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Wickedness in Politics: a *House of Cards*

The intertextual relationship between literature and television as evident in adaptations of Michael Dobbs' *House of Cards*

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Introduction

Representative democracy entails that another person represents you and your interests when important decisions are made. However, it is often the case is that these people are just that; people. They are unfaithful to their spouses, they lie, they cheat and betray in order to retain and wield their power. This brings up the issue of trust within modern democracies. As with anyone else employed by the state for our benefit, we trust that politicians, to some extent, have the best interest of society at heart.

This thesis is to examine arguably the most famous fictitious politicians today; Francis Urquhart, also known as Frank Underwood. Known for being without scruples and Machiavellian, this character has a long and noteworthy textual history. Starting with the author's need to express his frustration with British politics, the character has traveled two mediums, three decades, and two cultures. What the author, Michael Dobbs, deems to be at the center of this character and his maneuvering, namely "unabashed wickedness"¹, will be at the center of this thesis as it charts how this theme has been adapted, expanded, and transposed. What is also of interest is the political reality which the texts portray. As most people who read the novels or watch the tv series will do so while living in a country governed by representative democracy, the manner in which the political world is portrayed is also of relevance. Due to how central politics is in these works, they will be treated as political novels, which are understood as novels which "chiefly concerns itself with men and women engaged in contemporary political life and discussing contemporary political ideas."²

House of Cards (1989) is the first of the three novels in the Urquhart-series, followed by *To Play a King* (1992) and *The Final Cut* (1995). The first novel was written in 1989 by Michael Dobbs, a former political aide to Margaret Thatcher.³ The following year, BBC aired their adaptation of the novel, a mini-series consisting of four one-hour episodes written by Andrew Davies. This pattern repeated two more times, creating a trilogy of novels and televisual adaptations. In 2013 Netflix released their adaptation of the novel and the series, crediting both the series and the novel as "based on" in addition to having both Davies and Dobbs as

¹ Dobbs 2015: 376

² Harvie 1992: 2

³ Dobbs 1989: 1

executive producers.⁴ In 2015 Dobbs revisited his novel, looking at it in a new light due to the interpretations made by the television series.⁵

All four works have the same basic plot structure. The Chief Whip of a recently elected party is not given the position he was promised by the winning candidate. As a response he uses his influence and authority within the party to usurp the winning candidate. He does so through a series of helpers, most notably through a female reporter who writes articles which are advantageous to his political maneuvering. The reporter is a young woman who does not attain a high rank at her newspaper but is able to publish her sensational stories due to the sensational nature of the information the Chief Whip gives her. The whip's second helper is a young and hot-blooded fellow party member about whom the whip has damaging information. He functions as an errand boy. As their illegal schemes bear fruit, the information the errand boy has on the whip becomes a liability, causing the whip to murder him. As the reporter investigates the death of the errand boy, she discovers that the whip had a part in it, thus causes a rift in their relationship. The whip usurps the winning candidate, but how the conflict between him and the reporter is resolved varies.

Wickedness

As this thesis examines a theme within these four texts, it is expedient to define what this entails. Wickedness as defined by Oxford's online dictionary is "the quality of being evil or morally wrong".⁶ In this context, the two alternatives "evil" or "morally wrong" will be regarded as synonyms. Since good and evil are abstract constructs, the notion of what is immoral will be governed by the collective understanding what is commonly seen as such, and also of shared notions of how a democratic society is supposed to function.

Stam's Issues of Adaptation

As this thesis deals with the adaptation of literature into television and, in turn, the novelization of a TV series, it is expedient to examine the relationship between the two forms of art. Novelization is here understood as a film or TV series being adapted into a text.⁷ Traditionally, literature has been seen as a more prestigious art form than film and TV. Having published several extensive works on this topic, Robert Stam is relevant. In the

⁴ Willimon 2013: ep. 1

⁵ Dobbs 2015: 376

⁶ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wickedness>

⁷ Cartmell 1999: V

introduction to *Literature and Film A Guide to the theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, Stam describes a relationship between the two art forms as one of rivalry.

He portrays the dialogue surrounding cinematic adaptations of literary works as one of loss.⁸ Critics often highlight the aspects of the novel which have been lost during an adaptation process. This causes a lamentation of loss, rather than a celebration of what has been gained. Stam argues that critics are overly focused on what is missing from the original work, rather than focusing on what is gained, and writes: “The inter-art relation is seen as a Darwinian struggle to the death rather than a dialogue offering mutual cross fertilization”⁹

Attention and prestige are finite resources which dictate the death, and life, of certain forms of art suggesting that only those who attain enough can survive. This creates a dichotomous thinking which presumes and furthers a rivalry between the two forms of art. It also furthers the notion that one of them is superior to the other. This also ties in to the cognitive effort required, as reading and understanding a work of literature invites the imagination to conjure mental images, whereas visual mediums project images which do not need to be coded in order to be understood.¹⁰ As it involves merely recording what is physically present, it cannot be art in the same way as an art form which evokes the imagination through words.

Another aspect of the relationship between these two art forms, is the notion of seniority. The most senior is seen as the most refined and elevated. In this context, the senior art form of literature is seen as inherently superior to cinema, which in turn enjoys an elevated position over the junior art form of television. This chronology of literature preceding cinema is also prevalent in most cases of adaptation, as cinema adaptations of literature is far more common than novelization of cinema.

Adaptations are caught in a catch 22 in terms of fidelity to their source.¹¹ If an adaptation’s version of the novel is very true to its original it is thought of as unoriginal, whereas if it deviates a great deal it is unfaithful to the source. They are also considered lesser than their source, due to their imitational nature. The notion of fidelity is central to this. Stam argues that it is “important to move beyond the moralistic and judgmental ideal of “fidelity””.¹² Stam argues that the notion might not have a strong theoretical impetus, but it does however have a

⁸ Stam 2005: 3

⁹ Stam 2005: 4

¹⁰ Stam 2005: 7

¹¹ Stam 2005: 8

¹² Stam 2005: 15

great deal of experiential truth. He argues the universality of feeling a novel one holds dear was not done justice when adapted to the screen.

Another relevant term in this context is intertextuality. According to Sanders, Kristeva is often attributed to coining the term despite being primarily occupied with how signs and signifiers functioned within a given culture. The term has later come to refer to how texts “encompass and respond to other text both during the process of their creation and composition in terms of any subsequent individual or collective reader or spectator response”.¹³ How texts are intertwined and imbedded in one another becomes of importance as one investigates four different texts bearing the same name. Apart from the original novel, the analyses of this thesis will examine the intertextual nature of the texts as they encompass and respond to prior works.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is primarily focused on analyzing the four texts in question. Instead of analyzing them in relation to medium, this thesis will examine them chronologically, starting with *House of Cards* (1989) and ending with *House of Cards* (2015). The two series are examined in between the novels as they were produced in that order. The first television adaptation is examined in relation to what it adds to the theme of wickedness as a generic transposition, whereas the Netflix series is also examined as a cultural transposition. According to Genette and Whelehan, a transposition is one of three categories for adaptation. Although all adaptations are in some sense transpositions in that they take “a text from one genre and deliver it into a new modality and potentially to different or additional audiences”¹⁴, some of these are cultural in “relocating their source text not just generically but in a cultural, geographic and temporal terms”.¹⁵

The four analyses of this thesis will serve to answer questions about these four texts. Given that wickedness is prevalent, how does the theme of wickedness find expression in the texts? To what extent is the wicked male politician allegorical of the political system in which he operates? And to what extent is a righteous character present in the work, and how is the discord between wickedness and righteousness resolved? And how does the adaptations or

¹³ Sanders 2006: 2

¹⁴ Sanders 2006: 25

¹⁵ Sanders 2006: same page

novelizations rework the theme of wickedness? These question all serve to answer the primary question;

In what manner is the theme of wickedness prevalent in Michael Dobbs' *House of Cards* and how is it altered in the novel's respective adaptations?

Analysis

Original Novel

The analysis of this thesis is structured chronologically. As *House of Cards* (1989) is the first of the texts, this is analyzed here. This analysis, nor any of the following, adhere to a certain methodology or paradigm of literary studies, but charts the theme of wickedness through the four texts.

If one is to analyze a piece of literary art, one might find oneself drawn to the author of the work. This draws from one of the oldest paradigms within literary theory, namely the historical-biographical approach. This approach assumes a fundamental connection between the author's life and historical setting and the literary work in question.¹⁶ The author and the literature are intertwined to such an extent, that studying one without the other, is to comprehend half of the meaning within a work of literature. One of its two fundamental assumptions consists of the notion that to understand what motivated the author to write the literary work, is to gain understanding of a literary work.¹⁷ Although this view of literature is only briefly utilized in this thesis, Dobbs is an interesting author in this regard, as he presents an anecdote from his life as integral to the composition of the novel. Being on vacation with his wife, he felt he could write a better book than the one he was reading.¹⁸ Having never written fiction before, it took the support of his spouse and the frustration with his own political career to start the process. Having recently been let go from Thatcher's political team, one might imagine Dobbs experienced a great deal of political frustration at the time of the novel's conception. When reflecting on his political frustration several years later he alludes to the idea that the book would not have been possible without it, and that the frustration was worth the book.

This biographical story serves two purposes. Firstly, the novel is established as being based on Dobbs' own experiences with the workings of British political life, which alludes that the novel has an authentic understanding of British political life. Secondly, it sets the tone of the author in regards to British political life, namely that of discontent, anger and frustration. This is evident in the afterword's conclusion, which states that the character was to be named FU, a well-known abbreviation for an exclamation of defiance. Given the fact that the story starts

¹⁶ Claudi 2013: 17

¹⁷ Claudi: Same page

¹⁸ Dobbs 2015: 377

with his dismissal from Margaret Thatcher's government, it is not difficult to guess to whom this impolite gesture is directed towards. Seeing as how Francis Urquhart maneuvers within Westminster directly following Thatcher's resignation, the manner in which he operates can be seen as an expression of Dobbs' vengeful spirit, destroying the Conservative Party from within. In addition to debasing the Conservative Party, the book also examines how to usurp a prime minister. Here we find the theme of wickedness, in the immorality of thwarting the institutions of British governance. From its story of origin this book is to undermine, belittle, and criticize not only the system itself, but also the politicians which operate within it.

Chief of wicked

The most noteworthy manner in which wickedness is prevalent in Dobbs' novel, is through Francis Urquhart. He reaches the top of the political system in a pragmatic and ruthless manner, involving such deadly sins as lying, murder, and theft. He manipulates those around him with extreme competence, underestimating only one character and paying the ultimate price for it. His path to Downing Street is not one of political capital, public trust, or ideals. Through the book we are not presented with Urquhart's actual policies or proposals, but rather how he manipulates the politicians themselves.

It is not clear which role Urquhart serves in the novel. The first character to be introduced is Mattie, who uncovers and hinders Urquhart's misdeeds. This might suggest their role as antagonist and protagonist. An antagonist is here defined as the "chief opponent of the hero or protagonist in a story".¹⁹ As is discussed later on in the thesis, Urquhart's role changes a great deal when adapted into that of an anti-hero. An anti-hero is here defined as a chief person who "instead of manifesting largeness, dignity power or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual, or dishonest."²⁰ Although both characters are wicked, their role in the narrative is altered.

As a political novel, the manner in which the political system is portrayed is also of relevance. Whether Urquhart functions as a villain in a virtuous system, or whether the system is as morally corrupt as he is, becomes an issue of some importance. The wicked aspects of a government in this regard are those which undermine the democratic and parliamentary ideals validating and justifying its existence.

¹⁹ Gray 1992: 25

²⁰ Abrams 1999: 11

House of Parliament

The title *House of Cards* functions as an allusion to the British Parliament, aligning it with the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The phrase “a house of cards” commonly refers to a structure built on such an unstable foundation that it might collapse at any minute. The title also serves to normalize the plot of the novel as another aspect of government, meaning that what transpires within the novel is allegorical of any branch of government, and that all politician’s careers are in a delicate balance.

This is made clear in the first page of the book, which is illustrated by a drawing of a broken portcullis. As the crowned portcullis has since the twentieth century been the emblem of both houses of the British parliament²¹, this might foreshadow the broken system which the novel is to depict, or how Urquhart is to break it. The portcullis has resulted through custom and usage rather than any conscious decision.

Before Urquhart is introduced, two short paragraphs foreshadow the essence of the novel’s moral message: the first is of a moth killing itself, the second concerns a police officer trying to build a house of cards. The moth is drawn to a lightbulb and dies as it reaches what it desires most, leaving the blackened and charred body to fall to the ground. The moth symbolizes how Urquhart is to fall from the top of Westminster after fulfilling his obsession. The police officer is nervous as he is to place the final pair of cards on top, thereby completing it. The police officer completes the house, but it only stands for a few seconds before external forces, the wind, topples it. This is to symbolize Urquhart’s house of cards, which is completed, stands only briefly, before it crumbles. This delicate and complex structure is however brought down by something outside of the constructor’s control, namely Mattie, here symbolized as the wind. Constructing something unable to support itself only results in a sense of frustration for the police officer, whereas Urquhart’s house of cards causes death, humiliation, and a severe disruption of the British government. Urquhart’s disregard for the consequences of his web of lies, adds to the theme of wickedness in the novel. Doomed to collapse, and immoral in its origin and means, Urquhart’s house of cards should fail if justice is to prevail. If the theme of wickedness was to be taken to its extreme, then the house of cards would prevail regardless of its wavering and wicked foundation.

²¹ <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-information-office/g09.pdf>

The office of Chief Whip

In his political novel Dobbs examines an office which enjoys a great deal of trust, power and secrecy, namely that of the Chief Whip. His position as a keeper of secrets out of the limelight gives him sensitive information regarding the other members of the party. This position is introduced primarily in contrast to his elected position, stating that his power does not come from his public office, but his role as Chief Whip. As in any democratic ideal, the power one possesses over a government, and the people it represents, should come from the endorsement of the people, and not from the inner workings of the political machine. The notion of immorality or wickedness in this sense is conveyed through the discord between the trust which the people have given him, and the political power he wields. Urquhart uses his undemocratic power to achieve the ultimate position within the government.

In his aptly named *What's Wrong with the British Constitution*, Iain McLean writes that Parliamentary Sovereignty rests on the notion that the UK Parliament governs the country.²² The issue lies in the fact that it consists of an unelected monarch and an unelected House of Lords. Only the House of Commons is elected by the people, and one of McLean's seven main points when summarizing his book is that "No intellectually defensible case can be made for retaining an unelected house of Parliament, an unelected head of state, or an established church."²³

This notion of elitism and aristocracy is also prevalent in Urquhart as a character. He distinguishes himself on several occasions from the common rabble, over which he feels superior. This is for instance evident when Collinridge, the newly elected Prime Minister, reprimands Urquhart for being overly expedient in reshuffling the cabinet Urquhart is angry for having been disciplined:

His natural assurance seemed to desert him when it came to Collinridge, a grammar school product who in social terms would have had trouble gaining membership of his club. The role reversal in Government unnerved him, unsettled him and he found himself acting out of character when he was in the other man's presence. He was frustrated with his inadequacy. And quietly loathed Collinridge and all his kind for undermining his position.²⁴

²² McLean 2010: 4

²³ McLean 2010: 313

²⁴ Dobbs 1989: 43

His social position in this context is that of affluence as a member of Britain's upper class. Social standing should, in Urquhart's mind, lead to elevation in the government. These aristocratic and elitist musings also draw away from the egalitarian principle that forms the moral bedrock of democracies. There is a discord between the principle behind representative democracy and Urquhart's view of it. In this context Urquhart is representative of an undemocratic idea of governances as he feels class and social standing should trump merit and competence.

The exchange of Ideals

What is missing within the political system that Dobbs portrays can be telling of its inner workings. This is relevant when examining certain aspects which are expected to be at the center of any functioning parliament, namely the ideals and propositions of the politicians, and their exchange of opinions and points of views. The UK government's home page places this as one of the four functions of parliament, which is to "Debate the important issues of the day".²⁵ On the same webpage, The House of Commons is described in the following way; "The UK public elects 650 Members of Parliament (MPs) to represent their interests and concerns in the House of Commons".²⁶ Members of Parliaments are there to represent their constituencies and debate the political issues of the day. This clearly deviates from politics as portrayed in Dobbs' novel, perhaps suggesting that Dobbs is critiquing British politics.

British political life is examined by Dobbs, portraying a political reality in which views, ideas and policies are not of significance. Sorlin points out that Dobbs' inside knowledge of the inner workings of parliament, having served as Margaret Thatcher's side and Norman Tebbit's chief of staff, lends weight to the authenticity of the novel.²⁷ What is in the novel represents, to some extent, the inner workings of the British Parliament. What is seldom brought to the fore in Dobbs' novel is what these politicians stand for, and which changes they seek in British society. The few programs and ideas the readers are presented with are either derailed by Urquhart, or have already been cancelled, which Urquhart uses to further his own agenda. Here Urquhart stands opposite of several of his rival candidates for the Premiership. Whereas both McKenzie and Earle have proposals which they feel might better society, their integrity is besmirched in the media before it they are enacted. In this sense Urquhart is different from other politicians in that he has no agenda other than self-

²⁵ <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/role/>

²⁶ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/commons/>

²⁷ Sorlin 2016: 4

aggrandizement. This is not to say that other politicians are not ambitious, as they see their proposals as a way of raising their standing, so that they may win the leadership election. Urquhart as a politician appears to distinguish himself from idealists and is an opportunist without an agenda who is only interested in rising to power.

Another way in which these fictitious politicians are ineffective, is when the parliamentary process allows for an exchange of opinions and views. This is prevalent during Question Time in which the government, spearheaded by a prime minister, answers questions from the House of Commons. Here one's views, opinions and criticism may be brought to the fore in a constructive and productive manner. This ideal is in stark contrast to the gladiatorial bout described by Dobbs. He portrays it as a way for the elected officials of Britain to do each other harm, rather than do good by the people:

In principle it gives members of parliament the opportunity to seek information from the leader of Her Majesty's Government, in practice it is an exercise in survival which owes more to the roman arena of Nero and Claudius than to the ideals of the constitutionalists who developed the system.²⁸

This passage draws heavily on the contrast between the old and brutal, and the modern and civilized, where the British political system draws from the former. The Prime Minister is expected to win, and if he does not, then his support will wane significantly. The premiership of Collinridge is also evident of this. He is dealt a rather large blow in one of his first Question Times and is forced into capitulation in a later one. This timeline runs parallel with the lack of support he receives within his own party, supporting the notion that losing the battle which is Question Time, means losing control of his supporters, reducing governance to an archaic and primitive bout of strength.

This chapter also foreshadows how Urquhart is to betray Collinridge's trust:

The Chamber places Members in face to face confrontation with the antagonists in the opposition parties, separated only by the distance of one sword's length, lulling the unwary into a complacency and into forgetting that the greatest danger is always but a dagger's length away, on the benches behind.²⁹

The physical harm inflicted is not limited to the parties themselves, but in the very nature of politicians as they are able to do each other harm regardless of party lines. The complacency described by Dobbs is to be personified by Collinridge and the dagger is to be personified by

²⁸ Dobbs 1989: 77/78

²⁹ Dobbs 1989: 77

Urquhart. As Urquhart uses his trusted position in Collinridge's premiership to destroy it, Collinridge's unquestionable trust to Urquhart is to be his own political demise. The greatest danger was never Collinridge's opposition, but the one's he trusted.

Roger O'Neill, Urquhart's errand boy, becomes a liability as his erratic and unreliable behavior might topple Urquhart's political house of cards. Urquhart decides that O'Neill cannot be trusted and decides to murder him. When reassuring himself of the choice to murder, Urquhart reflects on how ineffective and weak most politicians are. He draws great strength through distancing himself from normal politicians, and that his policies, whatever they may be, will be implemented firmly and with an unwavering will.

All too often Administrations had been brought to their knees as leaders listened to the siren voices, confronting the harsh realities of power only to withdraw into weakness and compromise. Didn't they say that once they were elected, all politicians were the same? Most politicians *were* the same – weak, irresolute, insignificant characters, who fouled the nest and got in the way those who had the resolve to move forward.³⁰

Here the weakness of his fellow politicians is presented as being their inability to act when needed, and thereby slowing down the process of government. This expedient, resolute and willful character which Urquhart describes himself as, is reminiscent of a tyrant. Debate and compromises only serve to hinder progress and foul the nest. Only firm and unwavering leaders might bring their beloved country back into the light.

Opposite characters

Urquhart and the system in which he operates are both strongly tied to the theme of wickedness in Dobbs' novel. Urquhart's wickedness stands in opposition to Mattie Storin, the other main character of the novel. The first chapter of the novel introduces us to a tired, sloppy and overworked reporter trying to stake her claim in the fiercely misogynistic world of journalism. Whereas Urquhart is in a world of comfort and power, Mattie is on the outside of privilege, trying to be heard. Urquhart's party, in which he holds an important and respected position, has just won a majority in parliament, and he has been promised a cabinet position. *The Telegraph*, an organization in which Mattie enjoys little power or respect, has a fading readership, an incompetent editor, and a censoring proprietor with deep political ties. Here there is a hierarchy of power, in which the wicked are at the top, and the honest are on the

³⁰ Dobbs 1989: 342

bottom. As Mattie's position might resonate with the majority of the population, she could be thought of as a representative of the people.

In the novel's initial chapters, in which Mattie is introduced, she reflects on the similarities between sex as a single girl, and the life of politics:

The constant danger of being seduced by a smile of a whispered confidence, the unending protestations of loyalty and devotion which covered, just for a while, the bravado, the exaggeration, tiny deceits which grew and left behind only reproach and bitterness.³¹

Her reflections portray her as someone who is able to resist the rhetoric of charmers and politicians, due to her ability to see behind their façade. This also suggests that politics and romance both consists of empty promises which are inevitably broken. The participants in both cases are dishonest for their own benefit and to the detriment of others.

Although both characters gain power throughout the novel, they are building on different foundations. In this context of contrasting characters, the literary term "foil" is relevant. A foil is a character who is introduced in order to highlight by contrast certain aspects of a character of greater significance.³² Mattie's characteristics are to highlight certain aspects of Urquhart's qualities. Whereas Urquhart's power is based on fear, deception and secrecy, Mattie's is built on honesty, perseverance and friendship. She is firm and forthright with her superior and the world at large, while relying on the friendship she has with the paper's junior editor, Johnnie Karajewski. Urquhart works to cover and obscure, while Mattie to uncover and illuminate, which is also central to their jobs. Mattie is a political correspondent who seeks truth and information which people deserve to know, thereby holding politicians accountable for their actions. Urquhart on the other hand, serves in his position as Chief Whip as the keeper of secrets, a role which is integral to his party fellows avoiding accountability. This is apparent when one of his fellow party members, Harold Earle, is blackmailed by his homosexual lover, David.³³ When David threatens to go to the press if he is not payed, Urquhart threatens him with legal prosecution, and David leaves Earle alone. Although the morality of Earle's actions is not that of wickedness, the suppression of information from the public serves against the ideal of transparency which elected officials are to adhere.

³¹ Dobbs 1989: 8

³² Gray 1992: 121

³³ Dobbs 1989: 285

Here one sees the wickedness inherent in the secrecy of politicians, which is challenged by a free and unbiased press. The problem in Mattie's case is that her journalistic freedom is suppressed by the internal hierarchy of her paper. What Mattie discovers regarding Collinridge's alleged affair, is at odds with the political ties of the paper's proprietor. When her editor is tasked with burying the story, he tries to demote Mattie. Mattie quits and tells her editor that he "can keep the words. But you don't own the truth".³⁴

In addition to their age and gender, their names also speak towards their role as opposites. Whereas his name speaks to an ancient aristocratic Scottish house, hers is a diminutive form of Matilda and Madeline. This serves to juxtapose their positions in terms of prestige and seniority. The young and childish reporter is to uncover the secrets of the senior and esteemed politician. By her junior position at *The Telegraph* and in the power structure, Mattie is fighting an uphill battle against an established order.

Feminist literary theory emphasizes the functions and roles of gender within literature. The way in which power is structured allowed men to dominate women, culminating in the notion of the patriarchy as a structural idea of a man in control.³⁵ According to Claudi, the power structure of genders also relate to Foucault's notion of power structures which only allows certain voices to be heard. Speakers in discourses have a hierarchical structure, where some voices are listened to more than others. Within certain schools of thought within feminist literary studies, literature becomes a means for the patriarchy to remain in power over women.³⁶ How one examines literature in this sense, could be by looking at how power and gender operate together in an oppressive way. The relationship between Mattie and Urquhart is relevant in this context. The masculine and dominating voices of Urquhart, the proprietor and senior editor of *The Telegraph*, all serve to suppress Mattie's voice, without succeeding. Her tenacity, competence and perseverance enables her to break the control of the patriarchy.

Violence

The theme of violence is prevalent in the novel. In addition to the gladiatorial bout that is Question Time and the swords and daggers of the House of Commons, the theme of hunting and killing is also significant. Urquhart grew up in the Scottish Highlands, where he hunted deer and other game. This superiority of man in nature is seen as his birthright, which he

³⁴ Dobbs 1989: 250

³⁵ Claudi 2013: 188

³⁶ Claudi 2013: 168

extends to his musings towards certain humans as well. This is apparent when Urquhart is considering murdering his anxious agent Roger O'Neill.³⁷ Before O'Neill arrives, Urquhart goes for a walk on the moors musing about his ability to hunt, judging himself as an incomplete hunter because he has never killed a man. Although anthropocentrism differs from elitism in morality, the notion of putting oneself in the center of all hierarchies at all cost, alludes to a selfish and wicked person. Anthropocentrism here defined as an attitude which involves placing human needs above all others.³⁸ Urquhart aligns the morality of killing animals to that of killing humans by viewing them as just another animal.

Urquhart also thinks of his brother's last moments. In what manner he faced his enemy in battle, whether with animalistic rage or crippling fear, wondering if he had "felt a calming certainty about the need for self-preservation which had overcome all apprehension and a lifetime of Sunday School morality – just as Urquhart felt now".³⁹

For Urquhart, his situation demands killing for his own survival, much like that of the primal hunter, a setting which Urquhart is comfortable with. However, he is not completely comfortable with what he deems necessary and seeks the council of a medical professional in order to ascertain the mental state of Roger O'Neil. The doctor confirms that an addict in his state does not think clearly and is not to be trusted.⁴⁰ Urquhart confirms as much as he tests O'Neill's patience by toying with his emotions regarding his reward for helping him. Urquhart seeks to justify the course of action he is considering and needs to affirm that his choices are murder or exposure. Given that he is at the center of the natural and social world, the choice is obvious to him. The manner in which he kills O'Neill also serves to justify his murder. By poisoning his cocaine, Urquhart places blame on O'Neill's self-afflicted cocaine problem, suggesting that he is killing himself. While doing so, Urquhart has a moment of doubt and his will becomes a battleground:

The morality and restraint which the system had tried to beat into him from birth screamed at him to stop, to change his mind, even now to turn back, while his guts told him that morality was weakness.⁴¹

His morality is fighting his baser instinct for survival and losing. Violence is bound to strength and weakness to compromise, justifying the need to kill. O'Neill's weakness is

³⁷ Dobbs 1989: 335

³⁸ Claudi 2013: 248

³⁹ Dobbs 1989: 334

⁴⁰ Dobbs 1989: 335

⁴¹ Dobbs 1989: 342

cocaine, and the manner in which he is killed is tied to that weakness, which has no place in the world in Urquhart's mind. The insignificant and weak have to bow to the needs of the strong and powerful, which Urquhart compares to great men playing chess with pawns. "Urquhart could be one of the great, *should* be one of them, and O'Neill was as insignificant a pawn as he could imagine."⁴²

Final prey

In Urquhart's mind, weakness and a lack of significance are the two aspects of O'Neill which justify murdering him. Urquhart is to make a similar choice at the novel's very last chapter. In the roof garden atop Westminster Mattie confronts him with her recent discoveries. She has uncovered his web of lies and is about to topple his house of cards. She goes there armed with the news that Landless is not going to buy United Newspaper Group, which is due to Mattie's threats of making him culpable in Urquhart's crimes. Having lost control of the press, Urquhart can no longer stifle her voice, blocking the truth. Since he is unable to stifle her, he considers murdering her. Whereas O'Neill was weak and insignificant, Mattie is headstrong and determined. Once more, Urquhart draws from his anthropocentrism, but with less success. When Urquhart raises a chair above his head in order to strike her down with it, she stands defiant, causing him to lose his nerve. In comparing Mattie to a deer who bounds away after the hunter has hesitated only for a moment, Dobbs highlights the primal aspect of Urquhart's, now broken, masculinity:

He gave a whimper as the chair dropped from his hands and the awful truth of his own cowardice dawned upon him. He had faced his challenge, a fight to the death, confronted the truth, and had failed.⁴³

Here his role as the master of secrecy and violence is broken, after which he takes his own life. Urquhart refuses to stand trial and be judged, but rather chooses to pay the ultimate price. Mattie walks away with her new romantic partner and a fulfillment of purpose. The comfort and discomfort of their introduction have been reversed. Their role as moral opposites is concluded by the triumph of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked.

The theme of wickedness is therefore concluded by a reversal of the structure of power prevalent throughout the novel. Whereas Mattie was without power and inept, Urquhart was

⁴² Dobbs 1989: 343

⁴³ Dobbs 1989: 382

capable and commanding. The final chapter of the novel reverses this order as Mattie outsmarts Urquhart and he loses everything.

This analysis has made clear to what extent wickedness is a central aspect of *House of Cards* (1989). Dobbs' motivation for writing the novel, the violence endemic in both political life and Urquhart's character, as well as the undemocratic and androcentric structures which disallow the voice of morality, all evoke wickedness. Mattie and a free press functions as a moral foil for Urquhart and his political maneuvering. Urquhart is distinguished from his fellow politicians as his motivation for political involvement is exclusive to self-aggrandizement.

BBC's Adaptation

One year after Dobbs' novel was published the BBC aired the first episode of their four-part miniseries. The series was written by Andrew Davies and Michael Dobbs. Ian Richardson, a veteran thespian, was cast as Urquhart and Susannah Harker was cast as Mattie Storin. Harker was 25 at the time of recording, whereas Richardson was 56⁴⁴, which is relevant when examining the most dramatic change regarding the novels two main characters, namely their romantic relationship.

This analysis will also examine how the narrative is told in relation to Nichols' distinction between story and plot. Whereas the narrative of a story is conveyed through a plot, the notion of a "style" refers to how it is told.

Style signals the mark of an author who has created a world from a particular perspective and told a story in a distinct way. Unlike the plot, which can be told in many ways, the style represents an individual filmmaker's idiosyncratic way of seeing things. ⁴⁵

As this analysis examines the particular perspectives chosen when conveying the general plot of the novel, Nichol's definition of style will be utilized throughout the televisual adaptations.

Wickedness and point of view

The theme of wickedness is prevalent from the very first scene of the series. In it we see Urquhart sitting behind his desk in a dark room, barely lighted by one small lamp. Later in the series we are shown that this is not how would sit if he was working, supporting the notion that this is an introduction of the character, more than an introduction of the plot. He sits in the shadows and confesses his inner thoughts to the camera in an aside. An aside is a speech by a character that is not meant for another character but for himself and therefore the audience.⁴⁶ It indicates a character's true intentions due to the rule that one does not voluntarily mislead oneself. In addition, an aside is often indicated by some sort of visual cue, often by looking towards the audience or by significant lighting.⁴⁷ Urquhart sits at his desk holding a framed picture of Margret Thatcher. At the top of the frame there is a crown, suggesting that she held the highest position in the land, which is supported by Urquhart

⁴⁴*House of Cards* (1990). www.imdb.com. May 4, 2018
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098825/?ref_=nv_sr_2>

⁴⁵ Nichols 2010: 146

⁴⁶ Pavis: 29

⁴⁷ Pavis: 30

referring to her premiership as a “reign”.⁴⁸ He does not place the picture back where it stood, but places it face down, as if he does not wish her to bear witness to what is to come. Her reign has come to an end and she should not bear witness to the skirmish of contenders which is to come.

The temporality of the series distinguishes itself from that of the novel in this instance. The novel starts following a general election making Collinridge the Prime Minister, whereas the series starts in 1990 following Thatcher’s resignation from Downing Street. The diegesis of the novel is therefore further removed from reality, whereas the series is more closely tied to the contemporary political landscape. This becomes apparent in the scene in which Urquhart introduces his fellow politicians within the Conservative Party. Their flaws are magnified by comparing them to Urquhart’s idol, Thatcher.

The initial scenes of the first episode establish Urquhart as the main character. His political life and the inner workings of the political system will be the focus of the series. The second scene of the first episode show politicians entering Westminster while Urquhart comments on their character and their chances of becoming the next leader of the Conservative Party.

Urquhart’s role of keeping the troops in line is paired with a shot of the politicians walking in an orderly fashion up the stairs, showcasing Urquhart’s success and control. The camera pans from them as they enter and ends on Urquhart, who is placed higher up in the entrance hall looking down as they enter. His physical elevation serves as a signal of his superiority. The only one halfway up to his physical elevation is Collinridge, who is about to be made Prime Minister. Urquhart then states in a voice-over:

Who could replace her? Plenty of contenders. Old warriors, young pretenders. Lord Billsborough, say. The Party Chairman. Too old and too familiar, tainted by a thousand shabby deals. Michael Samuels, too young, too clever. Patrick Woolton. Bit of a lout. Bit of a bully-boy. Yes, it could well be Woolton. Henry Collinridge. The people’s favorite. A well-meaning fool. No background and no bottom.⁴⁹

The camera pans from these men below to Urquhart above them. He turns as if to walk away before turning back again as if the viewer asked “What about you?”. Which he responds with a smile;

⁴⁸ Davies 1990: ep 1

⁴⁹ Davies 1990: ep 1

What? Me? Oh, no, no, no. I'm the Chief Whip. Merely a functionary. I keep the troops in line, I put a bit of stick about, I make em' jump. And I shall, of course give my absolute loyalty to whoever emerges as my new leader. You'll have to excuse me now⁵⁰

It is clear from this introductory shot that he thinks that that all the other contenders to follow Thatcher are inferior to himself, who holds them in very low regard. Their faults as politicians will justify Urquhart's cruel and wicked treatment of them. It is also clear that Urquhart assumes a dialogue between him and the audience, as if he knows what the audience is thinking. It might also guide the viewers response as he dictates their thoughts about his asides. In this context, Lothe's two definitions of characterization is relevant. Lothe distinguished between "direct" and "indirect" character indicators in a text.⁵¹ A character who is clearly summarized in a "direct and summarizing way" by the narrative voice is, according to Lothe, directly characterized. On the other hand, a character who who is defined by their actions and speech is indirectly characterized.⁵² An indirect characterization is conveyed to the viewer in an ambiguous way, meaning it is left to the viewer rather than the narrative voice. In this scene Urquhart creates a distinction between how the viewer is to characterize the other politicians. Through his description he directly characterizes the other politicians, but the viewer is left to indirectly characterize Urquhart himself throughout the series. Although the other politicians describe him, they do not enjoy Urquhart's omniscience, nor his position as a narrative voice.

This ties to another aspect of Urquhart as the main character of this series, namely that of omniscience. Several cuts between scenes only consist of Urquhart's face speaking directly into the camera, introducing the viewer to the following scene. The viewer's introduction to both Roger O'Neill and Mattie Storin are two such scenes. Both are directly characterized by Urquhart in terms of their value to his political maneuvering. Urquhart terms them "helpers" and "little sprites and elves to do his bidding", which a man of state needs. The scenes in which O'Neill and Mattie are introduced are of particular interest as they set Urquhart, not only as the main character, but as an omniscient narrator. Urquhart's face speaks directly to the camera about Roger O'Neill while the shot fades to O'Neill buying cocaine. The shot ends with Urquhart commenting on O'Neill's addiction and the fact that that this only makes him easier to manipulate. What is of interest is that Urquhart is not present when O'Neill

⁵⁰ Davies 1990: same episode

⁵¹ Lothe 2000: 81

⁵² Lothe 2000: 82

purchases the cocaine, and yet he comments on what the viewer just saw, suggesting that he is in control of what the viewer is shown. As a keeper of secrets, he is aware of everything which happens in his party, and through these visual cues he is established as an omniscient narrator. His role as a person within the digesis and outside of it as a narrator overlap in this sense as it is his job to know everything. Omniscience dictates both the office of Chief Whip and the role of narrator.

Violence

The violence prevalent in the novel also plays a vital role in the initial scenes of the first episode. The role of hunter and master of the environment is an integral aspect of Urquhart as a character. This is apparent after Collinridge delivers his inaugural speech to his party. Afterwards, Urquhart explains his views on Collinridge in an aside “His morality is strictly back-street Sunday School hypocritical cant. Picked up in Peterborough or Rugeley or some such god-awful place.”⁵³

From this aside, the episode cuts to a scene in which Urquhart is hunting. The cut between the scenes is scored by trumpets of war followed by the image and sound of a rifle being fired, reminiscent of the command to fire in war. This cut serves to contrast the Christian peaceful morality of Collinridge to the violent and dominating morality of Urquhart. As previously mentioned these introductory scenes are guided by Urquhart, where he dictates what we are shown and how we are to perceive it. He chooses to portray himself as a man of action, competence and command. He fires his rifle accurately, commands his hound, reloads, and fires once more with precision. This is all done while speaking smilingly into the camera regarding Collinridge and his relationship to him. The killing and commanding of animals, and the persuasion of others, are two crafts so integral to him that they require little effort. This is opposed to several other asides, in which he pauses in order to find the right word. This scene is to juxtapose the two politicians: the spineless Collinridge and the violent and commanding Urquhart. The disdain Urquhart has for Collinridge also comes across when Urquhart states that “Though we certainly started something when we let fellows like that climb up the greasy poll”. Here Collinridge’s lack of background and character is seen as symptomatic of the current time, in which Urquhart claims there are firm commanders left. The thought that the leaders of today are unworthy of their position serves to justify

⁵³ Davies 1990: ep 1

Urquhart's cruel and wicked treatment of them. In addition, the notion that Urquhart defines himself by his ability to inflict violence on others expands the theme of wickedness.

This self-elevation returns in how the second episode starts. Following a quick recap of the first episode's events, Urquhart's face is shown on screen going from smiling to austere. After the intro, Urquhart is again outside hunting. Here he is skinning and hanging up carcasses of spoils from a hunt while speaking in an aside. This is to symbolize the relationship between the wounds he has inflicted in the first episode, and the fact that he is to bide his time to optimize their effect. This becomes clear when Urquhart reveals that he "could, of course, reveal to the nation that the Prime Minister and his brother are both implicated in an outrageous piece of insider dealing".⁵⁴ Urquhart pauses to smile, before merrily finishing his thought "but I think we'll let that one mature a little first, don't you?"⁵⁵

Another way in which violence amplifies the theme of wickedness is through the final scene of the series, in which Urquhart kills Mattie. Although he does not bludgeon her to death, which the original novel suggested, he throws her off the roof of Westminster. Here we see a more direct link between how Urquhart envisions himself, and how he acts. Whereas Urquhart of the novel was unable to kill Mattie in order to survive, the BBC's version of him is. As examined earlier the violence of the gladiatorial bout that is politics requires a politician who is adept at deflecting and inflicting harm. This aspect of politics is expanded upon in Richardson's portrayal of Urquhart, who is adept at inflicting deadly blows.

Expanded in this context refers to Richard Hand and his five strategies of adaptation, along with omission, addition, marginalization, and alteration.⁵⁶ Addition refers to adding textual material which was not prominent in the original, whereas omission refers to the opposite. Expansion involves giving more prominence to a thematic issue suggested in the source text, whereas marginalization refers to its opposite. Alteration refers to altering themes, textual style and or narrative events. Throughout this thesis alteration and expansion will be of relevance.

Asides and omniscience in BBC's adaptation

When adapting Dobbs' novel to the small screen, Urquhart's asides play an important role. As stated above, Urquhart is given a far more significant role in Davies' adaptation than he is

⁵⁴ Davies 1990: ep 2

⁵⁵ Davies 1990: same episode

⁵⁶ Hand 2010: 1

given in Dobbs' novel. The emphasis on Urquhart as an omniscient narrator and the series' protagonist differs from the novel's emphasis on both Mattie and Urquhart. In addition to the wicked character being emphasized, his reasoning and thoughts are brought into the spotlight, namely through asides to the audience. The first season of *House of Cards* starts and ends with asides revealing Urquhart's feelings towards the death of two women, firstly Margaret Thatcher and lastly Mattie Storin. The inner workings of Urquhart's mind both frame and permeate the series.

The manner in which the inner workings of an anti-hero's mind is portrayed draws from the performing arts, of which Richardson is a veteran. The asides of Machiavellian schemers like Iago, Richard III and Macbeth are invoked, lending a sense of timelessness and high culture to the character. Iago was overlooked by Othello for a promotion, Richard III schemed within politics to rise to the highest office, and Macbeth murdered a king who trusted him. These are all wicked anti-heroes who let nothing stop their goals and spoke to the audience in asides. Both in television and in theatre, these asides serve to give a transparent insight into the mind of a character. Macbeth is particularly relevant as Urquhart speaks several of his lines in the series. The first time he does so is of note because it frames both his wife and himself as the power-hungry couple of the Scottish Highlands. Urquhart says that one of his supporter thinks he should be the Prime Minister, and before his wife, in this series called Elizabeth, can reply he says "Glamis and Cawdor and King hereafter".⁵⁷ The three witches of Macbeth are replaced by one campaign supporter, but the message is the same. Drawing from Lady Macbeth, Elizabeth agrees and says he would make a far better prime minister than Collinridge. She will later urge him to do so and play an instrumental role in Urquhart hardening his will to his wicked deed, namely politically killing the leader in order to usurp him. Elisabeth also serves as assistant when Urquhart poisons O'Neill, helping him dispose of the gloves he has used. She is his most trusted helper and his closest confidante. This differs from the supporting, but relatively irrelevant Mortima who is Urquhart's wife in Dobbs' novel.

The viewer is also elevated into the position of omniscience along with the anti-hero in the televisual adaptation of *House of Cards* (1989). According to Sorlin, the manner in which the viewer is addressed in Francis' asides strikes the viewer due to its proximity.⁵⁸ "Given secret information on a confiding mode, the audience is allotted a privileged position compared with

⁵⁷ Davies 1990: ep. 1

⁵⁸ Sorlin 2016: 204

the other characters who are lied to and manipulated”.⁵⁹ She argues that through asides, the viewer is privy to information about what is about to happen and why, only to have the spoken course of events unfold in front of their eyes. This effect is furthered by the omniscient role which Urquhart has in the series. The reader or viewer’s overview of the situation could lead to the notion that the unfortunate fates of Urquhart’s victims could easily have been avoided. It seems obvious to a viewer that Urquhart introducing a beautiful young woman to a known womanizer is done in order to use the subsequent infidelity to blackmail him later. It is not obvious to the womanizing Woolton, who later on has his chance of becoming prime minister ruined by the affair. The politicians thus seem unaware of the situation they are in in contrast to the viewer, which might cause the viewer to judge them negatively. The viewer’s knowledge serves to make the politicians within the system seem incompetent, which supports Urquhart’s reasoning for removing them. Their inability to govern legitimizes the wicked deeds of Urquhart, lessening the resistance of persuasion to Urquhart’s point of view.

This notion of the oblivious and incompetent politician is most often personified by Henry Collinridge, who does not realize that Urquhart should not be trusted. As Collinridge fails to see the link between his level of trust in Urquhart, and his failing premiership, the viewer might agree with Urquhart’s initial view of him as a fool. Although a prevalent aspect of Dobbs’ novel, certain additions are made to further this aspect of Collinridge’s incompetence. When Collinridge declares to his cabinet that he is resigning, he takes time to thank Urquhart in particular for his help the last few months.⁶⁰ Certain viewers might revel in the notion of knowing more than the most powerful man in the country, reversing the normal status quo of information and power in society. The notion of incompetent politicians serves to justify Urquhart’s wicked acts. The notion of the incompetent politician is expanded upon, lessening the moral resistance that Urquhart’s wicked acts might be met with.

The scene in which Collinridge resigns is followed by a rather long aside in which Urquhart is in the bathroom. He takes off his jacket, urinates, meticulously washes his hands, and returns to his job. He does this while musing on the erroneous fool that Collinridge was as a Prime Minister in an aside. His contempt for the viewers, forcing them to watch him urinate, and his contempt for Collinridge are combined in this scene. This impolite gesture is in contrast to his insistence on guiding the viewers through his logic and his calm manner. As before, Urquhart

⁵⁹ Sorlin, 2016, same page

⁶⁰ Davies 1990: ep 3

includes the viewer by using personal pronouns such as “we” and “us”, making the viewer culpable in his ploys. After reveling in his victory over Collinridge, he looks towards the camera, then looks away, then looks back as if he is surprised by the facial expression he sees when he looks into the camera, “Not feeling guilty I hope. If you have pangs of pity, crush them now”.⁶¹ Urquhart reacts to the assumed reaction of the complicit viewer, which stands for his moral compass. The collective “we” of the viewer and Urquhart should not feel guilty according to Urquhart. After explaining his reasoning, he asks “all right?” into the camera, as if the viewer’s objections should now have been put to rest. He feels the need to justify his actions, claiming to have done both the country and Collinridge a favor, due to Collinridge being “in the trap and screaming from the moment he took office”.⁶² Although his actions are wicked, he includes the viewer both in the reasoning and the justification of them. In claiming that Urquhart does not have the stomach to rule like a country like Great Britain in this aside, Urquhart also raises the standard by which a prime minister should be judged. In saying so he also implies that the British people, who are the social context of the series, deserve better leaders than conventional politicians, personified by Henry Collinridge. One might infer that Urquhart thinks the country should be govern by unconventional politicians like him.

Another novelty in this adaptation of *House of Cards* (1989) is the use of humor and irony. Several of Urquhart’s asides are delivered while he is smiling. Urquhart also laughs while in his confidential bubble with the audience. Whereas the Urquhart of original novel was severe and to the point, Richardson’s portrayal is one who revels in his schemes bearing fruit. This is evident at the start of several episodes, in which Urquhart updates us on the developments of the political world in asides. Here he is merry and upbeat as the events he has set in motion, are now working to forward his agenda. In the start of the series’ third episode, Urquhart walks past the camera saying that “Someone is in trouble. Someone’s going to get it in the neck. But not us, eh?”.⁶³ The viewer’s inclusion in his schemes and his humor serves to lighten the tone of the series, as we are about to witness an honorable and well-meaning Prime Minister resign after being framed.

Relationship with the press

As mentioned previously, the relationship between the two main characters of the novel serves to display wickedness and virtue. Urquhart’s wickedness and immorality is brought

⁶¹ Davies 1990: ep 3

⁶² Davies 1990: same episode

⁶³ Davies 1990: ep. 2

down by the righteous and morally sound Mattie, who sees through his web of lies and refuses to be physically intimidated. By having Urquhart as both omniscient narrator and main character of the series, this relationship is fundamentally altered. Through their romantic affair, Urquhart sways Mattie towards conclusions he wants her to reach. The persuasive nature of this powerful man is evident in Urquhart's most iconic lines "You might think that. I couldn't possibly comment".⁶⁴ By gratifying her reasoning, while at the same time avoiding culpability, Urquhart allows Mattie to draw her own conclusions through his logic.

Their initial coalition is disguised as one which is to be for the good of the country. In their first meeting in Urquhart's study, he claims that neither Collinridge nor the other politicians around him are thinking of the good of the country, but of themselves.⁶⁵ This is what their coalition is based on, exemplified by Urquhart suggesting that Mattie is new to politics and might not be corrupted by it yet. Urquhart feels things should be aired publicly and Mattie is to become his instrument. But the notion of the good of the country, transparency and avoiding corruption, are just the opposite of what Urquhart has in mind. While feigning openness and transparency, he is conceitful. Mattie, who is attracted to him, is drawn into his lies, corrupting her objectivity and obscuring the truth, thereby doing the country a disservice. Although Mattie's inability to suspect Urquhart is prevalent in the novel, this is because she struggles to put all the complex pieces together. Davies' adaptation credits this ineptitude to Mattie's inability to resist Urquhart's charm. As Urquhart's introduction of O'Neill and Mattie as little helpers precedes their meeting, the viewer is led to believe that their relationship is a part of Urquhart's plan, making him the agent of their relationship and Mattie the object of his seduction. Whereas the Mattie who initiated Dobbs' novel prided herself on her ability to see beyond the charming façade of men and politicians, Mattie of the BBC's series succumbs to both in Urquhart.

Their relationship also carries a strong oedipal aspect as both the characters and the actors portraying them are aged several decades apart. When Mattie leaves Urquhart's residence after their second meeting, she states that he reminds her a great deal of her father, who she got along with. Later in the series, Mattie tells him that she is attracted to him, which Urquhart dismisses by saying he is old enough to be her father. Her response is that "perhaps that's something to do with it".⁶⁶ Urquhart proclaims that he always wanted a daughter.

⁶⁴ Davies 1990: same episode

⁶⁵ Davies 1990: ep. 1

⁶⁶ Davies 1990: ep. 3

When they are about to become sexually intimate, she insists on giving Urquhart the affectionate nickname “Daddy”. The development of his role as father and chastiser and her as a loving daughter grows in parallel to their sexual nature. Their relationship’s wickedness here borders on the incestuous and unnatural. As Mattie is drawn away from her virtuousness and into wickedness, the righteousness of the series differs greatly from that of the novel.

This notion of unchecked wickedness comes to its extreme conclusion in the last scenes of the series, in which Urquhart kills Mattie by throwing her off the roof garden on top of Westminster. Otherwise in complete control of his words, Urquhart mentions that his country house is near where Roger O’Neill’s corpse was found. Mattie starts suspecting him, and he cannot persuade her away from the conclusion that he murdered O’Neill. Mattie’s journalistic instincts overcome her affection for him, and she sees him with clarity. She regains her objectivity and enters the role of Urquhart’s opposition. The truth which Mattie symbolizes has no place in Urquhart’s Westminster, and she is thrown off it. The immoral and wicked house of cards that Urquhart has built cannot withstand her external interference. His now supreme power is illustrated by his aside quickly following her death. He tells the audience his retelling of the story, which becomes the voiceover in a scene in which spectators find her body. When the scene ends, this voiceover becomes diegetic sound again, but now as a radio broadcast and the official version of the story. His words not only dictate the viewer’s perception, but the perception of the public. His patriarchal position as a privileged speaker becomes clear to the viewer as Urquhart escapes justice. The patriarchy, or The Establishment, as it is described in the novel, wins the day, and the moral core of the story is greatly altered.

In an interview several years later, Davies explains that he wanted sex to be at the spine of his adaptation of the novel.⁶⁷ Davies felt that the characters of the original novel were not well drawn and that the dialogue was hopeless. The novel rather “missed the trick”, and Davies explains that Mattie is;

“having an affair with the assistant editor of the paper, which just goes nowhere. The spine of the story is Urquhart’s rise to power, and her story is finding the truth about him and destroying him and, so I thought, well, that’s where the sex has to be. But he’s old enough to be her father! All the better – she can call him Daddy while they’re doing it! The ending of the book has her confronting him with the truth and he hurls himself off the roof of the Palace of Westminster. But when I go to that point I

⁶⁷ Cartmell & Whelehan 2007: 244

realized that “my” Urquhart would never do that. He would throw her off instead. So he did. And so I completely changed the ending⁶⁸

Here Davies clearly expands on the theme of wickedness. The oedipal aspect of their relationship is thought of as good, and Davies’ Urquhart would murder Mattie instead of taking his own life. By focusing on the sexual relationship of Urquhart and Mattie, which as discussed functions as an obstacle for Mattie’s role as a moral foil, the dynamic of the two characters is completely altered. Although Davies considers it as going nowhere, Mattie’s relationship with the assistant editor of the paper is a vital aspect of how she uncovers Urquhart’s schemes.

This analysis has shown that the theme of wickedness is very prevalent in the BBC’s adaptation of the novel. Not only is wickedness central to the series, but the theme is expanded upon in a significant way. Urquhart’s omniscience becomes even more prevalent as he speaks directly to the audience through asides and voiceovers. The morality of Mattie is brought into question, as her romantic involvement with Urquhart clouds her judgement. In this regard, the moral foil of the novel is altered, and the moral message of it is fundamentally changed as the series concludes with The Establishment winning the day.

⁶⁸ Cartmell & Whelehan 2007: same page

Netflix's Adaptation

Two years after the BBC's series aired, Dobbs published the sequel to both the first book and the first series, named *To Play The King*. The subsequent year, an adaptation of that novel was aired. In 1994 Dobbs published the final book of the trilogy, *The Final Cut*, which again was adapted to the small screen. *The Final Cut* marked the end of Urquhart. He was dead, his legacy broken and the people of Great Britain could go back to normalizing the life of their politicians. 18 years later, the Americans had the opportunity to look behind the veil of their elected officials and examine their political reality. Whereas the BBC were in a relatively secure position as a television network, Netflix had a great deal invested in this project.⁶⁹ This was to be the first product that the streaming service produced themselves and Netflix committed themselves to two seasons. From this one can deduce that the two first seasons of the series are one single body of work. The show had to captivate and fascinate from the start, as it was a pilot project and a new way of vertically integrating the production of media. The show was an enormous success and at the time of writing, Netflix is finishing the production on the sixth and final season of *House of Cards* (2013). The adaptation of Dobbs' novel and Davies' series was put in the hands of Beau Willimon. Willimon wrote the play *Farraguth North*, which was loosely based on his experience in working on a presidential campaign. In 2011 he adapted it into film titled *The Ides of March* starring George Clooney.⁷⁰ Having experience from adapting political fiction onto the screen, Willimon was a natural choice by Netflix. As Willimon achieves a cultural transposition of the novel and series, the theme of wickedness prevails, but takes on new forms and aspects in accordance with its new cultural context.

Sandrine Sorlin compares *The West Wing* with *House of Cards*, concluding that they both show the inside of the political world in the US, but in different ways. Whereas the *The West Wing* showed politics as it should be, *House of Cards* shows politics as Americans imagine it to be. Underwood's choices and morals seem to be in concordance with the public opinion of multiple scandals and lies within Congress.⁷¹ Ian Scott furthers the notion of the sinister politician in American cinema saying that the American public

⁶⁹ Andrevia, 2011

⁷⁰ *The Ides of March* (2011). www.imdb.com. May 1, 2018 <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1124035>>

⁷¹ Sorlin 2016: 8

has operated, and crucially been perceived to operate in a state of perpetual crisis since Vietnam and Watergate, to such an extent that any fictional/factual/factional presentation American democracy in film can and has been met by a public well versed in cynicism and easy dismissal⁷²

From Scott's statement one might infer that the American audience was inclined to believe the immoral political landscape and wicked politicians, which are central to Dobbs' novel and the BBC's series.

Introductions

The first three scenes of the series all precede the introductory credit roll and gives the viewer an insight into both the plot, theme, setting and characters of the series. Nichols's notion of style as mentioned above, is also of relevance as the way in which the plot is presented is as relevant as the plot itself.⁷³ The screen is black for the first few seconds of the first scene and the sound of tires screeching is followed by a thud, which is followed by a dog whimpering. Pictures appear as Underwood opens his front door and runs down the street in front of his bodyguard Mike towards the dog. The car drives off and leaves Frank and Mike alone with the whimpering animal. Underwood sends Mike to see if the owners are home, while remaining with the dog. The camera is facing Underwood and the street he came from, making the dog outside of the shot. Underwood speaks in an aside saying that "There are two kinds of pain. The sort of pain that makes you strong, and useless pain, the sort of pain that is only suffering. I have no patience for useless things." Underwood proceeds to strangle the dog, saying that "Moments like this require someone who will act. Who will do the unpleasant thing. The necessary thing"⁷⁴

These reflections of certitude are endemic of how Underwood speaks in his asides. Sandrine Sorlin points out that a great deal of his lines in asides are general knowledge which are neither specific for a situation, nor up for debate.⁷⁵ He elevates his own opinions to the level of general rules accepted by all. He states several of these certitudes through the series' first two seasons. "Friends make the worst enemies." and "Proximity to power deludes some into believing they wield it." are two examples of how Underwood relays his personal opinions as accepted wisdom. This might suggest to a viewer that this authoritative figure is an

⁷² Scott 2000: 158

⁷³ Nichols 2010: 146

⁷⁴ Willimon 2013: ep. 1

⁷⁵ Sorlin 2016: 208

embodiment of know wisdom, which one either rebukes or accepts. The viewer's opinions are forced to either agree with such a statement or rebuke the character as a whole.

As the dog's struggle fades away, Underwood says "There. No more pain". As the viewer does not see the dog, Underwood's assessment of it as doomed might be met with resistance. The dog could perhaps have been saved, and the sympathy one feels for a wounded animal might overcome one's belief in Underwood's assessment. His assessment is phrased as accepted wisdom, making this decision seem like accepted wisdom. This furthers Urquhart of the BBC series' tradition of distancing himself from something which he has an active part in, most noticeably in his catchphrase "You might very well think that, I couldn't possibly comment"⁷⁶ when confirming Mattie's political suspicions. As the camera does not reveal the severity of the dog's injuries, or the way it dies struggling, there can be no debate over the morality of his actions. The viewer has to believe in Underwood's assessment not to paint him as a killer and in turn a wicked man. The ambiguity of the scene causes the viewer to question the wickedness of Francis Underwood. In addition, the manner in which the shot is directed highlights Underwood as the point of view. The viewer only hears the street until Underwood sees it, and the viewer is forced to view only what Underwood allows.

The aside, the physical violence, and the protagonist as a warden of death, illustrates how the series draws from both the novel and the BBC series. As mentioned, Urquhart in the BBC series draws his strength from his mastery of physical violence illustrated by his hunting. The Urquhart of Dobbs' novel kills his own dog in order to spare it from any more illness and suffering. Underwood is therefore a reworking of both Urquharts. As Urquhart of the BBC's adaptation directed how to introduce himself, as a hunter and commander, so does Netflix's Underwood. Through these scenes directed by the characters themselves the viewer is introduced to them. Both these scenes adhere more to Lothe's notion of indirect characterization rather than direct, which separates them from the other characters of their respective series, which Underwood directly characterizes.

The next scene shows Underwood washing his hands then looking to the camera. He then goes to zip up his wife's dress and tells her that she looks beautiful. He washes his hands of the incident and carries on with his life. He does all this in a calm manner which shows that he is in no way distraught over having killed an animal a few moments before. Underwood bringing death has little effect on him, which invites the viewer to wonder why this might be.

⁷⁶ Davies 1990: ep. 1

Underwood's wickedness remains ambiguous, as he symbolically and metaphorically washes his hands off the incident without any distress.

The political landscape is of importance when examining Netflix's adaptation as well. The political landscape of in which this character is to operate, is introduced in a scene that takes place at the stroke of midnight in a large New Year's Eve party hosted by President-elect Garret Walker. While the rest of the party sings Auld Lang Syne, Underwood, in an aside, introduces us to his role in politics, his views on Walker and Walker's closest allies. The scene consists of cuts between what Underwood is describing and an eye-level dolly camera which goes backwards out of the room as Underwood is talking. Underwood dictates who the viewer is shown, and what they are to think of them. On Walker, Underwood answers two of his own questions; "Do I like him? No. Do I believe in him? That's beside the point".⁷⁷ Political ideology is not of importance, but his role in the coming cabinet is. Linda Vasquez, the President's chief of staff and the coming Vice President Jim Mathews, are introduced. Mathews has delivered votes in the keystone state of Philadelphia and is not going to be "put out to pasture" by becoming the Vice President, and Vasquez is "tough as a two-dollar-steak". They, along with Underwood himself, are introduced by means of their function and usefulness to Walker. Underwood also introduces his function:

I'm just a lowly house majority whip. I keep things moving in a Congress choked by pettiness and lassitude. My job is to clear the pipes and keep the sludge moving. But I won't have to be a plumber much longer. I've done my time. I backed the right man. Give and take. Welcome to Washington.⁷⁸

His view of his job and Congress itself comes across and he is looking forward to putting it behind him. Although his old job was an important one, it was one of demeaning servitude, whereas his new role is to be one of prestige and power. The attitude towards his fellow politicians, his lack of faith in political ideals, and his self-aggrandizement, all serve to highlight the character of Frank Underwood as a wicked politician. Lothe's notion of direct and indirect character presentation is as relevant in this context as when Urquhart presented his fellow politicians.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Willimon 2013: ep. 1

⁷⁸ Willimon 2013: same episode

⁷⁹ Lothe, 2000, p. 81-82

Zoey

The following scene shows the Underwoods discussing their coming year and the positive significance it will have on their lives. The subsequent scene shows a reporter at the Washington Herald, where she enjoys no such significance. This is Zoey Barnes, who is the American equivalent of Mattie Storin. Greville Preston and Johnnie Karajewski have become Tom Hammerschmidt and Lucas Goodwin. Whereas the British editor was a bumbling puppet for the paper's proprietor, the editor of the Washington Herald is a steadfast, principled and competent editor of incorruptible journalistic principles. Lucas, his vice-editor, shares these principles, and both chastise Zoey for her impatience in becoming a renowned journalist. She is constantly reminded of her junior position and immaturity by her colleagues, who once refer to her as a "twitter twat". As she wishes to bring her ideas to the internet instead of print journalism she represents the need for change within the paper, which leads to several conflicts with her editor. When Hammerschmidt calls her a "cunt" she immediately tweets it, leading to Hammerschmidt's dismissal from the paper.⁸⁰ He shows his inability to adapt to the modern world, whereas Zoey shows a competence for standing up to the patriarchy in addition to utilizing the power she has online. In addition, this might serve to indicate that modern social media give voices to those who previously had none. Mattie Storin of the novel or the BBC series, did not have the opportunity to voice her opinions when it was stifled by her editor. Mattie wanted to write a book, illustrating that even the alternative route to a voice was through print media. Here Dobbs' notion of the steadfast journalist standing up for herself in a deeply masculine world of journalism comes to the fore but she is now armed with a new weapon. Certain aspects of Zoey are to embody a moral counterweight to Underwood, but in a way borrowing from both Dobbs and Davies. However, she is not a foil as described above, as her tenacity and need for power mirrors that of Underwood rather than serving as a contrast which highlights Underwood's wickedness.

The sexual relationship introduced in the BBC's series is also present, but in a different manner. Although Zoey uses her sexuality to get Underwood's attention, she does so primarily to help her career. Whereas Mattie Storin in the BBC series was sexually attracted to Urquhart regardless of their age difference or how he helped her career, Mara's rendition of Mattie uses her sexuality in a more instrumental way, lessening the Oedipal aspect of their relationship. In addition to the age difference in casting being reduced from 31 to 24⁸¹, there

⁸⁰ Willimon 2013: ep. 4

⁸¹ *House of Cards* (2013). www.imdb.com. May 3, 2018 < <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1856010>>

is also far less talk of fathers and daughters. However, there is a relationship of a patron and client as Underwood has information which Zoey needs in order to elevate her status as a journalist. The asymmetrical relationship of power between them is central to their relationship, which comes across before their first sexual encounter. Underwood asks her to take off her high-heeled shoes, both making her shorter and widening the gap in their physical stature. When Zoey wants to stop the sexual aspect of their relationship, Underwood starts to withhold information from her. He categorizes himself as a “just a very generous John”, indicating that their relationship functions as a form of prostitution, and not a sexual relationship between equals.⁸² Zoey is fine with that asking him to pay her the information she needs. Here the wickedness of the character is prevalent in a different manner. The oedipal and seduced Mattie is replaced by a strong-willed woman who prostitutes herself to further her career. The wickedness of Davies’ series is persistent although in a different form, which is why Zoey does not embody the role of moral foil on her own.

Moral journalism

The moral foil of Dobbs’ novel is prevalent in Willimon’s adaptation, but as a trio of reporters. Only when Zoey allies herself with two of her colleagues, Jeanine and Lucas, does the unraveling of Underwood’s web of lies begin. While they are nearing the truth, Underwood offers Zoey a return to his good graces if she desists from her enquiries. When she deletes all traces of him from her phone, he throws her in front of a moving train. The prestigious location of Westminster is replaced with a lowly subway station. Aware of the danger she is in, Zoey tries to take precautions, but is ultimately too curious for her own good. When Underwood gives her a cryptic answer at the end of their conversation, Zoey follows him out of the view of the other travelers on the platform, thereby foregoing her safety. Once alone, Underwood turns Zoey around and pushes her facing forward into the oncoming train. Underwood does so in order to make her death look like a suicide, much like Urquhart of the BBC adaptation did. Both reporters’ curiosity blinded them from the imminent danger they were in.

The two other members of her trio are to choose two different ways of dealing with Frank. Whereas Lucas Goodwin chooses to fight the establishment, Jeanine Storsky chooses to hide and give in. Jeanine tells Lucas that she is scared and that “He’s got power, he’s got a lot to

⁸² Willimon 2013: ep. 9

lose, and right now he is winning”.⁸³ Lucas refuses to let Underwood get away with murdering Zoey. Underwood and Stamper use their connections in the FBI to frame Lucas, leading to his arrest. The truth and accountability of the original novel, which their trio was to represent, is crushed as the power of the Establishment perseveres. Without a free and unbiased press, wicked politicians like Underwood continue to rise through the ranks.

Painter & Ferruci describe Zoey as childlike, unprofessional, and unethical which is the opposite of the example posed by another reporter in the series, Ayla Sayaad.⁸⁴ Whereas Zoey functions as Underwood’s lapdog and stenographer, Sayaad functions as a watchdog and a threat to Underwood. When Sayaad becomes the White House correspondent in Underwood’s white house, her access to the white house is revoked due to her tough line of questioning during a press conference. This might suggest that only mouthpieces like Zoey will survive in Underwood’s wicked climate of press-repression. The uncompromising watchdog is reminiscent of Dobbs’ Mattie, while the infantilized and sexual journalist reminds one of Harker’s portrayal of her.

Cultural transposition

The elitist aristocratic Scot is turned into a Southern-American of no background or family wealth. Whereas this was what Urquhart chose to define him in his introduction of himself to the viewer, Underwood’s lack of wealth is what defines him. When explaining the difference between himself and a political opponent, Underwood says that he’s a “white trash cracker from a white trash town that no one would even bother to piss on. But here’s the difference. I’ve made something outta myself”.⁸⁵ As mentioned above, the morality of the system in which these characters operate is of relevance to their wicked nature. As elected officials, how they achieved their power and how they wield that power speaks to the moral character of that elected official.

Whereas Urquhart drew his right to govern from his privilege, Underwood draws from his lack of it. The qualities which have made him overcome the obstacle of low birth define him. This alludes to a fundamental difference in the political system in which these two operate. When discussing the ideology prevalent in Netflix’s *House of Cards*, Sorlin writes:

⁸³ Willimon 2013: ep. 14

⁸⁴ Painter & Ferruci, 2017, p. 497

⁸⁵ Willimon 2013: ep. 6

The protagonist's quest is, in fact, informed by the foundational myth of American culture based on the historical belief that the land offers equal opportunity for all those willing to succeed through hard work and initiative no matter their lowly beginnings.⁸⁶

Whereas the United Kingdom still has a House of Lords and an aristocracy, Underwood embodies the notion that he can “seize opportunities for prosperity beyond class and origin of birth”⁸⁷ according to Sorlin. The systems in which these two operate speak to differing notions of qualifying for public office. Although Urquhart also feels he possesses qualities regardless of his birth, Underwood possesses nothing else, making him the more egalitarian politician.

What is also of interest is their historical subjugation. Both Scots and Southern-Americans have fought wars to free themselves of the government which they now are a part of. Although neither of them proclaim so, Urquhart works towards dethroning an English prime minister, and in the following season, an English king, and Underwood works tirelessly to overthrow a northern president. Although their motives are primarily political, Underwood's fascination with the Civil War is closely tied to his success of destroying Walker's presidency. Although he says explicitly that he disagreed with the Confederacy of the South, he visits battlegrounds, talks with re-enactors and builds a large miniature replica of a battle of the Civil War. The battle he is recreating in his spare time, is the one in which his own great grandfather died. When asked about the miniature battle by a politician who will be instrumental in passing Walker's impeachment, Frank responds that “it is something I've been working on for a while. Help me finish it”.⁸⁸ This suggests how closely tied this notion of historical revenge might be to his political usurpation.

Another aspect of the cultural transposition is the fact that the political realities these two wicked politicians operate within differ greatly in terms of obstacles for the politician to overcome to rise to the top. Whereas Urquhart must force the current Prime Minister to resign, and win the ensuing leadership election, Underwood has a far more complex way to the Oval Office. Underwood does not have to win a leadership election, but he must convince the current Vice President to resign, convince the president to appoint him as the new Vice President, then force the President to resign. Whereas Urquhart could distance himself from the current government and grab power in its aftermath, Underwood has to build and break

⁸⁶ Sorlin 2016: 38

⁸⁷ Sorlin 2016: 39

⁸⁸ Willimon 2013: ep. 25

alliances within the White House in order to achieve his goal. He will have to align himself with President Walker and then distance himself from him. As the way is longer, the sacrifices are greater. Whereas murdering O'Neill was to cover Urquhart's tracks, Underwood kills Russo in order to manipulate the current Vice President to resign. Here the wickedness differs as Urquhart had to choose between murder and imprisonment. Urquhart did not plan on O'Neill's mind becoming erratic and thereby completely untrustworthy. In addition, Urquhart of *House of Cards* (1989) called a doctor to confirm his suspicion that a person in O'Neill's state could not be trusted. Urquhart had less of a choice, whereas Underwood's plan depended on Russo's death and the Vice President taking his place as candidate for the governorship of Pennsylvania. Although both murders are immoral, the necessity of it is rather different thereby expanding the theme of wickedness.

Ideologies & realities

As mentioned above, Urquhart's political realities involved few proposals or political ideologies, as they were mostly means for Urquhart to sabotage either the government or one of the other contenders for the leadership. Although Underwood does not show an interest in the ideology or the people he represents, there are those who do. One of them is Donald Blythe, who has been campaigning for education reform for decades.⁸⁹ He is paired with Frank when they are to work on one of the key points of Walker's political agenda, namely education. Blythe has to redraft his proposed bill due to its ideologies being too far to the left for the House to approve, meaning it is not passable. After assuring Blythe that together they are going to accomplish a great deal, he confesses in an aside that "Two things are now irrelevant, Donald Blythe, and Donald Blythe's new draft. Forward. That is the battle cry. Leave ideology to the armchair generals it does me no good".⁹⁰ This idea of battles and generals is also reminiscent of Underwood's preoccupation with the Civil War later on in the series.

Underwood values action and expediency over ideals. He places himself in the field of battle, from which Blythe is removed. This coincides with Sorlin's analysis of Underwood's language, which she judges as following the structural metaphor that "ARGUMENT IS WAR".⁹¹ The viewer later learns that passing any reform is what matters to Underwood, because it gives him influence in the White House. The two politicians represent two

⁸⁹ Willimon 2013: ep. 2

⁹⁰ Willimon 2013: same episode

⁹¹ Sorlin 2016: 49

completely different approaches to the role of elected official. Blythe is less pragmatic and forceful, but he wants to use his power in order to better the country even though it is at the expense of his political capital. When Underwood points out to Blythe that it is not his ideas, but the weight of his name that is the reason he is allowed to lead this reform, Blythe responds that “my name comes with my ideas”.⁹² He is not willing to compromise his ideals for political capital. Underwood is the opposite. He has no political ideals other than gaining political capital in order to further his own ambitions. By juxtaposing him with an idealist, Willimon sheds light on the fact that Underwood has no causes, or concerns regarding the American people, which he is elected to represent. The term foil is again relevant as this minor character sheds light on an aspect of a major one.

Economic interests

The political reality of Congress differs from that of Westminster due to the influence of economic interests. Whereas Urquhart’s political reality was shaped by reputation and political momentum, Underwood’s is shaped and hindered by financial interests through their lobbyists. Remy Danton, a lobbyist for a natural gas company, is to represent this aspect of the American political reality. In the second episode of the series, The Majority Leader and the Speaker of the House are having a meeting with Underwood to discuss the political agenda, when they are interrupted by Danton. Underwood interrupts the meeting in order to talk to Danton. He chastises Underwood because he was not nominated for Secretary of State, which Underwood had assured Danton he would be. The plans of SanCorp, the corporation Danton represents, are now to be put on hold, which Underwood is accountable for. As always, Underwood explains the political reality to the viewer in an aside saying;

SanCorp is into natural gas. I don’t give a hoot about natural gas, but I have 67 deputy whips, and they all need cash to win races. SanCorp helps me purchase their loyalty and in return they expect mine. It’s degrading I know, but when the tit’s that big, everybody gets in line.⁹³

In the next scene, Danton reminds Underwood of their arrangement; “Secretary of State, Argentina and offshore drilling contracts“ and “Eight figures to you and the D triple C”.⁹⁴ Through these statements the viewer can infer that a deal was made, which depended on Underwood becoming Secretary of State. Danton goes so far as to threaten his role as an elected official, threatening that SanCorp can “throw money at your challenger next cycle”.

⁹² Willimon 2013: ep 2

⁹³ Willimon 2013: same episode

⁹⁴ Willimon 2013: same episode

Here we see how interwoven the financial contributions of corporations might be in the American Political system, which would undermine the democratic process. Whereas Urquhart was able to discredit Collinridge by suggesting that his policies were tied to financial gain, Underwood's power is built on it. The wickedness and immorality of both the system and the character is escalated, thereby expanding the theme.

The theme of wickedness is at the core of this adaptation of *House of Cards* (1989). The notion of the omniscient and wicked main character is furthered and developed in order to suit the culture in to which it is transposed. The elitist musings of the aristocratic Urquhart are changed into more egalitarian ideas of the American dream, as Underwood deems his ability to make something out of himself regardless of his meagre origins as central to his character. In this regard, one might say that Underwood illustrates what kind of qualities one must possess in order to rise to the top of the political ladder in American politics. A disregard for not only the value of human life, but the democratic ideals of the political system, and the ideologies of others, seem to be some of these qualities. Wickedness is as central, if not more so, to Underwood as with any of the Urquharts. Although she shares the same fate as BBC's Mattie, the role of moral foil is altered a great deal as Zoey distinguishes herself from her British counterparts in terms of morality.

Revised Novel

Dobbs ends his revised novel with an afterword. Regarding the many adaptations of his novel through the years, stating that:

To mark this new lease of life for *FU* I've taken the opportunity of reworking the novel- no great changes, no one who read the original will think it a different book, but the narrative is a little tighter, the characters more colorful and the dialogue perhaps crispier. I've revisited it in order to repay some of the pleasure that *House of Cards* has given me during all these years. What has remained constant is the novel's unashamed wickedness. Bathe in it. Enjoy.⁹⁵

Dobbs here critiques the same aspects of his novel which Davies did in his interview with Cartmell and Whelehan, saying that the original novel; "had a great thriller plot, but the characters were not awfully well drawn. The dialogue was hopeless and he kind of missed a trick, I thought".⁹⁶ Given the extensive reworking of the text which the televisual adaptations have achieved, several questions arose in regard to how Dobbs' revised novel could draw inspiration from the televisual adaptations, and still be as more or less the same novel as the original. This analysis will examine to what extent the theme of wickedness is prevalent in the revised novel, and how it differs from the original. As the original novel and its characters are analyzed above, this analysis will focus on the alterations made to the novel, rather than examining the novel as independent of previous works. Dobbs created the characters and the narrative in 1989 and altered them in 2015, and this analysis will focus on these alterations and, when prevalent, chart their intertextual nature.

Urquhart's omniscience and prologues

The revised novel follows the notion of a male main character. Although the novel's first chapter still starts with a chapter in which Mattie is introduced, it is preceded by an added prologue. This prologue is one page long and is reminiscent of Richardson's first scene and aside from 1990. "Nothing lasts, not for ever" initiates it, mirroring Richardson's lines regarding Thatcher's reign. This prologue deals with the fragility of life and the legacy a man might leave behind him. The use of male pronouns suggests that these are the musings of a man. Not only does this set the tone for who the novel's protagonist is, but also whose thoughts we are to be given direct insight into. As established earlier, which of the main characters one lends weight to, speaks to the wickedness of the novel or series. Whereas the

⁹⁵ Dobbs 2015: 376

⁹⁶ Cartmell & Whelehan 2007: 244

original novel had an even balance between Urquhart and Mattie, the adaptations following it have given Urquhart far greater significance. This one-page-prologue is the first of many prologues initiating the novel's chapters.

As mentioned above regarding both series, a narrator conveying insight into the events before they unfold in the plot, gives the narrator a sense of omniscience. When Urquhart and Underwood speak directly to their audience about the events which are to transpire, they seem in complete mastery of their environment. This also serves to give the character a certain hegemony of interpretation over the events. By making the viewer biased in regard to what is about to transpire, the narrator might dictate the manner in which these events are understood. When Underwood tells the viewer in an aside that "All martyrs crave a sword to fall on. So you just sharpen the blade, point it at the right angle, and 3,2,1..".⁹⁷ Blythe interrupts his aside by saying that he will take the fall for the legislative draft being leaked. Not only does Underwood seem omnipotent, but he also imposes a hegemony over how the viewer interprets this selfless act. This hegemony of interpretation and direct communication is prevalent in the manner in which the chapters of the revised novels are initiated. Whereas the original novel did not have any, all chapters of the revised novel are introduced by prologues. Urquhart's musings precede every chapter in the book in form of a prologue, thereby giving him this role of omniscient narrator. Only in the fifth prologue when Dobbs writes "my wife", is the reader given insight into the identity of whose thought are expressed. Later on, this voice writes about his old ghillie, which relates to his background in hunting on the Scottish mores.

The chapter in which Urquhart and Mattie meet is preceded by the following prologue:

The truth is like a good wine. You often find it tucked away in the darkest corner of a cellar. It needs turning occasionally. And given a gentle dusting, too, before you bring it out into the light and start using it."⁹⁸

This notion of the truth being in need of polishing before it is brought to into the limelight speaks to the nature of Mattie and Urquhart's relationship. Urquhart is to use Mattie to massage the truth into what he wishes to bring into the limelight. Urquhart of the BBC's series calls this having "a sympatric ear at the press. Those valiant seekers of the truth."⁹⁹ This need to bend the truth precedes Mattie showing up at Urquhart's door. Even before we

⁹⁷ Willimon 2013: ep. 2

⁹⁸ Dobbs 2015: 57

⁹⁹ Davies 1990: ep. 1

learn of her intentions or his, the reader is presented with Urquhart's need. The prologue also serves to prime the reader towards what is to come in the novel, if the prologue had involved the need for a free and unbiased press, then the following chapter's lies might meet a stronger moral resistance. How she is useful to him precedes their meeting, expanding the theme of the wicked omniscient narrator.

In addition to the prologue of the chapters, there are far more chapters to introduce. By adding more chapters to the revised edition, the omniscient consciousness preceding them is given a more hegemonic voice in the novel. By preemptively commenting on more of the plot of the novel, his narrative consciousness is more prevalent than it was in the original, and closer to the wicked whips of the series.

In line with expanding the theme of wickedness, Dobbs removed Urquhart's phone call to a doctor regarding O'Neill's state of mind. Urquhart's thoughts of doubt and hesitation regarding the murder are also removed and the revised chapter mainly consists of an objective account of events. As the original novel portrayed a man fighting his conscience, the revised edition portrays a man without one.

Merriment

Whereas Urquhart of the original novel was severe and humorless, the Urquhart of the BBC series was far more content and merry. He delivered several of his asides while smiling and others while laughing. In not taking political life seriously, Urquhart of the BBC adaptation makes light of both the consequences his actions have, and the political system as a whole. When the Secretary of Health, Peter McKenzie, delivers his speech at the party conference, Richardson laughs into the camera and says "God! What an idiot that man is".¹⁰⁰ His discontent of his fellow politician comes across, as well as the humor he finds in the discord between McKenzie's intellect and his political position. Wicked treatment of incompetent and idiotic politicians might be met with less moral resistance, than if they were competent and intelligent. This is also relevant in terms of Urquhart as a narrator, as he dictates the reader or viewer's view of the politicians of Westminster. If they are whimsical and trivial, then Urquhart's destruction of their careers is less wicked.

The merriment prevalent in BBC's Urquhart is novelized throughout *House of Cards*(2015). When Collinridge asks Urquhart to investigate who has been leaking sensitive information to

¹⁰⁰ Davies 1990: ep. 2

the press, Dobbs adds that Urquhart averts his eyes from him “not wanting the Prime Minister to see the delight dancing within them”. In this passage Dobbs has also added that Urquhart “smiled, but only on the inside”.¹⁰¹ Although this is a serious matter and his superior is very distraught, Urquhart remains gleeful on the inside. This addition furthers the interpretation made by the BBC’s adaptation.

The merriment and asides of the BBC’s adaptation is also novelized into interior monologues. Urquhart meets Mattie in Westminster and leads her towards the conclusion that the leaks are coming from within the cabinet, after which she suggests that they are being “wicked together”. Following this line Urquhart then muses: ”Wickedness. Was that what he was up to? Yes it probably was, Urquhart decided as he continued up the stairs. He leaned against the wall and laughed out loud.¹⁰²

Underwood’s answering of his own questions, the merriment of the BBC adaptation, the asides prominent in both series, are all brought into these three added lines to the revised edition. Internal thoughts are made clear, portraying a mind which revels in being wicked. One might also point out that laughing out loud, and its abbreviation LOL, is an expression which is far more prominent in the contemporary moment than it was in 1989.

Intensified contempt

Urquhart and Underwood’s opinions regarding their fellow politicians are very clear in both series as well as in the original novel. They are unfit for office, and lack both intellect and moral compasses. Although Urquhart is gleeful regarding the fall of his Prime Minister, the same case can also be made regarding the other politicians. The aside in which Richardson urinates while speaking to the audience is paused by him peeking out of the door at McKenzie, Woolton, Earle and Samuels. He tells the audience that “You saw them. You saw their eyes a-glitter round the table.”¹⁰³ The trend of vilifying the other politicians continues all through Netflix’s adaptation, in which the cocaine-addicted errand boy is personified by a congressman from Philadelphia. Walker being portrayed as an indecisive and feeble President also serves to justify the actions of the protagonist.

There is a trend of vilifying the other politicians. In a scenario where wickedness extends to several of his fellow politicians, Urquhart’s actions might be met with less resistance from the

¹⁰¹ Dobbs 2015: 92

¹⁰² Dobbs 2015: 101

¹⁰³ Davies 1990: ep. 3

viewer. This trend is furthered as Urquhart's opinions regarding his fellow politicians, becomes the narrative tone of the revised novel. As the novel is told in third person, the most direct manner Urquhart addresses the reader is through the prologues of the chapters. What does become apparent in Dobbs' revised novel is how the contempt of politicians significant in the televisual adaptations has become prevalent in the narrative tone of Dobbs' revised novel. One of Urquhart's main rivals for the premiership is the foreign secretary Patrick Woolton. Both novels introduce the reader to Woolton's private life through Urquhart's experience of him. The scandal some years before, which Urquhart had to cover up, was of a sexual nature. This story is recounted right before Urquhart is to present him with the notion of a leadership election, in which Woolton is to be crucial to Urquhart's plan. The Urquhart of the BBC's adaptation does not retell the story but describes Woolton as a "lout and a lecher" in an aside following the meeting.¹⁰⁴ What is of interest is that both novels include a brief free indirect discourse as Woolton contemplates whether he will stand in an upcoming leadership contest. "Why you old fraud. You want the job just as badly as ever".¹⁰⁵ This free indirect discourse is not unusual as Urquhart is in the room, but there are instances of his contempt emerging when he is not present. This is the case when Woolton is at home with his wife, thinking of his recent improvements;

Ever since his conversation with Urquhart at the Party conference, Woolton had been running hard behind the scenes. He had lunched with almost every editor in Fleet Street, **taken drink with leading backbenchers and slept with no one but his wife.**¹⁰⁶ (my emphasis)

The part of the sentence in bold is added to the revised edition, while the rest remains the same. Although the sentence is structured differently it conveys the same information. Gaining good press and support among party members is equated with sexual fidelity as something which will lead to a better political situation. By adding drinking and sexual behavior to the list of improved behaviors from Woolton, Dobbs highlights Woolton's character. Urquhart's witty and judgmental tone towards Woolton has become a part of the narrative tone. A meeting between Mattie and a political ally of Roger O'Neill, Stephen Kendrick, is also altered to highlight the debauched and promiscuous nature of modern politicians. The scene is far more sexual as Kendrick talks of his recent divorce, serves Mattie wine and insists that Mattie call him "Stephen" and not "Mr. Kendrick". In the original novel

¹⁰⁴BBC episode 2

¹⁰⁵Dobbs 2015: 146

¹⁰⁶Dobbs 2015: 246

this conversation was over tea and ends amicably with laughter, whereas in the revised Kendrick asks Mattie if “you think I’m shallow enough to turn on an old friend just because you flash your tits at me?”.¹⁰⁷ This infers that the sexual nature of the meeting has not escalated to such an extent that Kendrick is swayed to betray his friend’s trust, meaning it will take a more significant sexual act. The theme of the wicked politician is furthered in Dobbs’ revisited novel, following the theme’s expansion in the two series.

Mattie

Mattie’s role as a moral foil to Urquhart is central to the original novel’s portrayal of wickedness. When adapted, this role changed completely as the two became romantically involved. Several of the meetings she has with Johnnie in order to discuss her case and its complexity, are rewritten so they are with Urquhart who guides her away from suspecting him to be at the center of her case. Her romantic entanglement with Johnnie is reduced to a partnership in which he is unable to win her affection as she is far more captivated by Urquhart. The female reporter’s romantic situation is allegorical of her naivety. Whereas the Mattie of the original novel was only involved with Johnnie, she was able to see clearly and conclude in an objective manner. As Mattie in the BBC’s adaptation is only romantically involved with Urquhart, she is situated on the far end of the spectrum. She is unable to conclude in an objective manner and pays the ultimate price. As Zoey of Netflix’s adaptation was involved with Underwood and later Lucas Goodwin, she represents a middle ground. She does suspect that Underwood is responsible for the murder of the errand boy but does not have any proof. Although she takes precautions before meeting Underwood, she does however underestimate the danger she is in, and Underwood is able to murder her. This meeting is also preceded by Underwood suggesting that she is still able to enter his good graces once more, suggesting that she is there to go back to him, breaking faith with Lucas. Mattie of *House of Cards* (2015) is a patchwork of these characters. She is romantically involved with both men and does not suspect Urquhart until it is too late. Although she does not call Urquhart “daddy” she still sees him as a mentor and a father figure. The added passage takes place the morning before her death, illustrating her naivety and dependency on Urquhart:

Foolishly, early that morning, she walked towards his house in Cambridge Street, drawn to him, desperate for his wisdom, only to see him on his distant doorstep kissing his wife Mortima for the

¹⁰⁷ Dobbs 2015: 298

benefit of cameras. Mattie had put her head down and hurried quickly away, ashamed of herself. Yet her doubts, and her needs had grown. Some wickedness, some outrage was taking place, but the world seemed stubbornly blind to it. Surely Francis would understand, know what to do.¹⁰⁸

Although she has two romantic partners, the passage above portrays a Mattie more similar to the BBC's version of her, than that of *House of Cards* (1989). Her dependence on him lessens her role as a moral foil in the novel, his seduction of her in order to have a "sympathetic ear at the press" serves the establishment and its wickedness.¹⁰⁹

This analysis of the revised novel charts the many ways in which *House of Cards* (2015) incorporates several aspects of the televisual adaptations into *House of Cards* (1989). The authoritative and omniscient voice of the wicked politician has become prologues to every chapter, thereby framing the plot within them. The asides and merriment of the televisual adaptations are also prevalent in the revisions Dobbs has made to his novel. The manner in which the other politicians are portrayed are also in line with the bleak view prevalent in the televisual adaptations. They are portrayed as both debauched and wicked through changes made to narrative tone in several instances. As mentioned regarding the televisual adaptations, the way in which the conflict between the whip and the female reporter is resolved is central to the significance of the theme of wickedness. As Urquhart murders Mattie at the end of the revised novel, the theme is expanded in accordance with the conventions set by the televisual adaptations.

¹⁰⁸ Dobbs 1989: 366

¹⁰⁹ Davies 1990: ep. 1

Conclusion

Thesis Question

The parent research question stated above was “In what manner is the theme of wickedness prevalent in Michael Dobbs’ *House of Cards* and how is it altered in the novel’s respective adaptations?”.

From its conception the original novel was preoccupied with wickedness. Dobbs’ need to express anger and frustration was transformed into a main character whose initials was to express a rude gesture. The political reality Dobbs depicts is also of wickedness, as it does not adhere to several ideals of representative democracy, or parliamentary procedure. The notion of violence is prevalent in both how Urquhart emphasizes himself as a hunter, and in the rhetorical blows of Question Time in parliament. In this context Urquhart can be said to be allegorical to the system in which he operates. However, his fellow politicians, most noticeably Collinridge, are portrayed as principled, idealistic and caring, which is exploited by Urquhart as a weakness. Mattie functions as a foil to Urquhart in her honesty, transparency and in the righteousness of her cause. These qualities enable her to expose Urquhart and hinder his immoral agenda, bringing the theme of wickedness to a righteous conclusion.

The original novel is the last one to do so. All three adaptations proceeding it have expanded the theme of wickedness in a significant way by having the whip escape judgement by murdering the female journalist. The revised novel and Davies’ adaptation both end with Mattie’s murder, leaving the reader or viewer with the moral lesson that the establishment always wins. Although the house of cards built by the protagonists of the televisual adaptations do not last throughout their respective series, the seasons which this thesis has examined were both meant as the end of their respective narrative.¹¹⁰

Davies’ adaptation made Urquhart the main character of the series. He is given far more time on screen, and he dictates how the viewer might perceives certain aspects of the series. Through his asides he includes the viewer in his knowledge and wicked thoughts, as well as his contempt for his fellow politicians. To a certain degree he also dictates what the audience thinks of him as he answers questions he imagines the viewer has. This shift towards Urquhart not only as the main character, but also a character with a direct narrative voice, alters the

¹¹⁰ As mentioned above, Netflix’s two first seasons are understood as a single body work, due to how they were produced.

dynamic of the two main characters. By emphasizing the wicked character, the theme is expanded.

The Netflix adaptation is also of interest in this regard. It perpetuates the notion of The Whip as the main character and furthers the idea of the aside as a direct way of broadcasting the thoughts of the protagonist. It also expands the notion of a wicked and immoral system as financial interests greatly affect the political reality. The notion of the American Dream is incorporated as merit replaces aristocratic privilege as what qualifies one for public office. The more wicked side of this aspect, is that Underwood can be thought of as representative of what kind of politician is able to rise through the ranks of his political reality, thereby offering a rather bleak insight into American politics

Several paragraphs of the revised novel are altered in such a manner that they portray the politicians in a less favorable light. Both Woolton and McKenzie are portrayed to be far less interested in politics, but rather the women their power might entice. This change follows the trend of demonizing the surrounding politicians, thereby suggesting that Urquhart's wickedness is allegorical of the political system itself. The revised novel also novelizes several aspects of the TV series. As the omniscient narrative voice of the protagonists of the televisual adaptations are novelized into prologues to all chapters of the revised novel, the theme of wickedness is expanded.

Afterword of the Author

As mentioned initially, this thesis seeks to examine certain aspects of Dobbs' afterword of *House of Cards*(2015);

- 1) That what is at the core of the novel is its "unabashed wickedness"
- 2) Despite drawing inspiration from the BBC and Netflix's adaptations, no one who read the original novel will think the revised novel a different book.

As the analyses of this thesis illustrates, the theme of wickedness is very much prevalent in the original novel, and in all four of its adaptations. Although it takes on different forms and varies within the cast of characters, it is a central aspect of all four texts. Both televisual adaptations are using a rhetoric of violence in which they are at the center. Although it is always present, the righteousness which is to face this wickedness varies.

And herein lies the discord between Dobbs' second statement regarding the revised novel, and the results of this thesis. The discord between them is due to the differing ways in which the

rift between the young female journalist and The Whips is resolved. How the conflict between the Chief Whip and the female journalist is resolved is central to the moral message of the narrative, and in turn the text's wickedness. The moral message of the original novel was can be summarized to the notion that as long as there are people of admirable qualities working within the fourth branch of government, wicked politicians cannot retain their power. This is naturally greatly altered when the Chief Whip murders the reporter and escapes prosecution. Although wickedness is prevalent in the original novel, the righteous win the day and the Establishment cannot retain their ill-gotten power.

The change of narrative tone, the sexualization of the female journalist, the wicked and omniscient prologues to the chapters, all draw from the televisual adaptations. This suggests a novelization of these aspects of the series. It also suggests a high level of intertextuality as the novel draws inspiration from the TV series, perhaps placing them on an equal level of prestige. If this is the case, this is contrary to the issues of adaptations put forth above. According to Stam critics often ignore the cross-fertilization which Dobbs celebrates by incorporating aspects of television into his literature. It also suggests how the two mediums can function as an artistic space of cross-fertilization as he proposed. As the analysis of this thesis has shown, in terms of wickedness and morality the original and the revised novel differ a great deal.

From the four analyses of this thesis one might see a trend of expanding the theme of wickedness. Although a prevalent aspect of the original novel, the televisual adaptations and the revised edition all expand in the theme, making it more prevalent than in the original novel. The discourse of gain and cross-fertilization proposed by Stam is realized as Dobbs novelizes the innovations made by adaptations of his own novel. The theme of wickedness returns to literature in a way adhering to Hand's notion of expansion in adaptation. The expansion of the theme of wickedness is clear throughout the intertextual history of *House of Cards*. The revised novel follows this trend to such an extent that the moral message of the original novel is completely altered, making the novel far more wicked.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the intertextual relationship between two novels and two television series, all named *House of Cards*. The original novel was written in 1989 and its most popular adaptation today is Netflix's ongoing series. At the time of writing the sixth and final season of the series is set to air this coming fall. The thesis follows the theme of wickedness from the novels conception, through two televisual adaptations, and back into literary form. The author, Michael Dobbs, deemed wickedness as the one constant of the adaptations after publishing a revised version of his novel in 2015. As the text returned to literature, is it shown to novelize several alterations belonging to the televisual adaptations, most notably the dominant narrative voice of the male politician. The notion of the wicked main character as allegorical of the political system, and the notion of a moral foil are both examined throughout all analyses. The thesis concludes that the theme of wickedness has been prevalent throughout all four works, and the choices made when adapting and novelizing follow a consistent trend of expanding the theme. The manner in which wickedness is reworked and made anew showcases the intertextual relationship between the four texts.

Appendix: The Master Project's Relevance to Teaching

As this thesis is written at the end of a five-year program through which the author is qualified to teach in schools, the relevance of this thesis in regard to that profession needs to be addressed.

As a teacher it is important to imprint students with some general understanding of how representative democracy functions. The elected representatives of our state are to be held by a certain standard. As this thesis examines the lives and political realities of fictitious politicians, the way they are portrayed might be relevant to students of today. As both Netflix's adaptation of Dobbs' novel is very popular, impressionable students might see this as an insight into how American democracy functions. Through the immoral dealings, theft, violence and misinformation of the series, a grim picture of democratic participation is painted. It is important that students understand this as a fictitious work, which has had wickedness as its most prevalent theme from its conception three decades ago. The mistrust this depiction of representative democracy might evoke needs to be addressed and eradicated. Although the wickedness of the series stems from an actual politician's need to say "FU" to the political system, the series, nor its unabashed wickedness, should not be thought of as representative of the average politician.

If students are to abandon all trust of politicians, then their participation in democracy will either be stunted or limited to political candidates who pride themselves on not being politicians. Recent events in US politics might suggest that such an approbation simply entails that one is not qualified for political office.

In addition, one should be aware of the intertextual relationship between texts. Students should not automatically assume that a new work of popular culture is completely original but rather rejoice and celebrate the new lease of life a certain works of art is given through adaptations. Moreover, thoughts of fidelity as a standard for judgement of such adaptations should be rebuked in the classroom. This in favor of the intertextual relationship which works of art might embody.

In respect to language learning, one can see a great deal of benefits in working with both novels and films. Reading and listening might expand a student' receptive vocabulary as they are challenged by novel words and phrases, hopefully stimulating their interest in the English language. Working with political novels and films, one might be informed of certain political realities.