

## ECOS DE SHAKESPEARE: *JÚLIO CÉSAR* E *HOUSE OF CARDS* – O ÚLTIMO ATO, DE DOBBS E DA BBC

### ECHOES OF SHAKESPEARE: *JULIUS CAESAR* AND *HOUSE OF CARDS* - THE FINAL CUT BY DOBBS AND BBC

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**Resumo:** Em 2017, publicamos um artigo sobre o diálogo que se estabelece entre a trilogia *House of Cards*, de Michael Dobbs, as séries da BBC e da Netflix e as peças de Shakespeare – *Ricardo III*, *Macbeth* e *Otelo*. Este texto dá continuidade à primeira publicação e versa sobre o último volume da trilogia de Dobbs, *The Final Cut* [O último ato], e a Temporada 3 da BBC, para demonstrar como *Júlio César*, de Shakespeare, foi ressignificado nas duas produções, assunto até então não explorado. Voltamos a nossa atenção, portanto, apenas para esse último romance de Dobbs e sua adaptação na última temporada da série da BBC, enfatizando o protagonismo, a volubilidade do povo e a retórica em discursos proferidos por personagens de Shakespeare e de Dobbs. Procuramos demonstrar também como essa temporada da série, apesar de reproduzir um primeiro-ministro fragilizado pela idade e perseguido por lembranças involuntárias de crimes cometidos no passado, como no romance, ameniza a crueldade e intensifica problemas emocionais, tornando os acontecimentos mais palatáveis e o protagonista mais humano ao espectador da série.

**Palavras-chave:** *Júlio César*; Shakespeare; *House of Cards*; Dobbs; Série da BBC

**Abstract:** In 2017, we published a paper on the dialogue between Michael Dobbs' *House of Cards* trilogy, the BBC and Netflix series, and Shakespeare's plays – *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*. This work is a continuation of that first publication and deals with the last volume of Dobbs' trilogy, *The Final Cut*, and its adaptation – Season 3 of the BBC series – to show how Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was ressignified in those two productions, a subject not explored before. We turn our attention, therefore, to Dobbs' last novel of the trilogy and to the last season of the BBC series, emphasizing the protagonism, the volubility of the people, and the rhetoric in speeches delivered by Shakespeare's and Dobbs' characters. We also try to demonstrate how this last season, despite reproducing a premier weakened by age and pursued by involuntary memories of crimes committed in the past, as in the novel, softens his cruelty and intensifies his emotional problems, making events more palatable and the protagonist more humane to the viewer of the series.

**Keywords:** *Julius Caesar*; Shakespeare; *House of Cards*; Dobbs; BBC series

## Introduction

*Shakespearean texts are dense hypertexts that dialogue with multiple sources and with the complex web of intertexts accumulated throughout the ages. According to a great number of contemporary critics, translations and / or adaptations / appropriations of Shakespeare's plays display a rich cultural-semiotic fabric that grant the bard's texts an afterlife they would never have achieved without these numerous variants.*<sup>1</sup>

Camati & Miranda, 2009

In the concluding remarks of the article “House of Cards: Shakespearean DNA in the Trilogy and the Series”<sup>2</sup> we discuss the proximity/distance between William Shakespeare’s plays *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*, and *House of Cards*, novels and series. We emphasize, in that article, that the motivation that leads Iago, in *Othello*, to rebel against the general, is similar to the motivations that lead the protagonists of the trilogy and series to rebel against their superiors, a triggering issue in the narratives. Iago’s plotting turns him into one of the most strategic characters in the three plays, and even though thirst for power, betrayal, and criminality characterize them all, they are more evident in *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. Richard “clears” his way to the crown of the United Kingdom by planning the murder of his brothers and nephews; while Macbeth, following the witches’ third prediction – that he will be King of Scotland –, anticipates his rise to the throne by killing, with his wife’s encouragement and assistance, King Duncan, his friend, while he is a guest in the couple’s palace<sup>3</sup>.

The story of the reception of *House of Cards* (novels and series) outside the United Kingdom and, more specifically, in Brazil, took place in a way that we could classify it as “inverted”. Most Brazilian viewers first came in contact with the Netflix series, the latest production, in which the themes – insatiable lust for power, crime and corruption in politics – were developed in a North-American context. This series aired for the first time in early 2013, in a streaming format, and was completed in 2018, with Claire Underwood in the leading role, played by Robin Wright, due to the involuntary dismissal of the actor Kevin Spacey, the leading male actor, who played Francis Underwood. Echoes of Shakespeare, especially from *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*, perceived by those who once read or watched the plays, led us to search for the Netflix series hypotexts, and find other information available at the opening of the maxiseries: “Based on the novels by Michael Dobbs & the mini-series by Andrew Davies [BBC].” Ironically, however, if we lose that information, it is Shakespeare’s echoes that awakens the viewer to possible resignification of earlier texts, making clear the Shakespearean palimpsestic marks in the series. These marks, however, become almost imperceptible in the course of the North-American series (73 episodes), by its deep and extensive immersion in the political-cultural context of the United States and by its gradual and inevitable departure of the series from Michael Dobbs’ trilogy (*House of Cards*, *To Play the King* and *The Final Cut*) and from the BBC series *The House of Cards Trilogy* (12 episodes).

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from “Apresentação” in the book *Shakespeare sob múltiplos olhares*, de Anna Stegh Camati e Célia Arns de Miranda.

<sup>2</sup> Reichmann, Brunilda T. “House of Cards: Shakespearean DNA in the Trilogy and the Series”. *Raído*, [s.l.], v. 11, 2017, p. 141-164.

<sup>3</sup> Reichmann, Brunilda T. “House of Cards y Shakespeare: la influencia del dramaturgo en seriosos contemporáneos”. Trad. Célia Celli. Rev. Maria Ascensión Jiménez Martín. *Scripta Uniandrade*, Curitiba, v. 15, n. 3 (2017), p. 01-31.

In this article, we try to demonstrate how Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*<sup>4</sup> dialogues with the last volume of the Dobbs trilogy – *The Final Cut* – and with Season 3 of the BBC series, which is not the case with the Netflix series. In this volume/season, interculturality takes place between the late twentieth-century United Kingdom (Dobbs' text and the BBC series) and Rome 44 BC (*Julius Caesar*), emphasizing, approximating and/or ignoring characteristics and values that permeate the play and the British edition of *House of Cards*.

Despite the historical marks left by the Roman Empire in the post-republican period of Roman civilization, at the time of the play *Julius Caesar*, Rome is still a Republic, a state ruled for almost 500 years by senators and magistrates, without the presence of a unique and absolute monarch. Brutus' greatest concern, affirmed by himself and reaffirmed by Mark Antony's speeches in the play, is the maintenance of the Republic, which was threatened by the suspicious, radical and arrogant attitudes of Julius Caesar, a prominent military commander: his alleged reluctance to accept the emperor's symbolic crown, when it is offered to him three times in the beginning of the play, his decision not to forgive a fellow mate, his belief that he was never wrong, and his "acceptance" to be crowned emperor on March 15, 44 BC – in the Ides of March. *Julius Caesar* appears in the novel *The Final Cut* and the BBC series as representation and reference, as Francis Urquart's bedside text and last reading, as a rhetorical reproduction of Mark Antony's speech (to turn the Roman people against Brutus) in Urquart's speech, delivered to destroy his opponent, the candidate Thomas Makepeace who, until that moment, was the only politician who confronted and opposed the prime minister and was about to win the election.

## The Play within the Novel

In *The Final Cut*, Urquart is in his third term as prime minister. His concern about age, lack of energy and appearance, the foreseeable end of his political career and the dissatisfaction of the British people with his conduct as prime minister make Urquart susceptible, fragile and insecure. "He stared at himself in the mirror. Time had taken its undeniable toll; the face was wrinkled and fallen, the hair thinned, the eyes grown dim and rimmed with fatigue" (Dobbs 218)<sup>5</sup>. But he pretends to be the same strong and powerful man of the past, feared by his party colleagues and opponents. His wife, Mortima, however, appears stronger and a closer companion to her husband, proud and aware of his love for her; just as Elizabeth, the name used in the series, who plays a major role in the development of the narrative. The couple is more united than ever and goes to the Royal Shakespeare Company to watch Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, as a celebration of their wedding anniversary.

They arrived late, their coming almost regal. If nothing else, after the eleven years they had lived in Downing Street, they knew how to make an entrance. Mortima, always carefully presented, appeared transported on a higher plane in an evening dress of black velvet with a high wing collar and a necklace of pendant diamonds and emeralds that caught the theater's lighting and reflected it back to dazzle all other women around her. [...]

"Le roi est arrivé." (3)

The surprise of the prime minister, at the beginning of the play, is that the actor who plays Julius Caesar, with his face full of make-up, resembles him. "Then, there was laughter, Caesar had made his first appearance on stage with a face adorned with heavy makeup that

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*. London: Longmans., Green and Co Ltd, 1959.

<sup>5</sup> All other references to Dobbs' *The Final Cut*, included in this work, will be documented in the text with page number(s) only.

make him look uncannily like Francis Urquart” (6). He realizes the subtlety of the moment and, as he was accustomed to reacting immediately in unexpected situations, he is not only the first one to pull the string of laughter, but waves his white handkerchief to the show’s producer, pretending to appreciate the comedy and boldness of the scene and to show that he is going along with it.

In *Julius Caesar*, the most prominent characters in the beginning of the play are Brutus and Mark Antony, but the dialogues and actions are all centered on the popular recognition of General Julius Caesar's military power.

In the specific context relevant to the play, Julius Caesar was part of a political alliance with Crassus and Pompey, known as the Triumvirate. Caesar’s success in the Gallic Wars extended Rome’s power to Britain and the Rhine Area, giving it prestige and political power. This fact, coupled with the death of Crassus in the Battle of Carras and Julia – Caesar’s daughter and Pompey’s wife – destabilized the balance of power between Caesar and Pompey. Pompey aligns with the Senate, which orders Caesar to dissolve his army and return to Rome. Caesar defies his orders and returns to Rome ahead of his legions, violating the law that prevented generals from marching with armies beyond Rubicon. Crossing the river, Caesar would have uttered the famous phrase: *Allea jacta est* (‘Luck is cast’). Civil war has been launched, Caesar is victorious and assumes absolute power. The Republic was watching the beginning of its end. (Barroso 392, *my translation*)

In Dobbs’ third novel, Francis Urquart’s presence is also less prominent than in the previous novels of the trilogy, similar to that of Julius Caesar in Shakespeare’s play. Yet, it is important to say that Urquart is a hybrid character, an amalgam of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Brutus: he desires the grandeur of Julius Caesar, imitates Mark Antony’s rhetoric to manipulate popular reaction (the volubility of the English people resembles the volubility of the Roman people when they hear Brutus’ and Mark Antony’s speeches), and commits “suicide” as does Brutus. But while Brutus’s suicide is the result of a momentary decision, Urquart’s is masterfully planned. In pointing out these resignifications, we clarify that some of them are present only in Dobbs’ novel, while others are present in both the novel and the BBC series. We will indicate this distinction as we discuss each subject.

According to Linda Hutcheon, “For an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both the knowing and the unknowing audiences” (Hutcheon 121), which is one of the adapter’s major challenges. It is expected that some viewers will not identify or care about the appropriations of Shakespeare play in Dobbs’ latest novel and/or Season 3, but the reception should still have an impact on him, even if it is different from the knowing audience’s reception. Those who do not know Shakespeare’s play will not grasp the multiplicity of layers or the plurality of meanings the series offers to those who do, but they will nonetheless respond to the work.

The reason for my confidence is that I firmly believe that adaptation is (and has always been) central to the human imagination in all cultures. We not only tell, but retell our stories. And retelling almost always means adapting – ‘adjusting’ the stories to suit a new audience. Even before the advent of today’s globalized world, in which the internet (and even before that, with television and radio) assures that any story will eventually be retold somewhere in the world, all cultures were involved in interlanguage translations and intercultural adaptations. (Hutcheon 10, note for the Portuguese edition, *my translation*)

## Protagonism in *Julius Caesar* and *The Final Cut*

An intertextual production implies “a relationship of co-presence between two or several texts, that is, essentially, and most often, as the presence of one text in another” (Genette 9). There is no doubt that *Julius Caesar* is present in *The Final Cut*. The very physicality of Shakespeare’s play reinforces this closeness and interrelationship. *Julius Caesar* is the play that is in Urquart’s hands at various times in the novel and the series, being the last book read by the prime minister in both productions. However, if we look at Julius Caesar’s protagonism, we will see that he is rarely present until the beginning of Act III of the play, when he is then murdered by his “friends.” But he is the subject of all the conversations in the first half of the play and also of the events in the second half. Barbara Heliodora discusses the questioning of Julius Caesar’s protagonism in the “Introdução” of her translation of the play:

He [Julius Caesar] deserves to be the title character of the work, precisely because the entire first part is devoted to planning his death, while everything that happens after his assassination, at the beginning of Act III, is dedicated to avenge that same death. (7, *my translation*)

Despite of the less extensive but no less important presence of Julius Caesar from the beginning to the end of the play, Brutus’ speeches and attitudes revolve around the maintenance of the Republic, the danger of Julius Caesar becoming emperor, and the implications of an emperor presence/absence for the Romans. Mark Antony is the defender of Julius Caesar, he wants him to accept the crown, without considering the consequences his absolute power would bring forth to the people.

[...] it was possible for Shakespeare to identify Brutus as an assured politician... there was no man in the world ... worth the loss of any portion of the rights and duties of the citizen ... while for Mark Antony, a military man and an aristocrat, in fact, most citizens would rather take care of their lives than think of the State. (Heliodora 8, *my translation*)

Urquart also shares his protagonism in the novel with Thomas Makepeace (his Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and then his antagonist), with his wife, and with the narrative of the political and economic situation of the island of Cyprus, and the involvement of the British as mediators in the conflict between Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots.

The most striking distinction between Julius Caesar and Urquart lies in the fact that Caesar rejects, even though it is a questionable rejection, the symbolic crown offered to him by Antony. Here is the narrative told by Casca to Brutus about the rejection of Julius Caesar when the fake crown was offered to him three times, under the acclaim of the people of Rome, at the beginning of the play:

	CASSIUS
Who offered him the crown?	
	CASCA
Why, Antony.	
	BRUTUS
Tell us the manner of it, gentle Casca.	
	CASCA

I can well be hanged as tell the manner of it. It was mere foolery; I did not mark it. I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown, yet't was not a crown neither, 't was one of those coronets: and as I told you, he put it by once: but for all that, to my thinking, he would fain have had it. Then he offered to him again; then he put it away again; but to my thinking he was very loath to lay his fingers off it. And then he offered it the third time; he put it the third time by, and still as he refused it, the rabblement hooted, and clapped their chapped hands, and threw up their sweaty nightcaps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath, because Caesar refused the crown, that it had almost choked Caesar; for he swooned... (29)

It was not “mere foolery” nor did Casca fail to “mark it”. The following day, despite the premonitions about the Ides of March, the nightmare Calpurnia (Caesar’s wife) had, and the premonitions, Julius Caesar is persuaded by Decius to go to the Senate, since it had decided “To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar./If you shall send them word you will not come,/Their minds may change” (93). This argument is enough to bring Julius Caesar to the Senate, where he is murdered.

Urquart, on the other hand, never rejected any possibility of becoming prime minister; by the way, he made his way up to 10 Downing Street using every trick, manipulation, and iniquity possible. When he was not rewarded with the position he expected – to be a senior adviser in the prime minister’s office – from the politician he helped elect, he begins his malignant and strategic move to reach the top – depose the prime minister and take his place – without considering whom he might harm or even destroy in his way. If Julius Caesar is likened to an unborn serpent – “a serpent’s egg,/Which hatched, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,/And kill him in the shell” (55), Urquart is a serpent that has already hatched, crawled, and reached his possible opponents from the moment his revenge begins, without any concerns for whoever stands in his way. “Political power belongs to the category of man’s power over another man. [...] This power relationship is expressed in a thousand ways...” (Bobbio *et al* 955, *my translation*), and in *House of Cards*, either in the novel or in the series, political power is expressed in the most infamous and sordid way possible.

In the last volume, Urquart has been in office for eleven years, a few days less than former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, mentioned in the novel and the series. Urquart’s protagonism, as mentioned earlier, is shared with Thomas Makepeace, also a member of the conservative party who abandons his position as Secretary of Foreign Affairs and his party after Urquart’s aggressiveness and lack of respect. He, then, begins a campaign to oppose the prime minister. Makepeace, symbolic name for a possible Urquart’s successor, struggles to make public (after meeting Maria Passolides, daughter of Evangelhos Passolides and niece of the two teenagers killed in the past by Urquart on the island of Cyprus) the archives of the Cypriots murdered in Cyprus four decades before, to discover the British agents responsible for the killing, and to discover the places where the bodies were buried. In the novel, Maria and Makepeace become lovers since their first meeting. In the series, they remain friends, fighting for the same cause. She turns her father’s motivation – discover the bodies of his two murdered Cypriot brothers, George and Eurypides – into Makepeace’s cause, and at the end of the long political journey, he arrives in London with more than 40,000 followers, slightly before the day of the election for prime minister. He is hailed by the people who, tired of Urquart’s politics, enthusiastically support him. This enthusiasm lasts until Urquart’s arrival and speech at Makepeace’s rally.

More than forty thousand people were gathered under the unseeing eye of Lord Nelson, until Trafalgar Square brimmed and overflowed with their enthusiasm. Makepeace walked through their midst like Moses carving his path through the Red Sea, his hands raised, clenched above his head, and they thundered their approval. (440)

Therefore, in addition to sharing the scene with Makepeace and his own wife in the third volume, political issues involving Cyprus, the United Kingdom and France take up much of the last volume of the trilogy. The discovery of a gigantic sheet of oil off the coast of Cyprus – a secret affair – will determine the island’s division between Turk and Greek Cypriots.

In the series, these issues are treated by the prime minister and his wife; therefore, Urquart remains the protagonist in the series, sharing the scene with Makepeace, and Elizabeth, who leaves the background and comes to the foreground of the “stage” with him. She is strong when he fades, she comforts him when he despairs, she becomes the holder of his fate, when he thinks he is old and feels defeated. Elizabeth is willing to politically “seduce” the Turkish president, naively passing inside information to the incorruptible British judge, and defiantly confronting the behavior of the same judge who had presided over the Cypriot land division, showing that she had manipulated him and that now he is on her hands. She moves through the scenes with the same “political juggling” as her husband, and she ultimately determines when he should leave the “scene”.

### Mark Antony’s and Urquart’s Rhetoric and the People’s Volubility

Both Mark Antony and Urquart use flattering rhetoric to lift their listeners’ spirits and destroy their targets: Brutus who had tried to justify the murder of Julius Caesar, and Makepeace who wants to succeed the Prime Minister Francis Urquart. Thus, speaks Brutus to the Roman people to justify his crime.

#### BRUTUS

Be patient to the last.

Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear. [...] If there be any friend in this assembly [...] If then... that friend demands why Brutus rouse against Caesar, this is my answer: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? (137)

Brutus goes on with his logical speech and, in the end, gives a warm welcome to Mark Antony, before departing, imagining that his “friend” will endorse his Republican ideals and his participation in the assassination. Mark Antony, then, begins his speech before Caesar’s corpse and makes a subtle and veiled campaign for those who listen to him to turn against Brutus. He makes it clear that his purpose is not to praise Caesar, pretending that he is on the side of those who killed him. However, during his speech, Mark Antony undermines the people’s belief in Brutus’ appreciation – that Caesar was ambitious – while talking about the good he did to Rome. Parallel to the repeated qualification that Brutus was an “honorable” man, he shows “evidence” of Caesar’s generosity to Rome and its people. Here are some phrases of Mark Antony’s speech:

#### ANTONY

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.  
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.  
The evil that men do lives after them;  
[...] The *noble* Brutus  
Hath told you that Caesar was ambitious.  
[...]  
Here, under leave of Brutus, and the rest, –  
For Brutus is an *honourable* man,  
So are they all; all *honourable* men,

[...]  
 He [Caesar] hath brought many captives home to Rome,  
 Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:  
 Dis this is Caesar seem ambitious?  
 [...]  
 You all did see that, on the Lupercal,  
 I trice presented him a kingly crown,  
 Which he did trice refuse. Was this ambition?  
 Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,  
 And, sure, he is an *honourable* man.  
 [...]  
 But here's a parchment, with the seal of Caesar:  
 [...]  
 And being men, hearing the will of Caesar,  
 I will inflame you, it will make you mad. (143-147, *my emphasis*)

Gradually, prompted by Antony's speech, the listeners begin to rebel against Caesar's murderers, especially Brutus. Antony intensifies his "campaign" by turning to Caesar's corpse and showing the marks of the injuries caused by the killers – Cassius, Casca, and Brutus. He, Antony, also emphasizes Caesar's love for Brutus – also known as "Caesar's angel" –, and ends the subtle accusations by showing the people how betrayal bled through the body of the great military man. Then, cautiously and wisely, Antony turns again to Caesar's will to demonstrate how the Roman people would benefit from it.

## ANTONY

Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up  
 To such sudden flood of mutiny.  
 For they have done this deed are *honourable*,  
 [...]  
 Here is the will; the will; let's stay and hear the will!  
 [...]  
 Here is the will, under Caesar's seal: To every Roman citizen he gives,  
 To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.  
 [...]  
 Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,  
 His private arbours and new-planted orchards...  
 (155-157, *my emphasis*)

In fact, Antony urges the Romans to revolt against the "injustice" of the murder, with his repetitive, parallel, and seemingly praising rhetoric. They take Caesar's corpse and go away with it with the mission to chase after his killers. The same audience who applauded Brutus moments earlier and who agreed with his radical attitude to maintain the Republic now cry for justice and revenge. Cassius and Brutus are, then, forced to flee from Rome.

In Dobb's novel, Urquart says he wants to "address Tom Makepeace's little rally" (440). This "rally" is a gathering of over 40,000 people waiting at Trafalgar Square for Makepeace's final speech in his campaign for prime minister. Urquart, in Downing Street, listens to the clamor of the crowd and thinks, "It was better just to believe in yourself, to die like a Caesar instead of a humble sinner" (410). This decision is not only motivated by Makepeace cheering crowd, for, if we look backwards, we see the precise and careful steps taken by the prime minister to enter History as a hero and prevent Makepeace's political rise. The day before his arrival in London, Urquart has set fire to the small restaurant in London that belonged do Evangelhos Passolides, the Greek Cypriot, while he was away. Passolides is Maria's father and the brother of the two teenagers Urquart had killed when he was a lieutenant in Cyprus, at the age of 23, four decades before. Passolides suspects that Urquart



was responsible, but he has no concrete evidence of this responsibility. Returning from his morning shopping, the Cypriot sees his little restaurant, his only property, on fire. An envoy from Urquart then gives him an envelope where the name of the lieutenant responsible for his brothers' deaths is not redacted – it was Francis Urquart himself. The next day, the minister has to go to Makepeace's rally so Passolides could kill him in the midst of the crowd. Urquart believes that he can, by talking to the people and being killed in front of them, become a hero and destroy Makepeace's political yearnings to become the next prime minister. Corder, his security guard, is unaware of the whole plan, disagrees with his walk to the rally and says:

'You have been under a immense strain recently. Might this have' – an awkward pause – 'clouded your judgement?'

'Gently put. Thank you.' Urquart moved to place his hands of reassurance on the shoulders of the other man. 'But on the contrary, old friend, the immense strain about which you talk has brought great clarity. You know, the prospect of being hanged and all that? I know what I'm doing. I absolve you of any responsibility.' (441)

This is one of the few moments, in the third volume, that Urquart feels alive and energetic again – as he devises a sophisticated plan and will execute it perfectly. Usually his plans include the destruction of a fellow politician, but this time it is the ambition to enter History that moves him and fills him with energy. Next day, the morning of the day of the murder, Urquart takes a long bath, slowly chooses his best suit, and prepares for what he considers "his final triumph." The last book that he takes in his hands is *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's play. As Urquart walks to the podium, accompanied by Mortima and Corder, he is booed by the crowd, but Makepeace, an honorable man, gives in to him, saying, "Let us hear him before condemning him" (417). Urquart raises his hands to the sky and says: "Marchers! Marchers for peace! I salute you" (447) and argues that his ambition to come and stay in Downing Street was and is an ambition to do the best for his country.

It was as though he had thrown a massive blanket over a fire. Calm  
[...]

"I have held ambition for my office, for there can be no greater privilege or higher accolade in a politician's life than lead this country and you, its people. You have been king enough to confer that accolade on me repeatedly for more than a decade, and if you choose to deny me that honor now then again I have no complaint. And certainly not against Tom Makepeace, *for he is a decent man.*

[...]

There was a shout from the crowd.

"No! Not even against tom Makepeace. For he was a member of my Government for so many of those years. *And he is a decent man.*

[...]

"Earlier today Tom Makepeace said I owe you an apology and I listened to his words, the words of *a decent man*, with care. (448-449, *my emphasis*)

So continues Urquart until he sees Passolides wind his way through the crowd. The minister's timing is perfect and he steals the moment for himself. While he talks, he continues to stare at Passolides who is now in front of the crowd. "I may have loved my country too much. In this case, it was a mistake, a fatal mistake. And I will be forced to pay for it" (419), he says, echoing Brutus' speech as he spoke of his love for his homeland.

Passolides's mouth was working in the greatest agitation. His eyes filed with blood.  
[...]

"I have no Family, apart from Mortima." [...]

There was no applause, no one any longer rushing to be identified with Makepeace. Urquart had them, had turned them. The play was nearly at its end. [...]

“Tom Makepeace has claimed you all his brothers and sisters today...” [...] “Perhaps he had the right to do so. But if he claims the living, then let me claim the dead.”

Passolides seemed to be crying, his jaw adrift. Urquart claimed the dead. George and Eurypides. This man was the Devil himself. (451-452)

Urquart then dares to speak of Cyprus and the many Englishmen who cherished noble ideals and paid with their lives for the peace he had pursued – that was his final provocation to the staring Cypriot. Passolides, filled with hatred that lasted more than four decades, fires his weapon. Urquart runs out of air. A dark patch appears on his white shirt, a second one. His knees give way. He looks at Mortima and tries to hug and protect her, “...but he could no longer feel. There was no pain. A sense of exhaustion, perhaps. And exhilaration. Triumph at having cheated them all, even at the end. And cheated them by his end” (p. 452). Mortima realizes then what he did and kisses him. He smiles and mutters: “Great ruins.” Passolides is shot by Corder and dies before Urquart, according to what Dobbs tells in the Epilogue of the novel. Urquart is veiled in Westminster, and an endless crowd pays homage to him. No word is said about Thomas Makepeace, the candidate virtually elected by the same crowd that ultimately honors the prime minister. Urquart’s speech and death guarantee his place in History and the permanence of the conservative party in power. The volubility of the English people resembles the volubility of the Romans while listening to Brutus’ and Mark Antony’s speeches. As we can see, in the third volume, Dobbs creates a protagonist who has Caesar’s and Mark Antony’s characteristics in life and Brutus’ in death.

In Season 3 of the BBC series, the adapters remove from Urquart the trait of great strategist and the diegese moves away from the play *Julius Caesar* at the end. The assassination of the prime minister is planned by his wife, Elizabeth, and his agent Corder, as they realize that there is no way to save Urquart from defeat and failure at the end of his career as Head of Government in Britain, unless they make him a victim of the people who reject him. Corder hires a sniper to kill the prime minister at the inauguration of Margaret Thatcher’s statue in the courtyard of the Parliament, then Corder kills Passolides, so people would believe he was the one who killed the prime minister. In the series, the meticulous planning and perfect timing of Urquart’s execution plan is lost. Makepeace becomes an accomplice in the murder, because Corder, after the shooting, whispers in his ears, as if to say that everything happened according to the plan, and pledges his allegiance to the candidate. The responsibility for the murder lies with Passolides, while Urquart recovers his lost dignity and enters History as the longest-serving prime minister, surpassing Margaret Thatcher’s permanence in power by a few days.

Since the project of inaugurating Thatcher’s statue was proposed, Urquart tries to prevent such “shamelessness” from happening. He hates the idea that she might remain the longest-held prime minister, and that a statue be erected in her honor. However, along with Urquart and Elizabeth, we spectators follow every step of the installation, from site preparation to inauguration, for he is unable to prevent such a tribute from happening, which means that his political powers are fading. The statue’s inauguration is, ironically, the scene of his death. The preparation of the installation and the inauguration of the statue draws an ironic parallel with the preparation and death of the prime minister. The statue rises while Urquart falls.

Urquart’s political strength is weakened over time, as is his mental health and emotional state – another trait adapted in the series, by altering the prime minister’s degree of cruelty and intensifying his emotional problems, making events more palatable and the protagonist more human to the viewer of the series. In it, the protagonist is continually persecuted by memories of past crimes, especially those committed against the two Passolides teenagers in Cyprus and against the journalist and lover Mattie Storin. While in the novel,

young lieutenant Francis Urquart burns the two teenagers alive, aware of what he is doing; in the series, he shoots the teenagers and burns their bodies afterwards, so they cannot be identified. The image of the burning bodies is present – “felt as present and integrated as such in memory” – in Urquart’s mind at various points in the series, because the relatives of the missing people are struggling to have the archives of the war exposed to the public, and this may expose his involvement. Urquart is really taken by the image, as his involuntary memory takes over, making him falter in his actions and almost faint repeatedly. The second image that plagues his mind is the image of Mattie’s fall as he throws her over the parapet of the top floor of the Parliament. In an unfortunate decision by the adaptation team, Mattie had chosen to call him “Daddy,” giving an incestuous and Freudian connotation to their relationship. As her body is falling to the ground, she shouts “Daddy” several times. Her cries, perpetuated in Urquart’s memory, also take him unawares and he becomes unable to act at those moments. As mentioned before, he does not remember those moments, he relives them, and the power of these memories annihilates his emotional state, weakening his actions. Urquart’s images of suffering, even if involuntary, are intensified in the series and make him more vulnerable than in the novel.

The comparisons/confrontations between the texts analyzed bring to mind Barthes’ idea, when he says that

We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture. (Barthes, Ubu/Web Papers 4)

## Final Remarks

In the first article published about *House of Cards* (novels and series), we demonstrate how the protagonist Francis Urquart dialogues with the characters Macbeth, Richard III, and Iago. The protagonist’s criminal profile resembles those of Shakespearean characters. Like them, Urquart will commit monstrous crimes to avenge his supposed enemies, reach power, and retain it for as long as possible. The breaking of the fourth wall, making us listeners of privileged criminal information, somehow brings us closer to the protagonist, while the other characters, without such information, remain ignorant of the protagonist’s personality and his machinations to destroy politicians who can run for the post of prime minister.

In the third volume of the trilogy, *The Final Cut*, the most intense dialogue is with Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*. Urquart becomes an amalgam of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Brutus. Julius Caesar’s ambition, even if veiled, is present in the prime minister. Mark Antony’s rhetoric, with the power to completely manipulate the reaction of the Romans, is imitated by Urquart who, by continually “praising” Makepeace as well, destroys the popular support he had gained with his honest and charismatic commitment. Like Brutus, but much more elaborately, Urquart determines his own death. Brutus asks a battle mate to hold the sword and throw himself at it to end his life. Urquart strategically plans his death in the novel, taking care of every detail so that his murder is consummated at the Makepeace rally, after destroying him verbally. This happens in the novel, because in the series Urquart is not the same strategist. It is his wife who plans to recover his dignity through his murder at the inauguration of Margaret Thatcher’s statue. This change in the plot removes the fate from the protagonist’s own hands, further weakening a politician in full decay. It further implies the idea that Makepeace will follow Urquart’s path, by becoming an accomplice in his assassination and the prime minister who will succeed him in Downing Street. An honorable

man, an upstanding and dedicated politician, Makepeace seems, in the end of the series, to choose the path of crime and corruption, just like his predecessor.

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