وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

MINISTERE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

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University of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi Ouzou

Faculty of Letters and Foreign languages

Departement of English

جامعة مولود معمري تيزي وزو

كلية الاداب واللغات

قسم الانجليزية

Field: Letters and Foreign Languages

Major: English language

Specialism: General and Comparative Literature

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in English

Title :

William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1599) Reworked in McKelle George's *Speak Easy, Speak Love* (2017): A Dialogic Perspective

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Academic Year : 2024/2025

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. CHERIFI for his unwavering support and guidance, particularly during the most challenging moments of this journey.

We also extended our thanks to the board of examiners for taking time to read and evaluate our research with care and attention.

Our deepest appreciation goes to our teachers whose dedication and knowledge have shaped our academic growth.

Finally, we are profoundly grateful to our families for their continuous encouragement and support throughout this entire process.

Dedication

I would like to thank my beloved family, whose support, patience, and encouragement have been the foundation of my journey and the essence of my strength.

To my mother, grandmother, and my aunties, for their sacrifices and unconditional love, and to my lovely friends who always cheer me up.

Thank you for reminding me that even in the darkest moments, there is always a reason to keep going, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Aya

Dedication

To my family, whose unwavering encouragement lit the way when I could no longer see it myself.

To my beloved cousin, your faith in me never stopped, you stood by me when I needed it most, and for that, I am endlessly grateful

Melissa

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Abstract

This dissertation examines McKelle George's *Speak Easy, Speak Love* (2017) as a dialogic transformation of William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1599), arguing that George's novel actively enters into a critical conversation with its source text rather than merely reproducing it. Grounded in a synthesis of dialogic and intertextual theory, the study draws primarily on Bakhtin's concepts of stylization, hidden polemic, and overt polemic, alongside Gérard Genette's notion of pastiche, to analyse the novel's adaptive strategies. By relocating Shakespeare's comedy to 1920's America, George reshapes narrative structures, character relationships and modes of speech in order to question traditional views of honour, love, social controls, and gendered authority. The analysis shows that stylization operates through transformed dialogue and behaviour, reflecting a shift in cultural norms and power relations, while hidden polemic subtly challenges Shakespeare's treatment of female reputation and moral judgement. Overt polemic becomes more visible through revised character roles and altered narrative outcomes, specifically in relation to authority and romantic resolution. This dissertation demonstrates that *Speak Easy, Speak Love* engages in a sustained relationship with *Much Ado About Nothing*, revealing how adaptation can both revise earlier texts in response to shifting cultural and ideological contexts.

Key words: Dialogism - William Shakespeare – Adaptation – *Much Ado About Nothing* – Gérard Genette – Mikhail Bakhtin – hidden polemic – overt polemic – *Speak Easy Speak Love*

I. Introduction

Harold Bloom (1998) asserts that "we keep returning to Shakespeare because we need him; no one else gives us of the world most of us take to be fact" (Bloom, 1998, p.17). William Shakespeare's literary genius extends beyond temporal and cultural boundaries securing his place as the central figure of the Western literary canon. His works, as if they are sacred texts, offer a universal reflection on the human condition, but also the very fabric of language and thoughts. The profound psychological depth of his characters, the moral and existential dilemmas they face, and the enduring relevance of his themes render his influence inescapable. His works have become a lens through which reality is understood, redefining notions of self and identity. Even in an era where traditional literary reverence is often challenged, his presence remains unshaken, as his unparalleled representation of human nature continues to resonate across generations. Whether viewed as a chronicler of reality or as a theatrical visionary who has reshaped perceptions of emotion and thought, his legacy persists, proving that no other writer has so thoroughly captured the complexity of life itself.

Shakespeare's plays do not feel confined to the 16th and 17th centuries, as they explore the complex and timeless themes of love, power, jealousy, and the fundamental question of human existence. Take Macbeth's ambition spiraling out of control, or Romeo's and Juliet's reckless passion, these flawed characters remain with us because they feel real and struggle with problems, we recognise and identify ourselves through them. Even Shakespeare's language has crept into everyday life phrases such as "all the world is a stage" (Shakespeare, 1623/2004, p.83) or "to thine own self be true" (Shakespeare,1602/ 2004 p.45), continue to be used in movies, memes, and casual conversations. This is why directors and artists keep reinventing his works like *Throne of Blood (1957),* a setting of *Macbeth* into a historical drama set in feudal Japan and *Haider (2014), a* Bollywood drama inspired by *Hamlet.*

Adapting literary texts, particularly those as revered as those of Shakespeare, requires a delicate balance. Being too faithful to the original risks creating something static and museum-like, while excessive deviation can distort the essence of the original work. The most successful adaptations, however, do not merely replicate the source material; they rather engage with it in a dialogue. They retain the main elements of the story while reimagining its setting and context, whether by transforming *The Tempest* into a postcolonial allegory as seen in Aimé Cesaire's A *Tempest (1969),* or replacing the Elizabethan drama with the jazz world of the 1920's like McKelle George does in *Speak Easy, Speak Love (2017).* Such reinterpretations do not simply pay homage to Shakespeare's work, they have the potential to critically reshape, examine, and uncover new meanings and perspectives. In *Speak Easy, Speak Love,* a modern retelling of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing,* set during the Roaring Twenties, George reimagines the play's characters and conflicts within the vibrant atmosphere of speakeasies and jazz, swapping sword fights for barroom clashes and period costumes for flapper dresses. Beatrice's and Benedick's sharp-tongued banters feel right at an era marked by rebellion. This dissertation digs into *Speak Easy, Speak Love* as a case study of literary dialogism, exploring how George's novel enters into a dynamic conversation with Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing.* Rather than treating the modern retellings as a simple adaptation, the study investigates how the two texts interact across time, culture, and language. Using Bakhtin's theoretical insights, particularly his concepts of stylization, polemic, hidden and overt, as well as the concept of pastiche by Gérard Genette and dialogism itself.

Review of literature

Shakespeare's works are known for their timelessness due to the fact that they revolve around universal and perpetual topics. His works are still looked on till today and never seem to stop astonishing generations of readers. *Much Ado About Nothing* (1600) and *Speak Easy, Speak Love* (2017) highlight ongoing themes such as love, deception, and social norms through amusing witty dialogues, which is why many scholars and different ideologists have commented on these themes. *Much Ado About Nothing* has received both praise and criticism for its treatment of certain themes, characters, and plot elements. While it is classified as a comedy, the play explores serious issues as public shaming, betrayal, and the fragility of reputation. In this play, the line between tragedy and comedy becomes blurred, especially through the witty banter and misunderstandings between Benedick and Beatrice.

Recent pragmatic approach to *Much Ado About Nothing* explores how wit and impoliteness work together dialogically to form relationships and social dynamics between characters. From a pragmatic perspective, Nesaem Mehdi Al-Aadili (2023), examines in her doctorate thesis: Witty banter in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of The Shrew*: A pragmatic Study, how banter and rhetorical devices (metaphor...) operates through speech, particularly in the exchange between Beatrice and Benedick. This aligns with Bakhtin's concept of dialogic interaction, where multiple voices are manifested through language. As Al-Aadili (2023) points out, "Banter, which is a form of mock-impoliteness, can be pragmatically realized via the speech act strategies of joking, teasing, mocking, and insulting as well as the rhetorical devices of pun, symbolism, imagery, simile, and metaphor" (Al-Aadili, 2023, p.17). The author explains that, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, banter is not just random joking but a structured way of communicating that carries depth. The study explains that banter is "mock impoliteness"; it means that it sounds rude on the first impression, but it is playful and used to build closeness between characters. This is especially visible in the way how characters

like Benedick and Beatrice tease and insult each other using clever wordplay and metaphors. The author points out that the banter reveals how characters relate to each other emotionally and socially and how their speech can carry both conflict and affection at the same time. This idea supports the view on language in this play as being dialogic. It brings up different voices, perspective, and intention in one conversation; what might seem just a witty insult is a deeper way of showing power dynamic, emotional connection, and the complexity of human relationship. The interactions between Beatrice and Benedick demonstrate how Shakespeare uses language to express both conflicts and affection at the same time.

Marry Kelly (2023) represents this complexity between comedy and tragedy in her article Laugher in the shadow: navigating comedy and tragedy in *Much Ado About Nothing* (2023). This work reflects how the play's comedy surface masks a profound emotional tension, especially in the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick who use wit as a shield for self-protection. Their language is not only for entertainment but also as a defense mechanism against love and gender roles. *Much Ado About Nothing* "teeters on the border between comedy and tragedy" (Kelly, 2023, p.4). In this quote, Kelly shows how Shakespeare's play blends comedy and dark heavy themes. She explains that the play has both smart jokes, like the ones between Beatrice and benedick often arguing and using their wit to hide their true feelings and silly humour like the mistakes Dogberry and the Watchmen make, She points first that the funny scenes seem like a joke, but they help solve the problem in the story like in hero being wrongly accused of infidelity before the public eyes. Kelly insists that the mix of comedy and tragedy help us feel both the pain and the hope in the play. The sad parts feel stronger because they are next to the funny ones and the humour helps the story to lighten and bring a happy ending to the story and the characters; an example of this contrast is when hero was falsely accused of infidelity. Kelly says in her article, that Claudio questions the virtue and modesty of Hero, emphasizing the theme of trust and betrayal. The doubt he casts upon her virtue creates a tragic

conflict, as it involves the rupture of a relationship that was expected to culminate in marriage. Claudio's words reflect the tragic aspects of the play, as the scene marks a pivotal moment where Hero's reputation is unjustly destroyed (Kelly, 2023, p.5). She highlights one of the most heart-breaking moments in the play; Claudio publicly shames Hero at their wedding, accusing her without having any solid proof. As stated by the author, this scene represents how fast comedy can turn into tragedy in a few moments and change its entire direction from funny and filled with witty banter to deception. In this scene, the atmosphere shifted dramatically. Claudio's words were cruel, calling Hero a "rotten orange" (Shakespeare,1600/1989, p.106) and claiming her blushes as a signal of guilt. Kelly emphasises how this moment caused serious consequences and how trust can break easily. Hero's injustice shows the fragile nature of women's dignity in a patriarchal society; she was pure, yet her future and entire life were nearly ruined by men around her who believed a lie, because of this Hero had an emotional shock and fainted even though her own father wished for her death. Hero's role is to be spoken for rather than to speak (Paul, 2021, p.25); the author explained in performing patriarchy in *Much Ado About Nothing* (2021) how Hero's presence in the play is largely defined by the actions and words of the male character around her, Claudio or her father Leonato. Beatrice and Benedick often take the spotlight in the play for their wit and independence. However, Hero's and Claudio's relationship is where Shakespeare explores the patriarchal norms. Hero's function within the narrative is shaped by patriarchal expectation, her value is measured by her obedience and accommodation. According to the author this perspective adds more knowledge for understanding Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* has been celebrated for a long time for its witty dialogue and romantic tension; George, as any other Shakespeare's inspired author, took the initiative to reimagine the original play but in the heart of the Jazz Age. *Speak Easy, Speak Love* takes place in 1920s prohibition era, the novel stays true to the original plot but with new

insight to the themes. Although George's novel is discussed by readers online, a careful search in major academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and the MLA International Bibliography did not find any scholarly articles or academic studies about this work. Most of the available sources are reader reviews on Websites like Goodreads, personal blogs, or young adult literature platforms. These texts mainly express personal opinions and do not offer detailed critical or theoretical analysis. This shows that George's novel has not yet received serious academic attention, which makes the present study an original contribution to the field.

This lack of scholarly attention shows that *Speak Easy, Speak Love* has not yet been recognized as a serious subject for literary study, even though it has many interesting elements worth exploring. For example, the novel brings Shakespeare's story into a 1920s Prohibition-era setting, which adds a new cultural and historical layer to the original plot. It also offers fresh perspectives on the characters, their relationships, and the way dialogue shapes their interactions all of which are valuable topics for deeper analysis. Because of the absence of formal research, there is a clear gap that this thesis aims to fill. By studying the novel through Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and comparing it with Shakespeare's original play, this research will not only highlight the novel's unique features but also help start a more serious academic conversation around it. To the best of our knowledge, this makes the project both relevant and original, since it covers a book that has not yet been fully explored in the world of literary studies. This thesis may be the first academic study to work on *Speak Easy, Speak Love* (2017) in connection with *Much Ado About Nothing* (1600).

Issues and Working Hypotheses

This study examines how dialogue functions in *Much Ado About Nothing (1600)* by William Shakespeare and in *Speak Easy Speak Love (2017)* by McKelle Goerge, focusing on the way charater interactions create meaning in each work. While Shakespeare's play has been widely analysed, George's novel has not yet received serious academic attention, and existing materials are largely limited to reader reviews and online discussions that lack critical depth. This research therefore addresses how dialogue structures differ between two texts, how character agency is reshaped through George's rewriting, and how the 1920s America setting influences conflict, authority, and gender relations. It is hypothesised that dialogue in Speak Easy Speak Love is less hierarchal than in Shakespeare's play and allows female characters greater control over conversations, that the shift in setting moves the focus of conflict from public honour to to personal choice, and that George uses dialogue to question the social and moral values presents in the original play. This study aims to test these hypotheses and demonstrate that George's novel actively reworks Shakespeare's use od dialogue to produce new meaning about relationships, power, and communication.

Methodological Outline

This research is structured into a general introduction, followed by detailed methods and materials, results and discussion sections, and a general conclusion. The discussion section will be divided into two chapters; chapter one will focus on studying Shakespeare's *Much Ado About nothing* and McKelle George's *Speak Easy, Speak Love* by borrowing Bakhtin's concept of stylization and Gérard Genette's pastiche. The second chapter will be devoted to studying the two novels using Bakhtin's hidden and overt polemic, and also Bakhtin's notion of object-ness as interpretive element.

II. Methods and Materials

1 Methods

1.1Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study draws primarily on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, which provides a rich and flexible lens for examining literary texts as sites of interaction, negotiation, and transformation. This framework is particularly suited to analysing adaptation and intertextual engagement, as it allows for an exploration of how meaning is shaped through dialogue with prior texts, cultural contexts, and ideological frameworks. By focusing on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and George's *Speak Easy, Speak Love*, the study aims to investigate the ways in which the latter reimagines the former not simply as a modern retelling, but as a complex rearticulation shaped by stylistic, thematic choices, and cultural reinterpretation. Bakhtin's theory offers the tools to unpack these layers, particularly in relation to how George's novel enters into conversation with the Shakespearean source text and the broader literary tradition it represents.

1.2 Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1984)*, Bakhtin argues that dialogism on a surface level, refers to the presence of multiple voices in a single text. But on a deeper level, dialogism is not only a literary device, it is a worldview. According to Bakhtin, language is never neutral, not only a tool used by one isolated person to express themselves. Instead, language is social to its core. Every word we speak or write is already carrying traces of other voices, other contexts, and other meanings. In contrast to monologism, where one voice, usually the author's, dominates and tries to fix meaning in place; dialogism allows space for other different perspectives, unresolved questions, and genuine interaction. Bakhtin argues that "Truth is not

born, nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110). Dialogism is not only about literature; it is about how we live. It challenges the idea of the isolated self, instead it suggests that we are always in conversation, always becoming ourselves in response to others. Our thoughts, our words, even our sense of self is shaped in this back and forth dynamic.

1.3 The concept of stylization

According to Bakhtin (also in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics)*, stylization operates as a form of double voiced discourse in which the voice of the original speaker is both preserved and recontextualised. He explains,

> There exists a group of artistic speech phenomena that has long attracted the attention of both literary scholars and linguists. By their very nature these phenomena exceed the limits of linguistics; that is, they are metalinguistics. These phenomena are: stylization, parody, skaz, and dialogue (compositionally expressed dialogue, broken down into rejoinders. All these phenomena, despite very real differences among them, share one common trait: discourse in them has twofold direction - it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward another's discourse, toward someone else's speech" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.185)

Stylization does not parody or distort the original utterance, instead it honours its integrity while subtly reframing it within a new ideological or artistic horizon, Bakhtin emphasises this point by explaining that,

> If we do not recognize the existence of this second context of someone else's speech and begin to perceive stylization or parody in the same way ordinary speech is perceived, that is, as speech directed only at its referential object, then we will not grasp these phenomena in their essence: stylization will be taken for style, parody simply for a poor work of art. (Bakhtin, 1984, p.185)

This duality creates a layered form of expression where the original speaker's language is echoed, yet refracted through the consciousness of the new speaker. The result is a dialogic interaction between two intentions, one historical, the other contemporary. Rather than simply

erasing the past, stylization derives from it, engaging in a conversation that is respectful and transformative. In this way, stylization becomes a sophisticated negotiation between fidelity and reinterpretation, allowing the past to engage with the contemporary.

1.4 The concept of pastiche

Gérard Genette considers pastiche as a type of literary imitation that focuses on style rather than content, and importantly, it does not aim to ridicule the original. Pastiche often serves as homage or playful emulation, but sometimes it can include subtle critique, In *Palimpsests*: *Literature in the Second Degree (1997)*, Genette provides an example of a non-satirical imitation,

> Whatever the case may be, it is a kind of homage. This traditional term, which Claude Debussy was to use as a title for a (quite free but fervent) pastiche of Jean Philippe Rameau, optily designates the non-satirical mode of imitation, which can hardly remain neutral and offers no other choice except that between mockery and admiring reference - unless the two are mingled in an ambiguous mode, which appears to me the most specific effect of the pastiche when it succeeds in escaping the aggressive vulgarity of caricature.(Genette, 1997, p. 98).

Unlike parody, which often ridicules its source, pastiche is more of a tribute; it copies the stylistic features of a previous text or author in a tone that is either neutral or affectionate. It is a way of engaging earlier literature, not to destroy it, but to celebrate it. For Genette, this kind of imitation falls under what he calls hypertextuality, where a new text builds on another one, but in the case of pastiche, it does so without ruining the original's core structure or message.

1.5 Hidden polemic and overt polemic

According to Bakhtin, hidden polemic is characterised by a dialogic interaction where the speaker responds to another voice without directly naming or overtly addressing it. It is, "addressed, as if it were, to a third party and is as if carried on in his presence" (Bakhtin,1984,

p.195). Bakhtin explains that in hidden polemic, “one word acutely senses alongside its interaction someone else’s word speaking about the same object” (Bakhtin,1984, p. 195). He further notes that the speaker’s discourse in a hidden polemic, “presupposes someone else’s speech, and at the same time it remains directed toward its referential object” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.195, which reveals the subtle; indirect, yet dialogic nature of hidden polemic. Overt polemic, in contrast, occurs when a voice directly challenges another, making the object of critique explicit. This type is more combative and immediate, with clearly identifiable opponents and thematic conflicts. Bakhtin frames overt polemic as dialogic in nature, but openly confrontational, stating that is “explicitly oriented toward another’s discourse, with a clear adhesivity to an opponent” (Bakhtin,1984, p. 194). In some cases, overt polemic is accompanied by what Bakhtin calls “object-ness”, where the discourse treats the opponent not as a fully realised voice, but as a fixed object to be dismissed, ridiculed, or displaced, revealing how polemic can both challenge and reduce the other.

2 Materials

2.1 Biography of the Authors

a. William Shakespeare: A Biographical Sketch

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is widely regarded as the greatest playwright in the English language and a towering figure in world literature. Born in Stratford Upon Avon, England, he was baptised on April 26, 1564, likely born a few days earlier, a date now celebrated as his birthday. By the early 1590’s, Shakespeare had moved to London, establishing himself as a successful actor and playwright. He became associated with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, later known as the King’s Men, a leading theatrical company that performed for Queen Elizabeth and King James the first. Between 1590 and 1613, he wrote 39 plays, 154 sonnets and several long narrative poems. His plays span comedies (*A Midsummer’s*

Night's Dream, Twelfth Night), histories *(Henry IV, Richard III,* tragedies *(Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear),* and romances (*The Tempest, The Winter's Tale).* In 1613, he retired to Stratford, where he died on April 23, 1616 at age 52. He was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford, where his epitaph famously warns against moving his bones.

b. McKelle George's Biography

McKelle George is an American author and librarian whose literary work engages with reimagining historical fiction and canonical texts for contemporary young adult audiences. Her debut novel, *Speak Easy, Speak Love (2017),* serves as a creative adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing,* transposed into the context of 1920's Prohibition era, America. In addition to her work as novelist, George is professionally affiliated with the field of librarianship, she is based in Salt Lake City, Utah and continues to contribute to literary culture through both her writing and her advocacy for the reading community.

2.2 Synopsis of the Novels

a. *Much Ado About Nothing*

Set in Messina, *Much Ado About Nothing* revolves around the romantic entanglements and deceptions of two couples: Claudio and Hero, Benedick and Beatrice. The play opens with the return of Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon from a victorious battle accompanied by his noblemen, Claudio and Benedick. Claudio, a young lord, falls in love with Hero, daughter of Leonato, governor of Messina. Meanwhile, Benedick and Leonato's niece Beatrice engage in a spirited battle of wits, each professing disdain for love and marriage. Don Pedro orchestrates Claudio's courtship of Hero, but his illegitimate brother Don John who is resentful of his brother Claudio's favor, plots to sabotage the union through a deceitful scheme. Don John convinces Claudio that Hero has been unfaithful. At their wedding, Claudio publicly shames Hero by

accusing her of infidelity, as a result, Hero faints. Her family, believing that she is innocent, pretend she has died in order to protect her honour and uncover the truth. Meanwhile, Benedick and Beatrice, tricked into believing that they harbour each other's secret affection, confess their love. Beatrice, outraged by Hero's mistreatment, demands Benedick to prove his love by challenging Claudio into a duel. The comic constable Dogberry and his watchmen uncover the truth by exposing Don John's plot revealing in the process Hero's innocence. Claudio, remorseful, agrees to marry Hero's cousin, who is in fact Hero in disguise as a penance. The play concludes with a double wedding as Claudio reunites with Hero, Benedick and Beatrice finally embrace their love.

b. *Speak Easy Speak Love*

Set in 1927 during America's prohibition era, *Speak Easy Speak Love* follows six teenagers whose lives intersect at Hey Nonny Nonny, a hidden speakeasy on Long Island. Beatrice, an outspoken and fiercely independent girl recently expelled from boarding school, is sent to live with her Uncle Leo, the owner of the speakeasy. There, she meets Benedick Scott, a cynical and quick tongued aspiring writer who has been sent away by his wealthy father. Their initial hostility gives way to a reluctant mutual understanding as both become entangled in the fortunes of the speakeasy and its eccentric community. Meanwhile Hero, Beatrice's quiet and dutiful cousin, is drown into a blossoming romance with Prince, a charismatic bootlegger and political hopeful who determined to keep Hey Nonny Nonny afloat. Prince's half-brother John who pretends to be resentful but, but deep down wants to help Prince and keep him safe from danger begins plotting to undermine Prince and damage Hero's reputation, sparking a chain of misunderstanding and emotional upheaval. As the characters work together to save the speakeasy from financial ruin and outside threats, including law enforcement and rival criminals, they also navigate complex relationships, personal ambitions, and questions of

loyalty. The speakeasy becomes not only a physical refuge, but also a space for growth, reconciliation and self-discovery.

III. Results

We have noticed in our research that George stylises Shakespeare's dramatic play for a temporary young audience within a Prohibition-era setting. Our study reveals that *Speak Easy, Speak Love* retains some of the foundational character dynamics and narrative structures of its source text, particularly in the dialogic interplay between Beatrice and Benedick, George's novel ultimately functions as an autonomous literary artifact, rich with its own political, cultural, and emotional vocabulary. The transformation of the character motivations, especially a character like John (paralleling Don John), illustrates a significant shift from Shakespearean villainy to nuanced psychological realism. Moreover, the results demonstrated that George's characters are not only transpositions, but rearticulated identities situated in a distinctly American sociohistorical context, grappling with issues such as gendered agency, class instability and the search for the personal autonomy within the constraints of a covert and high stakes setting The results further showed that while George borrows names, relationships, and certain narrative bears from Shakespeare, she infuses her version with a more introspective and emotionally layered perspective. Themes of performativity, freedom and reinvention emerge strongly, particularly in the use of speakeasy (Hey Nonny Nonny) as both a literal and symbolic space of transformation. Characters, such as Hero, Prince, and John are reimagined with expanded emotional arcs, distancing themselves from their Shakespearean origins and embodying the aspirations and anxieties of youth negotiating a fractured society. The results show that *Speak Easy, Speak Love* is less than a direct adaptation and more a work of literary stylization, echoing Bakhtin's notion of double voiced discourse. It engages Shakespeare as a point of dialogic departure, not as a textual constraint, allowing George to craft a narrative that is both referential and distinctly modern.

IV. Discussion

In this part of our research, we apply Bakhtin's concept of stylization to the dialogue, character, speech, and naming system in *Speak Easy, Speak Love*, highlighting how George revoices Shakespeare’s original characters within a 1920s cultural framework. Genette's concept of pastiche is examined through the plot structure and setting, where George preserves the narrative skeleton of *Much Ado About Nothing* while adapting it to the Prohibition era. Hidden polemic is addressed in relation to themes of honour, love, and gender, where George quietly challenges the ideological assumptions of the original text. Overt polemic appears in the removal of transformation of character, especially, in how figures like Dogberry are reimagined to critique outdated presentations of law and authority. Finally, Bakhtin's notion of object-ness is explored in connection to character agency, as George refuses to reduce characters to passive roles, instead giving them voice, choice, and power within the narrative.

Chapter one: Mckelle George's *Speak Easy, Speak Love* (2017) A Dialogic Study of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1600).

In literary theory, dialogism is a concept developed by Mikhail Bakhtin. it refers to the interaction between texts, voices, and ideologies across time. No utterance exists in isolation, "The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it" (Bakhtin,1981, p.279) it means every word is in dialogue with what has been said before and what may be in response, " there is always a gap between our own intention and the words which are always someone's else words"(Bakhtin,1981, p. 424)Literature from this light becomes a dynamic conversation in which texts answer, echo, challenge or recontextualize each other.

In The dialogic imagination, Bakhtin describes stylization as an artistic representation of another linguistic style, an artistic image of another language. Bakhtin proposes that dialogic texts contain multiple voices. And even when a later work borrows the language or form, it includes different points of view and tones, even told, or written by one author. A modern novel, especially one based on a classical work, is not just telling its own story; it is also responding to all their previous stories. Even if a modern writer uses old style, they often do it with a new purpose and Bakhtin calls this accentuation; which means to keep the same form but giving it a new meaning. The witty banter between Beatrice and Benedict, for example, is similar to Shakespeare's play but in George's scenario, it reflects gender equality not traditional romance.

This chapter examines George *Speak Easy Speak Love (2017)* as a response to Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing (1600)*. George does not merely retell Shakespeare's play, but she engages with it critically, preserving its tone and structural features while changing its ideological views using Bakhtin's concept of stylization and pastiche. This chapter explores how *Speak Easy, Speak Love* revises Shakespeare's narrative within a modern, feminist, and culturally dynamic context. The first part addresses stylization, analyzing how George adopts

Shakespeare's language, structure, and social norms to fit the jazz age. The second part follows with a pastiche that deals with how George honours the original play by adopting Shakespeare's storytelling and stylistic patterns without ironic distance, creating a story that honours the original while setting it in the culture, language, and style of the 1920s America.

1 Stylization as revoicing: Shakespeare in modern aspects

1.1 George's use of language and dialogue

In Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, stylization is a method by which one discourse reshapes the voice of another. It is neither parody nor imitation. Stylization allows a text to echo the style, structure, and language of another work while inflicting it with a new aesthetic purpose. This technique is crucial for literary works that aim to bring back a work, as a stylized text but into a modern, cultural, and political conversation. In this light, George's *Speak Easy, Speak Love* can be read as a stylized text of William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing.* George adopts the plot structure and tonal features of Shakespeare's romantic comedy into the era of 1920s America. The novel has the Shakespearean spirit, and wit yet inserts those elements in a setting defined by rebellion and expanded social possibilities.

Speak Easy, Speak Love is a great stylization of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing,* it derives from the verbal sparring and the banter between Beatrice and Benedict, and the exchanges full of double meanings and teasing. The witty arguments between Beatrice and Benedict are a key part of their relationship in both Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and McKelle George's *Speak Easy, Speak Love*. In both versions, their conversations are full of sarcasm and clever insults that reveal not just their intelligence, but also the romantic tension underneath. In Shakespeare's original, their exchange in Act 1, Scene 1, "I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick nobody marks you," (Shakespeare, 1600/ 1989, p. 8). followed by Benedick's, "What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?" (Shakespeare, 1600/1989,

p. 8). This shows how their teasing acts as a cover for something deeper. George's novel keeps this sharp back-and-forth but reimagines it in a 1920s setting, where the language is more modern and playful. When Benedict says, "Miss Clark, have we just made the hard turn from enemies into friends?", then Beatrice, "If you don't mind being wrong and inferior most of the time because that's not something I can help," (George, 2017, p.164), it still feels like a challenge, just with a jazz-age twist. Instead of poetic insults, their banter now sounds more casual and sarcastic, matching the time period's tone while staying true to the essence of their connection. Even though the style changes, both texts use this verbal sparring to show how Beatrice and Benedick's relationship is built on mutual respect, stubbornness, and hidden affection. This line mirrors Beatrice's original line in *Much Ado About Nothing.* The banters are the same. However, it is updated with the Roaring 20s slangs and cultural references of jazz music which does not align with the Elizabethan era. George uses the Roaring Twenties idioms, modern gender dynamics, and more emotionally resonant tone. For example, Beatrice in *Speak Easy, Speak Love* tells Benedict Are you thick in the head?" Beatrice asked. "He might have blown his nose in that, and you just paid ten whole dollars for it. Then again, someone like you probably does blow their nose in dollar bills, so it doesn't make much difference "(George, 2017, p .45), and Benedick answers, "Whatever compels you to think I care to hear about your opinions on my actions, kindly locate that switch and turn it off" (George, 2017,p.45), here, the expression, "blow their nose in dollar bills"(George,2017,p.45) is dripping with 1920's jazz - era wealth and class. This exchange retains the combative flirtation of Shakespeare's original plot, yet the language is reactant, these metaphors become references to capitalism, rebellion, and gender politics all embodied in the idioms of the roaring 20s. The stylization is more than just linguistic; It's also an ideological shift, Shakespeare's Beatrice, though witty and loud, is ultimately constrained by social expectation, and her dialogue while bold is rarely allowed to disrupt the play's patriarchal narrative arc.

Stylization extends beyond romantic dialogue. In *Much Ado About Nothing,* miscommunication is often fueled by overhearing such as the famous “gulling scenes” where Benedick and Beatrice are tricked into believing the other loves them (Act 2, Scenes 3 and 4). George reimagines this structure using modern communication tools: gossip columns, planted letters, and social maneuvering at the speakeasy. The deceit remains lighthearted but takes on greater emotional stakes; misunderstandings risk public exposure, career damage, or emotional collapse rather than merely wounded pride. For example, when Hero is slandered in the novel, it is not during a noble wedding, but at a public fundraiser filled with social elites echoing the public humiliation of Shakespeare’s Act 4, Scene 1, but stylized in tone and consequence for a different cultural moment. Even supporting characters are stylized through dialogue. Maggie, the Margaret equivalent, speaks in the rhythmic ease of a Harlem jazz singer, using colloquialisms and musical phrasing that contrast with Hero’s refined diction, reflecting their distinct identities and moral perspectives. Her line, “Couldn’t find one. Everybody knows the pay is lousy. Tomy and Jez only come out loyalty” (George,2017, p.28), captures her direct, no-nonsense tone and the musical cadence in her speech. Prince Morello, Shakespeare’s Don Pedro figure, speaks with clipped, calculated intensity; his words shaped by mob diplomacy and hidden emotional conflict, his speech carries the weight of power, expectation, and constantly negotiate loyalty and threat. He says, “How do you know I'm not a gangster?” (George,2017, p.10) is deceptively casual, yet it implies a menace it’s a question meant to provoke, but also to mask a deeper tension.

1.2 Naming as a strategy: stylized characters

In *Speak Easy Speak Love,* Mckelle George preserved the first names of Shakespeare's characters: Beatrice, Benedick, Hero, Margaret, and Don Pedro (renamed prince) which immediately make a dialogic link with *Much Ado About Nothing.* However, she updates their surname to add a modern touch the reflect the 1920s setting, giving new meaning to these characters. These modifications are a clear example of Bakhtin's stylization: the characters are speaking in Shakespeare's originals, but their identities are reshaped through cultural, ideological, and symbolic lenses.

Scott keeps his Shakespearean first name, which came from the Latin Benedictus; meaning blessed. This connection suggests continuity with the original character who is witty, emotionally guarded man. However, the "Scott" in his name reposition him in modern America context. The name evokes social statues and may allude to the 1920s literary culture figures like F. Scott Fitzgerald. This can also be linked to Benedick's dream of being a writer shown through his obsession with his typing machine. Scott situates Benedick within the upper-class world of speakeasy, in the novel Benedick is rich that's what the name suggests.

Hero Stahr is one of the clearest examples of stylization in *Speak Easy, Speak Love*. McKelle George keeps the name "Hero" from Shakespeare's original play, which helps readers recognize the connection between the two works. But George also changes her by placing her in a different time and giving her a new role that fits the setting of the 1920s. The last name Stahr is a stylized spelling of "star," which reflects Hero's position in the story as a singer and co-owner of the speakeasy. This name choice is not random it shows how George uses style and symbolism to build the character. The spelling "Stahr" gives her name a sense of glamour and old Hollywood charm, matching the elegance and drama of the Jazz Age in addition to her name, Hero's appearance and job are also part of her stylization. She wears fashionable clothes,

sings on stage, and helps run a hidden bar, all of which are connected to the cultural style of the 1920s. These elements turn her into more than just a love interest; she becomes a character shaped by music, nightlife, and the energy of the time. Her name, voice, and role are carefully designed to reflect both the world she lives in, and the story George wants to tell. Through this stylization. Beatrice Clark Beatrice Clark's name is itself a deliberate stylistic choice that reflects the character's wit, depth, and evolving social role. George preserves Beatrice's first name from Shakespeare, the name derives from Latin "Beatrix" which means "she who makes happy" or "blessed" (Brewer's Adrian Room, Dictionary of Names,1995, p.55), maintaining a link to the original play's spirited heroine. However, by giving her the surname Clark that originated as a job that literate people can gain money from "who earned his living by his ability to read and write". (A Dictionary of English Surnames, Reaney & Wilson,2006, p.58). George stylizes her heroine as a woman of intellect and ambition.

In this version, Beatrice is not just witty; she is a future doctor, a clever and determined young woman shaped by the energy of the 1920s. This historical backdrop is an important part of the novel's stylization: The Jazz Age setting allows George to blend period-accurate social change with literary character development. Beatrice's modern speech, direct commentary, and public confidence are all stylized to reflect both her personal independence and the broader cultural shift of women stepping into public, professional, and academic spaces. Rather than hiding a message, George makes empowerment part of Beatrice's visible identity through voice, attitude, and appearance. These choices are not simply thematic they are part of how George retools the Shakespearean source through stylistic adaptation, using naming, voice, and setting to reflect a reimagined feminist heroine in a new time and place.

Prince Morello serves as McKelle George's modern reimagining of Shakespeare's Don Pedro, carefully adapted to suit the setting of 1920s New York. The author retains the title "Prince" as a nickname, preserving the character's air of nobility, charm, and leadership, while

also making him feel more grounded in the informal, fast-paced environment of the Jazz Age. The surname "Morello," an Italian name, enhances this transformation by aligning him with the diverse cultural backdrop of the era, especially in a city shaped by immigration, ambition, and reinvention. Through this name, George subtly situates him in a space of influence and style rather than inherited power. In contrast to Shakespeare's Don Pedro, who holds military and political authority as a prince of Aragon, Prince Morello operates within the social hierarchies of reputation, charisma, and personal alliances. This shift in context allows George to maintain the character's original traits his diplomacy, charm, and central role in the affairs of others while adapting them to a world where elegance and discretion matter more than titles. The speakeasy setting, with its codes of glamour, and rebellion, suits his role as a leader who observes more than he reveals. He becomes a symbol of modern authority: smooth-spoken, well-connected, and emotionally guarded. By stylizing Don Pedro into Prince Morello, George does not simply update the character, she reframes him entirely, inserting the ideals of nobility into a world of jazz, smoke, and social complexity, where power lies not in birthright, but also in presence.

1.3. Rewriting the chronotope: from Messina to the Speakeasy

In Bakhtinian terms, the chronotope refers to how time and space are connected and represented in a story. It is a way of understanding how the setting shapes the actions, relationships, and meaning of a narrative. Bakhtin explains it as "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 425). In other words, the chronotope allows readers to see how a story reflects the culture, values, and historical context of the time it was written in or set during. It is not just about when and where something happens, but how those elements create a specific world that influences everything within it. In Speak easy, speak love, McKelle George reshapes Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* by changing its chronotope. She moves the story from the royals and military camps of early modern Italy to the lively, glamorous world of 1920s New York during

the Prohibition era. The new setting, a speakeasy, becomes a space filled with jazz, secrets, and ambition. This change does not only affect the plot, but also how the characters interact, what roles they play in society, and what kinds of power they hold. For example, Hero is no longer a silent noblewoman, but the strong and creative owner of the speakeasy. The transformation of the chronotope allows George to explore new meanings in the original play and to highlight themes like independence, identity, and performance in a modern, stylized way. In *Much Ado About Nothing,* the events take place in Messina, a quite noble town in renaissance Sicily. It is a highly structured place where men hold power and women are expected to be quiet and obedient. Therefore, the reputation of anyone is everything. The characters interact through formal events like masked balls, arranged marriages, and public ceremonies. These places are full of strict rules. When Hero is falsely accused by Claudio, he humiliates her in public shouting, "Give not this rotten orange to your friend. She is but the sign and semblance of her honour" (Shakespeare, 1600/1989, p.98*).* In this scene, it shows how men hold power in that space and how public shaming becomes a weapon against women who cannot defend themselves.

In *Speak Easy, Speak Love,* George moves the story settings from Messina to a speakeasy on Long Island during the 1920s, a time of jazz, rebellion, and cultural change. This new setting transforms the world of the story. The speakeasy, named *Hey Nonny Nonny,* a playful reference to the song in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Shakespeare, 1600/1989, p.52). *T*he speakeasy is illegal, underground, and full of energy. In Bakhtin's term, the chronotope refers to how time and space are connected and represented in a story. It is a way of understanding how the setting shapes the actions, relationships, and meaning of a narrative. Bakhtin explains it as "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Bakhtin,1981, p. 425). In other words, the chronotope allows readers to see how a story reflects the culture, values, and historical context of the time it was written in or set

during. It is not just about when and where something happens, but how those elements create a specific world that influences everything within it.

The 1920s settings are mostly important; it was a time of radical changes. Women were granted the right to vote in the United States through the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S Constitution , prohibition had created a thriving underground culture with young people challenging traditions. This can be shown in novel through the characters running and supporting Hey Nonny Nonny. They challenged the law banning alcohol. They embrace music, dancing, and relationship in a way that contrasts the older generation, this captures the spirit of rebellion not just breaking rules but also rejecting moral expectations. In this light, George's speakeasy stylizes Shakespeare's noble court into a vibrant, jazz-infused space where women can lead, speak freely, and take meaningful risks. Beatrice, for example, is no longer a noblewoman whose fate is tied to marriage, but an independent young woman aspiring to become a doctor and make a name for herself. The modern setting reflects and enhances her autonomy now her world is one that supports self-definition rather than social duty.

George also stylizes the emotional dynamics of the original play through changes in setting. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, significant events unfold in formal, public spaces like churches and ballrooms places which are governed by ceremony and performance. In *Speak easy, speak love*, however, the most emotionally charged moments take place in private, intimate spaces: quiet corners, back rooms, and soft exchanges between jazz sets. This atmospheric shift creates a space where characters are not confined by social expectations but can instead express vulnerability and emotional honesty.

1.4 Echoes and evolutions, reimagining Shakespearean themes through stylization

Mckelle George's *Speak easy, speak love* does not just retell the story of *Much Ado About Nothing* in a different time or period, it actively reimagines the play's main themes through the lens of a new era. While Shakespeare's original focuses on ideas like honour, reputation, deception, and traditional gender roles, George adapts these themes into something close to 1920s values, such as self-expression, personal freedom, and emotional honesty. Instead of just simply renovating the settings, she transforms how these themes function in story. This kind of transformation matches with Bakhtin's idea of stylization, when an author reuses an old work's ideas and materials to give it a new voice or purpose.

The theme of honour, especially in relation to women, is treated very differently. In *Much Ado About Nothing,* honour is strongly linked to chastity and sexual reputation and Hero for example is judged based on her silence after the public shaming even without having any solid proof. This is how weak a women's reputation was at the time. Claudio says,

> Would you not swear,
> All you that see her, that she was a maid,
> by these exterior shows? But she is non:
> She knows the heat of a luxurious bed;
> Her blush id guiltiness, not modesty
> Leon. What do you mean my Lord?
> Claud. Not to be married,
> not to knit my soul to an approved wanton
> (Shakespeare,1600/1989, p.98)

In here Claudio accuses Hero not based on truth but on appearance. Honour is something fragile. It can be affected by what people see rather than who the person really is. Hero is not given a chance to defend herself; she faints, and her silence added to the idea that shame has taken over her and her values away. However, George reworks this theme by redefining honour as something internal and emotional instead of something society has control over it. George, stylizes Hero's storyline by changing how her character reacts and speaks. In Shakespeare's play, Hero is quiet and does not speak much after being accused. Her role fits the world of noble families and public reputation. George, however, places Hero in a 1920s speakeasy, a space

where people can be more open and emotional. This change in setting allows Hero to respond directly and honestly when she is hurt, which fits the style and tone of the modern world George creates. Instead of keeping the same ending, George changes how the story resolves. Hero does not quietly forgive or return to her relationship right away. This isn't meant as a criticism, but as a creative choice that matches the time period and emotional style of the novel. In George's version, the drama happens in private moments rather than public scenes, and the characters speak more personally. Other characters around Hero are also changed to fit this style. In Shakespeare, her father reacts with shame and sadness saying, "O Fate! Take not away thy heavy hand. Death is the fairest cover for her shame that may be Wished for" (Shakspeare,1600/1989, p.102) believing that her death would be better than living her life being shamed by people. In George's story, the people around Hero like Beatrice and Maggie show support and love that a true family and friend should "Hero fought her own tears, flushed, her chin wobbling as she attempted to stand up. Beatrice was at her side in a moment, helping her. The crowd came to life" (George,2017, p.224) between the play and novel Hero's father reaction was different instead of wishing death Leo comforts his daughter "He knelt next to Hero. "Here, sweetheart, let me help you. Hero resisted for a moment, but his touch was gentle, his voice so scaring Beatrice hardly believed it belonged to him. With a tiny nod, Hero allowed him to tuck one arm under her knees and the other against her back. He hoisted her up. "Thatta girl." (George,2017, p.228) even if her reputation is on the verge but because of the modern setting the focus is not on restoring a public image but on expressing feelings in a more modern, realistic way and that's why her father responded differently. Through this stylization, George keeps the original themes but changes how they are shown to fit a different time and tone.

Love is a central theme in *Much Ado About Nothing*, but George stylizes the way love works by making it more emotional and realistic. The play distinguishes between different types of love: Claudio's romantic idealization, Benedick's and Beatrice's intellectual attraction, and

the superficial flirtation of masked ball. In the play, Claudio falls for hero's beauty and social status; his declaration "In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on" (Shakespeare,1600/1989, p.13) shows love as visual attraction and idealization. Claudio falls in love with an idealized version of Hero rather than knowing her as a real person. He's attracted to her beauty and what she represents socially. Romance love is usually influenced by external power and public image. In the play, Claudio abandoned Hero as fast as he fell for her. When honour is questioned, he says, "her blush is guiltiness, not modesty" (Shakespeare,1600/1989, p.98*). L*ove in the play is fragile and conditional. George made significant changes in the relationship between hero and prince in the novel. In the original story, hero remained silent and married Claudio at the end but in the novel Hero confronted Claude after the accusation "Let go of me, you unbelievable ass," she said. "That's what this is about? You're jealous because you think someone else manhandled what's yours?" (George,2017, p.224). However, Benedick and Beatrice have a completely different type of love. They are attracted to each other's intelligence and sense of humor but even when they claim to hate each other, they're always having clever conversations and paying attention to what the other person says. Their love grows slowly because they understand each other's minds and personalities. This makes their relationship stronger and more real than Claudio and Hero's.

2 Pastiche in the plot of *Speak easy, speak love* in light of *Much ado about nothing*

a. The Public Shaming Scene

Some of the scenes in *Speak Easy, Speak Love* imitate scenes from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing,* but George transforms them by adding her own creative interpretation and stylistic choices. The public shaming of Hero in *Speak Easy, Speak Love,* mirrors the dramatic core of Shakespeare's play, yet it is carefully crafted to fit the historical and social context of the 1920s. In the original play, the public shaming of Hero occurs at the altar in front of an entire audience. Claudio denounces her as disloyal and not a virgin, using harsh terms like "rotten orange" and accusing her of knowing "the heat of a luxurious bed". In *Speak Easy Speak Love,* the public shaming occurs at a speakeasy during a birthday party. John Morello (Don John's counterpart) orchestrates a deceptive plot, similarly involving Hero's "kiss" with him, which is witnessed by Claude Blaine (Claudio's counterpart) and Prince (Don Pedro). This prepares Claude's public accusation at the party, where he lashes at Hero and calls her a "liar" who uses people like "tools"

> What gossip, Hero? Claude broke in, drunkenness blurring him like a poorly taken photo. Prince startled out of the bubble he and Hero created, finally realising they had an audience. That you are a liar? Claude asked. His voice was quite but piercing. That everyone around you is no more than a pawn to give you what you need?
> (George, 2017, p. 223).

To compound the situation Prince also voices his disapproval of Hero's perceived actions. Simultaneously, the speakeasy is raided by Prohibition agents Mr. Hansen and Mr. Smith (Dogberry and Verges in the play) resulting in its closure. Despite the contrast between

the symbolic meaning of both places, they serve as a public stage where reputations are dramatically destroyed. George maintains the dramatic tensions of Shakespeare's play while reimagining specific events that align with the Jazz Age. She explicitly takes freedom with history to make sure that the story's core remains faithful to Shakespeare's play, presenting a respectful homage to the source material.

b. The Deception Scenes

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Don John is portrayed as a "plain dealing villain" (Shakespeare,1600/1989, p.72) , words said by John himself in Act 1, Scene 3, where he confesses to his followers that he is wicked, that he does not pretend to be good or virtuous. His motivation is driven by jealousy and envy toward his brother Don Pedro and Claudio, which leads him to plot against Hero and ruin Claudio's chance at happiness. His plan involves Borachio, his accomplice who staged a false scene at Hero's chamber window after he wooed Margaret and made her call him Claudio, while. He called her Hero. At that exact moment, Don Pedro and Claudio witnessed that staged scene and believed Hero's unchastity. In *Speak Easy, Speak Love,* George writes the deception scene differently. She reimagines it with greater personal involvement and emotional complexity. Here, the deception scene is no delegated to minor characters but performed by John Morello himself, who kisses Maggie in Hero's room to create a misleading silhouette meant to be witnessed. This shift from indirect plotting to direct action, changes the nature of the betrayal. George removes the use of side characters in the deception scene, instead she assigns this role to a central character. This choice adds emotional depth and makes the character's intentions more visible to the reader. George's recreation of the deception scene is a close example of pastiche, as she closely mirrors Shakespeare's original plot while rewriting it in a new style, tone, and setting.

The deception scene involving Benedick and Beatrice are central to both Shakespeare's play and George's novel. George takes the gulling of both characters through overheard conversations from the play and adapts these elements in her novel; by doing this, she retains the core of the play and the reunion of the two witty characters by tricking them into falling in love. In the play, Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio intentionally engage in a conversation about Beatrice's supposed passionate love for Benedick, knowing that he is hiding and listening to them. They describe Beatrice as deeply smitten and tormented by her secret affection for Benedick, saying she, "tore the letter into a thousand halfpence, / railed at herself that she should be so immodest to write to one that she knew would flout her. 'I measure him', says she, 'by my own spirit; for I should flout him if he write to me. Yea, though I love him, I should'(Shakespeare,1600/1989, p. 88). Similarly, Hero, Margaret, and Ursula, stage a conversation for Beatrice, discussing Benedick's profound love for her. They portray Benedick as greatly suffering from unrequited love, that Beatrice's disdainful and witty nature is what stands as an obstacle in front of his love. Hero suggests that Beatrice, "cannot love, nor take no shape nor project /of affection, she is so self-endeared" (Shakespeare, 1600/1989, p. 92). When Beatrice overhears their conversation, she reflects on her own behaviour and decides to change her stance. In George's adaptation, she takes Shakespeare's original device of making friends conspire to make the main characters fall in love through staged conversations and applies it to her novel in a modern context ; an homage through borrowed elements.

Speak Easy, Speak Love was published in 2017, just one year after the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 2016. This timing is significant, as it places the novel within a period where many writers were re-examining Shakespeare's work. In one of her interviews posted on September 16, 2017, , though, she does not explicitly state that she participated in the Shakespeare's 400, she says, "I was inspired to do a Shakespeare retelling after seeing some amazingly clever and innovative adaptations at the RSC (Royal Shakespeare Company) and the

Globe in England. She also states, “when I sat down to think of ways to tackle my favourite play, *Much Ado About Nothing*, I thought instantly of the 1920’s” (George, 2017). A very short paragraph in the novel titled “About the Author”, we can see that she hated reading Shakespeare in high school, but her hatred turned into love after she saw productions in Stratford - Upon - Avon about the play and the different ways it could be interpreted.

1.2 Pastiche in titles of *Speak Easy, Speak Love*

One clear example of pastiche in *Speak Easy, Speak Love*, is that all 34 chapters are taken directly from lines in *Much ado about nothing;* this smart choice creates a direct connection between the works and reminds the reader of the original play. These titles serve as clues about the events and themes in each chapter. For example, chapter one “Fallen Into A Pit Of Ink”, this phrase appears in *Much Ado About Nothing* when Leonato laments Hero's dishonour describing her as “fall'n /into a pit of ink” (Shakespeare, 1600/1989, p. 109). Though, chapter one does not really represent a scandal the way Hero's situation does in *Much Ado About Nothing,* instead, this might represent the chaotic atmosphere or trouble brewing, particularly related to the speakeasy's troubles and the introduction of the characters of Benedick, Claude, and Prince and their chaotic escape from danger. Chapter two, “Lady Disdain Are You Yet Living?” (Act 1, Scene 1), this iconic line is said by Benedick to Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* initiating one of their witty banters,

> Beatrice: I wonder that you would still be talking, Signor Benedick; no body marks you.
> Benedick: What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?
> Beatrice: is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come in her presence.
> (Shakespeare,1600/1989, p. 65)

This chapter marks Beatrice's arrival at Hey Nonny Nonny in *Speak Easy, Speak Love* and her sharp-witted confrontation with Benedick as soon as she arrived, establishing their merry war of words. Chapter four “Men of Some Other Metal”, is taken from Beatrice in the play where she expresses her deep hate for marriage and conventional men, as she views men as being made of “valiant dust” and “wayward marl”; she expressed her refusal to be outmastered by them. She says,

> Leonato. [To Beatrice] Well,
> niece, I hope to see you one
> day fitted with a husband.
> Beatrice. Not till God make
> men of some other metal than
> earth. Would it not grief a
> woman to be outmastered
> a piece of valiant dust? to
> make an account of her life to
> a clod of wayward marl? No,
> uncle, I’ll none
> (Shakespeare,1600/ 1989, p. 75)

She means that she would only consider marriage if God were to create men from a different metal or substance than earth. This emphasises her resistance to traditional societal expectations for women. In *Speak Easy, Speak Love,* Beatrice’s interactions and character embodies this sentiment; the chapter opens with Benedick, Prince, and Claudio arriving and looking miserable, covered in booze, dirt, and grease which are earthly substances. She challenges Benedick, calling him an amateur rebel and noting that he is “clearly rich, clearly educated” (George, 2017, p. 35) but still “subject to the same mercies”(George, 2017,p. 35).She says this as a response to Benedick when he told her, “Now as I recall, you were retrieved early this morning from Inwood, near northern Manhattan, which anyone can tell you is the location of a home for wayward and criminal girls”(George, 2017, p. 35), and then she responds, “You are clearly rich, clearly educated, and as an actual rebel I consider it a kindness to tell you that you are but an amateur”(George, 2017, p. 35). As we can see in Benedick's insult, the word “wayward” is also used in the original play, particularly Beatrice’s statement about marriage

and men. Readers of *Much Ado About Nothing,* upon reading *Speak Easy, Speak Love,* would be transported back in their mind to the play.

Chapter thirty of *Speak Easy, Speak Love* is titled "I Do Love Nothing in the World So well As You; Is That Not Strange?", this line is spoken by Benedick in Act 4, Scene 1. This declaration occurs right after Hero's public shaming at the altar, a moment of deep crisis. It is within this charged atmosphere that Beatrice, enraged by the slander against her cousin, commands Benedick to kill Claudio and serve justice for her cousin, and also to prove his and manhood,

> Benedick, surely, I do believe your cousin is wronged
> Beatrice. Ah how much might a man deserve of me that would right her!
> Benedick. Is there any way to show friendship?
> Beatrice. Avery even way, but no such friend.
> Benedick. May a man do it?
> Beatrice. It is a man's office but not yours.
> Beatrice. I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?
> Beatrice. As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say. I love nothing so well as you.
> (Shakespeare,1600/ 1989, p.112)

In the same chapter we can find another line that is taken from *Much Ado About Nothing,* "The God of love, who sits above, and knows me, and knows me how pitiful I deserve" (George, 2017, p. 238). This line is also said by Benedick in the play when he was singing in Act 5, Scene 2. Chapter thirty-three, is titled "I do Suffer Love", this line is taken from Benedick's straightforward admission in Act 5, Scene 2 of Much *ado about nothing.* This phrase follows Beatrice's question, "But for which of my good parts didst thou fall in love with me?" (Shakespeare,1600/1989, p.125) and Benedick responds, "Suffer love! A good epithet. I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will?" (Shakespeare,1600/1989, p.125), this phrase marks the culmination of their witty banter which successfully transform into romantic feelings. George shows great respect for Shakespeare's words and ideas by incorporating

several lines from the play and integrating them in her novel in a clever way. Her careful and generous use of theses quotes is not just for show; it shows she is deeply connected to the emotions at the heart of the play. This way, George makes sure her adaptation keeps the heart and feel of Shakespeare's play.

Chapter two: echoes of subversion- hidden polemic and overt polemic in *Speak Easy, Speak Love*

This chapter explores how *Speak Easy, Speak Love* engages in a layered, dialogic conversation with Shakespeare's *Much ado about nothing* through the double lens of hidden polemic and overt polemic, as theorised by Bakhtin. While George's novel appears, on the surface, to pay homage to the Shakespearean comedy, a deeper reading reveals moments where her adaptation subtly undermines or directly critiques the original. Through hidden polemic, George embeds implicit challenges to the values upheld in Shakespeare's play, specifically in her reframing of public shaming, moral justice, and female agency. These critiques are not openly stated but become evident through symbolic contrasts, narrative shifts, and revised character arcs that question the logic of romantic reconciliation and patriarchal control. In contrast, her overt polemic is visible in moments where George directly responds to Shakespeare's structural or character decision, particularly through explicit changes in character motivation and plot resolution. She reimagines figures like Don John, Hero, and the comedic constables with a critical edge, often pointing out what she sees as flaws in the original narrative logic. Her commentary, drawn from interviews and her author's note, shows a conscious intention to rewrite, and at times reject aspects of Shakespeare's worldview.

1 Hidden polemic in plot: sacred shame versus secular scandal

The contrasting locations for Hero's public shaming in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Speak Easy, Speak Love* reflect a hidden polemic about shifting societal values, moving from sacred ideals to secular concerns. In Shakespeare's play, Hero is publicly disgraced during her wedding, right in a church, a place that represents religious authority and traditional values. Claudio accuses her of being unfaithful, which ruins her reputation and highlights how society judges a woman's worth based on her purity. The church setting makes the accusation against

Hero feel more serious and tied to traditional values. Her supposed death, and the rituals afterwards show how female honour is restored through a very old-fashioned way. In contrast, George relocates the shaming to a speakeasy birthday party, a wild, illegal place that reflects the rebellious spirit of the 1920s. Instead of Hero being sexually impure, the focus is on betrayal and dishonesty in a world of illegal alcohol trade. By moving the setting to a modern one, George shows how the idea of morality changes, how society's values shifted; instead of focusing on purity and obedience, the concerns shift to personal choice and power, highlighting the move from male dominated rules to feminist freedom. The difference in these two scenes of public shaming, is that Hero's "stain" in *Much Ado About Nothing* is moral and centered about her loss of honour and chastity. In *Speak Easy Speak Love,* though Hero's reputation is also tarnished and attacked, "the stain" is expanded to include the illegality of the speakeasy and the family's shady business; the raid adds legal and financial repercussions to the public disgrace. Although the speakeasy is illegal and chaotic, it surprisingly gives women more freedom to express themselves than Shakespeare's church. Instead of openly attacking the gender rules of Shakespeare's world, George challenges them by changing the setting and the reasons behind Hero's downfall. In the modern version, Hero still faces social judgement, but she can regain her dignity through personal choice, open conversation, and support from others rather than relying on religious rituals or male approval.

1.1 Challenging the marriage plot through a hidden polemic

Shakespeare's Hero marries Claude at the end even though he wrongly accused her of being unfaithful. Claudio is often presented as an immature and easily led person, yet Hero still accepts him. This reflects the traditional idea of marriage at the time, where a woman, even when wronged, is expected to forgive and marry the man who chose her. Hero herself does not say much in the play, she is a passive character and her fake death serves more as a silent way to escape shame than a true act of resistance. George, however, gives her version of Hero a very

different ending. Claude, the modern version of Claudio, is charming but self-centered and acts quickly on false information when he sees Hero in a staged scene with John. Instead of the story ending in forgiveness and marriage like *Much Ado About Nothing,* Hero and Claude separate completely. Hero does not chase him or beg him to be chosen by him again. Instead, she stays behind, and holds on to her dream of running her mother's speakeasy, proving that future and happiness are not tied to romance, especially with someone who did not trust her. This version of her is bold and witty, and more self-aware. During her public shaming at the speakeasy, she retorts and defends herself against Claude's insults saying, “That's what this is about? You're jealous because someone else manhandled what's yours?” (George,2017, p.223). This is something Shakespeare’s Hero would never dare to say, she fainted after crying and begging which in itself, is a show of weakness. Shakespeare ironically names her Hero; despite the meaning of her name, she remains passive and pardons her accuser instead of defending herself. George’s Hero, despite being hurt by Claude and struggling with Prince’s distance, she eventually succeeds in reconciling with Prince and forming a new relationship with him that is full of respect, mutual goals, and attraction. By changing her outcome, George challenges the idea that a woman’s happy ending must come through marriage; she represents Hero as a woman who chooses herself first and finds a better love and goal. This modern version critiques the Shakespearean model by embodying the heroism the original character lacked. This is a hidden polemic of the story, one that argues that real happiness for women should not always come from being rescued or married, but from having control over their own story.

1.2 Hidden critique of law enforcement and manipulation

Mr. Hansen and Mr. Smith modeled on Dogberry and Verges in *Much Ado About Nothing,* represents a hidden critique of law enforcement during Prohibition. George states in her author’s that they are based on real- life Prohibition agents Izzy Einstein and Moe Smith, Izzy was known for pretending to be an idiot to avoid suspicion, a tactic described as “genius”

by George (George, 2017, p.267). They use various disguises to infiltrate establishments and hide their true identity. In the story of *Speak Easy Speak Love*, they dress as pheasant hunters to sneak into Hey Nonny Nonny. This kind of disguise shows the theme of appearance versus reality. It means that what people seem on the outside might not show who they really are from the inside. This also suggests that those who enforce law sometimes conceal their true intentions behind a deceptive outer appearance. They claim that they do not take bribes but Mr. Hansen (Dogberry) admits to Benedick that they "don't take bribes to disobey the law" (George, 2017, p. 233) and also adds, "we don't take bribes to turn the other way or hurt nobody, but we will take an extra paycheck to do what we are sworn in to do either way"(George, 2017,p.233). This means they would not take bribes to break the law, but they would accept extra money to target specific establishments like Hey Nonny Nonny speakeasy. Hey Nonny Nonny was specifically targeted by Benedick's father who hired these two to shut down the speakeasy, a proof that wealth and power can influence law and its application; turning law into a tool to achieve personal interests rather than relying on the system of justice. In addition, Dogberry asks Verges in front of Benedick, "how many speakeasies do you reckon are in New York city alone?" (George, 2017, p.233), Verges answers, "why, it'd have to be fifty thousand at minimum. Probably closer to a hundred thousand if you counted the smaller joints, too" (George, 2017, p.233). Then Dogberry asks another question to Verges and keeps the conversation going in front of Benedick saying, "I reckon you're right, so why would we spend our time bothering with a has been speakeasy in Flower Hill that only opens by special invitation anyway?"(George, 2017, p. 233) Verges answers Dogberry's question, highlighting in the process the absurdity of Prohibition laws, "I guess if we got an offer we couldn't refuse" (George, 2017, p. 233). Even though there are thousands of speakeasies all around New York city, the two agents chose Hey Nonny Nonny as a target only because there is an extra paycheck. Despite their adherence to the law, they are willing to manipulate and bend it to gain their own

benefits. Their bribes do not overlook illegal activity, their actions are not for the sake of breaking the law, but they show that law can be manipulated by those who have power and influence.

1.3 False atonement: romantic redemption as self - centered redemption

Claudio's agreement to marry Hero's cousin, who is in fact, Hero herself in *Much Ado About Nothing,* could be interpreted as an act of repentance and restitution. On the surface, it seems as if Claudio is accepting responsibility for his wrongful accusations and seeking to restore the damage he has done. However, this could also be interpreted in a different way. His supposed atonement is flawed, if we look at it closely, we may uncover that his gesture is more about absolving his own guilt and less about honouring Hero's dignity. Marriage became a tool, not for justice, but for self-redemption. Claudio's love for Hero is rooted in a superficial knowledge of her character, not genuine one, she is an idealised and objectified person. He views her as an embodiment of chastity and social perfection. The moment that perfect image chatters, his love disappears and turns into disgust and rage, then resorts to public cruelty as a punishment. His slander at Hero at the altar is brutal and impulsive, his reaction makes him look like an immature man whose pride and ego had been wounded instead of someone who has been wronged. As for Hero, her silence, forgiveness, and the friar's solution of restoring her honour is just a plan to return her to society instead of personal justice. Claudio's attempt at redemption is not complete because he never truly reflects on his actions or changes as a person. His willingness to marry another woman right after Hero's fake death, merely because she is Hero's cousin who looks exactly like her, as Leonato says in the play, "My brother hath a daughter, /Almost the copy of my child that's dead, /And she alone is heir to both of us"(Shakespeare, 1600/1989, p. 122), portrays him as a superficial person. After learning from Leonato that Hero has died, he does not show real remorse, he accepts Benedick's challenge to defend Hero's honour in a duel, but they were interrupted by Dogberry who arrived at the right

time and uncovered the truth through Borachio confession. Claudio tells Leonato that he is ready for his revenge whatever it may be saying, “I know not how to pray your patience, /Yet I must speak. Choose your revenge yourself; /Impose me to what penance your invention /Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinned i not /But in mistaking” (Shakespeare,1600/ 1989, p. 122). Claudio immediately tries to defend himself by saying he made a mistake instead of apologising to Leonato about the trauma he caused to his daughter. He minimises the profound harm he caused by describing what he did as a mistake only. This emphasises his lack of self-awareness and failure to realise the severity of his public shaming of an innocent woman. In George’s adaptation, Claude is also impulsive and emotionally immature, whether Hero has forgiven him is not clear, but one thing is clear ; in chapter thirty three ;it is mentioned that Hero told Benedick that Claude had called her ; that somebody had let know that she had never been unfaithful. He sent her a “generous care package with swaths of silk and chiffon and gingham and a seamstress workbox , the nicest set his converted pounds could buy” (George, 2017,p.255) , this shows that he attempted to apologise , asking her to see him again in hope that she would forgive and maybe reunite with him .But Hero chose Prince over him. During the party in the cotton club, at the end of the story, there was no interaction between them, she sat beside Prince instead to give an easy redemption after his return. After being shamed and humiliated, she refuses to crumble under shame, she immediately becomes confrontational and defends herself. During her conversation with Beatrice in the aftermath of the public shaming, she tells her cousin, “I am not sad, so you know, I'm angry” (George, 2017, p.228). She says these words in the middle of her sniffs, which shows that she is strong and she can handle herself. This is why Claude’s and Hero’s story does not conclude with forgiveness, it concludes with separation.

1.4 Leonato’s character as hidden polemic against patriarchal norms

One of the most significant examples of hidden polemic in *Speak Easy, Speak Love* lies in George’s recharacterisation of Leonato, specifically in how she responds to Hero’s public

humiliation. In the play, Leonato's reaction to the shaming of Hero clearly shows how strongly he has absorbed patriarchal beliefs. Upon hearing Claudio's accusations, his immediate instinct is not defending his daughter, he quickly assumes her guilt and expresss a violent sense of betrayal, " O Fate ! take not away thy heavy hand./ Death is the fairest cover for her shame/ That may be wished for" (Shakespeare,1600/ 1989,p.108) .He rejects Hero out of the pressure to maintain his social honour, not because of sincere emotions. In contrast, George's novel does not reproduce this reaction. In *Speak Easy, Speak Love*, Leonato is portrayed as someone who does not participate in Hero's public shaming, even though the story still includes that dramatic event, he does not deny or come to her defense immediately, but his emotional support before and after the incident shows his loyalty to her. This narrative choice operates as a hidden polemic; it does not openly criticise Shakespeare's version of Leonato, it does so by presenting a different kind of father figure, it quietly questions and reshapes the reasoning behind Leonato's betrayal in the original play.

Throughout George's novel, Leonato is portrayed with gentle humour and enduring affection for his daughter. He is emotionally awkward and flawed, yet he is never cruel. His comment, "My girl was always a brat of a biddy …but she can out cure any sailor. Perfect, just perfect" (George, 2017, p. 263) reveals a father who knows his daughter, accepts her , and loves her even in moments of tension , this way , George presents a version of Leonato whose love is not perfect , but remains steady and unconditional , he does not link shame with silence and death and reacts with paternal concern instead of honour driven violence as in the original play . Even his physical description, "thinner, mustache grayer" and him "trying to drink less" (George, 2017, p.263), suggests a period of quiet suffering and personal effort to change, which supports the idea of silent suffering instead of an overt moral outrage or honour driven violence. Before his physical description, *Speak Easy, Speak Love* details his struggle, "his broken heart

sank them as swiftly as Anna's death" (George, 2017, p. 80), leading him to ruin and lose valuable business opportunities because of his excessive drinking.

There is a moment where Leonato in the novel does not show emotional strength, specifically his declaration for Prince to get out of the speakeasy after he hurt his daughter saying, "This is my speakeasy…And that is my little girl. It's clear that one of them means much more to you than the other. Get out of my house, young man" (George, 2017, p.224) This is his way of showing his anger and disappointment in the way Prince treated Hero. This change in Leonato's character is important because it shows that he responds to emotional pain with compassion instead of blame, and this offers a new perspective on fatherhood and authority George's quietly challenges the patriarchal culture of shame. His calm support mirrors thee friar in Mach Ado About Nothing, but the only difference is, that his support stems from genuine emotional care. This way, George shows that it is the family who help with healing and finding the truth, not official figures. This suggests a more personal and fair kind of justice. The novel places moral authority in the hands of those who offer care and emotional support and justice is shown as something based on care, honesty, and close relationships; it comes from personal support; not from rules or public actions. However, In *Much Ado About Nothing***,** Leonato expresses his desire for Hero's death to cover her shame, he even accepts the Friar's plan to feign her death, showcasing a shift from rage to strategy driven by paternal concern for his daughter's reputation not her wellbeing.

In portraying a Leonato who remains loyal to Hero, George makes us question in Shakespeare's play "why would a father let his love for his daughter be outweighed by a public shaming?". George answers this question by building a dialogue with the original play. Her version of Leonato gives a new point of view that makes readers think differently about Shakespeare's character. Through small changes, she shows a more caring and thoughtful

figure. This helps the story create a meaning through connection and invites readers to question characters and their motives.

This transformation also aligns with George's way of reimagining gender and power in her novel. Hero is no longer silent and passive; she becomes emotionally strong and confident. Her father's support reflects and reinforces this change, him not shaming her, allows her to retain her dignity and her social position. Leonato's character becomes redeemed and also used as a tool to highlight what *Much Ado About Nothing* suppresses; the possibility of unconditional love in a patriarchal world.

In the end, the way George rewrites Leonato is one the strongest examples of her hidden critique of the original play, without directly condemning Shakespeare's treatment of Hero's downfall.

1.5 Reimagining Don John through hidden polemic

In *Speak Easy, Speak Love***,** John is not a "plain dealing villain" (Shakespeare,1600/ 1989, p.72), he is a complex character, his motivation is not driven by jealousy and envy; it is more complex and sympathetic, driven by a desire to protect his half-brother Prince. Instead of trying to ruin love out of spite, his deception is rooted in a strong believe that Prince's relationship with Hero and his connection to the Speakeasy could seriously harm him. His concern about his brother leads him to create a plan to sabotage his relationship with Hero and Hey Nonny Nonny. By causing a rift between them and pushing Prince to sever ties with the speakeasy, John hopes to protect him from the threats posed by rival gangs and bootlegging.

Even though, most characters view John Morello as nothing more than a villain, Maggie understands the true motivation behind his harmful actions. After the public shaming, she visits John in an effort to bring back Prince. During their conversation, she reveals her awareness of his intentions, saying, "I know why you did it… To break Hero and Claude up, make Claude

think she wasn't faithful" (George, 2017, p. 243). John's real feelings toward his brother appear when Maggie tries to convince Prince to return with her, he urges him saying, "Go Pedro, you can always come" (George, 2017, p. 243), Prince responds, "You can't keep protecting me from everything. I'm going to help" (George, 2017, p. 243). Prince's reluctance to return with Maggie is due to his desire to stay with their sick mother and help John to take care of her. This means they share a strong bond, John telling him to come back any time, means that they do not hate each other.

Through this characterisation, George engages in a hidden polemic with Shakespeare's original portrayal of Don John. What was once a simple villain is now a complex character whose harmful actions come from a desire to protect, not from cruelty.

2 Overt polemic in the characters of John, Hero, and Claudio.

Although *Speak easy, speak love* often responds to *Much ado about nothing* through subtle references and hidden critique, there are also moments where George's approach becomes direct. The novel clearly challenges Shakespeare's way of developing certain characters and building the plot. One of the most important examples of this open critique appears in how George deals with character motivation. She gives her characters deeper, more realistic reasons for their actions instead of letting them act out of plain emotions like jealousy, envy, and moving the story as Shakespeare did.

In *Much ado about nothing,* Don John is characterised as a "plain dealing villain" whose motivation for sabotaging Hero and Claudio's wedding is driven by envy and malice. George explicitly states in her author's note that her "biggest question" about *Much Ado About Nothing* was "why Don John was such a jerk to everyone" (George, 2017.p.266) and asserted that "Don John needed a little more motivation for sticking his nose in things" (George, 2017. p. 266). In *Speak Easy, Speak Love* she gives John a more convincing reason to act like a villain. His

villainous actions are tied to his concealed desire to protect his brother Prince from harm. In addition, George also explicitly criticises Hero's reconciliation with Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing,* she expresses her disapproval saying, "why in God's name would Hero take Claudio back?" (George, 2017.p.266). This offers an overt polemic against Shakespeare's reconciliation of Hero and Claudio by refusing to replicate it. Shakespeare's Hero, despite being shamed and humiliated, reunites with Claudio through a staged plan of mistaken identity and a fake repentance from Hero through her fake death, a resolution that highlights her weakness and lack of agency. George directly challenges this outcome by giving her own version of Hero emotional depth and self-respect. Her decision not to reunite Hero with Claude signals a conscious rejection of the romantic logic in *Much ado about nothing.* This choice responds to her question, "why in God's name would Hero take Claudio back?". In *Speak Easy Speak Love,* Hero is active and manipulative (in a harmless way). For example, during her first encounter with Claude, she initiates the conversation by planting herself in front of him and uses her charm to make him attend her party, even giving him a ticket with a whispered password and a tug on his ear. She also orchestrates the plan to make Benedick and Beatrice fall in love stating that "love is the easy part. The surest way to get people to take a second look at a person they thought they didn't like is to tell them that person likes them" (George, 2017.p.154).

2.1 Overt polemic in the characters of Dogberry and Verges

Another key example of overt polemic in George's adaptation appears in her treatment of Dogberry and Verges. In her author's note, she openly admits that she was unsure whether to include them at all, saying that they "exist nearly on their own (probably to give stage actors time to set up new scenes and change costumes), except for one crucial illuminating contribution" (George, 2017.p. 267). This statement directly questions the artistic function of these characters in *Much ado about nothing,* suggesting that they are more like theatrical tools than essential to the plot. Even though Dogberry and Verges do help uncovering John's deceitful

plan, George presents their broader role as disconnected from the main action, useful more for pacing than narrative depth. From this point of view, Shakespeare's comedic subplot seems added more for convenience than because it is truly important to the main theme. Through this explicit critique, George reframes the two characters in *Speak Easy Speak Love* as morally ambiguous Prohibition agents modeled after real historical figures, Izzy Einstein and Moe Smith. By assigning them a more realistic role like raiding speakeasies and exposing how law enforcement can be corrupt, George gives them a new purpose and at the same time criticises how they were originally portrayed. This change does not only offer a new role to the characters, but also questions the way Shakespeare integrated them in his play. Based on Bakhtin's idea of "object-ness", George shows that Dogberry and Verges were not real, active characters in Shakespeare's play, they were like fixed tools used to move the plot forward. Bakhtin argues in a monologic novel (which he generally contrasts with Dostoevsky's polyphonic one), characters can become "objects, fixed elements in the author's design" (Bakhtin, 1984. p. 7). George's critique is not subtle, it is overt, as she openly points out that the original characters do not serve much purpose and replaces them with ones that better fit the tone of her novel.

General Conclusion

This dissertation has explored Mckelle George's *Speak Easy, Speak Love's* engagement in a conversation with Shakespeare's *Much ado about nothing,* not by retelling the same story in modern clothes, but by rethinking its values, its voices, and its possibilities. Through the lens of Bakhtin's stylization, hidden and overt polemic, alongside Genette's theory of pastiche, this study has traced how familiar characters, plots, and themes are revived with new meaning in a different cultural moment. The novel becomes a deliberate act of reinterpretation that questions, reworks, and updates the original paly. Each chapter is built toward a clearer explanation of how adaptation can function as both homage and critique. Chapter one investigated the use of stylization and pastiche, focusing on George's revoicing of Shakespearean dialogue and character traits using the 1920's language, cultural markers, and evolving gender roles. The chapter also traces the significance of naming, emotional tone, and historical context as tools of stylization. The discussion of pastiche shows how George honours Shakespeare's language and structure through imitation, especially in her chapter titles, character arcs, and key scenes. This respectful borrowing allows her to maintain a connection to the source text while infusing it with new historical depth. Chapter two focused on hidden polemic and overt polemic, examining how George uses both subtle and direct critique to reframe Shakespeare's treatment of themes such as honour, trust, and gender roles. The analysis showed how George reimagines scenes of public shaming and romantic resolution in ways that resist the patriarchal logic of the original play. Particular attention was given to George's reframing of key characters, including Leonato and Don John, whose narrative functions are reshaped to expose the limitations of Shakespeare's original representations. The chapter also focused on the element of object-ness in relation to figures such as Dogberry and Verges, demonstrating how George removes their comic detachment and reassigns them more grounded, morally complex roles. These

reconfigurations allow for a deeper and more inclusive portrayal of justice, agency, and identity, aligned with modern ethical consideration.

Overall, this research illustrates how adaptation serves both as a vessel for cultural memory and a tool for cultural critique. George's novel does not discard Shakespeare's legacy; it enters into a dynamic conversation with it, questioning its assumptions while preserving its emotional cores. In doing so, Speak Easy, Speak Love demonstrates the power of intertextual writing to revise classic texts through the lens of new generations. It shows that literature is dynamic and always changing, able to grow in its form, voice, and meaning to match the values of different periods. Adaptation serves as both a creative method and a thoughtful response to social and moral questions, giving older stories the chance to express fresh and relevant ideas.

Future studies on *Speak Easy, Speak Love* can explore the novel through different critical perspectives that were not the main focus of this dissertation. A feminist approach can help examine how the story deals with gender roles, power dynamics, and women's emotional and social agency. Characters such as Hero and Beatrice can be studied in more depth to understand how their voices are shaped, protected, and allowed to grow within a world that often tries to silence them. This perspective can also place George's work in conversation with other modern adaptations that bring attention to the experiences of women who were either overlooked or mistreated in earlier versions of literary tradition.

Another useful approach is psychoanalytic criticism, which can provide insight into the emotional lives of key characters. A character like Benedick can be analyzed through his inner tension, his guarded behaviour, and his evolving connection to Beatrice, all of which reveal deeper psychological patterns. Similarly, Prince's reserved actions and sense of duty can be explored as expressions of emotional control, trauma, or suppressed desire. These readings can

help uncover how characters in the novel deal with identity, vulnerability, and intimacy in ways that reflect both personal history and social pressure.

Both approaches can help future researchers better understand how *Speak easy, speak love* adds layers of emotional and symbolic meaning to Shakespeare's play. These readings can also contribute to broader discussions about adaptation, voice, and representation in modern literature. By using new critical tools, future scholars can continue to explore how stories from the past take on new life through the lens of different values, theories, and questions.

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