

The opening scene of Henry M. Milner's equestrian drama *Mazeppa* (1831) contains an unmistakable echo of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as, on battlements lit by 'the uncertain glimpses of the moon', a cautious sentinel calls out, 'Who goes there?'<sup>i</sup> The play is characterised by such recycling and repurposing. It is a theatrical adaptation of Lord Byron's poem *Mazeppa* (1819) that also borrows from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. In so doing, it engages in more than one type of adaptation. The shift from Byron's poem to Milner's equestrian spectacle altered the meaning of the poet's work, from an exploration of one man's solitary and potentially meaningless ordeal to a vivid portrayal of a densely populated social world in which, thanks to his ride on the wild horse, Mazeppa rises from lowly page to avenging prince. The inclusion of allusions to, and reworkings of, Shakespeare, situated the play within a tradition of Shakespearean adaptations on the illegitimate English stage. This tradition enacted a form of cultural contest between popular and elite theatre, as has been explored by Jane Moody and others,<sup>ii</sup> but since Milner's was not explicitly an adaptation of Shakespeare it complicates this opposition. Milner's *Mazeppa* is therefore particularly useful to illustrate the negotiation of cultural values that takes place in the act of adaptation.

The theatrical *Mazeppa* thrived: its first season in 1831 was an immediate success and the play ran for several hundred performances at Astley's Royal Amphitheatre in London. It was revived for many years subsequently in both England and America, including a famous production that starred the celebrated Adah Isaacs Menken, who played the role of Mazeppa for American audiences in 1861 and for English audiences two years later to great acclaim.<sup>iii</sup> This demonstrates that the particular adaptations made in the course of the transition from poem to theatrical presentation were very successful. As I will show, these changes were in part due to Milner's skill as a writer of hippodrama (as equestrian drama was also known) and his ability to heighten the spectacular and sentimental opportunities created by the bond between horse and rider. Such alterations successfully adapted the poem to a popular dramatic form, but they simultaneously reworked its meaning to one that was more calculated to appeal to a popular audience. While Milner's skill in taking advantage of the theatrical opportunities presented by hippodramatic spectacle has been noted by A. H. Saxon and David Mayer,<sup>iv</sup> the way in which Milner adapted the meaning of Byron's poem using these techniques has not yet been discussed.

Milner's reworkings of Shakespeare were significant in realigning Byron's *Mazeppa*. They underpin two of his most significant alterations to the poem: the introduction of a romance plot bearing strong resemblances to *Romeo and Juliet*, which sustains the action of Acts One and Three, and an attempted usurpation that draws on modified elements of *Macbeth* to provide much of the material for Act Two. Milner does not only borrow plot elements; he includes direct references to these plays in his dialogue, which suggests that his audience might have been expected to recognise such allusions. By incorporating Shakespeare's drama into his repurposing of Byron's poem, Milner reclaimed these texts for a popular audience, drawing on an illegitimate tradition of rewriting and adaptation to create a theatrical *Mazeppa* with long-lasting appeal. This aspect of the play has not been explored, and I will argue that Milner's participation in this

wider practice of adaptation creates a tension between a subversive cultural appropriation, and a more conservative adoption of Shakespeare as a figure whose works were becoming more freely available to the illegitimate stage despite the prohibition of the 1737 Theatrical Licensing Act. In this way, Milner's *Mazeppa* enacts a blurring of high and low forms of cultural production, and it is suggestive that this should take place in a play whose adapted central motif – that of Mazeppa's ride – traverses the boundaries between high and low, enabling Mazeppa's progression from 'rebel slave' (I.4) to prince of Tartary.

By paying careful attention to the dramatic inventiveness shown by Milner's use of hippodramatic effects and Shakespearean allusions to adapt Byron's poem for the popular stage, I will argue that this play challenges assumptions that nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations are purely derivative and lack merit. Rather, I suggest that such adaptive work reveals broader cultural and dramatic shifts. Its study allows us to consider more closely the particular qualities that distinguish adaptation from other forms of writing, and to ask whether the poor reputation of theatrical adaptation as a genre might have resulted from its transgression of the very cultural hierarchies to which it calls attention.

### Mazeppa on the Move

Byron's *Mazeppa* took for its subject a legendary episode from the life of the Ukrainian leader Ivan Mazepa (1639–1709) whose life was recorded by Voltaire and other eighteenth-century historians.<sup>v</sup> According to the legend, in his youth Mazepa was caught having an adulterous affair with the wife of a Polish nobleman and as a punishment he was tied naked to the back of a wild horse, which was then sent off to gallop into the wilderness. The poem was published in 1819, along with 'Venice. An Ode' and a short prose piece, 'Fragment'.<sup>vi</sup> It occupies itself chiefly with the agony and terror Mazeppa undergoes on his harrowing ride, a hallucinatory ordeal in which he travels alone through eerie forests and is frightened by the appearance of menacing wolves, all the while suffering the pain of his bondage to the horse. He eventually crosses the river from Poland and arrives in Ukraine, where the horse dies and Mazeppa is rescued by a beautiful Cossack girl. The poem begins and ends with its elderly protagonist, now ruler of Ukraine, relating this story to the Swedish King Charles XII immediately after the two leaders, Mazeppa and Charles, had been defeated in battle against the Russian Tsar Peter I.

Critically the poem was not particularly successful, but the theme proved to be a popular one and the twelve years after the poem's publication saw the creation of poetic, artistic and dramatic versions of Mazeppa's ride. Numerous paintings of the subject were exhibited in the years between 1820 and 1827 by French Romantic artists including Théodore Géricault, Horace Vernet, Eugène Delacroix and Louis Boulanger, while Victor Hugo's poem *Mazeppa* was published in his collection *Les Orientales* in 1829.<sup>vii</sup> There were also at least four plays starring Mazeppa. The first, by Milner, was called *Mazeppa; or, The Wild Horse of the Ukraine*; it was staged in 1823 at the Royal Coburg and apparently never revived.<sup>viii</sup> The second, *Mazeppa; ou, le Cheval Tartare*, written by Léopold Chandezon and Jean-Guillaume-Antoine Cuvelier, was performed in Paris at

Franconi's celebrated Cirque Olympique in 1825.<sup>ix</sup> This French drama was translated into English by John Howard Payne in the same year, although his translation was apparently never staged.<sup>x</sup> Milner's second version of the play, *Mazeppa: A Romantic Drama in Three Acts*, premiered at Astley's Royal Amphitheatre on 4 April 1831.

Milner's 1831 version incorporates elements of Chandezon and Cuvelier's play, as well as Payne's translation, but he added significant elements of his own. His *Mazeppa* is an orphan from Tartary,<sup>xi</sup> but he has been a page at the Polish court since his youth. He is in love with the exotically-named noblewoman Olinska, who, unlike her equivalent in Byron's poem, is not married, but is betrothed against her will to a Polish count called Premislas. Act One is set entirely in Poland and focuses on the relationship between *Mazeppa* and Olinska and the obstacle of the Count Premislas. The play begins with a romantic balcony scene between the two lovers, before a grand tournament in which *Mazeppa* demonstrates his martial skill and a spectacular procession in which Olinska is officially betrothed to Premislas. Following the betrothal *Mazeppa* challenges Premislas to a duel, which leads to the crisis of his punishment on the wild horse that closes the opening act. In the second act the action moves to Tartary, where *Mazeppa* and his mount are mistaken for a frightening folkloric apparition known as the Volpas by the Tartar peasants. The horse collapses with *Mazeppa* still attached to its back; the Tartars investigate and the Tartar leader, the Abder Khan, recognizes *Mazeppa* as his long-lost son and is joyfully reunited with him. An ambitious chieftain called Thamar attempts to assassinate the Khan in order to usurp the throne, but after another combat scene the entire Tartar army appears on the side of the Khan to secure victory. Finally, in the Third Act, the action returns to Poland, where the grand wedding spectacle between Olinska and the Count Premislas is interrupted by *Mazeppa* and the Tartar soldiers who have infiltrated the castle. An epic battle ensues, from which the Tartars emerge victorious, and Olinska is betrothed to *Mazeppa* to end the fighting, and the play.

Previous examinations of the *Mazeppa* legend have tended to neglect the popular dramas in order to focus on literary and painterly manifestations, and as a result the meanings that *Mazeppa* might evoke for a popular audience have been somewhat neglected. Hubert Babinski has considered Byron, Hugo and the French Romantic painters to argue that *Mazeppa* represents the figure of the Romantic genius, tortured but ultimately triumphant.<sup>xii</sup> Taras Koznarsky and Thomas M. Prymak have explored varying historical and literary portrayals across Europe,<sup>xiii</sup> while Ksenya Kiebusinski has concentrated on French adaptations in prose, on stage, and in material culture throughout the nineteenth century, charting a course from the 'artistic genius' to a 'comic seducer' and finally a 'tragic traitor'.<sup>xiv</sup> Martin Meisel has discussed portrayals of *Mazeppa* in *Realizations*, arguing that paintings of the naked man tied to the horse 'negated the mounted figure of the man of destiny' exemplified most strikingly by portraits of the Emperor Napoleon, while Milner's play offered a contrast to hippodramas about Napoleon as they each presented alternative aspects of 'the fascination of the horse and its drama'.<sup>xv</sup> According to Meisel, the Napoleonic portraits and equestrian dramas exemplified individual mastery, while the paintings and stagings of *Mazeppa* represented 'the helpless, headlong rush to a

common destruction, strangely allied with a sensation of freedom and release, that writers on mass phenomena such as Carlyle and Dickens evoked through the imagery of the sea and the conflagration'.<sup>xvi</sup> Although this is a provoking idea, Meisel does not develop it further, and in proposing it he draws on Byron's poem without taking into account the alterations Milner makes in his hippodrama. These alterations are the subject of my essay.

Milner's play has received attention from biographers and others interested in the actress Adah Isaacs Menken, the most famous performer of the Mazeppa role, but they have considered the drama for what it can tell us about the actress, while A. H. Saxon and, more recently, David Mayer have discussed the play as a pre-eminent example of hippodrama.<sup>xvii</sup> However, the adaptations Milner makes to the Mazeppa legend have not been thoroughly explored. Tony Voss<sup>xviii</sup> has briefly considered Milner's drama as part of a wide-ranging essay about versions of Mazeppa, and he notes the play's importance as the first time the legend is embraced by 'popular cultural forms'.<sup>xix</sup> However, he seems disappointed by the changes made as a result, claiming '[t]he legend of the aristocratic and transgressive romantic artist has been displaced into the bourgeois narrative of comic romance'.<sup>xx</sup> The play is described as a piece of escapism designed to please 'an urbanising audience working long days in the industrialised imperial economies'.<sup>xxi</sup> and Voss implies that this emphasis on popular entertainment deprived the Mazeppa legend of its most valuable cultural and historical resonances:

[B]ourgeois expectations required other narrative elements, transmuted from the legend and the history of the Hetman [Mazeppa]: the young page at the royal court becomes a foundling; adultery becomes courtship, romance and true love; the wished-for political independence of Mazeppa's people becomes the triumph of Tartary over the Poles, a clash of classes as much as of nations. The stage *Mazeppa* is a 'lost child' story, of family and social instability, characteristic of the age of Dickens.<sup>xxii</sup>

While noting the loss of historical and symbolic meanings in Milner's adaptation, Voss overlooks his own insight that Milner's play instead represents 'a clash of classes as much as of nations.' *Mazeppa* was not first performed in 'the age of Dickens'; the play premiered in 1831, five years before *The Pickwick Papers* began its serialisation and when Dickens was still a Parliamentary reporter. Instead, it was staged during a particularly febrile period in which class divisions were sharply contested. The previous year had seen the Swing Riots throughout the south and the midlands in protest against the tithe system, the deteriorating support provided by the Poor Law, and the tenant farmers who had been lowering wages and introducing agricultural machinery to replace farm workers. In March and April 1831, just as the play emerged, Parliament was attempting to pass the Reform Bill, which sought to extend the franchise and improve the electoral system; this controversial legislation sparked strong feelings on both sides and a few months later its slow passage resulted in more riots across the country. Two weeks after Milner's play began its run, the first version of the Bill was brought down by a hostile amendment and the King dissolved Parliament on 22 April 1831, resulting in a significant election victory for the Whigs who had

championed the Bill.<sup>xxiii</sup> Any play staged during this time that might represent a 'clash of classes', however obliquely and however gilded by spectacular entertainment, deserves a closer look.

Hippodrama was apparently well-positioned to stage a drama that bore an undercurrent of class tension. It was particularly finely attuned to contemporary circumstances, since Astley's and other amphitheatres were used to stage recent military events such as the Battle of Waterloo in order to keep the public informed as well as entertained.<sup>xxiv</sup> It also necessarily possessed a complicated, perhaps contradictory relationship to real life; although it was a staged performance, part of its attraction came from the physical presence of the horses and their connection to more quotidian life outside the amphitheatre.<sup>xxv</sup> In addition to these links to the non-theatrical world, equestrian drama occupied a particularly fraught position within the theatrical hierarchy. Since it was one of the illegitimate varieties of theatre, performed at venues that were not included in the Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737, equestrian drama was part of what Jane Moody has described as the 'battle for free trade in drama' which 'was not only a campaign to overturn a commercial monopoly, but also a deeply political conflict about who should control theatrical culture'<sup>xxvi</sup> as the illegitimate theatres sought ways to evade the restrictions placed upon their productions by the Act.

However, as well as seeking ways to thrive in its own illegitimate space, hippodrama was capable of subverting the theatrical hierarchy. Michael Gamer has described how the success of equestrian drama in attracting large audiences had persuaded John Philip Kemble in 1811 to stage a hippodrama of his own at Covent Garden.<sup>xxvii</sup> His production of George Colman the Younger's *Blue-Beard* earned the theatre thousands of pounds and was followed by a production of Matthew Lewis's *Timour the Tartar*, which enjoyed similar levels of success. However, by staging this illegitimate theatrical form at a patent theatre, Kemble had eroded the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate theatre that helped to sustain the reputation of his playhouse. Hippodrama therefore occupied a shifting theatrical space, sometimes able to transgress the barriers between legitimate and illegitimate. This made it a particularly resonant genre to adapt Byron's poem from a representation of elite individual endurance, to an illustration of its hero's rise from page to prince.

### Milner's Hippodramatic Adaptations

The action of a hippodrama took place partly or wholly on horseback, and between the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries such plays were increasingly popular in England and France. The two great venues were Astley's Amphitheatre in London, where Milner's 1831 *Mazeppa* was first performed, and Franconi's Cirque Olympique in Paris, where Chandezon and Cuvelier's earlier version was staged. There were many other venues that had the capacity to house an equestrian drama: in London for example there was the Royal Coburg, where Milner's 1823 *Mazeppa* had its brief life, and there were amphitheatres in regional cities and towns such as Bristol and Newcastle. Its audiences were heterogeneous, including farm workers,<sup>xxviii</sup> schoolchildren,<sup>xxix</sup> and the diverse

urban crowds that made up the audiences of the illegitimate theatres along the river Thames.<sup>xxx</sup> Its appeal to a multitude was part of its success.

An amphitheatre would typically have a proscenium arch stage at one end, in front of which was a large ring where the horses would gallop and perform. The horses would also mount the stage if required, and ramps and moving panoramas could create the illusion of movement across wide and varied ground. Large-scale events such as battles were staged, but hippodramas could also provide a more intimate performance. *Turpin's Ride to York* (1836), also written by Milner, concludes with a famous scene in which the highwayman's horse, Black Bess, dies beneath him at a crossroads. As I will suggest, this episode has a precursor in *Mazeppa*, demonstrating that Milner's adaptation contained elements that were themselves adapted in other hippodramas. The horse would perform the death, lying still as the actors continued with the scene around her, and finally would be carried out on the grooms' shoulders. The training undergone by the horses in order to stage the battles and huge set pieces would have been impressive, but such feats of stillness and concentration on the part of the animals – more usually seen pulling carts or carrying humans – were perhaps even more remarkable.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Milner took advantage of the opportunities such moments gave him in order to adapt Byron's poem to a more popular cultural form. The wild horse in Byron's poem is a 'Tartar of the Ukraine breed' (360), unlike Mazeppa, who is Polish, and the 'desert-born' (369) horse and his Polish rider are locked in an antagonistic relationship: 'Each motion which I made to free / My swoln limbs from their agony / Increased his fury and affright' (453–55). The horse dies before Mazeppa's rescue occurs. Milner's horse, by contrast, is the same nationality as his rider – they are 'Tartar friends' (I. 5) – and the animal is made to play a much more significant role in the drama. In Byron's poem, the ride is only an ordeal to be endured, chaotic and terrifying. The eventual outcome – Mazeppa's rise to leadership in Ukraine – is almost ignored, briefly referred to at the end of the poem and credited to chance: 'What mortal his own doom may guess?' (853) In Milner's play, however, his journey on the wild horse is a force of restoration and justice, as the Tartar horse takes Mazeppa, the Tartar prince, back to his home, his family, and his rightful place in the structure of government.

Milner exploited the opportunities that hippodrama afforded to use the horse as a fellow actor on stage in order to emphasise this adaptation. In the second scene of Act Two, Mazeppa and his horse collapse on stage to be discovered by Tartar peasants. The animal lies completely motionless as the Abder Khan, Mazeppa's long-lost father, recognises his son tied to the horse. Mazeppa is recovered and 'raised on a bier' (II.3) by the Khan's retinue, but here the Tartar leader halts the action:

*(Music. Mazeppa is raised on a bier)*

KHAN. *(pointing to the wild horse, which still lies extended on the earth)*

That noble steed claims our assistance, too. Of mortal mould it cannot be, but the choice instrument of heaven to restore to Tartary a sovereign, to a doting sire a long-lost son. *(The shepherds raise the horse)* (II.3)

While Byron's horse dies at the end of the ride, Milner incorporates the animal into the recovery of Mazeppa and a visual parallel is drawn between the two as they are both raised on biers and carried off to safety. The episode is designed both to impress and move its audience, as the skill required to train the horse to lie still is allied to the strength of the grooms who must carry the animal offstage, inspiring a combination of awe and pathos. Its success can be guessed by the fact that Milner employed the technique again in *Turpin's Ride to York*,<sup>xxxii</sup> repurposing episodes from his own previous work in what could be seen as another form of adaptation.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The significance of this scene goes beyond the technical or the spectacular, for by incorporating the horse into Mazeppa's recovery, Milner alters the meaning of the ride itself as Mazeppa's journey sets the world in order. It also transforms him at a stroke from page to prince, crossing class barriers and enabling him to return to Poland and marry the noblewoman, Olinska. This consequence is amplified in the final scene of the second act, when Mazeppa, the Abder Khan and the Tartar soldiers prepare to travel to Poland:

MAZEPPA. I fight for my Olinska and my love.

ABDER KHAN. I for my much-loved child and my revenge. (*Music. The horse is brought on*) Behold the steed, fated by heaven to bring you to your native land and throne, again awaits you. He bore you to my arms; let him now bear you to your triumph.

MAZEPPA. He was the instrument of torture; let him now be the messenger of vengeance. (*Music*) On to the Polish frontier!<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Again, the horse is brought directly into the action, as recovery becomes revenge and Mazeppa's ride now becomes one of retaliation against his Polish persecutors, resulting in his ultimate triumph. This reappearance of the horse is not recorded in the earlier editions of the published playscript; it only occurs in the edition published in 1885. This suggests it was added later and, if that is true, the increased significance of the horse was developed by later alterations to Milner's play, as it continued to be adapted in the light of its own success.

This alteration also underlines Mazeppa's return to the Polish court at the head of an army, apparently amplifying his successful traversal of class boundaries. In the Polish court, Mazeppa is an outsider, partly because he is a Tartar, but also because of his social position: his status as a page is emphasised several times, and he instinctively rebels against it. In the opening scene of the play, Drolinsko suggests that Mazeppa might go with Olinska once she marries Premislas, as her servant:

DROLINSKO. I dare say, as you are [Olinska's] favourite page, she will prevail on the Palatine to make you one of his esquires.

[MAZEPPA]. (*seizing Drolinsko by the throat*) Wretch, how dare you thus insult me? (I.1)

Mazeppa's acute awareness of his social inferiority, both to Olinska and to the mocking courtiers, provokes his violence. Furthermore, he is doomed to suffer his outlandish torture on the wild horse because this is 'the punishment inflicted on rebel slaves' (I.4), which emphasises the transgression of class boundaries inherent in both his relationship with Olinska and his consequent attack on Premislas. His return on the wild horse, now 'messenger of vengeance', is therefore doubly triumphant, and his exclamation to the Castellan makes this clear: "Tyrant, behold thy victim!" (III.3)

This particular adaptation might appear to represent most obviously the 'clash of classes' identified by Voss. However, Milner's drama operates more ambiguously than this. Mazeppa's ride, after all, represents restoration: the lost prince returned to his rightful position. This is hardly a radical plot device. While Milner might use his protagonist's humble status to attract the audience's sympathy and place an obstacle between himself and his leading lady, ultimately Mazeppa is able to triumph because of his royal pedigree. This more conservative aspect to Milner's play is bolstered by his most suggestive and least discussed alteration: his reworkings of Shakespeare. As I will show, Milner uses Shakespeare partly to establish Mazeppa as a conventional romantic hero; by aligning him with Romeo and contrasting him with the usurping Macbeth, Milner evokes a set of Shakespearean associations that suggest less radical interpretations of Milner's play than Mazeppa's rebellious cry against the 'tyrant' might encourage. This argument will inform my discussion of the complex relationship between high and low culture that is revealed by Milner's repurposings of Shakespeare, as I argue that this particular example of Shakespearean adaptation has a less fraught and more confident relationship with the bard than those plays explored by other studies of illegitimate Shakespeare.

### Milner's Shakespearean Adaptations

Milner's *Mazeppa* is not a whole adaptation of any one Shakespeare play, but it includes significant elements of two and a brief allusion to a third. These incorporations serve a number of purposes. At times they allow a situation to be set up quickly and economically, while in some cases, Milner uses them to access a certain set of tones: dramatic tension, romance, rebellion. These rather general resonances are sharpened by particular links to certain characters, particularly the distinguishing of Mazeppa by comparison and contrast with Romeo and Macbeth. Certain visual connections are drawn, such as the sentinel on the ramparts that opens both *Mazeppa* and *Hamlet*, or the balcony scene borrowed from *Romeo and Juliet*. There are even linguistic allusions, which demonstrate the depth of Milner's borrowings.

Since his adaptation concentrates particularly on its hero's identity it is appropriate that *Mazeppa* begins with an echo of *Hamlet*, as the sentinel calls out, 'Who goes there?' (I.1) This guard is unknowingly challenging Mazeppa, who is slipping through the castle to visit Olinska and who hides in the shadows, refusing to answer the call. Such a beginning immediately provides tension, borrowing from Shakespeare's dramaturgical playbook in order to create an arresting opening to the play. This brief allusion carries other resonances, since



*Mazeppa* also incorporates a revenge plot – Mazeppa’s revenge on the Castellan – and Milner’s hero is also a prince, displaced. This glancing evocation does little but hint at these later developments, although it might also prepare the audience for Shakespearean references to come, setting up the dramatic frame of reference within which Milner’s play operates.

The allusion to *Hamlet* is not pursued further, but the other Shakespearian reworkings are more detailed. Milner’s *Mazeppa* connects its leading character closely to Romeo, and develops the forbidden romance between Mazeppa and Olinska by using Shakespeare’s play as a touchstone. The opening dialogue between the two recalls the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* as Milner uses Shakespeare’s story of two lovers, separated by warring families, to hint at the obstacles that will be faced by his leading characters. The replication of the famous balcony setting would have amplified the romantic tone, as Mazeppa calls up to Olinska, who is about to emerge onto a balcony:

Ere yet the envious daylight robs my soul of this sweet privilege, of drinking from thine eyes deep draughts of the bright liquid fire which, as from twin stars of love, streams through my enraptured heart, appear, dear life! (I.1)

Milner’s ‘envious daylight’ reminds us of Shakespeare’s ‘envious moon’<sup>xxxv</sup>, and Mazeppa’s paean to Olinska’s ‘twin stars of love’ evokes Romeo’s praise for Juliet’s eyes, which are ‘Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven’ (II.2.15). Mazeppa’s image of the ‘bright liquid fire’ that ‘streams through my enraptured heart’ echoes Romeo’s more complex metaphor: ‘Her eyes in heaven / Would through the airy region stream so bright / That birds would sing and think it were not night’ (II.2.20–2). Mazeppa is therefore linguistically tied to Romeo, associating him with the archetypal romantic hero and, implicitly, positioning him as Olinska’s equal. The transgressive possibilities of a romance between a page and a princess are therefore neutralised even as the relationship is established.

Olinska’s relationship with her nurse, Agatha, also recalls Shakespeare, as Agatha warns Olinska of the dangers of her course of action while still assisting the lovers, and Olinska finally mirrors Juliet in her decision to commit suicide rather than marry her father’s choice of husband: ‘The victim’s adorned not for the altar but the tomb . . . Yes, this night, this very night, restores me to my lover, and the tomb. (*Placing her hand upon the dagger*)’ (III.1) Although these allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* suggest tragic possibilities, the play’s billing as a ‘*Romantic Drama in Three Acts*’<sup>xxxvi</sup> would have led the audience to expect otherwise. There is no mention of tragedy in this description, and a five-act play was much more likely to be a tragic structure than a drama in three acts. In any case, tragedy was common to the legitimate theatres, as opposed to equestrian venues such as Astley’s – although Milner’s inclusion of Shakespearean references in his hippodrama reveals the instability of these distinctions. While the play tantalizes its audience with the possibility of peril, this is never a serious likelihood; the references to *Romeo and Juliet* serve to amplify the romance plot and to ally Mazeppa and Olinska with the conventional romantic hero and heroine. The

adaptation of Shakespeare's drama with which the audience is presented is essentially benign.

However, the second act contains a potentially more volatile series of allusions to *Macbeth* in the person of Thamar, the disaffected Tartar chieftain who seeks the throne. This brief characterisation immediately suggests the parallel with the Scottish play. Like Shakespeare's antihero, Thamar is waiting for the current ruler to nominate his heir and hopes that the choice will be himself, but his ambitions are frustrated when the Khan nominates his own son, Mazeppa. Thamar's response is to attempt to kill the Khan in his sleep, as Macbeth murders Duncan. Not only that, he plans to blame Mazeppa for the crime, just as Macbeth attempts to stain Malcolm and Donalbain with guilt:

THAMAR. Another and a surer plan has glanced across my mind. The Khan himself shall perish. The crime, charged on this new-found stranger, hurls him at once to irretrievable ruin – and who shall then dispute the throne with Thamar? (II.5)

Thamar's final rhetorical question directly echoes Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's distinct mode of speech in Act One, Scene Seven of Shakespeare's play. Questions between the two are a frequent feature of the dialogue in this scene:

MACBETH. How now! what news?

LADY MACBETH. He has almost supp'd. Why have you left the chamber?

MACBETH. Hath he ask'd for me?

LADY MACBETH. Know you not, he has?<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The distinctive feature of Thamar's syntax is the presentation of a negative hypothetical: 'who shall then dispute the throne with Thamar?' This occurs repeatedly in the conversation between Macbeth and his wife:

LADY MACBETH. What cannot you and I perform upon  
Th' unguarded Duncan? . . .

MACBETH. Will it not be receiv'd,  
When we have mark'd with blood those sleepy two  
Of his own chamber, and us'd their very daggers,  
That they have done't?

LADY MACBETH. Who dares receive it other,  
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar  
Upon his death? (I.7.70-71; I.7.75-80)

The tone of Shakespeare's play is here present in the dialogue of Milner's drama, demonstrating how pervasively *Macbeth* had seeped into Milner's writing during this section of the play. However, the clearest echo occurs just before Thamar's final defeat, as he defies the Khan and Mazeppa: 'Yet do I laugh thy power to scorn, for hundreds now without await but my nod to shed their life-blood in my cause.' (II.5) This is a direct allusion to the Second Apparition's exhortation to Macbeth: 'laugh to scorn / The power of man' (IV.1.79-80). Immediately after Thamar has made this defiant declaration, he discovers that his faith has been

misplaced, as the Khan's forces vastly outnumber him and the scene swiftly closes with his capture. While Thamar's role aligns him with the usurping Macbeth, Mazeppa is positioned as the rightful heir, and the threat posed by Thamar is erased by the loyalty of the Tartar soldiers. The reference to the bard therefore acts as a conservative influence, carefully contrasting Mazeppa with the character who seeks to defy the social structure.

This conservative effect can be seen less directly in Milner's characterisation of Mazeppa's father, the Abder Khan. He is a prophet, immediately evoking resonances of the duplicitous witches in *Macbeth*, but the Khan's prophecies are benevolent and carry no sting. He foresees Mazeppa's return and the salvation of his people, and this duly occurs; his foretellings are paternal and patriarchal, in contrast to the subversive and dangerously ambiguous predictions of the three weird sisters. Like Milner's evocations of *Romeo and Juliet*, these allusions to *Macbeth* hint at possible threat but are ultimately benign reimaginings.

The presence of such developed Shakespearean references and reworkings in an illegitimate play is not in itself surprising. There was a thriving tradition of illegitimate Shakespeare adaptations in the early nineteenth century<sup>xxxviii</sup> and Milner himself had written many such plays. In 1823 he adapted *King John* for the Royal Coburg as *Magna Charta! or, The Eventful Reign of King John*, concluding with the signature of the famous document at Runnymede.<sup>xxxix</sup> He also adapted *The Merchant of Venice* as *The Three Caskets* in 1827, and wrote *The Lovers of Verona; or, Romeo and Juliet* in the same year and *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* in 1828.<sup>xl</sup>

Nor was Milner unusual in adapting Shakespeare. Moody lists a large number of illegitimate versions of the plays, including *Macbeth*, *Richard II* and *Cymbeline*, while Schoch, Taylor, and Greenslade discuss a variety of Shakespearean burlesques.<sup>xli</sup> All four critics point out that illegitimate Shakespeare risked transgressing the Theatrical Licensing Act and they argue in different ways that this transgression gave the adaptations a legal and cultural edge; Moody has claimed that 'dramatic genres became categories of major ideological dispute, and Shakespeare a major cultural weapon.'<sup>xlii</sup> However, the sheer number of adaptations, particularly by the time Milner wrote *Mazeppa*, suggests that this edge had been blunted and the law was no longer properly enforced. Moody has described a gradual shift in the style of the adaptations from versions that heavily altered Shakespeare's play towards dramas that 'had thrown caution to the winds, abandoning even the pretence of staging the plays as melodrama or burletta',<sup>xliii</sup> which also hints at a gradual acceptance of the flouting of the law. It demonstrates the increasing likelihood that a popular audience would have been familiar, not just with the broad outline of Shakespeare's plays, but with their language and texture.<sup>xliv</sup>

Given the growing willingness of authors to include Shakespeare on the illegitimate stage, and the greater familiarity theatregoers would have had with the plays in consequence, Milner's *Mazeppa* occupies a transitional point in the staging of illegitimate Shakespeare. His varied references to the plays suggest a developing confidence in his authority to make such allusions, and in their

legibility to his audience. In this respect, his approach has more in common with the playwrights of the legitimate stage. This can be understood by considering Taylor's comparison of the explicit and irreverent reworkings of the illegitimate Shakespearean burlesques with the approach taken by playwrights such as James Sheridan Knowles, Percy Bysshe Shelley and even Byron himself.<sup>xlv</sup> These authors deployed allusions to, and structural borrowings from, Shakespeare as part of a conservative attempt to rehabilitate a national drama that they viewed as degraded. Milner's *Mazeppa* engaged with Shakespeare much as Taylor suggests Byron and Knowles did: as a dramatic precursor whose work could be drawn upon in constructing his own play.

Rather than using Shakespeare to push against established cultural or social structures, Milner's play is participating within those structures. This is perhaps a subversive gesture, but it is not oppositional, particularly in the context of a theatrical tradition that was moving towards the Theatres Act of 1843 and the dismantling of the legal distinction between the legitimate and the illegitimate stage. By absorbing Shakespearean references into its adaptation of Byron's poem, Milner's *Mazeppa* occupied a complex and shifting space between high and low forms of cultural production, in different ways both subversive and conservative. This is not only true of Milner's reworkings of Shakespeare; it can also be seen in his use of the sometimes contested genre of hippodrama to adapt Byron's poem. His skilled manipulation of the spectacle of the horse onstage, and his understanding of the sentimental potential of the relationship between animal and rider, led to a reworking of Byron's poem that transformed Mazeppa's famous journey from a meaningless punishment to an event that was both rebellious and restorative. Milner's reconfigured ride transforms a page into a prince but it also underlines that this page has been a prince all along. Milner's adaptations of Shakespeare continued this balance, linking Mazeppa with the sympathetic Romeo and contrasting him with the usurper Macbeth to create a conservative framework for Mazeppa's seemingly transgressive rise, even as the introduction of Shakespearean elements itself introduced a tension between a subversive cultural appropriation and an indication of developing legitimacy.

Milner's adaptations were inventive and skilful. His use of hippodramatic spectacle and his interweaving of Shakespearean allusions should not be dismissed as simply derivative work – or perhaps we ought to see these derivations as themselves significant and worthy of study. Milner's complex negotiation of the boundaries between high and low artforms brings to mind the contested status of adaptation itself, and its place in a cultural and critical hierarchy that frequently relegates adaptation to a lesser level of artistic status and academic interest. Byron himself arguably adapted Mazeppa's story from the eighteenth-century histories he consulted, chief among them Voltaire, while Shakespeare is perhaps the greatest and most invisible adapter of all. What, then, are we particularly observing about a play when we label it an adaptation? What work is it doing that is distinctive? Adaptation is not simple replication: rather it is the establishment of difference from a source, or sources. To call a work an adaptation demands our careful attention to the meaningful changes it makes, and to why it makes them. Such attention rewards us with a greater

understanding of the very cultural hierarchies that adaptation frequently transgresses.

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i H. M. Milner, *Mazeppa: A Romantic Drama in Three Acts, Dramatised from Lord Byron's Poem, by H.M. Milner, and Adapted to the Stage Under the Direction of Mr. Ducrow, Printed from the Acting Copy, with Remarks, Biographical and Critical, by D-G*, in *Cumberland's Minor Theatre*, vol. 5 (London: John Cumberland, c.1831), (I.1). All subsequent quotations are taken from this script except where otherwise stated. Act and scene numbers will follow in brackets.

ii See J. Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); R. W. Schoch, *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); D. F. Taylor, 'Shakespeare and Drama', in G. Marshall (ed.), *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 129–47.

3 Adah Isaacs Menken (1835-1868) was an American actress, poet, and painter. *Mazeppa* was her most famous role; it attracted attention partly because of her physical bravery and skill during the performance of the celebrated ride, and partly because of the frisson of an actress appearing onstage nearly naked, wearing a flesh-coloured body stocking.

iv See A. H. Saxon, *Enter Foot and Horse: A History of Hippodrama in England and France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); C. Mayer and D. Mayer, 'Exit with Dead Horse', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 39:1 (2012), 78–92.

v Voltaire, *Histoire de Charles XII, Roi de Suède* (Basle: Chez Christophe Revis, 1732); C-L. Lesur, *Histoire des Kosaques, Précédée d'une Introduction, ou Coup-d'Oeil sur les Peuples Qui Ont Habité le Pays des Kosaques, Avant l'Invasion des Tartares* (Paris: A. Belin, 1814); J. A. Nordberg, *Histoire de Charles XII, Roi de Suède*, 4 vols. (La Haye: P. de Hondt, 1742–48). I will use 'Mazepa' for the real man and 'Mazeppa' for the character.

vi Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, vol. 4, ed. J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 493. All quotations from Byron's *Mazeppa* are taken from this edition. Line numbers will follow in brackets.

vii T. Gericault, *The Page Mazeppa*, [Oil on canvas]. Private Collection. (c.1820); H. Vernet, *Mazeppa aux Loups*, [Oil on canvas]. Le Musée Calvet d'Avignon (1826); E. Delacroix, *Mazeppa*, [Watercolour]. Ateneum, National Gallery of Finland. (1824); Louis Boulanger, *Supplice de Mazeppa*, [Oil on canvas]. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen. (1827); V. Hugo, *Les Orientales; Les Feuilles d'Automne*, ed. Pierre Albouy (Paris, 1966).

viii No copy of this play survives. There are references made to it in newspapers, for example the production is advertised in *The Morning Post* on 4 November 1823, and a playbill survives at the British Library, Playbills 174, Collections of Playbills for the Royal Coburg Theatre, 1818–72.

ix L. Chandezon and J. G. A. Cuvelier, *Mazeppa ou le Cheval Tartare* (Paris: Chez Bezou, 1825).

x J. H. Payne, *Mazeppa*, in *Trial Without Jury and Other Plays*, eds. C. Hislop and W. R. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

xi The geography of Eastern Europe is simplified in the play. Tartary was not a nation; Milner is probably referring to an area of modern-day Russia and the Ukraine known in the nineteenth century as Little Tartary, or Krim Tartary. This location allowed him to use spectacular and exotic costumes and scenery; its geographical accuracy was not really the point. It should also be noted that 'Tartar' was a

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nineteenth-century Western European corruption of ‘Tatar’. I will adopt the spellings used by the play for the purposes of this essay.

xii H. F. Babinski, *The Mazeppa Legend in European Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

xiii T. Koznarsky, ‘Obsessions with Mazeppa’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 31:1 (2009), 569–615; T. M. Prymak, ‘The Cossack Hetman: Ivan Mazepa in History and Legend from Peter to Pushkin’, *The Historian*, 76:2, (2014), 237–77.

xiv K. Kiebusinski, ‘The (Re)Fashioning of an Archetype of Genius: Ivan Mazepa in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Art’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 31:1 (2009), 633–53, p. 634.

xv M. Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 216.

xvi *Ibid.*

xvii Menken’s performance of Mazeppa has been addressed by W. Mankowitz, *Mazeppa: The Lives, Loves and Legends of Adah Isaacs Menken* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1982), R.M. Sentilles, *Performing Menken: Adah Isaacs Menken and the Birth of American Celebrity* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and D. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2006), among others. Discussion of Milner’s play as a significant example of hippodrama can be found in Saxon, *Enter Foot and Horse*, as well as D. Mayer, ‘Riding for a Fall: A Saddle for Mazeppa’s Fiery Steed’, in S. Johnson (ed.), *A Tyranny of Documents: The Performing Arts Historian as Film Noir Detective* (New York: Theatre Library Association, 2011), pp. 143–50. Also Mayer, ‘Exit’; Saxon, *Foot and Horse*.

xviii T. Voss, ‘Mazeppa-Maseppa: Migration of a Romantic Motif’, in *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, 49:2 (2012), 110–35.

xix *Ibid.*, p. 115.

xx *Ibid.*, p. 116.

xxi *Ibid.*

xxii *Ibid.*, p. 118.

xxiii See M. G. Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London: Hutchinson, 1973); E. J. Evans, *Britain Before the Reform Act: Politics and Society 1815–1832* (London: Routledge, 1994); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

xxiv Saxon, *Foot and Horse*, Chapter 5.

xxv This has been discussed at greater length by Mayer, ‘Exit’, and H. Velten, *Beastly London: A History of Animals in the City* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

xxvi Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 5.

xxvii M. Gamer, ‘A Matter of Turf: Romanticism, Hippodrama, and Legitimate Satire’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 28:4 (2006), 305–34.

xxviii Mayer, ‘Exit’, p. 78.

xxix See for example the review of *Mazeppa* in *The Examiner*, 19 August 1832, p. 534: ‘No schoolboy, residing within three miles’ circuit of the Post-office has properly completed his holidays till he has been to ASTLEY’S.’

xxx Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 4 and *passim*.

xxxi In compiling this summary I have used Mayer, ‘Exit’; Mayer, ‘Riding for a Fall’; Saxon, *Foot and Horse*; and J.S. Rarey, *A New Illustrated Edition of J.S. Rarey’s Art of Taming Horses* (London: G. Routledge & Co., 1859).

xxxii As described by Mayer, ‘Exit’.

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xxxiii A more famous example of such a device is the famous train sequence that was first used by Augustin Daly in *Under the Gaslight* (1867) and went on to be repeated in many melodramatic plays and films.

xxxiv H. M. Milner, *Mazeppa. A Romantic Drama, in Three Acts, Dramatized from Lord Byron's Poem, by H. M. Milner, and Adapted to the Stage under the direction of Mr. Ducrow*, Dicks' Standard Plays, No. 620, (II. 6). The introduction of the horse at this moment in the speech is taken from the Dicks' imprint, as it does not appear in the Cumberland Minor Theatre or Lacy's editions. The Cumberland edition, which I use throughout the rest of this essay, was produced shortly after the play premiered in 1831 and is therefore the earliest printed version of the play, while the Lacy's script was copied from the Cumberland edition and varies from it only in extremely minor respects. In these versions, two horses are brought on for Mazeppa and the Abder Khan at the end of the scene, but Mazeppa's horse is not differentiated. The Dicks' Standard Plays edition was published c.1885, so it is some fifty years older than the Cumberland Minor Theatre version.

xxxv W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, ed. B. Gibbons (London: Methuen, 1980), II.2.4. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Act, scene and line numbers will follow in brackets.

xxxvi Milner, *Mazeppa*, title page.

xxxvii W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, ed. K. Muir (London: Methuen, 1951) I.7.28–30. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Act, scene and line numbers will follow in brackets.

xxxviii As discussed by Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*; Schoch, *Not Shakespeare*; Taylor, 'Shakespeare and Drama'; W. Greenslade, 'Shakespeare and Politics', in G. Marshall (ed.), *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 229–50.

xxxix Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 121.

xl Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 135.

xli Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, Chapter 4 *passim*; Schoch, *Not Shakespeare*, *passim*; Taylor, 'Shakespeare and Drama', *passim*; Greenslade, 'Shakespeare and Politics', *passim*.

xlii Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 5.

xliii Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 135.

xliv Greenslade also points out that the success of Shakespearean burlesques depended on 'a 'knowing audience'', 'Shakespeare and Politics', p. 232.

xlv Taylor, 'Shakespeare and Drama', pp. 132–38.