

## "Danes Do It Melancholy": Allusions to Shakespeare in Films and TV

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### *Introduction*

This contribution could only be possible in the age of 'post-theatrical' Shakespearean films, a period that Shakespeare film studies conventionally identify as starting in 1989 (the year of Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*)<sup>1</sup>, a year that marks the start of a cinematic production characterised by a mainstream postmodernism which "encourages a predominantly American film idiom to function as a global currency"<sup>2</sup>.

The focus of this article is, however, not adaptations of Shakespearean plays per se, but source-text allusions to Shakespeare and to Shakespeare's plays, which in either an overt or covert form are contained in dramatic dialogues and in visual elements in US-produced films and television shows, a form of intertextuality in which references to Shakespeare in audiovisual texts have multiplied.

After a theoretical framing of the significance and import of allusions, this contribution will thus look into the ways Shakespeare has been 'alluded to' and explicitly quoted in a number of meaningful examples from American mainstream films and TV shows, with the

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<sup>1</sup> As Robert Shaughnessy notes, Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt, editors of the comprehensive collection *Shakespeare, The Movie* (London-New York, Routledge, 2001 [1997]), symptomatically dropped most essays which focused on Shakespeare films released prior to 1989 when editing the second volume, *Shakespeare, The Movie II* (London-New York, Routledge, 2003). See Robert Shaughnessy, "Stage, Screen, and Nation: *Hamlet* and the Space of History", in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. Diana E. Henderson, Maldon, Oxford and Carlton, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 54-76; p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Shaughnessy, pp. 74-75.

purpose of evaluating the function of this type of cultural references in the texts. When relevant, it will also highlight if and how the creators of translations into Italian for the specific mode of dubbing have acknowledged this particular form of allusions and acted accordingly by keeping or omitting intertextual references.

The majority of instances are included in the 'post-theatrical' timeline between the 1990s and nowadays, although luminous examples from earlier periods will also be quoted in order to pinpoint the function of these references. Even with these chronological and geographical limitations, the potential corpus of allusions to Shakespeare in popular audiovisual culture would be enormous. This paper will thus concentrate on works which cite Shakespeare and his plays for 'educational' purposes and those which, as it is further argued, serve as a mouthpiece for the film or TV 'auteur'. The article in fact contends that there exists a specific bond between the use of allusions to Shakespeare in popular audiovisual products and the film studies concept of auteurism, and will try to shed light on the implications of this fruitful intersection.

## *Allusions*

Allusions have been conceptualised as a special kind of cultural references<sup>3</sup>. Among the various definitions of the latter, Mailhac's, which focuses on the different 'distance' of these elements from the source and the target text, is particularly relevant: "by cultural reference we mean any reference to a cultural entity which, due to its distance from the target culture, is characterized by a sufficient degree of opacity for the target reader to constitute a problem"<sup>4</sup>. By referring to the degree of opacity Mailhac emphasises how the interpretation of cultural references is characterised by a varying degree of subjectivity. The distance between target and source cultures indicates the relativity of the concept, which is the main cause of the difficulty in

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of scholarly work on the topic, see Irene Ranzato, *Translating Culture Specific References on Television: The Case of Dubbing*, London-New York, Routledge, 2016, pp. 53-62.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Pierre Mailhac, "The Formulation of Translation Strategies for Cultural References", in *Language, Culture and Communication in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Charlotte Hoffmann, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1996, pp. 132-51; pp. 133-34.

finding univocal and unambiguous strategies for the translation of these references.

The term 'allusions' is privileged when used in connection with literary or, more broadly, artistic works, when it is referred to more complex intertextual elements and concepts than those taken from everyday life, i.e. to the words from a speech of a politician rather than to the politician himself/herself, or to an oblique reference to a film or novel character rather than to their author. Allusions create two kinds of links in the extratextual world: they connect the alluding text to the previous literary tradition and create a sense of connection between the author and the reader, "cultivating intimacy and forging a community"<sup>5</sup>.

An important aspect of allusions is literature's ability "to create new literature out of the old"<sup>6</sup>, that is to say, to involve the reader in a recreation by alluding to half hidden meanings that the readers should be able to grasp and then use in order to achieve a deeper knowledge of the work. Readers who recognise a creative allusion, i.e. an allusion which has not become stereotyped because of too many repetitions, attain a deeper understanding of a text, which means that they are in some way participating in its creation and can consequently feel a sense of fulfillment because they feel part of a restricted circle of readers who are on the same wavelength as the author<sup>7</sup>.

As Leppihalme states in her influential study on the translation of these items, allusions may create a culture "bump" to translators, that is, a small-scale culture shock which may cause problems in finding the right cultural equivalent. The amount of examples provided by Leppihalme shows that what she means by allusions is a wide range of possibilities from simple quotations to more oblique hints<sup>8</sup>.

In sum, allusions create a special relationship between the audience and the text itself and, to a certain extent, they presuppose a disposition on the part of the target culture audience to retrieve information and make associations which are usually more than just encyclopedic, since they require a certain degree of specialistic knowledge. Allusions

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<sup>5</sup> William Irwin, "The Aesthetics of Allusion", *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 36 (2002), pp. 521-32; pp. 521-22.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony L. Johnson, "Allusion in Poetry", *PTL: A Journal for Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1 (1976), pp. 579-87; p. 579.

<sup>7</sup> Ritva Leppihalme, *Culture Bumps: An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1997 (see in particular pp. 32-33).

<sup>8</sup> Leppihalme, *passim*.

to 'high-end' works or to popular culture products require what Finkel terms, writing about culture-specific references in general, a "reinforcement of attention"<sup>9</sup> by the audience and often create an effect of sophistication, as some of the examples in the following sections will show. The referents of allusions belong to a body of "assumed shared knowledge"<sup>10</sup>, which may be general or specialised, part of the source culture, of the target culture or of any third culture – but whose nature is different from cultural references whose referent is not a work of fiction but an element of reality.

Allusions can be overt or covert. The category of overt allusions includes intertextual references explicitly quoted in the text. Formal implicitness or covertness is traditionally considered a defining characteristic of allusions<sup>11</sup>. Genette, for example, adopted this view in his influential overview of the different types of intertextuality<sup>12</sup>. In contrast, others have argued for a more flexible approach, highlighting that allusions can also appear as exact quotations or proper names<sup>13</sup> or otherwise "preformed linguistic material"<sup>14</sup>, and may even openly state their source reference<sup>15</sup>. Whether highbrow or lowbrow, these references are generally perceived as having a sophisticated, sometimes 'intellectual' quality to them.

From what has been illustrated above, we may derive that covertness is the quintessential characteristic of allusions, while overt allusions may be classified as allusions by extension. As Irwin states, it is clear that an allusion is a type of reference, but in "what way it must be covert, implied, or indirect is a matter of some dispute"<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> A. M. Finkel, "Ob avtoperevode", *TKP*, 1 (1962), pp. 104-25; p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> Rauni Kaskenviita, "Alluusioiden Asterix-sarjankulttuurisidonnaisenäkännösongelman [Allusions as a culture-bound translation problem in the Asterix series]", *Sananjalka*, 33 (1991), pp. 77-92; p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Michael Pucci, *The Full-Knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1998, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1982, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion", *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1 (1976), pp. 105-28; p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> Leppihalme, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> William Irwin, "What Is an Allusion?", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 59:3 (2001), pp. 287-97; p. 287.

<sup>16</sup> Irwin, p. 287.

Covert allusions are often felt as problematic and sometimes too cryptic to be kept unaltered, even when an official translation may already exist (the term 'official translation' refers to the use of published translations in the case of books, to the translated dialogues and titles of films in distribution, and so on).

Sometimes it is an entire programme which, at a macro level, turns out to be an allusion to another text, playing from beginning to end with the presumed familiarity of the public with a given hypotext<sup>17</sup>. This operation can be carried out overtly, when a work is explicitly inspired by a source text, even if it deviates from it substantially – for example, season 4 episode 5 of *South Park* (Parker and Stone 1997-in production), which states from the very first lines of the script that it is an adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) – or it can also be carried out covertly, disseminating hints and clues so that the audience can recognise the hypotext(s) behind the hypertext. This is the case, for example, of the UK TV series *Life on Mars* (Graham *et al.* 2006-2007), a covert macroallusion to *The Wizard of Oz* (1900)<sup>18</sup>. As in this TV show, macroallusions are grasped by the audience by capturing dialogue excerpts, character and plot similarities, as well as visual hints, and by joining all the pieces to get a bigger picture. However, macroallusions appear to be more than just the sum of several overt and covert allusions, and they can be fully understood and appreciated in the wider context of the entire text which will clarify its bonds with the hypotext only when taken as a whole.

To sum up, macroallusions do not work so much (or not only) as accumulation of details but as a general concept of the film or programme, which might be expressed in either the visual or verbal style, or in a series of details, or in an explicit parody of plot, characters and contents. Macroallusions can be overt – for example in explicit parodies – but they are more often covert and quite subtle.

In films and television, allusions can also be non-verbal. Non-verbal allusions can be visual and/or acoustic, and their impact can be markedly exotic. These elements are some of the most characterising in terms of place and time. Their embeddedness into the source

<sup>17</sup> Ranzato, pp. 70-72.

<sup>18</sup> Ranzato, pp. 162-65. See L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz* [1900], London, Puffin Classics, 2008.

text cannot be rooted out and, in the case of a translation, they cannot be transferred into the target text by any strategy other than by eliminating them, that is, muting or editing them out, by adding an explicating caption on screen, or by simply leaving them untranslated as signs of foreignness. Often neglected by adapters, the potential of non-verbal references should be fully grasped as these signs are sometimes part of more complex verbal and non-verbal communicative acts. In the field of humour, this is what Zabalbeascoa recognises as “complex jokes”<sup>19</sup>, which combine the acoustic and the linguistic codes to achieve their humoristic effect. Díaz Cintas adds noise as one of the dimensions to this category, by which he means not only noise in itself but also suprasegmental and paralinguistic information such as intonation and regional accents<sup>20</sup>.

These broad conceptualisations will guide us in the qualitative evaluation of the Shakespearean allusions described in the following sections.

### *Shakespeare in film studies*

Film studies scholars have tended to think of films based on Shakespeare's works as forming a distinct genre<sup>21</sup>. According to some, there was a past era of “direct” or “straight Shakespeare”, an adaptational model that made both Olivier and Welles famously associated with all that was included in the meaning of “a Shakespeare film”, which has been followed by a period in which Shakespeare coupled creatively with popular culture<sup>22</sup>.

As Boots and Burt state, “while pride in anti-intellectualism has long roots as an American tradition [...] quite the opposite has historically been true of British cultural life”<sup>23</sup>, where ‘knowing one's Shakespeare’

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Zabalbeascoa, “Translating Jokes for Dubbed Television Situation Comedies”, *The Translator*, 2:2 (1996), pp. 235-57; pp. 251-55.

<sup>20</sup> Jorge Díaz Cintas, *La traducción audiovisual: el subtitulado*, Salamanca, Ediciones Almar, 2001, p. 122.

<sup>21</sup> Harry Keyishian, “Shakespeare and Movie Genre: The Case of *Hamlet*”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 72-81; p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> Boose and Burt, eds, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Incidentally, we might add, the same is true, if not even more true, for the Italian cultural tradition. More specifically, lowbrow contaminations of the ‘sacred’ Shake-

(and, more generally, the classics of the English canon) "has long been a rallying point of national superiority: the quotation of Shakespeare lines seems, in fact, to be used in Britain as a special, high-status kind of sub-language, a signalling code of sorts that regularly shows up in the language of even British detective novels"<sup>24</sup>. Although the present article generally shares this view, it is fair to remember that other scholars such as Keyishian argue that "it is doubtful there has ever been such a thing as a 'direct' Shakespeare" and it is hard to make "useful generalisations" for productions which are very different from each other across the whole span of film history<sup>25</sup>.

The American anti-intellectual stance complicates the reading of allusions to Shakespeare that, as exemplified in the following instances, have appeared in Hollywood films and US TV series in overt and covert ways. It is in fact a mode of speaking to the cultivated people in the know that, I would argue, clashes with this presumed anti-intellectualism and can indeed be related to the will of some authors (writers and directors) to present themselves as 'auteurs'<sup>26</sup> and thus give even mainstream audiovisual works an additional layer of interpretation that only a few members of the audience would arguably be able to grasp. The questions one should ask are, then, who is the recipient of these more or less overt allusions and what is the function that the author/auteur(s) assigned to them.

Film critics and reviewers have used "the discourse of authorship", arisen in European, rather than American critical institutions,

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spearean texts have acquired a scientific status thanks to the painstaking work of collection and analysis of allusions to Shakespeare (especially in Italian B-movies and commercials) done by Mariangela Tempera: see her essay "Uses and Abuses of Shakespeare in the Italian Media", in *Memoria di Shakespeare* 6 (2008), pp. 289-97.

<sup>24</sup> Boose and Burt, eds, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Keyishian, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> The concept of cinema auteurism includes "the particular creative, expressive and artistic activities of the personnel who collaborate in varying degrees to make a film and whose respective individual agencies determine in complex ways film style" (Paul Watson, "Approaches to Cinematic Authorship", in *Introduction to Film Studies*, ed. Bill Nichols, London-New York, Routledge, 2007, pp. 90-108; p. 107). The concepts on which auteurism and the cult of the auteur, born in the 1950s, are founded are the same which are linked to the view of cinema as an art: art, esthetics, artist, craft, agency, technique, practice, style, expression, experience (p. 104).

"to argue for the artistic respectability of cinema"<sup>27</sup>. It is a discourse that today can arguably be applied also to television, thanks to the proliferation of quality TV series<sup>28</sup> in recent times. While the notion of authorship "is not central to the legal and contractual basis of film production and distribution"<sup>29</sup>, and even less, I would argue, to the creative team which usually constitutes the 'author' of a television series (where it is usually the 'creator' and/or team of writers that is mostly associated with the word author, more than the director<sup>30</sup>), "it still has an enormous influence within cultural discourse"<sup>31</sup>. The author-name can become central to the marketing of the film or TV product, supporting the cultural and cult status of these audiovisual products. "Additionally, with the withering away of the socialist alternative to consumer capitalism, individualist discourses enjoy high status globally", writes Crofts<sup>32</sup>, who continues, citing Lapsley and Westlake<sup>33</sup>, by stating that the author can further serve as a

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Crofts, "Authorship and Hollywood", in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, eds John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 310-24; p. 311.

<sup>28</sup> Quality TV and auteur television are the object of several television studies and of critics' reviews (see for example Gary R. Edgerton and Jeffrey P. Jones, eds, *The Essential HBO Reader*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009; Mark Jancovich and James Lyons, eds, *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans*, London, BFI Publishing, 2003; Mark Leverette, Brian L. Ott and Cara Louise Buckley, *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, New York-London, Routledge, 2008; Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, eds, *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2007; Robin Nelson, *State of Play: Contemporary "High-End" TV Drama*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007). According to Thompson, quality programmes feature all or most of these characteristics: "A large ensemble cast; a memory; a new genre formed by mixing old ones; a tendency to be literary and writer based; textual self-consciousness; subject matter tending toward the controversial; aspiration toward realism; a quality pedigree; attracting an audience with blue-chip demographics" (Robert J. Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER*, Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 1996, pp. 13-16).

<sup>29</sup> Crofts, p. 322.

<sup>30</sup> Notable exceptions to this rule are very few, as the director of a series usually changes from episode to episode even in the cases in which the director is also the creator, as in Mark Frost's and David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). *The Knick* (2014-in production) (see following section), however, is one of these exceptions, as Steven Soderbergh directed the two seasons which have been broadcast so far while he is not one of the original creators.

<sup>31</sup> Crofts, p. 322.

<sup>32</sup> Crofts, p. 322.

<sup>33</sup> Rob Lapsley and Mike Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988, pp. 127-28.



"constructed coherence" with which the reader (viewer, in our case) identifies.

As Willems indirectly suggests, postmodern representations of Shakespeare, "with [their] self-referential system of echoes, allusions and visual quotations", have been paving the way for audiences to create a familiarity, if not with Shakespearean plays, at least with their representation in Shakespearean author films (like those by Welles, Kurosawa, Olivier, Zeffirelli and, more recently, Branagh)<sup>34</sup>. As Boose and Burt have it, "even films which adapt the Shakespeare script faithfully as Branagh's [...], speak within a metacinematic discourse of self-reference" in which, by quoting other canonic (and not necessarily Shakespearean) films, "they situate themselves in reference as much to the works of other directors as to a Shakespeare tradition"<sup>35</sup>.

It is thus to audiences which have arguably built a more or less rich network of audiovisual allusions to Shakespeare that mainstream films and television series presumably speak, building a far from simplistic relationship between author and recipient audiences.

### *Listen: the auteur is speaking*

The 2006 US film *Inside Man* is the story of a Manhattan bank robbery and ensuing police investigation, featuring famous Hollywood stars. Everything about the film speaks mainstream language and as such, as an elegant genre film, it was mainly received: a very well-made, well-directed, well-acted crime thriller. At least three elements, however, show that the film aspires to a higher status than that of a regular Hollywood movie: it is directed by a recognised 'author', Spike Lee; it makes early use of voice-over narration<sup>36</sup>; it opens with the following monologue by 'the robber':

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<sup>34</sup> Michèle Willems, "Video and Its Paradoxes", in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, pp. 35-46; p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> Boose and Burt, eds, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> Despite being recognised as a potential sign of 'weakness' on the part of film-makers, because it is often used to fill in gaps in the plot by borrowing more or less verbatim excerpts from literary sources, voice-over narration is also associated with the many auteurs who memorably used this device in their films for artistic effect: Allen, Coen, Coppola, Fincher, Gilliam, Kubrick, Malick, Mankiewicz, Nolan, Scorsese, Truffaut, Welles, Wilder, to name but just a few, successfully availed themselves of this narrative feature.

0.42-1.34

My name is Dalton Russell. Pay strict attention to what I say because I choose my words carefully and I never repeat myself. I've told you my name. That's the 'who'. The 'where' could most readily be described as a prison cell. But there's a vast difference between being stuck in a tiny cell and being in prison. The 'what' is easy. Recently I planned and set in motion events to execute the perfect bank robbery. That's also the 'when'. As for the 'why', beyond the obvious financial motivation, it's exceedingly simple. Because I can. Which leaves us only with the 'how'. And therein, as the Bard would tell us, lies the rub.

As the man himself emphasises ("I choose my words carefully"), his lexicon is interspersed with higher-register variants of more common words and expressions: "vast", "set in motion", "execute", "beyond", and especially the formal "exceedingly", are all used in the place of more colloquial words which one would perhaps expect from a criminal. Dalton's idiolect is thus established as that of no ordinary bank robber, even before he (mis)quotes from *Hamlet* (III.i.65): "therein [...] lies the rub".

Beyond the need for characterisation, the quote from Shakespeare and the mention of the Bard perform an obvious task: as this is evidently, to judge by his speech, no ordinary bank robber, the film is no ordinary tale of robbery. It is one told by auteur Spike Lee who speaks directly to those members of the audience who will appreciate the cultivated allusion. By associating himself with the Bard, Lee creates from the very first moments of the film an indissoluble link between the two authors (film director and playwright), establishing his film as a work which transcends the limited constraints of the thriller genre it is supposedly cast in.

By translating these words with the Italian: "Ed è qui, il grande Bardo direbbe, che c'è l'intoppo", the Italian dubbing adapter proves to have acknowledged the overt allusion by translating "rub" with "intoppo", the official translation chosen in some of the best Italian translations of the play<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, London, The Arden Shakespeare, 1997; see the following Italian translations: Masolino D'Amico, *Amleto*, Milano, Baldini Castoldi Dalai editore, 2005; Agostino Lombardo, *Amleto*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2006; Raffaello Piccoli, *Amleto*, in *Tutte le opere*, ed. Mario Praz, Firenze, Sansoni, 1965; Alessandro Serpieri, *Amleto*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2003.

Shakespeare's words may be encapsulated in adaptations from other literary works for an effect which amplifies the works' claim to auteurism. Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (*Barry Lyndon*, 1975) does much to create a visual allusion to Hamlet from the very first scenes in which young Lord Bullington makes his entry. A pale, tormented child whose mother has remarried in haste, when he is reproached by her for insulting his father(-in-law), he despondently retorts with the words: "Madam, *you* have insulted my father!", a covert but clear allusion to the "Mother, you have my father much offended" line from *Hamlet* (III.iv.9).

A perhaps less obviously auteurish reinterpretation of a high-end literary classic is the cult teen comedy *Clueless* (Heckerling 1995). Loosely based on Jane Austen's *Emma*, the film is the coming-of-age story of Cher, a popular Beverly Hills high school girl. When her stepbrother's snotty girlfriend misattributes the "to thine own self be true" line (*Hamlet*, I.iii.78) to Hamlet and Cher corrects her, the following exchange leaves the smug girlfriend in dismay:

42.14-42.32

Heather: It's just like Hamlet said: "To thine own self be true".

Cher: Ah, no, Hamlet didn't say that.

Heather: I think that I remember *Hamlet* accurately.

Cher: Well, I remember Mel Gibson accurately and he didn't say that.

That Polonius guy did.

"In the manipulation of cultural capital as a means of asserting status", Boose and Burt argue, Cher "clinches her superiority inside of a contest that defines itself through Shakespeare"<sup>38</sup>. The merry game of postmodern intertextuality, however, makes the decoding of these lines in terms of who is their recipient not as straightforward as the apparent lightness of the film would suggest:

who is the Shakespeare joke on – the girlfriend, Cher, or just whom? Just what is the high-status cultural currency here, and how does "Shakespeare" function as a sign? Does the fact that Cher knows *Hamlet* not via the presupposed Shakespearean original but only via Mel Gibson's role in Zeffirelli's movie signify her cultural illiteracy – or her literacy?<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Boose and Burt, eds, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Boose and Burt, eds, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, p. 8.

The way in which Franco Zeffirelli's films contribute to this supposed literacy but also the way the apparent mismatch of high-brow and low-brow culture complicates the journey and the reading of Shakespeare's "cultural capital" is also testified by the fascinating and somewhat surreal conversation between John Travolta's Tony Manero, in *Saturday Night Fever* (Badham 1977), and his new, upwardly mobile dance partner, Stephanie, who mentions at one of their meetings that she has just seen Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968):

00.40.26-00.40.51

Stephanie: Like we've seen Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Tony: *Romeo and Juliet*, yeah? I read that in high school. That's, that's Shakespeare, right?

Stephanie: No, it's Zeffirelli, the director of the movie. You know, the movie. Film.

Tony: Yeah. You know what I never understood about that, that *Romeo and Juliet*, I never understood why Romeo took that poison so quick, you know. I feel like he could've waited or something.

Stephanie: Ha, it's the way they took the poison in those days.

As in the former excerpt, here is a girl who is very sure of her Shakespeare, but her Shakespeare is the low-brow Shakespeare of the movies, while her naïf, working class partner who remembers his school books and hopes to contribute with something intelligent to the conversation, is remembering another Shakespeare, the high-brow one he studied on the canonical texts. She is sympathetic of his ignorance and feels she has to explain that by "movie" she means "film", and further affirms her cultural superiority by stating with confidence that that was the way poison was taken in those days. Although this film predates the period of cinema's height of fascination with the postmodern mixture of popular and literary culture, it foregrounds what will become a habitual practice by making the 'original' Shakespearean texts recede into the background.

Shakespeare is on the forefront also in some of the most popular recent TV series. Not surprisingly, quality TV productions often quote or allude to his works, as a way of strengthening their auteur aura. It is symptomatic that the two US series which have most drawn from Shakespeare's plays are related to directors who are first of all cinema authors: *House of Cards* (2013-in production) is

produced, among others, by David Fincher, who also directed its first two groundbreaking episodes, while the two extant seasons of *The Knick* (2014-in production) were entirely directed by the stylish film-maker Steven Soderbergh<sup>40</sup>.

More than quoting Shakespeare directly, *House of Cards* can be considered a covert macroallusion (as defined above) to Shakespearean plays, especially *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. The fact that lead actor and co-producer Kevin Spacey formerly performed the role of king Richard III in a memorable production of the play on the London stage (directed by Sam Mendes in 2011) is only the first, if perhaps most important, trigger for a chain of associations revolving around this play, and one that encourages the thought that the Shakespearean echoes have been consciously pursued. The visual (and acoustic) link to *Richard III* is also guaranteed by the stylistic device adopted throughout the series: the main character Frank Underwood often breaks the fourth wall by speaking confidentially to the audience in malignant asides. There is no need to include in this study the full list of resonances which, due to the success of the series, have duly been noted by devoted fans and critics on several websites<sup>41</sup>, but it is relevant to mention the clever way they are interwoven into the verbal and visual narrative with elegant results: from direct quotations, like the apparently incongruous line from *Julius Caesar* III.i.273<sup>42</sup> ("Cry, Havoc", said he who fought chaos with chaos, "And let slip the dogs of war", confides Frank to the audience in season 2 episode 12) to more covert allusions such as the meeting of Lady Macbeth/Claire Underwood with a malevolent old woman while she is jogging in a graveyard (season 1 episode 3), a fascinating allusion to Macbeth's encounter with the witches, in a scene which

<sup>40</sup> A third TV series, less successful in terms of viewership, but critically acclaimed, is the equally Shakespearean *Boss* (Safinia 2011-2012, USA), whose leading actor, Kelsey Grammer, told reporters: "We've borrowed a lot from Shakespeare [...]. That's the kind of stuff that is classically Shakespearean or Jacobean" (Jill Serjeant, "Forget *Frasier*. Mett Kelsey Grammer's Brooding *Boss*", *Reuters Television News*, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-boss-idUSTRE79H34S20111018>, last accessed 31 December 2016).

<sup>41</sup> See for example <https://www.buzzfeed.com/chelsealucas/quotes-from-macbeth-that-may-as-well-be-from-hous-1ozqr>; <https://usedbooksinclass.com/2013/02/18/house-of-cards-is-macbeth-dressed-in-borrowed-ropes/>.

<sup>42</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, in *Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, eds Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998.

a foggy atmosphere and the gloomy setting contribute to evoke the Shakespearean counterpart. And it will be sufficient to note that the mark of the author is conveyed through Shakespearean visual allusions even in the 'marketing paratext' of the series, as the image of Claire Underwood washing her bloody hands in one of the promotional photographs of the show graphically portrays:



The references to *Hamlet*, to *Henry V* and *Henry VI, Part 3*, in Soderbergh's *The Knick* are also meant to serve similar purposes: to construe the linguistic representation of a cultured, sophisticated leader of men who thinks outside the box – in this case doctor John Thackery, chief surgeon in an early twentieth-century New York hospital:

08.13-08.46

Christensen: You do realise if you choose to join us, the work will be hard and the hours long, the results slow and agonising, and we will see no shortage of death at our own hands.

Thackery: But the rewards...

Christensen: The rewards will be the achievement of it all.

Thackery: When the blast of war blows in our ears, then imitate the action of the tiger.

Christensen: Hmm?

Thackery: Shakespeare.

Christensen: Never read him. (*The Knick*, season 1 episode 2)

Although Thackery never speaks in asides, his Shakespearean moments, as the one cited above, are largely reminiscent of the way Shakespeare's texts are used in the dialogues of *House of Cards*, as a

way to portray a charismatic leader who, however unscrupulous, is also exceptionally adept at what he does.

It is my contention that the idiolects of these main characters, both marked by their creative genius, their behavioural extremities, their proclivity for cultivated allusions, serve as a mouthpiece for the auteur, the genius at the centre of a creative crew, a *modus operandi* which, as already mentioned, is the true nature of television authorship.

Perhaps the best way to detect the link between Shakespeare and the 'sense of authorship' is by finding it in the least probable sites, that is light comedies. The film *LA Story* (Jackson 1990), for example, was written by its leading actor, the popular comedian Steve Martin. His ambition to raise the film to arthouse cinema material is evident from the opening scenes, which the production notes on the DVD define as "Fellini-esque". The character played by Martin opens the story with a monologue (yet another voice-over narration) in praise of Los Angeles, which parodies John of Gaunt's deathbed speech to Richard II (*Richard II*, II.i<sup>43</sup>), substituting "this Los Angeles" for the concluding words, "this England":

2.57-3.10

Harris: I have a favourite quote about LA, by William Shakespeare. He said: "This other Eden, demi-Paradise, this precious stone set in a silver sea, this earth, this realm, this Los Angeles".

The film – which, for the elements in its plot and for the role magic plays in it, can be interpreted as a covert macroallusion to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (though not presented in the paratexts or launched as such) – even includes in its cultural mix a quite literal gravedigger scene. It further reveals Martin's authorial ambitions in the last words from the magic billboard on the side of the road that his alter ego likes to consult from time to time: "What I really want to do is direct".

A game of overt and covert allusions is played in another light comedy by two established authors, Joel and Ethan Coen. *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003) has the beautiful husband-hunter Marilyn quote from

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<sup>43</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Peter Ure, London, The Arden Shakespeare, 1956.

no less than *Venus and Adonis* ("Dismiss your vows, your feigned tears, your flattery / for where a heart is hard they make no battery", ll. 425-26<sup>44</sup>) in an engaging dialogue exchange with the powerful divorce attorney Miles whom she will eventually fall in love with. This is not the only time Shakespeare is quoted ("The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars but in ourselves", quotes Miles from *Julius Caesar*, I.ii.139-40)<sup>45</sup> in a film whose starring couple's quarrelsome duets are largely reminiscent of those of Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Whether in dramatic or comedic films, Shakespearean quotations and allusions are always highlighted in the audiovisual texts by having them delivered by key characters who speak them with a wink to selected members of the recipient audience.

### *There's the dub*

In a dubbing country such as Italy, 'dubbing adapters' is an umbrella term which can include a variable number of professionals: adapter proper, translator, dubbing director, even actors and distributors, as the latter often participate actively in the creation of translated texts that, depending on the social context and history of each dubbing country, and especially on the potential target audiences, can be characterised by various degrees of 'distance' from the original. In the specific field of Shakespearean adaptations, the simplification of the early modern English of the plays into contemporary standard Italian is a common practice in film dubbing<sup>46</sup>, with the obvious aim of expanding the potential target audience.

This handling of the Shakespearean texts in Italian translation for dubbing has some similarities with the practice of literal translations of Shakespeare's plays into modern English, usually aimed at the student market. In the *No Fear Shakespeare* series (now also available at

<sup>44</sup> William Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*, in *Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*.

<sup>45</sup> Incidentally, George Clooney, who plays the role of Miles, would quote the same line from *Julius Caesar* in *Good Night and Good Luck*, the film he directed in 2005.

<sup>46</sup> For notes on the transpositions of *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet*, see Irene Ranzato, "Manipulating the Classics: Film Dubbing as an Extreme Form of Rewriting", in *Challenges for the 21st Century: Dilemmas, Ambiguities, Directions*, eds Richard Ambrosini, Alessandra Contenti and Daniela Corona, Roma, Edizioni Q, 2011, pp. 573-81.



<http://nfs.sparknotes.com>)<sup>47</sup>, for example, the cover of each book proclaims that the series includes "the play *plus* a translation that anyone can understand". Shakespeare's original text is on the left side, while on the right is an "accessible, plain English translation". In the same way, Italian dubbings of Shakesperean films – with no exception from Mankiewicz to Branagh to Luhrmann, to name but a few – usually offer a version of the plays that 'anyone can understand'. Compare for example the following *Hamlet* excerpt (III.i.121-30) – faithfully reported in Branagh's film adaptation – to the *No Fear* simplified version of Shakespeare's text<sup>48</sup> and the Italian dubbing of the film:

Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery.

#### *No Fear Shakespeare*

Get yourself to a convent at once. Why would you want to give birth to more sinners? I'm fairly good myself, but even so I could accuse myself of such horrible crimes that it would've been better if my mother had never given birth to me. I am arrogant, vengeful, ambitious, with more ill will in me than I can fit into my thoughts, and more than I have time to carry it out in. Why should people like me be crawling around between earth and heaven? Every one of us is a criminal. Don't believe any of us. Hurry to a convent.

#### Italian dubbing adaptation in Branagh's *Hamlet*

Vattene in convento. Perché vuoi essere una levatrice di peccatori? Guarda, io sono abbastanza onesto ma potrei accusarmi di tali cose che mia madre avrebbe fatto meglio a non partorirmi. Sono molto orgoglioso, vendicativo, ambizioso, con più peccati sotto mano che pensieri in cui versarli, immaginazione per crearli o tempo per attuarli. Che cosa dovrebbero fare gli esseri come me che strisciano fra il cielo e la terra? Siamo un branco di canaglie. Non credere a nessuno. Chiuditi in convento.

<sup>47</sup> *No Fear Shakespeare*, <http://nfs.sparknotes.com/>, last accessed 31 December 2016.

<sup>48</sup> John Crowther, ed., *No Fear Hamlet*, <http://nfs.sparknotes.com/hamlet/>, last accessed 31 December 2016.

### Back translation

Get yourself to a convent. Why do you want to be a midwife of sinners? Look, I'm fairly honest, but I could accuse myself of such things that it would have been better if my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more sins to hand than thoughts to pour them in, imagination to create them or time to carry them out. What should people like me, who crawl between heaven and earth, do? We are a gang of knaves. Don't believe anyone. Shut yourself into a convent.

With the addition of some heavy manipulation ("midwife of sinners" instead of "breeder of sinners"), the spirit of the dubbing version is similar to the rationale behind the simplified play. As Hulbert *et al.* argue, "one might consider these translations of Shakespeare into contemporary vernacular prose as a sort of 'Bottom translation'"<sup>49</sup>, with reference to how this character in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reports biblical passages in a comically trivialised way. In all these instances, 'high culture' is simplified and made more accessible. Whether the operation carried out by dubbing adapters can be considered educational is doubtful. What is certain, is that this is the Shakespeare that has always been offered to Italian film audiences.

If the audience is mainly one of children and young adults, the simplification may become omission. In the 1971 film version of *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (Stuart), whose screenplay was written by the same author of the book it is based on, Roald Dahl, none of the quotes from Shakespeare's plays spoken by the eerie main character of the fable made it to the Italian version, thus impoverishing his idiolect considerably. "Is it my soul that calls upon my name?", quotes Wonka, for example, from *Romeo and Juliet* (II. ii.164)<sup>50</sup>. The phrase is given in the film a quite different rendition: "Ho il timore di aver tralasciato qualche particolare" ("I fear I have overlooked some detail") (48.18-48.20).

Not all adapters are so radical in manipulating the language of dialogues, but in some instances their work can still result in a more or less considerable departure from the original.

<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. and Robert L. York, *Shakespeare and Youth Culture*, New York-Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Brian Gibbons, London, The Arden Shakespeare, 2003.

In 1991 Oliver Stone cast the Kennedy assassination through the lens of *Julius Caesar* in *JFK*, quoting *Hamlet* in the process. The film reveals its inspiration from the Roman play especially in the final section of the trial, in which Jim Garrison, the district attorney who devoted a large part of his life to investigate president John Kennedy's assassination, expounds his theory:

3.02.51-3.03.04

President Kennedy was murdered by a conspiracy that was planned in advance by the highest levels of our government and was carried out by fanatical and disciplined cold warriors in the Pentagon and CIA's covert-operation apparatus.

This image of Kennedy/Caesar as the victim of a conspiracy plotted by those who were closest to him is preceded and followed by two effective *Hamlet* quotations:

3.00.46-3.00.58

Garrison: We've all become Hamlets in our country, children of a slain father-leader whose killers still possess the throne. The ghost of J.F. Kennedy confronts us with the secret murder at the heart of the American Dream.

Italian dubbing adaptation: Siamo diventati tutto Amleti in questo Paese, figli di un padre padrone assassinato i cui assassini siedono ancora sul trono. Il fantasma di John Fitzgerald Kennedy ci rivela un altro attentato, quello contro il sogno americano.

3.04.28-3.04.36

Garrison: ...you cannot see these documents for another 75 years. I'm in my early 40s, so I'll have shuffled off this mortal coil by then.

Italian dubbing adaptation: Non potrete vedere quei documenti per altri 75 anni. Io ho passato da poco la quarantina e quindi avrò già lasciato questa valle di lacrime per quella data.

Both Italian translations of these references to *Hamlet* show how the purpose of the adapter was not that of sticking strictly to the Shakespeare allusions. The image of the *padre padrone*<sup>51</sup> and especially

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<sup>51</sup> Literally "father, master", it is itself an originally literary reference which, through Gavino Ledda's book *Padre padrone. L'educazione di un pastore* (Milano, Baldini &

the Biblical one of the *valle di lacrime* (valley of tears), which substitutes the quote from *Hamlet's* "to be or not to be" monologue, virtually erase these important threads of the fascinating Shakesperean tapestry that the film director and writer Oliver Stone was able to weave into the original<sup>52</sup>.

### *Educational Shakespeare*

In 1994, Danny DeVito and the US Army found *Henry V* and *Hamlet* to be the perfect tool for transforming semi-literate and low-achieving soldiers into a proper army company in *Renaissance Man* (Marshall) which culminates with a *Hamlet* rap. A few years earlier, the much more celebrated *Dead Poets Society* (Weir 1989), to which this film is probably inspired, also ended with a Shakespeare play (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and featured an equally passionate teacher trying to ram the Bard down his pupils' throats, this time through impersonations of popular actors playing Shakesperean roles. Both these characters are conceived to convey the pedagogical import of Shakespeare's works through the classic figure of the teacher.

Yet another teacher who uses Shakespeare in an allusive game of references is featured, surprisingly, in an Arnold Schwarzenegger's film, *The Last Action Hero* (McTiernan 1992), where the character teaching *Hamlet* to her unenthusiastic students is Joan Plowright, a renowned Shakesperean actress and wife of Lawrence Olivier. As Boose and Burt comment:

The in-joke is included, but it is at the same time made purely extraneous to the pleasures of *The Last Action Hero*, where pleasure is

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Castoldi, 2014 [1975]) and especially Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's film *Padre padrone* (1977), has long entered the Italian imaginary and lexicon, and it is a collocation used frequently to refer to a controlling, menacing and often violent father figure. Not the positive image Garrison meant to convey with his original words.

<sup>52</sup> Incidentally, *JFK* is not the only Stone film to reveal its inspiration from Shakespeare. Echoes of his plays can be found in other films: *Richard III* in *Scarface* (De Palma 1983, scripted by Stone), and *Macbeth* in *Nixon* (Stone 1995) (Charles L.P. Silet, *Oliver Stone: Interviews*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2001, p. 177; James M. Welsh and Donald M. Whaley, *The Oliver Stone Encyclopedia*, Lanham, Toronto-Plymouth, UK, The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2013, p. 221).

distinctly located in the smash-bang thrills of pop culture. As the truant takes his seat and the teacher informs the students that they may recognize the actor, Sir Laurence Olivier, from his work in a television commercial or from playing Zeus in *Clash of Titans* (dir. Desmond Davis, 1981), the relevance of Shakespeare seems most vividly represented by the comically outmoded 16mm projector through which the old Olivier film is being shown.<sup>53</sup>

A more subtle educational path is followed in another American film aimed at young adults. *The Lion King* (Allers and Minkoff 1994) reworked *Hamlet* for a younger generation and cast Jeremy Irons in the role of the typical British villain in an American movie: he dubs Scar, the evil uncle of leading character Simba, and murderer of the legitimate king, the latter's father. A macroallusion that necessarily speaks to the parents more than to the supposedly privileged children audience, this Disney film has much to say through Shakespeare: even the opening song, the *Circle of Life* by Elton John<sup>54</sup>, whose lyrics explain how we are all born and we all must die in a circle of life, could arguably be interpreted as a Disneyan take of *Hamlet's* (I.ii.90) line "But you must know your father lost a father". The fact that these words are spoken by the villain Claudius in Shakespeare's play, and the fact that Scar/Claudius in the film is stereotyped with a dark colour palette and effeminate manners, only complicate the reading and add further meanings to this multi-layered Shakespearean audiovisual text for children and adults.

With a different kind of children, undoubtedly, in the mind of the authors, quoting or alluding to Shakespeare for pedagogical purposes is openly demystified in various places of the popular cartoon series *The Simpsons* (Groening 1987-in production). Apart from straightforward and irreverent parodies such as the *Hamlet* of season 13 episode 14 – which opens with the star of the show, Bart, sleeping under a poster that says "Danes do it melancholy" and a pennant that reads "Feudalism" – the show includes frequent, often unacknowledged, quotations from the plays, interspersed over the long span of the series's lifetime, meant "to parody both Shakespeare and the idea of quoting his plays as a means of practical advice or wisdom"<sup>55</sup>:

<sup>53</sup> Boose and Burt, eds, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> Elton John, *Circle of Life*, in *The Lion King Soundtrack*, USA, Walt Disney Records, 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Hulbert, Wetmore, Jr. and York, p. 27.

Bart: What about his name?

Lisa: His name doesn't matter. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

Bart: Not if you call them stenchblossoms. (*The Simpsons*, season 9 episode 2)

This typically Simpsonian down-to-earth repartee is in harmony with a treatment of the classics in general, not only Shakespeare's plays, which is common to irreverent cartoon shows such as *The Simpsons* and the already mentioned *South Park*. Nevertheless, this type of impudent parodies which seem so distant from the pedagogical approach of the earlier examples does not diminish, as Boose and Burt argue, in fact it augments, the import of Shakespeare as a necessary signifier in the postmodern discourse: "[h]e is that which must be posited [...] in order for popular culture to declare itself [...] unindebted to the 'S-guy'"<sup>56</sup>.

## Conclusions

Within the plethora of references to Shakespeare that intersperse even our contemporary cultural discourses, this paper has focused on audiovisual fictional works which cite Shakespeare and his plays for 'educational' purposes and those which, as it is argued, serve as a mouthpiece for the film or TV 'auteur'. The article in fact contends that there exists a specific bond between the use of allusions to Shakespeare in popular audiovisual products and the film studies concept of auteurism.

In some relevant cases, the handling of Shakesperean allusions by Italian adapters for dubbing has been looked into, and some similarities have been found with the practice of literal translations of Shakespeare's plays into modern English, usually aimed at the student market. As in these popular books and websites, Italian dubbings, too, provide translations "that anyone can understand" and in this effort of simplification, allusions can be manipulated or omitted.

It is apparent from the examples which have been put forward, that whether revered or demistified, explicitly quoted or covertly alluded to in popular films and TV shows, Shakespeare and his plays

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<sup>56</sup> Boose and Burt, eds, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, pp. 19-20.

seem to be firmly grounded in contemporary culture, including youth culture, although it is also evident that in the game of intertextual referencing, the 'original' Shakespearean texts may recede into the background in favour of their audiovisual renarrations.



### *Films and TV shows*

- Roger Allers and Ron Minkoff, *The Lion King*, 1994, USA.  
John Badham, *Saturday Night Fever*, 1977, USA.  
Kenneth Branagh, *Henry V*, 1989, UK.  
Kenneth Branagh, *Hamlet*, 1996, UK, USA.  
George Clooney, *Good Night and Good Luck*, 2005, USA.  
Joel and Ethan Coen, *Intolerable Cruelty*, 2003, USA.  
Desmond Davis, *Clash of Titans*, 1981, USA.  
Brian De Palma, *Scarface*, 1983, USA.  
Mark Frost and David Lynch, *Twin Peaks*, 1990-1991, USA.  
Matt Groening, *The Simpsons*, 1987-in production, USA.  
Amy Heckerling, *Clueless*, 1995, USA.  
Mick Jackson, *LA Story*, 1990, USA.  
Beeban Kidron, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, 2004, UK, France, Germany Ireland, USA.  
Stanley Kubrick, *Barry Lyndon*, 1975, UK, USA, Ireland.  
Spike Lee, *Inside Man*, 2006, USA.  
Sharon Maguire, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 2001, UK, USA, France.  
Penny Marshall, *Renaissance Man*, 1994, USA.  
John McTiernan, *The Last Action Hero*, 1992, USA.  
Trey Parker and Matt Stone, *South Park*, 1997-in production, USA.  
Farhad Safinia, *Boss*, 2011-2012, USA.

Steven Soderbergh, *The Knick*, created by Jack Amiel and Michael Begler, 2014-in production, USA.  
Oliver Stone, *JFK*, 1991, USA.  
Oliver Stone, *Nixon*, 1995, USA.  
Mel Stuart, *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, 1971, USA.  
Paolo e Vittorio Taviani, *Padre padrone*, 1977, Italy.  
Peter Weir, *Dead Poets Society*, 1989, USA.  
Beau Willimon, *House of Cards*, 2013-in production, USA.  
Franco Zeffirelli, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1968, UK, Italy.