

# Turgenev's appropriation of *King Lear*: A case of medieval transmission and adaptation<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper tries to provide a thorough analysis of Ivan Turgenev's appropriation of *King Lear*, the Shakespearean tragedy, as it appears in the novella *King Lear of the Steppes* (1870), from the perspective of translation and adaptation studies, and how this was adapted to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russia. This analysis highlights the role of cross-cultural relations and its influence on the evolution of target literatures. The comparison with Shakespeare's source text shows evident similarities but also differences, all of which raise multiple questions from the perspective of philosophy, history and ideology, among others. In fact, the interpretation of Shakespeare's work, in Turgenev's work and in the Russian literature as a whole, has become essential to understand the intellectual development of this country since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the rise of some debates about the Russian cultural identity, which still continue today. By focusing on Turgenev's novella *King Lear of the Steppes*, the relevance of processes such as appropriation and adaptation for the development of national literatures will be underscored and how these foster debate and discussion within cultural systems. And, in order to illustrate this, it will also be highlighted that Shakespeare's *King Lear* was in fact based upon several previous medieval sources and suffered multiple changes and adaptations over the centuries, which proves that knowledge transforms and adapts to the literary, cultural and ideological features of each period of time and society.

**Key words:** Ivan Turgenev, *King Lear of the Steppes*, translation and adaptation studies, comparative literature, William Shakespeare.

## 1 Introduction

The cross-cultural transference of knowledge is not a contemporary phenomenon, but one that has historically influenced, shaped and determined the evolution of societies and nations. Over the centuries the world has witnessed, directly or indirectly, the cultural collision of multiple groups of population and communities. This contact has not always been peaceful and the result is anything but predictable, as history shows. Although the capacity of cultures to outlive the people who created them should not be disregarded, a harmonious coexistence has not often taken place. Conversely, cultural clash and social tensions are the most recurrent consequences when two societies collide. However, these cross-cultural conflicts are not necessarily fought on the battlefield, and they are sometimes to be found in the fields of fashion, literature, music, painting or philosophy. For example, French continued being the language of literature and the arts long after the loss of

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Normandy in 1204, as it became a matter of prestige and distinction, a mark signalling a noble origin or an instrument of social promotion. French was also the language of the Romanov dynasty in Russia, and even a language largely spoken by the elites and the highest ranks of the army. In both of these cases, a highly nationalistic movement opposing this influence developed and intellectuals had to decide one over the other.

In this paper a thorough analysis of the role of cross-cultural relations and its influence on the evolution of target literatures will be provided. These cultural and ideological tensions will be illustrated by showing the case of Ivan Turgenev's appropriation of *King Lear*, one of Shakespeare's most influential tragedies, as it appears in the novella *King Lear of the Steppes* (1870). The relevance of processes such as appropriation and adaptation for the development of national literatures will be underscored and how these foster debate and discussion within cultural systems. And, by portraying the rewriting of *King Lear*, the focus will also be placed on how these rewritings tend to conform to the specific characteristics of the target language and culture. It will be also highlighted that this story was in fact based upon several previous medieval sources and, although Shakespeare's *King Lear* is today considered a masterpiece and one of his most important tragedies, the evolution of the text over the centuries and its perception have not always been as univocal as it might be assumed today, which proves that knowledge transforms and adapts to the literary, cultural and ideological features of each period of time and society.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Adaptation has influenced knowledge transfer and the development of societies since the dawn of time, as the genesis of religions, traditions, myths and literatures sufficiently prove. However, this creative process has been traditionally considered, both in literature and in the arts by extension, as secondary, derivative or a mere imitation. Only in recent times academics and scholars have successfully tried to underscore the relevance of processes such as adaptation and appropriation, highlighting their creative power and their contribution to the evolution of cultural systems:

The reproductive capacity of appropriation and the study of appropriation cannot be underestimated. Texts feed off each other and create other texts, and other critical studies; literature creates other literature. Part of the sheer pleasure of the reading experience must be the tension between the familiar and the new, and the recognition both of similarity and difference, between ourselves and between texts. The pleasure exists, and persists, then, in the act of reading in, around, and on (and on) (Sanders 2006: 13-4).

Adaptation as a pale copy of the real thing is an entrenched belief prevalent in popular press reviews of film adaptations, where the final paragraphs almost always contain an obligatory return to the inevitable "not as good as the book" conclusion. Such conclusions are reached for the most part by an imperfect knowledge of both forms by the critic (Cartmell and Whelehan 2007: 3).

Sometimes it is forgotten that some of the greatest masterpieces are, in fact, rewritings or retellings of previous stories, as it is the case of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Homer's *Iliad*. Adaptations are treated as second-order or derivative texts which cannot offer any valuable interpretation on the source text or, even, be considered as superior.

In the case of the cinema, as the previous quotation perfectly illustrates, there exists a tendency to consider film adaptation as inferior to its literary counterpart. Films which are based on literary texts must be 'faithful' to the primary text; otherwise considered as 'incomplete' or 'unsuccessful'. This requirement of fidelity, which could be also found when paying attention to literary adaptations, has hindered the development of film studies for decades and failed to realise that, many times, film adaptations were far better than their literary source texts:

Academic studies of adaptation remain stubbornly attached to literature as cinema's natural progenitor. It is as if adaptation studies, by borrowing the cultural cachet of literature, sought to claim its institutional respectability and gravitas even while insuring adaptation's enduring aesthetic and methodological subordination to literature proper (Leitch 2008: 64).

Adaptations that aspire to be "faithful" to their literary source encapsulate what Andrew Higson, in his work on the heritage genre, has described as the "discourse of authenticity": films that endeavor to give the impression of accuracy in the representation of a literary text, historical event, or period. No matter how good a copy it is, however, it is *qua* "copy" inevitably doomed to be inferior to its original (Cartmell and Whelehan 2007: 2).

Today, thanks to the contribution of academics and scholars such as Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, Julie Sanders, Thomas Leitch or Linda Hutcheon, among many others, adaptation studies as a discipline has consolidated its academic relevance and underscored the need for further scientific research. However, there is still a lot to be done. Some of the main concerns for scholars are those of finding a common framework for the field, due to the fact that there is a multiplicity of existing models (Leitch 2012), or even a proper definition for the concepts of adaptation and appropriation (Leitch 2008: 72). Depending on the perspective, authors have privileged the position of literature or the cinema; when, probably, the most accurate solution would be that of considering adaptation as a creative process which embraces the arts as a whole, no matter the genre or the medium.

In fact, adaptation studies is currently a conglomerate of different models and theories which pays attention to how different texts (literary, audio-visual or of any other type) are transformed and adapted to other genres and/or media. Although it is difficult to find a conclusive definition for the concepts of adaptation and appropriation, for the purpose of this study, Julie Sanders' work *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006) has been followed, which offers a satisfactory distinction between both processes. According to this author, an adaptation should be understood as a:

Commentary on a source text [...] achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized.

Yet adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the process of proximation and updating (18-9).

In contrast, the act of appropriation should be understood as a step further, in the sense that it is sometimes difficult for the reader to identify the connection between the target text and the source. In those cases, some more elaboration on the part of the reader is necessary in order to identify the shared codes, symbols, themes or ideas:

Appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations. But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process (2006: 26).

As it was previously stated, this definition is basically illustrative, as experience shows that, sometimes, the boundary separating the act of adaptation from that of appropriation is not as obvious as Sanders’ definition may suggest. One example of this would be William Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*, whose female protagonist was later appropriated by Nikolai Leskov in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1865), adapted to the opera by Dmitri Shostakovich in 1934 and to the cinema in several occasions, being William Oldroyd’s *Lady Macbeth* (2016) the most recent. Consequently, it is obvious that the processes of adaptation and appropriation can influence each other over time, so that, in the end, it becomes impossible to distinguish one from the other.

One criterion to distinguish these two processes would be the degree of manipulation implied in the result, seen as a product. This point of view, which considers the adapted/appropriated text as the result of a process of manipulation and interpretation of the original, a type of ‘hybrid’, brings into contact the discipline of adaptation studies with that of translation studies. In fact, there are some authors who have considered adaptation as a type of translation (Cattrysse: 1992; Perdikaki: 2017; Venuti: 2007):

Translation can never simply communicate in whole or in part the text that it translates; it can only inscribe an interpretation that inevitably varies the form and meaning of that text. Translation can be regarded as intercultural communication only if we recognize that it communicates one interpretation among other possibilities (2007: 29).

Translation studies and film adaptation studies are both concerned with the transformation of source into target texts under some condition of “invariance”, or equivalence. The use of so-called polysystem theories in their application to translation also seemed plausible because of their attack on various procedures and situations in the traditional field of translation studies, which seem to characterize studies of film adaptation as well (1992: 54).

As a result, although the focus of research was initially placed on inter-semiotic or intra-lingual changes, for example a novel which later became a film or an opera (Milton 2009: 51), adaptation and appropriation are today studied from a broader and perhaps even richer perspective, analysing them from many other possibilities (including inter-lingual and intra-semiotic perspectives). This shows that a 'hybrid' text (as it is the case of translation, adaptation and appropriation) deserves a hybrid approach.

In fact, Maria Tymoczko's definition of translation could be perfectly read and understood from the perspective of adaptation studies while paying attention to how adaptations and appropriation work within cultural systems and their importance for the evolution of societies:

Translation is not a simple matter of communication and transfer. In turn, as interest in and presumptions about linguistic fidelity and the communicative values of translation have given way to a deeper understanding of how translations work within cultural systems and how they are shaped by socio-political and historical frameworks, the role of translators as active figures in history, art, politics, ideology, and belief systems has become ever more manifest (Tymoczko 2006: 447).

In that light, the translator, as well as the adaptor, becomes an interpreter and an active cultural participant of a different text, who 'necessarily promotes, actively or tacitly, ideological, aesthetic, and cultural values. That is, the translator cannot absolutely avoid transforming (changing, modifying) source texts to some degree' (Jaques 2002: 14).

For the purpose of this study, the perspective of translation and adaptation studies is going to be adopted to illustrate the relevance of these processes for the evolution of cultural systems. In order to do so, it becomes essential to understand that 'all texts invoke and rework other texts in a rich and ever-evolving cultural mosaic' (Sanders 2006: 17) and that, this bricolage, as Graham Allen suggests (2000) connects intertextuality with the tenets of postmodernism.

Turgenev's *King Lear of the Steppes* (1870) should be regarded as an act of appropriation which exerted great influence on the cultural life of Russia. In fact, as it is going to be analysed in this paper, Turgenev's realistic portrait of the Russian society was highly influential for the development of the *intelligentsia* and the philosophical context of the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. His appropriation of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which is in fact the rewriting of several previous medieval sources, perfectly underscores this 'ever-evolving cultural mosaic' and tries to shed some light on how adaptation and appropriation really work. One of the main purposes of this paper is not only to compare Shakespeare's and Turgenev's adaptation or appropriation of King Lear's story, but also to try to illustrate the motivations behind these processes, which are mainly ideological.

Ideology is in fact a key term in order to understand the reasons behind processes such as adaptation and appropriation, at least in the case proposed here. Although the Oxford Dictionary suggests that ideology is a 'set of beliefs characteristic of a

social group or individual', the truth is that ideologies are rarely associated with individuals; instead, they are commonly linked to larger groups, mainly because 'ours is the truth, theirs is the ideology' (Van Dijk 1998: 2). As this definition sometimes leads to negative reactions, it would be more accurate to consider ideology as 'any constellation of beliefs or ideas, bearing on an aspect of social reality, which are experienced as fundamental or commonsensical and which can be observed to play a normative role' (Verschuere 1999: preface). Van Dijk regards ideology in very similar terms, defining it as 'the set of factual or evaluative beliefs – that is the knowledge and the opinions – of a group [...] In other words, a bit like the axioms of a formal system, ideologies consist of those general and abstract social beliefs and opinions (attitudes) of a group' (1998: 48-9). If those two definitions are joined, it could be concluded that ideology is not only a set of beliefs, but also the mode of thinking of a group that considers some opinions and beliefs as fundamental or commonsensical.

Precisely due to the fact that ideology represents the mode of thinking of human groups, this has been used over the centuries to instrumentalize power and impose some hierarchical structures on other communities or groups of people. The use of ideology as a vehicle for the legitimation of authority, control and social difference has provoked many conflicts in all possible areas of human experience; and the context of climate change, the struggle for natural resources and the new world hegemony suggest that these social clashes will continue in the near future. In fact, as some scholars such as Siniša Malešević suggest, the concept of ideology in the context of social and political relations has been replaced by that of identity, especially since the 1990s. This term is today understood as a 'dominant idiom to come to terms with the realities of the new post-cold and post-class world [...] [because] nobody would take lightly the accusation that he or she is "ideological," while nearly everybody would claim to have or be proud of having some kind of identity' (2006: 2-3).

In this paper, the focus will be placed on ideology from a social, cultural and artistic perspective, because it helps contextualise Shakespeare's and Turgenev's manipulations in order to adapt the text to the target system. And, at the same time, those deliberate changes and alterations unveil the true nature of adaptation and its importance for the evolution of society.

### 3 Shakespeare's King Lear

When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools (*King Lear*, 4.6.182-183)

In the reader's mind, Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a story of human suffering, whose tragical and despairing end leaves many questions unanswered on the human condition. It is well-known, although not sufficiently underscored, that Shakespeare's *King Lear* is in fact the rewriting of a medieval theme. The historical narrative of King Lear or Leir is to be found in a variety of texts ranging from the

Welsh *The Mabinogion* to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1135), which would be retold later in Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Ireland* (1587) (Griggs 2009: 5). From Monmouth's *Historia*, which Shakespeare knew directly or indirectly, he took not only the story, but also the political implications of Leir's decision to divide the kingdom:

Geoffrey was as interested in the political implications of his *Historia* as in the social narrative; therefore, he focuses as much upon the consequence of Leir's action in dividing the kingdom in two older daughters, as upon the initial love contest (Halio 1992, 2005: 2).

As it has been perfectly attested today, Holinshed's alleged historical account was actually embellished with legendary, folkloric and mythical elements. In this version, King Leir had three daughters: Gonorilla, Regan and Cordeilla. As in Shakespeare's account, they were told to express their love, but Cordeilla's answer was considered cold and ungrateful. The king decided then to divide the kingdom in two parts, each one for the eldest daughters, while he retained one for himself. It was as the king began to age that he started to rely more and more on his daughters, until they finally seized power. Angry and furious, the king fled the country and reunited with his younger sister in France, where they raised an army to invade Britain. After the successful campaign, Leir was restored to the throne until his final death, which took place five years later. It was Cordeilla, then, who ruled the country until the descendants of Gonorilla and Regan overthrew their aunt. Defeated, Cordeilla committed suicide by hanging herself:

It may be from Cordeilla's death in these accounts that Shakespeare got the suggestion for turning the old *Chronicle History* from a tragicomedy into tragedy, although his sub-plot, borrowed from Sidney's *Arcadia*, may also have influenced him. From the old play he got the basic outlines of his fable and adapted it to his own purposes, which were quite different from those of the anonymous author (Halio 1992, 2005: 2).

Cordeill's suicide, first mentioned in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, also echoes in Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* (1590), in particular in Book II, Canto X.32:

Till that her sisters children, woxen strong  
Through proud ambition, against her rebeld  
And ouercommen kept in prison long,  
Till wearie of that wretched life, her selfe she hong (Quoted in Kahan 2008:14).

It is not until Shakespeare's version that Cordelia's suicide becomes murder, as a consequence of Edmund's orders, who enters the story as part of a subplot reinforcing some of the main themes in this version: reconciliation and authority. Another important difference is that Shakespeare moves away from the warring factions and focuses on the protagonists to reach a closer and deeper examination of human nature.

Other appropriations of the story have been detected, as for example, Sir Phillip Sydney's *Arcadia* (1590). In this story, a blinded king is deceived by his illegitimate

son, Plexirtus, who seizes power and leaves his father (like Lear) 'nothing but the name of a King' (Halio 1992, 2005: 4). The resemblance with the triangle Gloucester-Edgar-Edmund is more than evident, although some other differences can also be traced, as the use of disguises to conceal identity or the feigned madness. But this is not the only coincidence:

Other incidents from Sidney's epic romance influenced Shakespeare's play. Queen Andromana's lust for both Pyrocles and Musidorus in chapter 20 is the mirror image of Gonerill's and Regan's lust for Edmond; her death by stabbing herself after her son Palladius is killed may have suggested Gonerill's suicide after Edmond's defeat (Halio 1992, 2005: 6).

Robert Greene's *Selimus* (1594), which retells the story replacing daughters with sons while introducing interesting subplots of disloyalty and sibling rivalry (Griggs 2009: 7) could also be regarded as one of those sources Shakespeare may have used in order to transform Leir's tragicomedy into his tragedy, while giving him the possibility of introducing a subplot to reinforce the main theme.

However, the main source seems to be the play *King Leir*, first performed in the early 1590s, which the Bard of Avon must have known. In fact, several scholars such as Richard Knowles have noted 'almost one hundred details common to these two plays but found in virtually none of the other sources' (Griggs 2009: 7). Examples of these similarities are the reconciliation between Cordelia and Lear or the presence of dead queens. In fact, Lear's deceased wife is mentioned only in passing in Shakespeare's version, which might be understood as a reference to this previous play and an omission indicating that the audience probably knew the story. In *King Leir* the death of the queen also reinforces the idea that the king needed the love of his daughters more than ever (Kahan, 2008: 8), a circumstance which has raised many speculations on the true nature of the relationship between Lear and his daughters, and why Cordelia refuses to show love to her father. In this regard, it is interesting to remark that none of the daughters is married in this version, so when Cordella fails the test, she is expelled helpless and penniless. After this incident, Regan and Gonoril marry the lords of Cornwall and Cambria, respectively (Kahan, 2008: 9), but both of them are defeated when the French king discovers how badly the King has been treated and plans an invasion.

It is obvious that Shakespeare did not follow *King Leir* to the letter, as this version did not include important characters such as Gloucester, Edgar, Edmund or the Fool. Consequently, although the extent to which Shakespeare borrowed from it is debatable, it can't be in any case denied. Another important thing to underscore is that he manipulated the sources deliberately in order to get a certain effect, as the audience, familiar with the story, would have expected something radically different for the ending. As some scholars have suggested, this unexpected ending would provide evidence that Shakespeare was looking for something 'real' in *King Lear*:



More extensive than the revision of his own play was Shakespeare's revision of his sources. He reconstructed the familiar story of old King Leir and his daughters so that the ending is far from what his audience expected or, in Shakespeare's sequence of events, from what any audience might reasonably expect [...] If, as Kermode says, everything in *King Lear* tends to a conclusion that does not occur – that is, a reunion with Cordelia that endures and includes restoration as well as redemption – it is sufficient for a true fiction. Drawing upon myth, Shakespeare transforms it and presents us instead with 'something real' (Halio 1992, 2005: 27-32).

Another important element worth mentioning is the addition of the fool. Shakespeare could have introduced this character to take advantage of the talent and skills of some of his actors, as for example Richard Burbage and Robert Armin. In fact, the latter was the author of several humorous books in which he discussed the importance of the "foolosopher", who according to Enid Welsford (Cited in Kahan, 2009: 11), 'does not merely raise a laugh or score a point, he sets a problem'. That is to say, fools not only make people laugh, but also stimulate philosophic discussion and exhibit an extraordinarily developed clairvoyance, which perfectly fits with the behaviour of the fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

While his folly could be disregarded as the raving of a madman, it could be also be seen as divinely inspired: the natural fool was 'touched' by God. Lear's 'all-licensed fool' enjoys a privileged status, much to Gonerill's annoyance (1.4.160), and his characteristic idiom suggests he is a 'natural' fool, not an 'artificial one, though his perceptiveness and wit show that he is far from being an idiot or a moron, however 'touched' he may otherwise be (Halio 1992, 2005: 7).

If the addition of the fool is remarkable, there is another great difference between Shakespeare's play and the sources which he probably used, a direct consequence of the process of adaptation: the problem of theodicy. That is, the reconciliation of the belief in divine justice with all the injustices on earth:

Repeatedly in the play, characters invoke or cite a variety of deities and metaphysical forces. Repeatedly there's a questioning of the entities that may govern our lives: are they kind, blind or cruel? Insistently, too, the play gives instances of the very kinds of suffering that make people seek some consolatory pattern in events [...] His adaptations seem designed both to confirm and to subvert the sense of divine ordinance of event (Shakespeare 1994, 2004: 15-6).

As the previous quotation perfectly illustrates, there are fragments in the play which seem to suggest the existence of some kind of providence ordering events, while some other parts deny this instance. For that reason, authors such as George Orwell have claimed that the text tacitly denies the belief in any God, while other exegetes, such as G.I. Duthie, see the play as an affirmation of Christian faith:

God overthrows the absolutely evil – he destroys the Cornwalls, the Gonerils, the Regans: he is just. God chastens those who err but who can be regenerated – the Lears, the Gloucesters – and in mercy he redeems them: he is just, and merciful. But again, God moves in a mysterious way – he deals strangely with the Cordelias of this world. His methods are

inscrutable. Shakespeare presents the whole picture [...] This, however, can mean 'pessimistic' drama only to those who cannot agree that the play is a Christian play (Quoted in Shakespeare 1994, 2004: 16).

From the perspective of this paper, this is one of the best evidences showing that, as a consequence of the adaptation process, the text is conformed to the target cultural system and the ideology of the period of time; but, at the same time, something of the past background remains. Consequently, the text becomes a palimpsest, a written record of how the story has crossed the boundaries of space and time in order to adapt to the present.

When Shakespeare adapted the story of *King Lear*, he Christianised the text, providing a new interpretation of the old narrative. This becomes clear if attention is paid to the fact that many characters invoke God, Satan, holy water or St. Mary in a story describing a pre-Christian ruler. At the same time, other invocations to 'the gods', Jupiter or Apollo portray a post-Roman but pre-Christian Britain; while other subtler elements, such as spectacles, fops visiting the barber or schoolmasters clearly point out at a period of time contemporaneous to that of Shakespeare (Shakespeare 1994, 2004: 12-13). As a consequence, *King Lear* hazily reflects the philosophical, cultural, literary and religious contexts of all the source texts which the author made use of, but also his own. This is particularly interesting for the purpose of this research, because it gives observable evidence that processes such as adaptation and appropriation are creative mechanisms which are not only capable of producing something distinctively innovative (as it is Shakespeare's *King Lear*), but also fostering the development of cultural and literary systems.

Although nobody would doubt to consider Shakespeare's play as a masterpiece and a profound reflection on human experience and nature today, the reception of Shakespeare's play has not always been unanimous. The Polish scholar Jan Kott summarised perfectly this situation in 1964:

The attitude of modern criticism to *King Lear* is ambiguous and somehow embarrassed. Doubtless *King Lear* is still recognized as a masterpiece, beside which even *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* seem tame and pedestrian [...] But at the same time *King Lear* gives one the impression of a high mountain that everyone admires, yet no one particularly wishes to climb. It is as if the play had lost its power to excite on the stage and in reading; as if it were out of place in our time, or, at any rate, had no place in the modern theatre (Kott 1965: 100).

Kott's concern about the apparent out of place of *King Lear* in modern theatre is, in fact, not 'modern'. As it is known, a civil war broke out in England in 1642 and the theatres remained closed until the year 1660. When they were finally reopened, the theatrical taste had changed as a consequence of Charles II's ascend to the throne, who had exiled to France during this period of time. When he returned, he was heavily influenced by French theatre, which was restrictively governed by Neoclassicism and the principles of "The Three Unities": Action, Place and Time (Kahan 2008: 14).

Nahum Tate's adaptation of the play was somehow perceived as a correction of the source text and held the stage from 1681 to 1838. This adaptation was actually

a deep and full-scale revision of Shakespeare's play. One of the most shocking changes affected the ending, which was significantly sweetened. According to Tate's version, Albany turns over the kingdom to Lear and Edgar marries Cordelia. This happy ending exasperated many nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars and critics, as for example Charles Lamb in the year 1811:

A happy ending! —as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through, —the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world's burden after, why all this pudder and preparation, —why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? (Cited in Kahan 2008: 17).

Despite Charles Lamb's words, the truth is that many renowned scholars willingly accepted Tate's version. Even Samuel Johnson praised Tate's changes, arguing that Shakespeare's version was, not only flawed, but ethically inferior:

And, if my sensations could add any thing to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by *Cordelia's* death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor ... He [Shakespeare] sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose ... he makes no just distribution of good or evil (Cited in Kahan 2008: 18).

Even, in recent times, other scholars such as A.C. Bradley have defended the idea of expurgating some parts of the play, as for example Gloucester's blinding or Cordelia's death, so as to consider some scenes as untheatrical:

The blinding of Gloster on the stage has been condemned almost universally; and surely with justice, because the mere physical horror of such a spectacle would in the theatre be a sensation so violent as to overpower the purely tragic emotions, and therefore the spectacle would seem revolting or shocking. But it is otherwise in reading. For mere imagination the physical horror, though not lost, is so far deadened that it can do its duty as a stimulus to pity, and to that appalled dismay at the extremity of human cruelty which it is of the essence of the tragedy to excite. Thus the blinding of Gloster belongs rightly to *King Lear* in its proper world of imagination; it is a blot upon *King Lear* as a stage-play [...] What they wish, though they have not always the courage to confess it even to themselves, is that the deaths of Edmund, Goneril, Regan and Gloster should be followed by the escape of Lear and Cordelia from death (Bradley 1957, 1992: 214-5).

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century folklorists detected some connections between the old story told about Leir and his daughters and the tale of Cinderella, also present in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, which have raised the interest not only of folktale experts, but also of anthropologists and literary critics (Halio 1992, 2005: 9-10). The greatest resemblance between this type of stories and *King Lear* is precisely at the beginning of the tragedy, when the King (or the rich man in many tales) asks his daughters to show their love to him. However, in order to be a true fairy-tale, as in the case of Cinderella, Shakespeare's tragic ending was a problem.

Perhaps for that reason, consciously or unconsciously, Nahum Tate's version introduced a happy ending during the Restoration period (Halio 1992, 2005:10).

It was not until 1838, with William Macready's *King Lear*, that Nahum Tate's version of the play finally started losing importance and becoming less relevant. The play debuted on 25 January 1838 and was greatly praised. Although it is generally agreed that Shakespeare's version returned to the stage with Macready, this is not completely true. He reintroduced the fool and restored Shakespeare's original ending, but, again, the text suffered from many alterations and manipulations in the process which emphasised one of the greatest concerns with the degree of 'fidelity' of the source text. In fact, it has been one of the main concerns for scholars and academics for centuries, as there are several posthumous versions of the play, and none of them can be considered as the definitive (Griggs 2009: 8). Consequently, for some editors, the solution to the problem has been to bring elements of the two main manuscripts together in order to create a hybrid version, while others have preferred a bi-textual approach (this is the case of Oxford, for example). The result is that it is impossible to prove that either text is conclusively the definitive or the closest to what Shakespeare originally wrote.

The example of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is clearly one of adaptation, appropriation and transmutation over the centuries, because it has been constructed from a range of different existing narratives and because the text has meant many different things for many people in different periods of time. The history of its performances shows how easily the play accommodates to the social, cultural, philosophical and/or aesthetic preoccupations of each era, and it will continue to do so as far as the play is capable of generating an endless amount of questions for which no clear-cut answer can be provided. But, apart from that, as it has been portrayed in this section, Shakespeare not only brought together several previous medieval sources, but also deliberately manipulated them to frustrate his audience's expectations and, perhaps, create 'something real.'

*King Lear* has offered multiple perspectives on human condition for centuries and, due to the fact that the Bard of Avon rarely gave definitive answers to the most complicated questions, precisely those which are easiest to formulate, each generation has tried to adapt Shakespeare's text to its own needs:

Why must Cordelia die as she does? The question has often been posed; evidently from the later seventeenth century to the mid nineteenth no satisfactory answer could be found, and the happy ending in Nahum Tate's redaction of the play was preferred. Twentieth-century critics [...] have not objected [...] It is not simply that our age has grown more pessimistic than previous ages were, or that our understanding of human nature is more profound than theirs. More likely, Holocaust and Hiroshima have prepared us so that we know Cordelia's fate corresponds to a truth of experience, not to 'natural ideas of justice' (Halio 1992, 2005: 25).

Ivan Turgenev's *King Lear of the Steppes* offers a little studied appropriation of Shakespeare's play, which clearly shares not only some resemblances with the source text but also other evident differences. All of these are intended and, as it

will be portrayed in the next section, they are the result of adapting the Shakespearean character, understood as an archetype, to a Russian environment and a context with different features and needs. This analysis will try to highlight that the appropriation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* obeys ideological and philosophical reasons. The purpose is not only to compare both works, but also to put in connection all the different appropriations and adaptations of the story and the character to show how these processes work and why they are so creative and attractive. Their capacity to create new hybrid texts which perfectly conform to the specific circumstances and conditions of the target cultural system foster discussion and debate, and promote the evolution of target national literatures.

#### **4 4. Ivan Turgenev's *King Lear of the Steppes* (1870)**

Turgenev's novella *King Lear of the Steppes* (1870) tells the story of Martin Petrovitch Harlov, an extraordinarily big and strong landlord who, after having a terrible nightmare, decides to divide his land in two parts and give them to his two daughters: Anna and Evlampia. This story is told from the perspective a young 3<sup>rd</sup> person homodiegetic narrator, who is in fact the son of Natalia Nikolaevna, saved from falling into a deep ravine by Martin Petrovitch twenty-five years earlier. Since that moment, Natalia felt grateful to Martin Petrovitch and tried to help him with all kind of matters, especially after the death of his wife. Consequently, Natalia arranged the marriage of the eldest daughter, Anna, to Vladimir Vassielitch Sletking, an orphan and the son of a petty official; and also found a fiancé, the retired army major Zhitkov, for the young Evlampia. Another important character to be found in the house of the wealthy Natalia Nikolaevna is Bitchkov, also nicknamed "Souvenir", who occupies a position between that of a buffoon (or fool) and a dependant.

One summer evening Martin Petrovitch came to Natalia Nikolaevna's house. He was pale and nervous but, unable to speak, he left immediately. However, he came back the next day and explained that he had had a terrible dream announcing his own death. Afraid and paralysed, he had decided to share the estate and give it to his two daughters. He wanted to prepare a formal act and asked for the presence of Natalia's son and Bychkov. The day of the formal act came and Martin dressed solemnly with his bronze medals and his sabre, looking confident and aware of his unlimited power. The event took place normally, but in the feast that followed, the intoxicated Souvenir interrupted to predict that Martin would soon find himself naked and out in the snow.

After the feast, Natalia and his son left the estate for a short period of time, but when they came back, the situation had changed completely. Martin Petrovitch had been put aside and had lost almost all his belongings. Now Slyotkin, his son-in-law, was the master of the estate and even the major Zhitkov, Evlampia's fiancé, had been driven out.

One day, while the narrator was wandering through the forest hunting, he found Martin Petrovitch sitting and crying by a pond. He was dressed in rags and in very poor condition. The narrator tried to speak with him about his terrible mistake but

Martin Petrovitch reacted aggressively and told him to leave. But some time later, in the middle of the night and during a strong autumn storm, Martin Petrovitch came to Natalia's house claiming that he had been driven out of his own house. Natalia and her son tried to calm him down, but Souvenir, 'like a demon possessed' could not stop humiliating him. In the end, Martin Petrovitch, furious, decided to come back to his house and take revenge. When he arrived, he climbed to the attic of his former house and started destroying the roof, while his two daughters and Slyotkin were trying to make him reconsider the situation and stop. Evlampia even recognised her mistake and offered to give him back all her possessions, but Martin Petrovitch replied that it was already too late for that. Suddenly a pair of front rafters collapsed, Harlov fell down and hit the ground heavily. Martin Petrovitch lay motionless, but still had time to say his last unfinished words to Evlampia: 'Well, daugh...ter...you, I do not...' The incomplete sentence left the question of forgiveness unanswered.

After the burial, Evlampia left the house. The narrator saw both sisters some time later. Anna had become a widow and the master of the estate. Her husband, Slyotkin, had apparently died, and the local people said that he had been poisoned. She had two daughters and a son and had become an excellent mistress of the estate. Evlampia was met by the narrator too. She had become the 'Virgin' leader of the schismatics, a sect that appeared in Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but the reasons explaining why and how she became their leader are not provided in the story.

When Shakespeare's and Turgenev's rewritings of *King Lear* are compared, some important similarities and differences are clearly perceived. It is obvious that many of the resemblances are intended and that *King Lear of the Steppes* was addressed to an audience who already knew the work of the English dramatist. Historically, Turgenev's work has been understood by scholars such as Afanasy Fet or Nikolay Strakhov as a philosophical and aesthetic criticism of Shakespeare's play or a parody (Volkov 2018: 5):

Hostile critics were – or pretended to be – indignant at what they claimed as a trivialization or vulgarization of Shakespeare's masterpiece; they forgot that here was not only an established pattern in Turgenev's work (a pattern at which no one had carped before), but one arguably analogous to a standard procedure in classical literature (Seeley 1991: 287).

Even the writer Ivan Goncharov defined it as a caricature of Shakespeare's masterpiece, although he also compared it in greatness to Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (Volkov 2008: 8). Unfortunately, the novella was forgotten and regarded as one of Turgenev's minor works. Only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in more contemporaneous times has the story aroused interest again among scholars, and other studies such as those of Yuri Lotman (1965), Yuri D. Levin (1965) or I.O. Volkov (2018) have tried to understand the connections between both works.

It is important to understand that *King Lear of the Steppes* is not an adaptation of Shakespeare's play but an appropriation, according to the definition provided by Julie Sanders and adopted for this paper, which adapts some elements of the source text to rural 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russia. For that reason, while it incorporates some features

from the Shakespearean tragedy, the result can be clearly regarded as belonging to Turgenev. The relationship between both texts is stated on the first page, what implies that the Russian author wanted the reader to understand his text in relation to Shakespeare's, with all the possible consequences that this fact could entail. He presents a group of educated college students speaking about William Shakespeare and the humanity of the characters he created. Suddenly, one of them interrupts the conversation to state that he actually met an archetype of King Lear, and tells the story:

The conversation turned on Shakespeare, on his types, and how profoundly and truly they were taken from the very heart of humanity. We admired particularly their truth to life, their actuality. Each of us spoke of the Hamlets, the Othellos, the Falstaffs, even the Richard the Thirds and Macbeths—the two last only potentially, it is true, resembling their prototypes—whom he had happened to come across.

'And I, gentlemen,' cried our host, a man well past middle age, 'used to know a King Lear!' (Turgenev, 2017: preface).

This introductory remark in the preface underscores two important facts for the understanding and interpretation of Turgenev's work: 1) the story is based upon the Shakespearean archetype of King Lear as a character, which can be regarded as a cross-cultural element; 2) Shakespeare himself based the creation of his characters on previous prototypes. The preface also implies that literary adaptation and appropriation is a legitimate and creative process, which in its turn, Turgenev is going to use too. In that sense, it cannot be denied that there is a certain parallelism between William Shakespeare and Ivan Turgenev in the use of historical prototypes to present their stories. A connection that the latter was not afraid to underscore in the preface. In fact, as it is going to be analysed in this paper, King Lear is one of the several Western archetypes used by Turgenev during his literary career, which pinpoints a certain literary pattern and can give us a glimpse of a major literary and ideological project:

From archetypal figures in foreign literatures Turgenev had regularly borrowed a single central characteristic as pivot for a work of his own; from Don Quixote the selfless dedication to his ideal; from Hamlet the crippling introspection; from Werther the self-destructive devotion. So now what he takes over from *Lear* is the towering pride – and the situation: the father who bestows all he has upon his daughters, thinking to govern them through their affection instead of their dependence, and the nemesis that overtakes his overweening (Seeley 1991: 287).

As it will be portrayed in this paper, the extent of the appropriation cannot be limited to a single central characteristic; in fact, the similarities are much more important, which suggests a deep and thorough reflection on Shakespeare's tragedy and a conscious process of adaptation to a Russian setting.

The first important analogy between both works, which attests that the connection goes far beyond adopting a single central characteristic, deals with characters, their features and functions in the novella. In fact, an obvious

correspondence of characters can be found in Turgenev's work, as Ivan O. Volkov has perfectly described in his research (2018). Martin Petrovitch Harlov can be identified as King Lear; Evlampia, because of her double nature, would correspond to Cordelia and Goneril; Anna would be Regan; Slyotkin would correspond to the Duke of Cornwall and Edmund; Souvenir plays the fool; Zhitkov performs the role of the Duke of Burgundy, and the servant Maksimka would be Kent. In this paper the focus will be placed on the most significant of them from the perspective of this research: Martin Petrovitch, Evlampia and the fool.

For obvious reasons, this comparison has to begin with the character of Martin Petrovitch, who plays the part of King Lear in Turgenev's work. The first startling difference between both characters refers to their physical descriptions. In Shakespeare's tragedy the King is described as old and decrepit, as the fool cunningly remarks: 'Thou should'st not have been old till thou hadst been wise' (1.5.38-9). Other academics see in the bare description of *King Lear* a search for a certain simplification of the scene:

What do we know of Lear's appearance, or of what the heath looked like? Lear is a powerful man, 'four score and upward,' and the crown of his head ('this thin helm') is covered by a few white hairs; the heath is a desolate place [...] that is all we know of the appearance of either [...] But this simplification is the condition of the greatest possible comprehension and intensification: character and situation alike take on a symbolic quality and are made to point to a range of experience beyond themselves (Knights 1963: 28-9).

In contrast, in Turgenev's work, Martin Petrovitch is portrayed as a giant, an enormous strong man. He is even compared at certain moments with a bear, an important symbol in Russian folklore. In the West, the bear has been traditionally connected to the idea of Russia as a nation, but one that is especially less developed than European countries. In Russian folklore, the symbol of the bear suggests both positive and negative connotations. While it can be seen as the protagonist of folktales and a good-natured creature, friendly and even charismatic; at other times, the symbol of the bear is an aggressive and frightening one. In Turgenev's novella, this symbol conveys both interpretations at the same time, although they take place at different moments. On the first pages, the description of the protagonist is that of a force of nature, a fearsome giant:

Picture to yourself a man of gigantic stature. On his huge carcass was set, a little asked, and without the least trace of a neck, a prodigious head. A perfect haystack of tangled yellowish-grey hair stood up all over it, growing almost down to the bushy eyebrows ... The voice that proceeded from this mouth, though hoarse, was exceedingly strong and resonant ... Its sound recalled the clank of iron bars, carried in a cart over a badly paved road; and when Harlov spoke, it was as though some one were shouting in a high wind across a wide ravine (Turgenev 2017: 8).

But, later, he is depicted as a vulnerable being, expelled from his own house, without any possessions, dumb and unable to defend himself:



I was standing moodily at my window, and I remember a sudden darkness came on—a bluish darkness—though the clock only pointed to twelve. Suddenly I fancied I saw a bear dash across our yard from the gates to the steps! ... the very monster I had seen dashing across the yard! And who was this monster? Harlov! (Turgenev 2017: 76-7)

At the end of the novella, while he is destroying his own house, a symbol of everything he has achieved in life but also of everything that has been stolen from him by his relatives, he embodies both interpretations of the bear: the giant and the barbarian. It is not difficult to see something of Russia also, as a geographical space, in the figure of Harlov, who hides behind an enormous physical appearance but, who, in the end, is filled with many doubts:

Kharlov is an uncouth Hercules [...] He is also a quite extraordinary compound of pride and fantasy [...] ‘Where in the world is there a power that could thwart my will?’ (XIV, 217); ‘But the Lord God knows that sooner shall this globe of earth be shattered than I take back my word ... or lose hear, or regret what I have done!’ (XV, 221). It is noteworthy that this pride is rooted not in realities but in fantasies. Kharlov is not at all proud of his prodigious bodily strength: that is just a gift of God (Seeley 1991: 288).

This apparent portrait of a man with almost supernatural powers, a mythical giant or a monster capable of any physical effort, soon crumbles to pieces. Harlov has a terrible nightmare, and becomes paralysed by a raven colt sporting and grinning, which is interpreted as the prediction of a premature death:

I fell asleep, and dreamed a raven colt ran into the room to me. And this colt began sporting and grinning. Black as a beetle was the raven colt ... It was an intimation... referring to my death ... I have planned in my own mind this: to divide—now during my lifetime—my estate between my two daughters, Anna and Evlampia, according as God Almighty directs me (Turgenev 2007: 33).

It is interesting to note that Harlov understands this bad dream announcing his own death as a message of God, an interpretation that leads up to the previous statement: that of considering his prodigious bodily strength as a gift of the divinity. In fact, the presence or absence of the providence is remarkable in both versions of *King Lear*. In Shakespeare’s play, God’s plans seem to overthrow the logical structure of the human world. Although some writers, as for example George Orwell, have stated that the play is incompatible with the belief in God; other scholars, such as Robert Ornstein, claim that King Lear is obliged to face the ‘vast inscrutable universe which surrounds him’, so as to realise that any possible explanation about the order and purpose of the world is beyond our reach (Cited in Kahan, 2008: 46-7). In *King Lear of the Steppes* Turgenev suggests a similar view on this ‘vast inscrutable universe’:

Everything in the world, good and bad, comes to man, not through his deserts, but in consequence of some as yet unknown but logical laws which I will not take upon myself to indicate, though I sometimes I fancy I have a dim perception of them (Turgenev 2017: 109).

From the perspective of Christianity, the powerful king who loses everything and becomes naked in the storm and the barren land, more than a treatise on politics or social order, has been read as a symbol of Christian humility and redemption. In Turgenev's work, the presence of the divinity, as it is interpreted by the characters themselves, is also constant. Apart from Harlov's nightmare, understood as a message of God, his presence as a Judge as well as our universal feeling of alienation are also mentioned at the burial:

The universal, unbending alienation, condemnation, which I had noticed on the day of Harlov's death, I detected now too on the faces of all the people in the church, in their actions and their glances, but still more grave and, as it were, impersonal. It seemed as though all those people felt that the sin into which the Harlov family had fallen—this great sin—had gone now before the presence of the one righteous Judge, and that for that reason, there was no need now for them to trouble themselves and be indignant (Turgenev 2017: 105).

This fragment raises the same uncertainties about the loyalty duly owed to the parents or the role of God in this world that any reader may find in Shakespeare's play. The fact that it is understood as a sin by townsfolk justifies the punishment, but also leaves space for many questions about the nature of suffering or its purpose. A certain questioning of the logical order of the world can be noticed in the fragment, as well as a universal feeling of loneliness and alienation. Jan Kott, a scholar who had already been mentioned in this paper, compared *King Lear* with Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame* in one of his books (Kott 1965). It could be added to that suggestive comparison that Turgenev's work conveys somehow the same feeling of universal alienation and absurd that the two works previously mentioned.

Another similarity between Shakespeare's and Turgenev's versions of *King Lear* is that both of them boast about their power and misinterpret the loyalty of their daughters:

'Father', ..., 'They do not know us, and that is why they judge of us so. But don't, please, make yourself ill. You are angered for nothing, indeed; see, your face is, as it were, twisted awry ... 'Thank you, my daughter Anna,' ... 'you are a sensible girl; I rely upon you and on our husband too' (Turgenev 2017: 49)

Despite this initial trust they soon realise their mistake and, when the revelation comes, this appears under very adverse weather conditions. It is common in Shakespeare's plays, as in *Macbeth* or in *The Tempest*, to use the weather to symbolise an inner struggle or a disruption of the natural order. In the case of *King Lear*, these adverse weather conditions symbolise the King's rage after the betrayal of his daughters, a consequence that can also be seen in Turgenev's novella:

The weather had been disgusting for the last five days. Shooting was not even to be thought of. All things living had hidden themselves; even the sparrows made no sound, and the rooks had long ago disappeared from sight. The wind howled drearily, then whistled spasmodically. The low-hanging sky, unbroken by one streak of light, had changed from an unpleasant whitish to a leaden and still more sinister hue; and the rain, which had been pouring and pouring, mercilessly and unceasingly, had suddenly become still more violent and more

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driving, and streamed with a rushing sound over the panes ... Suddenly I fancied I saw a bear dash across our yard ... (Turgenev 2017: 76).

As it is known, Lear's end comes after the death of Cordelia, who is hanged as a consequence of Edmund's command:

And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life! / Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, / and thou no breath at all? ... Do you see this? Look on her! Look, her lips, / Look there, look there (5.3.304-309).

In Turgenev's work, Martin Petrovitch Harlov plays a more active role in the denouement and dies because of his uncontrolled fury and rage. Although Evlampia looks for his forgiveness, his unfinished words leave the question unanswered. Perhaps this is probable (the narrator himself interprets it so), but not granted. The fact that Evlampia leaves the estate soon after Martin Petrovitch's death and joins a religious sect could imply a search for an unfulfilled forgiveness, but also a connection with the divinity:

She goes on to emulate and surpass her father: he had seen himself as God's deputy only in relation to his family; she has herself acknowledged as an incarnate deity by a much larger 'family' (Seeley 1991: 293).

Precisely the character of Evlampia, as it was previously mentioned, exhibits a double nature. On the one hand, it portrays Cordelia's tenderness and inability to express love for her father appropriately:

'Evlampia!' ... 'Upon my word, madam, she was like a stone! Nothing but a statue! ... Can it be she's no feelings for me! It's clear I'm in a bad way; it's clear I've a feeling that I'm not long for this world, since I make over everything to them; and yet she's like a stone! She might at least utter a sound! Bows—yes, she bows, but there's no thankfulness to be seen' (Turgenev 2017: 52-3).

This tenderness comes back at the end of the story, while her father is destroying the roof of the house and she realises that they have mistreated him. Then, the quest for forgiveness and pardon begins and Evlampia offers Harlov everything that has been taken away from him:

'Stop, father; come down. We are in fault; we give everything back to you. Come down!' ... 'I give you back my share. I give up everything. Give over, come down, father! Forgive us; forgive me ... Come, trust me; you always trusted me. Come, get down; come to me to my little room, to my soft bed. I will dry you and warm you; I will bind up your wounds; see, you have torn your hands. You shall live with me as in Christ's bosom; food shall be sweet to you' (Turgenev 2017: 96-7).

In the previous section the ambiguous relationship between King Lear and his daughters was discussed, a situation that has not escaped the scrutiny of academics for centuries. That ambiguity had made some scholars think that the love contest

was in fact much more than a simple test on fraternal love. The same uncertainty is also present in Turgenev's work, as it can be seen in the previous quotation. Evlampia's words suggest a startling amorous overtone which clearly reminds the reader of the relationship between Lear and Cordelia (Seeley 1991: 290).

But, if Evlampia performs the part of Cordelia, it is also true that she plays Goneril's. As it is the case of Edmund in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, both sisters seem to fight for Slyotkin. Although he is married to Anna, the text suggests that he is Evlampia's lover too. One day, the narrator is hunting and finds Slyotkin and Evlampia in the forest. They are resting and playing, but Evlampia's song is quite revealing: 'Hither, hither, threatening storm-cloud / slay for me the father-in-law / strike for me the mother-in-law / the young wife I will kill myself' (Turgenev 2017: 67-8).

Consequently, Evlampia embodies four main traits in the novella: sensuality, pride, lust and spirituality (Seeley 1991: 293). At the end of the story, many years after Harlov's incident, the narrator finds Evlampia again. The description well embodies these four main traits:

She turned her head a little, and I recognised Evlampia Harlov. I knew her at once, I did not doubt for one instant, and indeed no doubt was possible; eyes like hers, and above all that cut of the lips—haughty and sensual—I had never seen in any one else. Her face had grown longer and thinner, the skin was darker, here and there line could be discerned; [...] It is difficult to do justice in words to the self-confidence, the sternness, the pride it had gained! (Turgenev 2017: 112).

Another fundamental character in order to understand the work of both writers is the fool. He plays a significant role, not only in highlighting what seems evident for the reader, but also in anticipating what is to come. In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the fool is a combination of a clown and a soothsayer, as he is capable of foreseeing the future but also of making people laugh:

'I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are: they'll / have me whipped for speaking true, thou'lt have me / whipped for lying; and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace' (1.4.170-3).

[...]

'I am better than thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing' (1.4.181-2).

As Jan Kott points out, in *King Lear* the reader is faced with two types of fool: the jester who has accepted the fact that he is at the service of someone, and the clown, the greatest fool, that one who does not know that he is a fool (Kott 1965: 130). In order to illustrate this dichotomy, he rescues Leszek Kolakowski's words on the nature of buffoonery and humour:

The Clown is he who, although moving in high society, is not part of it, and tells unpleasant things to everybody in it; he, who disputes everything regarded as evident. He would not be able to do all this, if he were part of that society himself [...] The Clown must stand aside

and observe good society from outside, in order to discover the non-evidence of evidence, the non-finality of its finality [...] The philosophy of Clowns [...] reveals contradictions inherent in what seems to have been proved by visual experience; it holds up to ridicule what seems obvious common sense, and discovers truth in the absurd (Kott 1965: 131).

In quoting Kolakowski, Kott is referring to the opposition king-fool present in Shakespeare's tragedy. Lear's position is absurd, as he cannot foresee that, when he divided the kingdom, he was giving away his power too, so he could not remain a king. It is the fool who reminds this absurdity when he says 'thou art nothing' (1.4.182). In Turgenev's work, *Souvenir* exhibits the same qualities as the Shakespearean fool. He is capable of speaking what the main characters cannot foresee, and his capacity to see the future contrasts with Harlov's short-sightedness:

'Generous-hearted! Generous-hearted!' he began croaking; 'but we shall see whether this generosity will be much to his taste when he's stripped naked, the servant of God... and out in the snow, too!' ... 'Fool! fool! repeated Souvenir. 'God Almighty alone knows which of us is the real fool. But you, brother, did my sister, your wife, to her death, and now you've done for yourself... ha-ha-ha!' (Turgenev 2017: 48)

In conclusion, it can be stated that the similarities between both texts are more than coincidental, which implies that Turgenev was consciously producing a text which clearly exhibited elements from the source text, while others were definitely Russian: the bear, the religious sect, the landlord-peasants structure, the Russian folklore or the symbolism of dreams, among others. The fact that the tragedy takes place in rural Russia and that is compared to one of the greatest symbols of Western literature implies that there is a certain cultural belonging to Europe which deserves being emphasised. If the same archetypes and prototypes are valid and can be found at both ends of the continent, then it must be assumed that the same origin is shared. In the next section, the ideological purposes which could have influenced Turgenev's appropriation of *King Lear* will be illustrated.

## **5 The importance of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian Context**

### **5.1 Slavophiles and Westernisers**

As it was stated in the introduction, the cross-cultural transference of knowledge is not a contemporary phenomenon and, in many occasions, it has led to cultural clash and social tensions. When analysing the importance of Ivan Turgenev for the evolution of Russian literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is essential to pay attention to his context and how philosophical and ideological tensions had a significant impact on literature. In order to understand this clash, it is of paramount importance to bear in mind the role of the *intelligentsia*, a group of educated people who were engaged in shaping the culture and the ideology of the country. Its members were divided into two main perspectives, which somehow embodied the identity conflict of Russia as a country: the Slavophiles and the Westernisers. The former considered that the pathway towards Russia's salvation was close to the peasantry, the simple people, the land, the Russian Orthodox religion and the ideal of communality (Chances 2001: 112):

The etymological meaning of ‘Slavophilism’ is love of Slavs.’ [...] This term has come to be applied in a more narrow sense to a group of ideologists belonging to the conservative nobility, whose outlook was formed in the late 1830s in opposition to the trend known as ‘Westernism.’ [It] denoted in this case not so much a feeling of solidarity with brother Slavs as a cultivation of the native and primarily Slavic elements in the social life and culture of ancient Russia (Walicki 2015: 167).

The most important members of this ideological doctrine were Konstantin Aksakov, Ivan Kireevsky, Yury Samarin and Aleksei Khomiakov. For them, one key element was the relationship between Russia and Western countries. According to Kireevsky, the fabric of European civilisation was made up of three strands, which he connected to Christianity, the barbarian peoples that destroyed the Roman Empire and the classical heritage (Walicki 2015: 168-9). The fact that Russia had been excluded from the heritage of Rome was seen as a kind of blessing by some of these thinkers, because the ancient Roman civilisation was based upon the principles of rationalism, what explains their developments in jurisprudence; but this dependence left all the other social bonds aside. This is precisely why Western private and social life was, according to Kireevsky, ‘based on the concept of an individual and separate independence that presupposes the isolation. Hence the external formal relations of private property and all types of legal conventions are sacred and of greater importance than human beings’ (Walicki 2015: 169). In order to understand these words appropriately, it is important to state that the Slavophiles distinguished two types of truth: the inner and the external. The former referred to values such as religion, traditions or customs, which forged social bonds; the latter was represented by the state and the law, and was regarded as artificial. According to the Slavophiles, Russian people were superior to the Western Europeans because their convictions depended on moral and social values, instead of just legal ones (external):

All the finest minds in Europe bemoan the present state of moral apathy, the lack of conviction, the widespread egoism, and demand a new spiritual force beyond reason, a new motivation in life higher than calculated self-interest. In a word they are seeking faith, but they cannot find it among themselves, for Christianity has been distorted in the West by individual thought [...] This is even more evident if we compare the fundamental principles of European social and personal life with those basic principles which, even if they were not fully developed, were at least clearly seen in the social and personal life of ancient Russia (Kireevsky 1852: 82).

The Slavophiles recognised that a civilisation as the Western, based on rationalist criteria, had evolved faster than Russia, but this circumstance did not make it superior in any moral aspect. Peter the Great’s reforms to imitate the Western models had provoked a cut between the upper classes and the common people, which had caused a cleavage in Russian life: the antithesis between the people (*narod*) and the society (*obshchestvo*). This last group, which integrated a great part of the enlightened nobility and the elites, had greatly adopted Western customs, traditions and values. But, in doing that, according to Chaadaev and other

Slavophiles, they had abandoned their roots and had become men without a fatherland, strangers in the own country and homeless wanderers (Walicki 2015: 173). This description is especially interesting for us, and it refers to the so-called 'superfluous men.'

For their part, the Westernisers (*zapadniki*) did not form in any case a homogenous group, but a loose alliance of divergent trends which were opposed to Slavophilism. In general, the members of this ideological movement believed that the modernisation of the country required the adoption of West European laws, traditions and values (Chances 2001: 112). Visarion Belinsky and Aleksandr Herzen were the most important thinkers among the Westernisers. Although they agreed with the Slavophiles that Peter the Great's reforms had provoked a cleavage in Russian life, they understood it as a necessary step towards the modernisation of the country:

There is no point in blindly believe in the future; every embryo has the right to develop, but not every one succeeds. The future of Russia does not depend on Russia alone. It is bound up with the future of Europe (Herzen 1851: 148).

The attitude of Westernisers towards literature is highly representative of their attraction for European models. They considered that Russian writers should escape from folk poetry and bring Russian literature closer to that of the European countries, which were 'historical nations' and superior. This Hegelian concept was important during this period of time and was used to designate those nations which were understood to be true representatives of human kind:

The enthusiasm for Western culture among the Russian educated class naturally precipitated debate about the relationship of that culture to Russian culture and the degree to which Western culture could or should be accommodated in Russia. Consideration of these questions was in any case encouraged by the growth of interest within Western thought and literature in national distinctiveness and in the relative contribution of different peoples to the development of human civilization. This interest, which emanated from Germany in the late eighteenth century, found expression in the early nineteenth century among European peoples in a curiosity in their language, history, literature, music and customs, everything that gives a people its specific cultural identity (Offord 2001: 127).

Although Russian literature had potential, this had to copy and imitate the European models because, according to Belinsky, even 'Gogol [...] was without universal significance and could not be compared to the work of such 'world-historical' artists as James Fenimore Cooper and George Sand, let alone Homer and Shakespeare' (Walicki 2015: 227).

This intellectual and ideological debate which still continues today is of paramount importance for the purpose of this paper because it had a great influence on the literary development of some of the greatest 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian writers. Although they did not belong formally to any of these two groups, it is well known that both Turgenev and Dostoevsky reflected some of these ideas in their novels, being the former a convinced Westerniser and the latter, a Slavophile.

## 5.2 Turgenev's Westernism

As it was previously stated, the character of King Lear is not the only appropriation of Western literature in Turgenev's literary career. Hamlet, Don Quixote or Faust played an important role in his work and, in some cases, have had a tremendous influence on the development of Russian literature since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For reasons of space, only the dichotomy Hamlet-Don Quixote will be referred to.

'Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District' is a short story included in one of Turgenev's most celebrated works, *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (1852). The character, a self-defined 'unoriginal man' who is unable to act or be useful for those who surround him, initiated the study of Hamletism in Russian Literature. The concept of Hamlet-type characters or 'superfluous men' is still influential in contemporary Russian literature and could be define as:

'an ineffectual aristocrat at odds with society [...] 'dreamy, useless' [...] an 'intellectual incapable of action', an 'ineffective idealist', 'a hero who is sensitive to social and ethical problems, but who fails to act, partly because of personal weakness, partly because of political and social restraints on his freedom of action' (Chances 1978: 112).

In practice, the description referred to certain literary characters present in Russian literature who followed the ideals of Westernism, studied in Europe and returned to their homeland. However, when they did it, they realised that they did not fit anywhere, nor in Europe nor in Russia. These extremely selfish characters did not contribute to the modernisation of the country nor adapted to it. Because of their egotism and extreme inability to act, they were associated to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Since the publication of aforementioned short story and another of Turgenev's novellas, *The Diary of a Superfluous Man*, Hamlet has become the symbol of rational thought and individualism (even isolation) in Russia, and has been known as the superfluous man.

In one of his most famous speeches, 'Hamlet and Don Quixote' (1860), the Russian author provided a more detailed description of these two archetypes, while emphasising their importance for the development of Russian literature and the country as a whole. In that beautiful speech, he gave more details about these two types of characters. According to him, Don Quixote embodied faith and the belief in something eternal, an ideal that, although it is beyond human comprehension, it can still be achieved. Besides, he understood quixotic characters as those who try to institute justice and truth on earth, and because of that, they become an inspiration for the rest (Turgenev 1960: 94). These characters live and sacrifice for others, so there is no trace of egotism in them; and, although people laugh at them or find them ridiculous, they become leaders who are followed by the rest of society, as it is the case of Sancho Panza. In contrast, Hamlet-type characters live only for themselves and, although they lack faith in themselves, they resist to abandon this world. They embody egotism, disbelief and rational analysis, but they don't believe in anything (Turgenev 1960: 95).



Although Don Quixote could be considered as ridiculous and a madman, he has integrity and faith in an ideal, and that is something Hamlet could never achieve. In fact, Hamlet's main tragedy is that he cannot be Don Quixote (Terras 1991: 330). Hamlet-type characters are nostalgic and gloomy and will never reach happiness:

As an unoriginal person, I don't deserve an individual name... But if you really want to give some title, call me... call me the Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky district. There are many such Hamlets in every district, but perhaps you haven't come across others (Turgenev 2013: 298).

It is obvious that Turgenev used several Western archetypes to create some of his most powerful novellas and short stories, as it is the case of *King Lear of the Steppes* or 'Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District.' In the particular case of *King Lear*, bearing in mind everything that it has been previously stated, the appropriation had a double mission: on the one hand, it created a particular type of Russian tragedy based on a Western archetype; and, on the other, the adaptation of this model proved and gave support to the cultural link between Russia and the West. If the same type of tragedy could be found at both ends of the continent, the connection and the cultural belonging of Russia to Europe was more than evident. A third reason could be added: that of adopting Western models to contribute to the development of Russian literature, as it was considered at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that this had not achieved yet the same level of maturity as its European or North-American counterparts.

Consequently, Turgenev did not just copy or imitate these archetypes and their stories, but adapted them to Russia and, at the same time, created something that could only be regarded as original. In order to do so, he made use of two creative processes described in this paper: appropriation and adaptation. As this example clearly proves, both of them are highly creative and capable of fostering discussion and debate, thus contributing to the development of target cultural systems. His ideological views on the development of Russia, and how this country should follow the Western model, as this paper tries to show, could have served as an important leitmotiv in the literary construction of some of his most important works. The ideas of Westernism, hidden behind a unique genius and the talent of one of the most important authors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, can still be perceived.

## 6 Conclusions

The appropriation of King Lear, as an archetype, shows Turgenev's effort to mirror his age and, at the same, and perhaps more importantly, exert some influence on its development. Conscious that the literary and the philosophical had a tremendous impact on the Russian cultural life, which was by the time debating itself, and still does, between the incorporation into Europe or the preservation of its Asian legacy, Turgenev's appropriation of *King Lear* has to be understood as an example of how these processes of rewriting can foster debate and help develop target cultural systems.

In this paper a thorough analysis of the processes of appropriation and adaptation has been provided, highlighting and giving evidence to understand how they work.

These processes are not merely imitations or reproductions of previous existing works, as they have been sometimes considered, but highly creative and suggestive devices. They underscore the importance of cross-cultural relations and show that, although limited, the dialogue between the arts and society is still possible and can change the world.

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