the car. Peter stands still. Gun still raised. Unable to pull the trigger. He lowers the gun.

PETER
I love you.

MIRANDA
Love you too.

She closes the door. The car begins to drive away. Miranda leans her head out of the window.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
Bye, Dad.

Peter watches the car drive off.

INT. CAR

As Cal drives, Miranda climbs into the backseat where Finn is lying. He rests his head in her lap.

FINN
Where are we heading?

MIRANDA
I'm not too sure.

FINN
Are you okay?

Miranda smiles to herself.

MIRANDA
Yeah. I will be.

END

Conclusion
Reflection on *Miranda* and Smiley

My passion for adaptation began when I was little. Inspired by the stories my parents read to me before bed (often Shakespearean in nature), I would find ways of interpreting the plot to fit within my limited worldview. My first real interaction with adaptation occurred during the writing of *Jules and Monty* (2014), a modern web-retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* set on a college campus, which I developed with a friend of mine during our freshman year of college. Filmed the following year, *Jules and Monty* aimed to re-interpret the love affair between Romeo and Juliet, giving it slightly more time and aging the characters to fit with our modern conceptions of “consent” and romantic relationships. It was interesting to discover that the streets of Verona could easily be turned into the basements of fraternities and dorm rooms, since the tensions and passions of college are similar to those of a Shakespearean play.

I have this theory that we are constantly replaying the same stories. Some scholars, like Christopher Booker, claim that there are a limited number of plot lines in the world. While some chose to see this as a negative, I think there is actually something exciting about finding new ways to tell the same stories, something unifying about the idea that readers connect with similar concepts. Writers are primarily readers, so it follows that connect to ideas that have already been articulated and characters that pre exist our own creations. What’s exciting about being a well-read writer is having a tool kit full of references, stock characters to develop and express in a distinctive way, and tested plotlines to explore and alter.

Re-vision as a form of adaptation is particularly interesting to me as a woman writer, because I feel the need to grapple with archetypes that constrain the characters of Shakespeare’s time. I don’t consider this process an attempt to discredit Shakespeare’s

eminence, because he is absolutely capable of standing up to criticism, but rather complementary, since it tells us that these stories and characters are still relevant. It is a personal experience, re-visiting a text, because as a writer you have to be willing to grapple with ideas that are based in your own cultural identity and restrain from an ideology that no longer compels us. It is a discussion, sometimes an argument, with the original text, more than a betrayal. By rewriting Goneril's fate, Smiley provides the reader with an alternate way of viewing the "bad sister" stereotype, providing her with reasons for her cruelty and experiences that redefine her anger. After reading *ATA* a few too many times, I found that rereading *Lear* left me with a different impression of the "evil" older sisters. I was less willing to accept traditional readings, less willing to relegate them to the binary; I found myself actively questioning the language and cultural identity of the play. Smiley took a man's world and found a way to feminize it. She rewrote the story in a way that explained all of the characters, even Larry. While there are elements of her adaptation that I don't agree with, like her focus on violence as means of expressing patriarchy, I think it is an excellent example of what writers can accomplish by using their own voice to redefine an old story.

With *Miranda* my goal was to both modernize and to narrow down the scope of the story. *The Tempest* is considered by some critics as one of Shakespeare's "problem plays," because it is hard to fit it into any one category (history, tragedy or comedy) and is generally labeled a "romance". I began my adaptation by considering what I liked about *The Tempest* and what I found problematic. For example, I enjoy the romance between Miranda and Ferdinand (her speech "I do not know one of my sex..." (3.2.48-50) is one of my favorites) and consider Miranda's bluntness a result of her lack of socialization. I love the magic that permeates the

play, but find that is also an element that separates the audience from the characters as it plays against the realistic text. While I enjoy the comic plot, I've never found it particularly hilarious (except perhaps the "man or fish" speech) and am troubled by the presentation of Caliban. On the other side, I really dislike Prospero. I find him imperialistic, selfish and bit unhinged. In the few adaptations of *The Tempest* I've read, like *Prospero's Daughter* by Elizabeth Nunez, there is often a focus on colonization and patriarchy, which go hand in hand. As I am a white woman writer with a limited worldview, I decided that it would be smarter to confine my adaptation to a familiar world. *Miranda* is set in modern day America, where it is hard to find isolation except in extreme places, like the middle of the desert. Without the ocean and island, the language of story changes, the nature of a "tempest" changes. Miranda's running through the dust storm was the first image I had for the script, as she is trapped in the storm but able to endure it, unlike the men.

Prospero himself became the storm - like Lear in some ways - and the name "Prospero" became a title. In the play, Prospero is larger-than-life, defined by his magical abilities and powerful temper, so the name can be separated from the man. My main goal for the adaptation was to re-visit the relationship between Miranda and Prospero and empower Miranda to find the agency to leave the "island" on her own. She becomes the active agent in this story, the lens through which we discover Prospero's plot. Peter, our Prospero, becomes a little less mystic and more of a man, I hope. He has temper problems and is genuinely unhinged by the events of his previous life; thus, call into question whether Allan (or Antonio) was right in his actions. Certainly, Shakespeare's text suggests that which Prospero was, by his own account, not a good Duke. The "magic" becomes technology, with Ariel resembling Siri, a reflection of

Peter's intelligence and need for control still, but this time a little less self-sufficient. Caliban was always going to be a challenge, but I didn't want to fall into the trap of racially stereotyping him, as some adaptations do, or making his story about his appearance. Caliban is not Miranda's abuser in this story, but rather her ally, escaping Prospero alongside her.

What's tricky is telling a visual story in a succinct way. So much of this script is visual more than verbal, as the tone is reflected in the arid landscape and Peter's instability shows up in the tightening of his grip or the mashing of his teeth. Miranda could be any young woman on the brink of adulthood, any woman who takes her life into her own hands once she discovers the truth about her situation. Miranda's flight is not dependent on Finn. In fact, she almost becomes his savior, displacing the idea of Ferdinand as Miranda's husband, a replacement for the father. Miranda and Peter's relationship, while turbulent at times, is also loving, which I really appreciate about the original text: he controls her, but he adores her too. My hope was to break her free of the control, without destroying the relationship. This Miranda may never see her father again, but she does love him and recognizes his very human flaws.

One of the challenges of writing this script was containing the scope of the story. Telling *The Tempest* from Miranda's perspective is actually very tricky, because she isn't around for much of the action, as the play jumps through multiple storylines. Her knowledge of the events of the play is limited, and so must ours be if we want to stay true to our protagonist. Information in the screenplay is uncovered or stumbled upon. Originally the script was much longer - the men had their own subplot - but I think tightening the scale and focusing on Miranda aligns the audience with her and eliminates the overly complex plot elements of *The Tempest*. This is a story about a father and a daughter and that moment when you realize that

your father is not superman, when all of the details come together to reveal what you probably already knew.

My re-vision of Miranda is simple: I wanted to give the story to the one female character in the play. Inspired by Smiley, and encouraged by the critical texts I read, I have been “touched by the feminist desire to imagine women as subjects and not simply objects” by bringing my favorite characters into “a society in which the possibilities for women are far different than those in Shakespeare’s day” (*Transforming*, Novy). I strove to create a story that provided her with more complexity than Shakespeare’s “good” and “innocent” daughter, a story that brought Miranda into our modern time and allowed her the opportunity to reflect upon the flaws in her story, not to argue with Shakespeare, but to challenge him to a discussion.

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