



Grau d'Estudis Anglesos

Treball de Fi de Grau

Curs 2016-2017

TÍTOL: 'Divergent Shakespeare: Race, Sexuality, Gender and Performativity in Recent Shakespeare Film Adaptation'

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Barcelona, 12 setembre de 2017

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ABSTRACT:

From its Renaissance in the 1980s, Shakespeare film and television adaptation has become a more accessible and prolific bridge between contemporary audiences and Shakespeare’s work as a playwright. With the turn of the millennium, they have increased both in their number and difference from their predecessors, since the first adaptations in the 1930s, but so has changed our perspective as 21st century audience towards Shakespeare and the theatre of his time as cultural emblems. In the last twenty years, a new wave of Shakespearean adaptations has been responding to the audience’s needs in the form of film and television by providing us with some of the more ‘divergent’, experimental, and original adaptations of Shakespeare, and bringing the plays to life once again. By looking at and comparing three examples of Shakespeare film adaptations produced after the year 2000 — *Caesar Must Die* (2012), *Private Romeo* (2011), and *Omkara* (2006) — and analysing their approach to race, gender, sexuality and some of the performative aspects in the plays and films such as space, text and characters, this study will try to explore and document how more recent and less popularized by western media Shakespeare adaptations have been addressing and subverting the original texts, but also responding and establishing a dialogue with 21st century aesthetics, and ethical and socio-political issues.

KEYWORDS: William Shakespeare, cinema, adaptation, modernisation, contemporary critical theory.

TÍTULO: ‘Divergent Shakespeare: Race, Sexuality, Gender and Performativity in Recent Shakespeare Film Adaptation’

RESUMEN:

Desde su Renacimiento en la década de 1980, la adaptación <cine de Shakespeare, se ha convertido en un puente de más prolífico y fácil acceso entre su audiencia contemporánea y su trabajo como dramaturgo. Con el inicio del nuevo milenio, han incrementado tanto en número como en diferencias con sus predecesoras, desde las primeras adaptaciones en la década de 1930, al igual que también ha cambiado nuestra perspectiva como espectadores del siglo XXI con respecto a Shakespeare y sus obras como emblemas culturales. En los últimos veinte años, una nueva ola de adaptaciones shakespearianas ha respondido a las necesidades de los espectadores, ya sea en formato televisivo o cinematográfico, aportando algunas de las adaptaciones más ‘divergentes’, experimentales, y originales, dando así vida a sus obras de nuevo. Examinando y comparando tres ejemplos de adaptaciones cinematográficas de Shakespeare producidas a partir del año 2000 — *Caesar Must Die* (2012), *Private Romeo* (2011), y *Omkara* (2006) — y analizando cómo cada una enfoca temas como raza, género y sexualidad, y algunos de los aspectos performativos de las obras teatrales y películas como el espacio, tiempo y personajes, este estudio tratará de explorar y documentar cómo adaptaciones de Shakespeare más recientes y menos popularizadas por los medios occidentales, han estado abordando y subvirtiendo los textos originales, además de respondiendo y estableciendo un diálogo con la estética, y cuestiones éticas y socio-políticas del siglo XXI.

PALABRAS CLAVE: William Shakespeare, cine, adaptaciones, modernización, teoría crítica contemporánea.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project could not have been possible without the support of those whose work and ideas, inside or outside university and unbeknownst to them, picked my curiosity on the first place and encouraged me to go further, learn more, and investigate.

I would also like to thank my tutor, Dr. Clara Escoda, whose constant motivation and inestimable help and contributions at an academic level have been most valuable, but also for her patience and comprehensiveness during some of the most challenging stages. I also owe to her, one of the people that have unclosed the theatre of Shakespeare to me, discovering some of the other film Shakespeares that were still unknown to me.

For this reason, I would also like to express my gratitude to everyone, family, friends and university colleagues who have been involved or showed interest in this project, since every single contribution, either as suggestions or words of encouragement, especially when I most needed them, has been of great help and much appreciated.

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I. INTRODUCTION: ‘Divergent Shakespeare: Race, Sexuality, Gender and Performativity in Recent Shakespeare Film Adaptation’

One year after the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare’s death, it still seems that such death might have been fictional, or a lie devised by Shakespeare academics to make us believe he was a living creature, a witty playwright and equally humorous actor in the London late-1500s, after discovering that he actually did not do any of those things, or even ever exist. Whichever the truth may be, there is no denying that William Shakespeare is one of the dead authors kept most alive. As someone whose Shakespeare curiosity was picked a few years before studying him and his plays at an academic level, his work became alive to me as soon as I was granted easy access to the content his plays, and later, I had the chance to expand it as a university student. Both through printed drama or cinematic adaptations, and even performances on the rare and lucky occasion, I have been interested in learning about what the figure of William Shakespeare has become through the centuries, not only as the Shakespeare we think, but also as the cultural emblem of Early English Modernity, and of his theatre in a more global and open sense.

Recent cultural materialist theory has emphasized the need to observe Shakespeare’s plays as a product of their time rather than being texts independent of the history and society of Early Modern England.¹ The same idea has been put forward by Marxist Shakespeare criticism, concretely by Scott Cutler Shershow in *Marxist Shakespeares*, who elaborates on the difficulty, even for scholars of Early Modern studies, to dismiss “the idea of a ‘universal Shakespeare’[...] despite all the many recent efforts to place him within his own period and document the historical construction of his cultural status” (245) he also points out, however, that theoretical and critical approaches to Shakespeare such as Marxism, feminism and the like sometimes appear to insist “to appropriate Shakespeare for [their] own ideology [...] to the imperialism and self-advancement of the particular group” (Vickers x-xii) . Further on, Cutler Shershow also admits that scholars increasingly agree that “Shakespeare’ finally exists only as a process of shared and shifting interpretation” (246), a claim not unlike the one taken by cultural materialism and much in line with the resulting Shakespeare film corpus that includes

¹ Within the field of Shakespearean studies, cultural materialism is considered to be the study of Shakespeare’s texts in relation to their historical significations and which rejects what is now considered ‘conventional literary criticism’.

more traditional cinematographic adaptations and the more recent or ‘non-realistic’, contemporary ones.

Much has been said already about Shakespeare adaptations both in television and cinematic format, and certainly more will be said in the future years, for it is one of the subjects of Shakespearean studies that has been discussed the most, and unlike the study of its literary sources, the subject of its discussion is in constant recreation, much like the study of the text’s performance on the stage. The *Guinness Book of Records* had listed “410 feature-length film and TV adaptations of William Shakespeare's plays as having been produced” in its edition of 1999 (Young), and the online database IMDb (The Internet Movie Database) “had listed Shakespeare as having writing credit on 1,171 films, with 21 films in active production, but not yet released, as of June 2016” (Brooke) making William Shakespeare’s plays the most adapted and filmed texts in any language. Anthony Davies pinpoints the release of Laurence Olivier’s adaptation of *Henry V* in 1944, as the milestone in the development and study of Shakespeare and film which, from then on, made cinematic adaptations a fixed subject within the study of Shakespeare and his works. Davies describes in his essay how the boom of film Shakespeare finally awakened the critics and reviewers, who had rejected previous cinematic adaptations, who had to admit then were being “faced with [...] cinematic adaptation[s] which operate on too many levels [to] be patronizingly dismissed or glibly celebrated” (3).

From the first known film adaptation of Shakespeare in 1899, a silent film known as the Herbert Beerbohm Tree *King John*, the first decades of Shakespeare film adaptation progressed through the steps of well-known and established artists such as Kenneth Branagh, Peter Hall, Derek Jacobi, Gregory Kozintsev, Akira Kurosawa, Ian McKellen, Trevor Nunn, Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles or Franco Zeffirelli, to name perhaps the most well-known Shakespeareans in active performance. In the 1990s, however, filmmakers started taking the risk of adapting Shakespeare into more different settings and taking more liberties with the texts than in the first decades, slowly liberating Shakespeare from its “literary exclusivity [of] the text as a holy grail, sacrilege to discover it” (Bogdanov 58). Those were the necessary steps towards what has been happening in the 90s with some notable exceptions, namely, a renaissance of Shakespearean adaptations. The work and influence of Kenneth Branagh has established him as one of the forerunners and authorities of cinema adaptations of the Shakespearean dramatic text, and a key figure to the resurgence of Shakespeare’s popularity in the screen during

the 1990s. At a point in Shakespeare history where the playwright's presence in the screen had been doomed to television adaptations, cinemas worldwide offered Hollywood-made productions of big economic proportions and well-known stars, like Branagh's *Henry V* (1989), which usually guaranteed a vast popular success while also appealing to those who were more familiar with Shakespeare and his plays. A fruitful and profitable combination of cinematic and theatrical Shakespeare ensured that other productions followed by with Branagh on the lead, both in front and behind the cameras, such as his *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), and his last Shakespearean success, the tremendously ambitious and equally monumental four-hour adaptation of *Hamlet* (1996). Nonetheless, even if Branagh became relevant thanks to the popularity his films achieved, especially in North America, in Britain he was considered to have sold yet another traditional and Thatcherite version of England's literary heritage, thus becoming another "of the feel-good Shakespearians" (Rothwell 235). Having achieved a position of popularity, however, allowed for the more traditional and realistic Shakespeare — nowadays considered already 'classic' and representational adaptations — to evolve into the more experimental, 'non-realistic', and 'divergent' ones in the late 90s, but especially in the 21st century. Surprisingly, those more daring and 'divergent' adaptations of Shakespeare, even if they are in fact being made more and more often nowadays, appear to be far from reaching the level of interest and discussion that Branagh, Olivier and other more well-known directors generally occupy. The difficulty the more 'divergent' Shakespeares seem to have met in breaking away from more 'classic' representative adaptations, is not unlike the opposition and prejudice Shakespeare adaptation had also to face in theatre and Shakespeare criticism prejudices before it started to be popularized and well regarded both by critics and the public. This previous transition took place forty years ago, in what Davies describes as the "especially traumatic" historical moment when theatre Shakespeare and film Shakespeare met (1).

The question of fidelity and the general dismissal of 'non-realistic' or non-conventional adaptations seems to have made it difficult for recent Shakespeare film adaptations to pass the landmark test by Shakespeare scholars while, surprisingly, being well esteemed by film critics and highly praised by secondary, minor or non-western film academies and film institutions mainly. There have been some tentative attempts to document and comment on some of these lesser known post-90s adaptations, which have been cast a shadow on by some of the more popular, often youth-themed adaptations like

Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), or Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), the high-school rewriting of *The Taming of the Shrew*, or by films by already known and well-established directors such as Kenneth Branagh. However, only a very rudimentary link exists between the more traditional or 'realistic' adaptations and the more queer, subversive and 'divergent' ones that have been appearing more and more often since the 1990s, which either time or the fidelity hierarchy built around adaptations and the critics of adaptations have not paid much attention to. Now, the challenge is in taking a step forward and consider the void that has been left between criticism of the late 90s Shakespeare film adaptations, and the film adaptations that have been made in the last twenty years. To this aim, this study is going to focus on three examples, and will resume the conversation between Shakespeare and its adaptations, since their proliferation means also a diversification in their approach, as the inevitable intertextual extension of Shakespeare as a cultural emblem.

The main content of my study will consist in a comparison of three cinematic adaptations of three tragedies by William Shakespeare: Vishal Bhardwaj's Bollywood adaptation of *Othello*, *Omkaara* (2006), Alan Brown's *Private Romeo* (2011), a homosexual reinvention of *Romeo and Juliet*, and Vittorio and Paolo Taviani's experimental film *Caesar Must Die* (2012) on the process of performing *Julius Caesar*. Thus, I will approach the adaptations from the perspective of recent film adaptation theorists such as Robert Stam or Linda Hutcheon, but also in relation to Shakespeare film theory and Shakespeare literary criticism. As for each of the content of the films themselves and in relation with their original Shakespearean textual counterparts, I will look at them as undeniable adaptations within the framework of Shakespeare film adaptations, and point out some of the considerable differences between the text and the adaptations in terms of the aesthetics, setting, and character changes that have been made, and their independence from the Shakespearean dramatic text. However, I will also locate their similarities by drawing some concepts from race, gender and sexuality studies, as well as from performativity theory, and try to contextualize these adaptations within the critical texts and framework that may have informed them, as well as within the socio-cultural and cinematic background from which such similarities and differences spring.

I. CHAPTER 1: *Julius Caesar* and *Caesar Must Die* (2012)

In 2012, Italian well-established film directors Paolo and Vittorio Taviani co-wrote with Fabio Cavalli and directed *Caesar Must Die* (“Cesare Deve Morire”), a film, ‘docudrama’, adaptation or even appropriation of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* which takes place and was performed in that year, in Rome’s high security district prison of Rebibbia. Maria Valentini is one of the few academics who have so far contributed to writing about the film and to whom I have paid special attention in order to develop my own approach to it, as a film adaptation undoubtedly linked to Shakespeare’s play, and in the words of Linda Hutcheon and Valentini herself, “a work that is second without being secondary” (Hutcheon 8-9). Together with Valentini’s views, where she draws from Maruzio Calbi’s own critical essay of the same film, I will incorporate some of the most recent ideas by Cartmell on adaptation and adapting Shakespeare, and on Hutcheon’s and Stam’s ideas on fidelity and adaptability. Finally, after drawing on W.B. Whorfen’s views on performativity, I will focus on how spaces, characters, and dramatic themes of *Julius Caesar* appear in the film’s re-elaboration of the play.

It is perhaps worth clarifying the terms used above in order to locate *Caesar Must Die* within the more general realm of literary adaptation, which already tends to be open and accepting, particularly after the 1990 boom of Shakespearean adaptations for film and television. At the same time, this acceptance can often make the ‘labelling’ or classification of adaptations difficult due to each adaptation’s individual characteristics, and Shakespeare adaptations are not an exception. Just for the sake of better understanding each film and its creative context, one of the many explanations for the relationship between *Julius Caesar* and *Caesar Must Die* is to accept it as an ‘hypertextual’ product or elaboration of Shakespeare’s ‘hypotext’ of *Julius Caesar*, which, as Robert Stam explains in “From Text to Intertext”, taking Gérard Genette’s original classification of ‘transtextuality’,² transforms the pre-existing ‘hypotext’ “by operations of selection, amplification, concretization and actualization” (Stam 209). On the other hand, Valentini’s use of the words ‘adaptation’ and ‘interpretation’ suggest other approaches to understanding the film, the first one being a less specific term, and

² In his book *Palimpsestes* (1982) Genette proposes the term ‘transtextuality’ as a more inclusive alternative to Julia Kristeva’s ‘intertextuality’, and he describes ‘transtextuality’ as everything that can connect one text with another, whether it is explicitly stated, or tacitly, with other texts.

‘appropriation’ being an adaptation or loose adaptation which does not aim to maintain or pretend to portray the literary text (mainly plot, characters, aesthetics and historical ‘accuracy’) in a realistic or ‘classic’ way, as opposed to, for example, what Joseph Leo Mankiewicz’s adaptation *Julius Caesar* (1953) did. As for the terms ‘docudrama’ or ‘docufilm’, they are used by Valentini as opposed to Shaul Bassi’s ‘dramatization’ since, as Valentini says, they do not deny the play’s artistic representation of contemporary Italian society, but make a clear reference to the film’s approach to the play as documentary.³

Al Pacino’s *Looking For Richard* (1996) is perhaps the most popularized example — as popular as Shakespeare documentary films or ‘docudramas’ can possibly be — of the kind of adaptation process and re-elaboration of the play that took place in the production of *Caesar Must Die*. The film draws parallels between the workshop process of elaboration and creation of a stage production of *Richard III* and Shakespeare’s role in the 20th century and pop-culture. Al Pacino’s workshop approach to his film addresses and shows a stage director’s approach to the play’s characters and historical background, and juxtaposes the scenes in which the creation of a play is shown, with interviews with Shakespeare scholars and historians, with the actors of the play on Shakespeare and their roles, and street opinions on Shakespeare and his work. However, unlike the Tavianis’s film, Pacino’s film documentary includes footage of actors representing scenes from *Richard III* but there is no actual play nor film which is fully performed or represented as a production beyond the one Pacino is presenting as a ‘docudrama’. Instead, the *Julius Caesar* production that appears in *Caesar Must Die* was performed at the high security prison, and even though the film, like Pacino’s, focuses on the workshop process of creating the play and how the actors/prisoners experience it, there is footage of the actual performance of the play at Rebibbia both at the beginning and end of the film.

Winner of the 62nd edition of the Berlin Film Festival and of five David di Donatello awards (the Academy of Italian Cinema), becoming later selected as the Italian entry for the best foreign language film at the 85th Academy Awards that were held in 2013, the film was generally well received by critics and the Berlin festival, even though

³ See Valentini, especially note 4 on page 193. In “Shakespeare’s Italy and Italy’s Shakespeare: Place, “Race,” Politics” Bassi argues that ‘docudrama’ is a rich and well-known subgenre nowadays, but which doesn’t encapsulate the singularity of the Tavianis’s film as an artistic interpretation that offers a “mirror image of Italy’s current ‘country disposition’” (Bassi 182).

its final position was criticized by the press and considered 'conservative' for having chosen the Taviani brothers' film over some other notable and new candidacies ("Critics Lament"). The film covers a period of six months in which Rebibbia's annual arts social programme proposes the inmates to take part in a theatre production, in this case Shakespeare's Roman play *Julius Caesar*, which the Taviani brothers directed and wrote a script for in collaboration with Fabio Cavalli. The film presents the audiences with a documentation of the evolution of the play, from the choice of actors from the prison's high security wing, to the final rehearsal and public performance of the play at the prison's theatre. It documents the process whereby the inmates at some point become too emotionally involved with the characters, and presents the major themes of the play, such as power and honour. It also shows how the prison and its inhabitants, as a male-dominated and isolated space, become part of this "play-within-a-play-within-a-film" (Valentini 191), merging with how Rome, the Senate and text appear in Shakespeare's text. With the aid of Valentini's essay, this study will also focus on the construction and aesthetic elements of the representation of the Forum and assassination scenes in the rehearsals that appear in the film, and on how the aforementioned aspects of the film, together with its cinematic approach, dismantle traditional conventions of the play's dramatic performativity, and make it altogether a very different Shakespeare to the popularized or strictly academic one we are used to, but still a very remarkable and relevant one.

As a non-classic, and even experimental work on a historically classical play, *Caesar Must Die* problematizes traditional understandings of 'realistic' and textual performances of Shakespearean texts, and the dramatic text in general, in theatre studies. In "Drama, Performativity and Performance" W. B. Worthen describes the need for performance studies to question and retheorize dramatic performativity and relations of authority informing texts and their performances. He focuses also on the relationship between film adaptation and drama, and particularly on Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, a 'divergent' film adaptation of Shakespeare which "enacts a powerful theoretical encounter [...] with ways of rethinking the relations of authority that inform texts and performances" (Worthen 1095). Furthermore, in the same essay, he supports the idea that what we understand as realistic performances of a text are not in fact quotations, translations or interpretations of a literary text and submissive to it, but that performance "produces the text within a system of manifestly citational behaviour" (1098), thus

relegating the citational behaviour of a text's performance as an aspect of dramatic performances rather than of its dramatic authority:

As a citational practice, dramatic performance — like all other performance — is engaged not so much in citing texts as in reiterating its own regimes; these regimes can be understood to cite or, perhaps subversively, to resignify social and behavioral practices that operate outside the theater and that constitute contemporary social life. The citational practices of the stage acting styles, directorial conventions, scenography operate on and transform texts into something with performative force: performances, behavior (Worthen 1098).

Similarly, even though Worthen's focus is mainly on stage performance, the Tavianis's adaptation of Shakespeare's text does comply with both quoting practices of Italian translations of the original text, and resignified social and behavioural practices outside the play, which also constitute the contemporary, daily social life of the actors/inmates at Rebibbia. For this purpose, my commentary on the film will focus on how the themes of the play, such as power, masculinity and honour, together with space, appear in the film and are 'transformed' in the context of a 21st century Italian prison.

If *Looking For Richard* showed the mechanics of film-making, even if it is under the film directors' instructions, *Caesar Must Die* does the same for the mechanics of the staging of a play. In a black and white revival of the Italian neorealism of the 40s, the film starts with the presentation of the prison's theatrical project of the year, staging *Julius Caesar* at Rebibbia, which the Tavianis/Cavalli collaboration will be directing both in front and behind cameras. The inmates at the prison volunteering for the project appear then one by one, and introduce themselves in front of the cameras, as any other stage actor would, and each of them briefly improvises a few lines about themselves such as their names, surname, birthplace and their fathers' names, all under Cavalli's stage directions.

Once the process of deciding which of the play's characters the actors will perform and 'become' in the following six months is over, the metatheatrical canvas of the film is laid out, and the line that divides the prisoners from their characters becomes, at times, obscured and difficult to separate from the actors' inner struggles. Honour and power systems in *Julius Caesar* are also mirrored in the film through the duality of characters/performers. One of the points made by Valentini in her essay is how, the power

hierarchy of the Roman Senate under Caesar's control in the play shows "abundant parallels with the personal history of the Italian offenders who acted in *Caesar Must Die*, most of whom came from the south of Italy and were involved in criminal organizations with their own inner rules and hierarchies" (Valentini 184). Indeed, the film puts the actors/convicts in a dramatic situation in which the central character of the play is Julius Caesar, a historical figure associated not only with the splendour of the ancient Roman empire, but which they also recognise and are familiar with, to some extent. But instead of simply presenting us with classical splendour, the play presents us with the general Julius Caesar in decline, and how a division between the members at the Roman Senate begins to create, a division between those who want to betray and sacrifice him, and those who intend to remain loyal to Caesar's authority.

During rehearsals, the themes of treason and honour appear both in the performance and between the actors/inmates. In one of the many moments in which drama and reality merge, while rehearsing II,ii (00:34:00) — the moment in which Decius Brutus/Juan Bonetti is trying to convince Julius Caesar to go to the Senate — Julius Caesar/Giovanni Arcuri accuses Decius and the actor behind the character of being also two-faced, a flatterer and a liar. Decius/Bonetti tries to convince Julius Caesar that the meaning behind Calpurnia's premonitory dream should be interpreted as a good omen, securing then the conspirators plans to attend the Senate, where Brutus and other men are waiting to murder him. However, when Decius/Bonetti tells Julius Caesar the lie about the crown they are going to offer him, Arcuri starts reacting to Decius's words, beyond his character, and goes as far as to say that Decius Brutus's character is tailored to Bonetti. The conflict doesn't stop there and continuation of the rehearsal is postponed until Arcuri and Bonetti's fight subsumes — an incident that will not be the first nor the last in the film.

Valentini also notes how most of the members are likely to have been affiliated or connected with the Mafia, and are therefore familiar with its hierarchy, practices and symbolism of power, as well as with the respect that surrounds it. She also notes how some of these symbols appear similarly in the play, such as hand kissing, which Brutus does to Caesar in III.iii. Valentini compares it to '*baciamo le mani*' ('allow me to kiss your hands'), a typical Sicilian form of greeting and showing of respect that nowadays is mainly used as mafia-coded language to show respect and submissiveness to a superior authority. Thus, the fact that most prisoners are likely to recognise the significance behind

the gesture as one they are also familiar with, “establishes a further connection between the values of Rome — family, honor, loyalty; the values the conspirators claim to kill Julius Caesar for — and those upheld by the Mafia” (Valentini 189).

Another relevant aspect that should be mentioned when comparing the film and its dramatic source is the importance of spaces, both in the play and in this particular adaptation. The relationship between the setting of the film and the stage performance goes beyond the fact that both the prison’s location and the main setting of the play are the city of Rome. For this reason, it is worth looking at how spaces function in the film and their relation with the text and characters from both the film and the play.

Firstly, Valentini has pointed out how the prison becomes a ‘heterotopic’ space in Foucauldian terms; “[a space] of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed. Cases of this are rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons” (Foucault 23). Valentini herself explores Foucault’s idea further, and describes prisons as spaces which are also outside ‘normal’ time, as time is perceived differently during imprisonment than out of it. The perception of time in theatre is also different from that of ‘normal’ time. As Valentini claims, “Foucault includes the theatre in his account of heterotopia as a place with its own internal rules, where space and time diverge from those of everyday life [...] Therefore, theatre and prison then share this status: we might speak of one heterotopia within another, or of two heterotopic spaces which find some kind of resonance” (Valentini 192).

We find this non-normative space and time in *Julius Caesar* and *Caesar Must Die*, especially in how both the play and the prison in the film are mainly, or exclusively male spaces, where masculinity is the common denominator that links the community of both criminals and politicians. In this way, both the play and the prison become subject to their norms, values and code of honour, outside these ‘normal’ spaces and times. Given the limitations of performing the play in a male only, high security prison, the only two female characters of the play, Calpurnia and Portia — it is worth mentioning that, even for a Shakespearean tragedy, having only two female characters is a rarity — are made inconsequential to an extent. Thus, the heterotopic spaces are also in both cases male spaces, where their inhabitants follow their own social rules and code of honour outside ‘normative’ society, both in the play and in the film. Both as contemporary Italian inmates of a high security prison and as ancient Roman politicians, the inmate/actors must

convince Rome, and their audience, of why they need to kill the Caesar and why this needs to be made in the name of Rome.

Secondly, a close and reflective relationship is created between spaces in the play, and how they appear in the film, through the character/performer connections, either through how the performers react to the play and emotionally connect with it, or through how some of the prison's spaces mimic and convey the effect of those in the play. An example of this is seen early in the documentation of rehearsals where Cosimo Rega, the actor who plays Cassius, looks outside the prison through a window (00:20:15), while addressing Brutus/Striano who refuses to do the same, not wanting to face the truth yet. In the play, Cassius's scene with Brutus will trigger their plot to assassinate the Caesar in order to stop the Roman general's abuse of his power, which has made a tyrant of him. Meanwhile, in the text, Marcus Antonius is offering Caesar the crown which he refuses three times, which in the film is not seen. However, the spectators can hear a standing ovation coming off camera, most likely the sound of inmates from outside, as Brutus and Cassius could hear the enthusiasm and praise of the Romans at seeing Caesar 'humbly' refuse the crown. Then, Cassius/Rega, delivers the following lines from the play: "Age, thou art shamed! Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!" (I,ii;150), which in the multi-dialect Italian adaptation of the text appears as "Roma, città senza vergogna", and he adds, "you too Naples have become a city without shame".⁴ This is immediately followed by another moment in which the performance converges with how the inmates are experiencing the text, by breaking the play's fourth wall. Rega/Cassius briefly interrupts the rehearsal, admitting that he thinks "it is as if this Shakespeare had lived in the streets of my hometown". The rehearsal of the scene is resumed, and Rega puts on his Cassius mask back, but the spectator is left with the sensation that there is more in common between *Julius Caesar* and the lives of a group of full-time high security convicts and part-time actors than one would initially think.

Last but not least, it is also worth mentioning one of the most important and well-known scenes of the play, the so-called 'Forum scene', and analysing how it is performed in the film. In this regard, the film offers us another instance of the prison, both as a 'heterotopic' space and a male-only space, the occupants of which are receptive and even

⁴ Even though the adapted text is not discussed in the film, once the actors have been assigned their characters, they are given the stage direction that each should say the lines in his own Italian dialect.

familiar with the themes of honour and power. The film's culmination, takes place in the rehearsal of Caesar's assassination (III,ii) and the 'Forum scene' (III,ii), where all the participants — some of which we have seen rehearsing in their cells throughout the film —, are rehearsing the scene in the centre's courtyard (37:00:00). What is turned into an improvised, bare stage for the rehearsal, becomes Rome itself as spectators will become witnesses of the collective response to the assassination of Julius Caesar, much in the same way the city of Rome, and Early Modern audiences at the time, would have reacted to the performance.

As a prelude of raw prison-life realism before Shakespearean dramatism, the Tavianis show us images of the prison at night (00:37:54) and a glimpse of the inmates' thoughts in the darkness; we can hear whisperings about the long wait left for them in prison, about their sons, or how family never visits, some of them wanting to escape. One of them even complains about how a few of them have gotten diarrhoea. The whispering in the prison at night evokes images of the city of Rome, unable to sleep in anticipation of the next morning. Night grows into daylight and the face of the Caesar/Arcuri imposes itself on the screen (00:39:26), accompanied by music that announces blood and dramatism. Both the audience and the whole prison are about to witness the famous murder of the general, and after the familiar stabbings are delivered to the oblivious Caesar the camera captures the excitement of the Senators' cries of freedom, independence and redemption, while the other inmates escape from the murder scene.

Valentini asserts that the bareness of the courtyard (00:47:46) where Caesar/Arcuri lies on the floor with only a white sheet over his 'dead' body, takes this rehearsal of the performance back to the Elizabethan stage. And indeed, in "The Empty Space" Peter Brook claimed that all that was necessary for "an essential 'act of theatre'" to take place was "an empty space filled by a man crossing it while someone else is watching" (Brook, 9). The bareness of this stage is contrasted by the attentive and responsive crowd of prisoners — who seem to have become Roman citizens in the hands of the Tavianis — who take sides on the duelling rhetoric of Marcus Antonius and Brutus in III,iii.

The film concludes as it had started: namely, with images of the final rehearsal and actual performance, this time with a real theatrical audience that, hopefully, might have been able to witness the transformation of *Julius Caesar*, the text, the characters, the setting and themes, in yet another reincarnation of the Early Modern stage in

contemporary times, which is successfully found in Rebibbia. With the help of the Tavianis, the inmates at Rebibbia became more than actors; they are able to slip under the skin of *Julius Caesar* in ways they never had before, and discover there “a cathartic outlet in Shakespeare’s language [as] the play migrates to contemporary Italy, from the Globe to the jail” (Valentini 188), and in this way drug dealers, thieves, and an assortment of Italian criminals, becoming one with Shakespeare’s tragedy.

II. CHAPTER 2: *Romeo and Juliet* and *Private Romeo* (2011)

In 2011 Alan Brown wrote and directed *Private Romeo*, a ‘divergent’ reinvention of the romance of Romeo and Juliet, set in McKinley Military School, a 21st century U.S military academy, the protagonists of which, like the famous couple, fall in love in this contemporary, homosexual take on William Shakespeare’s famous tragedy of lovers.⁵ Under the motto of Shakespeare’s own words “love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books” (Act II, Scene ii). In his fourth feature-length film self-proclaimed gay activist, writer and indie film director, Brown, explores a homosexual relationship in the context of the U.S army, which goes against societal expectations and the oppression that ensues when the other members find out about it, in a tragedy for and about contemporary Romeos and Juliets. Brown’s film connects with Shakespeare’s play — much like *Caesar Must Die* did — by bringing the play to life through a complex and multiple construction of dramatic and cinematic situations that constitute the intertextual web of the film.

Similarly to *Caesar Must Die*’s approach to Shakespeare, *Private Romeo* starts without much of an introduction. In the first images already we can see what this adaptation will focus on: a bunch of privates from the U.S military academy are bringing the play to life, and what starts as an amateur performance ends up becoming the film’s plot. The premise for the characters being in the deserted academy, we are told, is that they have failed the land navigation exercises, and must remain on campus with no officers or faculty to control them, following their regular campus’ schedules of organized classwork, homework, and physical exercises, without variation. Since the first scene, we can see that the group of young privates at the McKinley military academy is reciting the play out loud in one of their courses which seems to be devoted to studying Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The film and play’s metafictional relation is established from the beginning. In terms of character, the film recovers the theatrical convention of doubling, not a very popular technique used for cinema nowadays, and even less so in the cinema, but very popular in Shakespeare’s day.

⁵ Brown has become well known as a writer and director in independent cinema circles such as the Sundance independent film festival thanks to films such as *Book of Love* (2004), *Superheroes* (2007), or his latest film *Five Dances* (2013), a coming of age film about a young dancer arriving to New York and discovering his sexuality. He has also received several awards for his work as a journalist, and his novel *Audrey Heoburn’s Neck*, published in 1996.

The cast consists of a group of young, generally amateur, cinema actors, presented to us as a group of six junior cadets who will also become characters from the play. Romeo is Sam Numrich (Sam Singleton), Juliet is Glenn Mangan (Matt Doyle), Josh Neff (Hale Appleman) is Mercutio/Capulet, Omar Madsen (Chris Bresky) is Juliet's Nurse, Adam Barry (Adam Hersh) is Friar Laurence, who is cast as a drug dealer, and playing Romeo/Sam's friend is Gus Sanchez (Sean Hudock) who takes the roles of Benvolio/Lady Capulet. Also, there are the two senior cadets in charge of the rest, with the names of Carlos Moreno (Bobby Moreno), and Ken Lee (Charlie Barnett), playing Tybalt and Prince Escalus respectively. The film also introduces spaces and scenery, all within the military academy, such as the sport courtyard, the shared rooms, or the emptiness of the building, all the spaces as contemporary versions of their counterparts in the play, such as the academy's chemistry lab, which will become Friar Laurence's cellar, the cafeteria that will host Capulet's ball, or spaces identified with sport and competition which will become the setting for physical violence and fighting; spaces of restrictions, limitations, daily routine and obligations.

Textually speaking, the film consists mainly of the original lines from the play and the cadets' own interactions which are introduced in between verses or scenes from the play. In terms of the film's linearity, it goes constantly back and forth from the *Romeo and Juliet* lesson the main characters are taking at the academy — and which also functions as the film's own introduction to the play — to the cadets becoming the characters from the play. Both the play's lines and Brown's own writing are delivered by the boys, and it would be difficult to make a distinction from the play's and the cadet's dialogues if it weren't because Brown also keeps most of Shakespeare's language. The audience can tell the difference mainly from the way the cadets address each other by their names, or by the Shakespearean characters they embody, but also from knowing the language and content of Shakespeare's text. An example of this alternation between Shakespeare's lines and those belonging to the film's fiction of the U.S military can be seen in how the Capulet ball is captured by the film (00:21:00), which includes a conversation between the cadets portraying Romeo and Juliet, while the rest of the characters are playing poker. Romeo first breaks the ice by complimenting Juliet's "Live Strong" band (later in the film, it will also be used as Juliet's token for Romeo), and his shoes. Without any notice, however, Romeo immediately changes back to Shakespeare's play text and delivers the line: "If I profane with my unworhiest hand this holy shrine, the gentle sin is this. My lips two

blushing pilgrims, ready stand. To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss” (I.iv; 206-9). Then, Romeo/Sam kisses Juliet/Glenn in the neck, and is replied by Juliet “Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, Which mannerly devotion shows in this; For saints have hands that pilgrims hands do touch, And palm to palm is holy palmers kiss” (I.iv; 210-214). The text then proceeds by maintaining Shakespeare’s lines for the rest of the scene.

Winner of the 2011 edition of the LGBT oriented L.A Outfest Festival, and having received a Grand Jury Award for Outstanding Actor, which was awarded to all of the actors’ performances, the film was acclaimed by the critics “for bringing fresh life to a timeless love story and infusing each moment with a 21st century immediacy” (Private Romeo Wins a Grand Jury Award at Outfest). Rather than becoming yet another classic film adaptation of the text, *Private Romeo* creates an untraceable and undividable union between the characters of the play and the characters of the film; that is, the adolescent and unexperienced cadets at the military school. The characters and setting make this a ‘divergent’ adaptation of Shakespeare which creates a unique and meaningful relationship between the play’s motif of the conflict between the individual, society, and the ways of challenging or escaping it, and the social critique the film makes against a very specific moment in the contemporary history of the United States. I will explore all the above in relation with the play, also bearing in mind how gender and sexual identities, together with homosocial and homosexual desire appear in the play and are explored in the film, making close reference to the critical work on *Romeo and Juliet* by Robert Appelbaum, and Bryan Reynolds and Janna Segal.

As has been done in many adaptations or reinventions of *Romeo and Juliet* during the 1990s, such as Baz Luhrmann’s hit *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, or the indie, sex, drugs and violence film *Tromeo and Juliet*, both released in 1996, the tendency followed by the 1990s adaptations of the famous tragedy of lovers, has been to adapt the play into contemporary settings in which the conflict of rivalry between families or gangs is usually maintained. In this sense, *Private Romeo* recuperates one of the themes or motifs of the play, namely, the individual against society, providing a whole new sense to ‘society’, which is embodied in a single institution, instead of in two opposed gangs or families, in a way that hardly any other film adaptation of the play does. Acknowledged by Brown himself to be a response to the recent increase of gay bullying the film is considered to be a critical and artistic commentary on the 1993-2011 U.S policy “Don’t

Ask Don't Tell" which prohibited military personnel from discriminating against homosexual or bisexual service members or applicants, while also denying openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons their entrance at the military service.⁶ Being also a gay rights activist and former journalist, Brown has expressed in several interviews, news articles and other online platforms how he came up with the idea of adapting *Romeo and Juliet* to a modern-day homosexual, military romance:

Though *Romeo and Juliet* is usually interpreted as a romantic tale of young love thwarted by a family feud, recent re-readings convinced me that it is actually a much more modern, and relevant story about sexual identity and desire pitted against society and its institutions; about personal freedom and rights versus authority. As a gay man and an artist, frustrated by the political battles, and inaction, over gay equality, and by the heart-breaking epidemic of gay bullying, I thought Shakespeare would be the perfect vehicle for exploring these issues. As *Private Romeo's* high school military cadets find themselves in the kinds of emotionally tumultuous situations — falling in love; the loss of friendship; confronting homophobia — that would leave any adolescent (or adult) at a loss for words, they must use Shakespeare's language as their sole means of expression, forcing them to explore the profound drama of coming-of-age (Brown, "Director's Statement").

Nevertheless, Brown's decision to take one of Shakespeare's most adapted and staged play to a homosexual terrain is not such a new, artistic and dramatic risk as one might

⁶ The "Don't Ask Don't Tell" law (DADT) was an official U.S. policy signed in 1993 and implanted in October of the same year, during the presidency of Bill Clinton, and coined by himself from his own address to homosexual personnel from the U.S. military to "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue, and don't harass". The law, directed at gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals from the U.S. military, was supposed to lift the former WWII ban, prohibiting the military personnel to discriminate and harass against closeted homosexual and bisexual applicants and personnel. At the same time, it also barred openly homosexual and bisexual individuals from entering the armed forces of the military service, otherwise creating a risk to the standards of morale, order and discipline of the U.S. military. The House of Representatives and the Senate voted to repeal the law during Barack Obama's presidency, eventually ending as recently as September 20, 2011.

initially think. First of all, it is worth reminding ourselves and contemporary Shakespearean audiences that until the 1660's and King Charles' Restoration women were not allowed to take part in the English stage, thus having young men and boys play the female roles, in what is commonly known 'crossdressing', or Shakespeare's "transvestite theatre" (McDonald 113).⁷ In this sense, and having grown accustomed to how Shakespeare's plays are currently staged, crossdressing does not come as natural for theatre and film audiences. However, regarding how it maintains Early Modern dramatic conventions of character, and by having an all-male cast which, furthermore, follows the practice of doubling, we could say that *Private Romeo* is more 'classic', than most of its cotemporary adaptations.

With such a significant change in character conventions from the point of view of our 21st century perception of the play, the homosexual relationship between the characters of Romeo/Sam Singleton (played by Seth Numrich) and Juliet/Glenn Mangan (played by Matt Doyle) might seem a big deviation from the frequently heterosexual portrayal of the play's couple. Nonetheless, not only does homosexuality serve to the director's purpose of adapting the play as historically heteronormative, or to represent contemporary queer identities in a very particular social-political context; the film also responds to gender and sexuality-focused critical readings of *Romeo and Juliet* which deal with gender identities and homosocial and homosexual desire. Such critical readings of the play, like that of Robert Appelbaum, portray sexuality and homosocial desire as becoming problematized in the restrictions of the Veronese society, not only for Romeo and Juliet, but also in its visible pressures unto homosocial and same-sex social interactions between the young men of the play, which are transformed into physical and violent assertions of masculinity. According to Robert Appelbaum, in his essay "Standing to the Wall: The Pressures of Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*":

It is clear from its context that the rivalry between the Capulets and the Montagues is also, for the men, the impetus for an inward rivalry, an

⁷ Until 1660, with the Restoration of Charles II, women were not allowed to act in English stages, their roles being played, usually, by boys or young men who worked as apprentices in the theatre companies. This practice, which has nowadays become to be known as transvestite theatre, which also involved the activity of cross-dressing, was particular of the theatre of Shakespeare and his contemporaries' theatre, and determined the way in which playwrights wrote female roles and the number of them, but also encouraged them to develop new thematic possibilities, as Russ McDonald explains in *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*.

inward pressure to masculine self-assertion that cannot be appeased or concluded. Both Gregory and Sampson find themselves called upon (from where is unclear) to initiate an incident of masculine aggression to stir or to stand and, either way, by being embroiled in a fight, to attain to the realization of a normative value (Appelbaum 252).

As Appelbaum further elaborates in his essay, it is hardly possible to find any alternatives in regimes of normative masculinity such as the one constructed in *Romeo and Juliet*; a regime “constituted as a system from which there is no escape, but in keeping with which there is no experience of masculine satisfaction either” (Appelbaum 253). This is made visible in how, throughout the play, conflicts and defiance of identity are solved with physical confrontation. Similarly, by taking the play to a military school, *Private Romeo* is also enacting a system of masculinity within an institution that has traditionally been — which indeed still is — the paradigm of virility. By juxtaposing both systems, we can see how the feud between families and the need for a self-imposed masculine standard on the one hand, and the imposed masculinity and predisposition towards violence in the military on the other, are not so different. As Appelbaum explains, Shakespeare denounces both open and explicit, and legalised, violence in the play, since both are imposed:

[...] if endless cycles of violence are expressions of the regime of masculinity, so is the promulgation of the law, a law of peace, which itself has the right to resort to violence (*‘On pain of torture, from those bloody hands / Throw your mistempered weapons to the ground’* [1.1.86-87, emphasis added]). So, too, is the promulgation of the idea of an alternative, the idea of standing apart from the masculinist regime in practices of heterosexual love (Appelbaum 255).

The violence that is explained in the previous quote is not unlike the violence that Brown wanted to denounce in this film. In the same manner as Shakespeare, he wanted to denounce both the physical violence of bullying against homosexuals or young boys who are not seen as ‘masculine enough’, and the more symbolic or legal violence of the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” U.S. policies and other institutionalized forms of homophobia, which he meant to criticize with his film. It is also important to notice in the quote above how also the law of peace can be dangerous if it is a law that imposes silence over the freedom of alternative masculinities, or in the film’s case, homosexuality. In the film,

there are several instances where one can observe the pressure of heteronormative violence both within and outside the dramatic text. The subtext of heteronormative violence — as verbal or indirect — is usually always present.

Just as in the play there are confrontations between the Capulets and the Montagues, the film also provides moments of confrontation and violence, which take place in the restricted, controlled and authoritarian spaces of the military academy. Instead of the streets of Verona, in the film it is the basketball court that becomes a space of physical confrontation. Here is where the initial background confrontation and the duel between Mercutio and Tybalt take place, as well as the place they die, and Escalus/Ken banishes Romeo. Every time the cadets play basketball in the court, and in the same way as we could perceived in a staging of the play thanks to the text and the live performance, their body language and reciting of the text evokes the confrontation and hostility between the two different teams that are playing basketball, which stand for the two different families as feuds in the play, and which the audience can easily identify, thanks to each side wearing different coloured shirts.

However, the film also shows the other kind of violence, the one that has to do less with family or gang rivalries, and more with the cadets' reactions towards Romeo/Sam and Juliet/Glenn's homosexuality, and which Brown is specifically criticizing in this adaptation of the play. Masculine self-assertion through violence takes place externally as the family conflict in the film, and internally, as cadets from one side of the team become violent to members of their same side. The most notable example of this takes places when Mercutio/Capulet and other cadets kidnap Juliet (00:35:00) and leave him sitting on a chair outside all night, gagged and with his hands tape tied, thus showing how the cadets become violent with one another outside their role in the play, in order to suppress or, in this case, to punish homosexual desire between the two main characters, even though the audience is never explicitly told so.

Other, more subtle, but equally significant examples of this include the Capulet ball in I.iv. In the film, instead of the ball scene at Capulet's hall, we can see all the cadets drinking beer and playing poker in the military campus's cafeteria. At one point, Romeo/Sam leaves the table and the others behind and goes to see Juliet/Glenn (00:20:14), and courts him from a spot that is separated from the rest, but still not completely hidden. It is not made clear if the Capulet and Montagues at the table can see the two talking and eventually kissing, but it is visually hinted, as Capulet/Josh and

Tybalt/Carlos refer to Romeo as “a slave come hither covered with an antic face to flare and scorn at our solemnity” (I.iv;168-70), while looking directly at Romeo. Just after the lovers have kissed, Tybalt/Carlos, who seems to have been looking at them from a distance like all the rest, warns Josh/Capulet again: “I will withdraw. But this intrusion shall now, seeming sweet, convert to bitterest gall” (I.iv; 204-5). It is unclear, however — as the film seemingly refuses to differentiate — whether it is the cadets’ rivalry, the nature of the romance, or the visualization of homosexuality itself, which triggers the tragedy.

The events that follow keep the structure of the rest of the play almost entirely except for scenes of Brown’s own devising such as Juliet/Glenn’s kidnapping. From that moment on, not only will Romeo and Juliet try to escape form the family feud, but they will also try to escape imposed normativity on their sexual identities, and on masculinity, from the confines of the military school: “a normativity that, once attained, can bring their masculinist goals of aggression to a final resolution: a mask of adequacy” (Applebaum 252), that will force heterosexual assimilation, as the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” law implies. Similarly, at this point, we can observe how, throughout the film, the oppression of masculine and family systems is exposed, together with that of the regime of heteronormativity. The film, like the play, offers ‘fugitiveness’ as the means to escape these multiple normative oppressions, but instead of the resulting, widespread, classic exaltation of heteronormativity and heterosexual love that *Romeo and Juliet* contains in its core, *Private Romeo* will transgress it, and subvert it with its different ending, while at the same time defying heteronormativity both inside the literary canon, and outside of it.

As Bryan Reynolds and Janna Segal describe in their essay “Fugitive Explorations in *Romeo and Juliet*: Transversal Travels through *Romeo and Juliet*’s Space”, the two protagonists in the film that are in love have represented as many possibilities of escaping authority and oppression as there can be, or might be at this precise space and time in the history of literary criticism of *Romeo and Juliet*. All of them consist on the normativization of the two teenage character seen as escaping from the authoritarian ideologies and structures of power, and which many cultural perspectives have addressed, as the following quote explains:

[Our fugitive reading] supports a recent trend in poststructuralist criticism on *Romeo and Juliet* that works to expose the ideological imperatives behind mainstream notions of romantic love by seeking to

demystify desire as represented in the text. However inadvertently, critics from various camps (feminist, queer, new historicist, cultural materialist, psychoanalytic, and/or Marxist) have reacted against the normativizing effects of the cultural imposition of Shakespeare's characters as icons of "true love" defined as heterosexual, monogamous, patriarchal, and/or worth dying for (Reynolds and Segal 43).

In the case of *Private Romeo*, even if the film were not strictly reacting against the normativizing effects of heterosexual imposition in the play, it would still be doing so against heterosexual cultural imposition on queer identities, through a contemporary testimony or product of it. In the same manner, the connection between the dramatic text and its consequent hypertextuality both as critical texts or cinematographic adaptations — including *Private Romeo* — have created a correspondence between critical readings on identity and sexuality through the years, such as Appelbaum's own contribution. After Act II, Scene ii, and the kidnapping and public shaming of Juliet/Glenn, the film proceeds as the play does. Romeo visits Friar Laurence, and together they plan his and Juliet's secret wedding, and later his impending marriage with Paris, for which he schemes — once again aided by the film's junkie version of Laurence — his comatose death, with all its fights and Tybalt and Mercutio's death in between. The film follows most of the play's structure, even if there are some fragments in which the text is paused and the film's military context is allowed in.

Finally, as the tragic ending comes nearer, the frenzy and tension in McKinley grows stronger. After Romeo/Sam has escaped from the academy and gone into hiding temporarily after being made responsible for Tybalt's death, Juliet/Glenn pays a visit to Friar Laurence's chemistry lab (1:15:00) in order to scheme her fake death by taking the Friar's potion mixture in an army's water bottle. The school's darkly lit auditorium is turned into the Capulet's crypt, in one of the most visually and emotionally striking moments of both play and film. Once Juliet/Glenn has taken the drink he slowly falls into sleep as he lies on the table that makes for the crypt, and where seconds later Romeo/Sam finds him and, devastated, lies next to his body after taking what's left of the poison, instead of waiting for the appearance of Paris, and avenging his supposed death. Having kept his adaptation as faithful as possible to the play in his own terms, the final scene and the bullying of Glenn, are perhaps the only major liberties the film takes in adapting the

text, and they are also the most deliberately, significant ones. By avoiding the fight with Paris in his own take of the tragic lover's enduring, Brown gives time for Juliet to wake up and see Romeo next to him, poisoned but not irreversibly hurt and, rushed by the Friar, kisses his lips hoping to get poisoned himself as well, in order to die next to his beloved. In doing so, however, surprisingly and unexpectedly, he wakes him up in the act, therefore eradicating completely the original tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet*. Brown described in an interview the reasons behind modifying such a symbolic and significant tragic ending:

I didn't see the point in doing the adaptation unless I had something to say. And I refused to do a film in which the gay lovers are punished or killed. *Brokeback Mountain* may be a beautiful, and beautifully acted film, but the characters live lives of loneliness and desperation, and one of them is brutally murdered. Enough of those films. The world needs to see gay love stories on film that end well. Film is a powerful medium. I believe in complete artistic freedom, but I also believe that we have to be responsible about the images and messages we put out there – particularly at a time when the struggle for gay civil rights is still being waged. And when violence against gay teenagers is such an issue.

It is then, with Brown's subversive manifesto, which is especially encapsulated in the ending, that the two tragic lovers are given the chance of homosexual love, and their identities are accepted in the oppressive, normativizing context of military Verona. In the same manner, fugitiveness becomes restorative and successful, as the two lovers finally kiss each other, relieved in front of the crowd. To give the film full closure, as the final credits appear Juliet/Glenn appears singing James V. Monaco and Joseph McCarthy's song "You Made Me Love You (I Didn't Want to Do It)", in a Youtube-like fashion as a moment of musical relief and an emotional recap of sorts. The song is about lovers that would die for each other like Romeo and Juliet would. Nevertheless, this time, if only in the film, love has truly won and become subverted through Brown's homosexual reinvention of the most famous tragic couple, not as martyrdom or as a sacrifice in the attempt to escape from oppressive normativities of any kind, but as a hopeful message of a love that can and should be accepted just as Romeo and Juliet's should have been. Thus, not only does Brown voice a powerful denunciation of the oppression suffered by alternative masculinities and the imposition of heteronormative love, from what is

probably history's most heteronormativized couple of lovers, but he also subverts Shakespeare's text in order to challenge and create a visible and positive space in both literature and history for those alternative identities and love stories to be accepted.

III. CHAPTER 3: *Othello* and *Omkara* (2006)

In 2006, award-winning Indian film screenwriter, director, and producer Vishal Bhardwaj, directed the Bollywood modern-day adaptation of the tragedy of Othello, *Omkara*, which he had also co-written with Robin Bhatt and Abhishek Chaubey. Bhardwaj, who also composed the film's soundtrack, including the songs, was already a well-known director and music composer of Hindi cinema, one of the major 'exporters' of William Shakespeare's works both in cinema and theatres. There's a deep-rooted, post-colonial, appreciation of Shakespeare's work in the Indian Imagination nowadays.⁸ Bhardwaj's second film of his unofficial Shakespeare trilogy, *Omkara*, transports the tale of the Venetian Moor perceived as a racialized, villainized and jealous Other, to contemporary Uttar Pradesh (UP), one of India's most populated states with a majority of Hindi inhabitants, and places him in the midst of a conflict of castes in the rural village of Meerut. It is a merge of mainstream commercial Bollywood cinema, and one of Shakespeare's four great tragedies, which enables a critical reading of *Othello*'s racial conflict as carefully constructed Othering rather than as representative of race or ethnical difference. In this sense, Bhardwaj's film eliminates *Othello*'s awareness of racial issues, but, nonetheless, evokes the same dramatic conflicts through the film's plot and addresses problematic relations of hierarchy and caste difference in Indian culture. Bearing all these in mind, I will analyse how the Othering strategies and racial difference from the play are approached and represented in *Omkara* through its transposition of the play to Indian culture, also making emphasis on how gender difference and patriarchal authority is projected and, finally, exploring how Othello's fictionalization of his identity is constructed in the film.

By the time he directed *Omkara*, Bhardwaj's career as a director, writer and producer of literary works was starting to consolidate. Years later, he would direct and produce a total of two film adaptations of the work by Indo-British writer Ruskin Bond, and of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (*Maqbool*, 2003), *Othello*, and the critically acclaimed adaptation of *Hamlet*, *Haider* (2014), which received 32 nominations, 13 out of which it finally won, including India's National Film Award for Best Music Direction, and Best Screenplay. Bhardwaj and his vast cinematographic and musical career has

⁸ See Poonam Trivedi's article "Why Shakespeare ... is Indian" for a very general yet informative overview on the importance and presence of Shakespeare in India nowadays.

finally put him on the map as a director outside of India, and his adaptations of Shakespeare's work have been compared to those of internationally-acclaimed director Akira Kurosawa. Even though *Omkaara* didn't achieve the massive popular and critical success at its release which *Haider* did, it certainly was critically seen as a success. After its release in 2006 it won three Indian National Awards, including one for Special Jury Award, Best Cinematography at the Asian First Film Festival, and it was later showcased in the Marché du Film section at the Cannes Film Festival and at the Cairo International Film Festival, where Bhardwaj was awarded a prize for Best Artistic Contribution in Cinema of a Director.

It is important to locate *Omkaara*, and Bhardwaj's other adaptations of Shakespeare at that, within the more general field of Shakespeare film adaptations outside of traditionally Western cultural representations of his work, but more specifically, within the presence and evolution of William Shakespeare and his plays as a result of colonial and postcolonial cultural processes between East and West. Over the years, adaptation and cultural studies have begun to address the adaptations or appropriations of translated Shakespeare into other cultures. In this case, Asian inscriptions of Shakespeare from a transnational diaspora of cultures, the result of which are films that exemplify the aforementioned postcolonial perspectives of Western and Eastern cultures in contact. According to Richard Burt in his article on Bollywood and Hollywood adaptations of Shakespeare, "[t]he range of Shakespeare and Asia in postdiasporic cinemas is so extremely diverse that it throws into relief just how homogeneous such accounts of hybridity in postcolonial studies are, no matter how much hybridity is said to be deconstructed and inflected with difference" (Burt 267).⁹ Nonetheless, even if critics have been observing these 'postdiasporic' cultural products through the lenses of postcolonialism since the 1990s, it seems special emphasis has been made on the effects of globalization, intercultural performances and scrutinizing oppositions between the local and native, and the global and foreign. In line with what Burt claims in his essay, it is also necessary to look at these adaptations as the result of a hybridity that reinvents interpretations as cultural products that are no longer exclusive of East or West, but that, in becoming transnational, have also created transnational relations of adaptability. In the

⁹ What Burt calls the 'postdiaspora' he considers a necessary, updated, new perspective on transnational and diasporic movements in the 21st century's dawn of globalization.

case of Shakespearean adaptation he says that “the point of focusing on the local [...] is not to examine how ‘the Other’ reinvents Shakespeare to criticize the center, itself a residually Eurocentric task, but to examine how Shakespeare is used in the peripheries to reinvent foreign, post-colonial, and indigenous literary or theatrical traditions” (Burt 266).

This is exemplified, in the case of cinema and Shakespeare studies, by the establishment of Bollywood cinema as India’s branch of national and commercial cinema, which has been influenced, and also been an influence itself, on the production and evolution of India’s cinematic adaptations of the Western literary canon, making Bollywood-like films of the work of authors such as Jane Austen, or Shakespeare.¹⁰ The origin of such adaptations — even if it is undoubtedly rooted in the colonial, postcolonial, or postdiasporic history — becomes an influence to the cultures which are subjected to it. The relationship between India’s Shakespeare and his relevance to its history and to the history of Bollywood has led to the current presence and relevance of Shakespeare both in theatre and cinema in India, and has eventually made an impact into Shakespeare studies themselves, which has been translated into a significant increase in the presence and recognition of Bollywood films within the field of Shakespearean adaptations.

As Rosa María García Periago explains in “Shakespeare Bollywood and Beyond”, Bollywood and other non-canonical, Asian adaptations of Shakespeare such as Bhardwaj’s *Maqbool* and *Omkara*, show the complexity and intricacies taking place whenever an adaptation of Shakespeare is made into a specific genre. According to her, in the process of adapting texts into a culture-specific genre, in this case Asian cinematic Shakespeare, either the form or Shakespeare is transformed, without necessarily changing the play’s meaning. In this sense, *Omkara* is indeed a film representative of the transformation of Shakespeare, but also of what is considered to be India’s most commercial Hindi cinema, namely Bollywood’s second wave or the more recent, 21st century appropriations of Shakespearean Bollywood. In this way, the film, like any other film of the Mumbai cinematographic industry, commonly known as Bollywood, includes a range of visual and sound aspects that are undoubtedly representative of Indian culture,

¹⁰ Such as the aforementioned adaptations of Bhardwaj, *Maqbool*, or *Haider*, or Bollywood adaptations of Austen’s novel such as Rajshree Ojha’s adaptation of *Emma* (*Aisha*) from 2010, or Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* (2004).

but which are also used to reinforce or support Shakespeare's text. This includes a somewhat frequent presence of musical and dancing numbers which, in the case of music and its lyrics, either aid, pause, or contextualize some of the play's instances dramatically relevant to the film, in a spur of the moment fashion as part of Bollywood's cinematographic story-telling. Instances of this include the film's title song, a musical theme that repeatedly addresses Omkara as a hero, or the scene where a drunk Kesu (Vivek Oberoi) dances to the frenzy and music of the moment, while Langda (Saif Ali Khan) anticipates the shame and failure of Kesu to Omkara's eyes, as his own ascension to become second in command. But beyond the more aesthetic dimension of the film, it also aims to connect with the play on a dramatic and social dimension, which shows Othello (Omkara) as an ideologically contradictory character, in India's current political situation:

Bhardwaj's choice of social milieu for his meditations on Shakespeare's tragic tales of kings and generals continues to be interesting. In setting both *Maqbool* and *Omkara* among criminals [...] he simultaneously draws on the legacy of the gangster film as a vehicle of high drama and intense emotion, and pointedly highlights a reality in today's India: the volatile intersection of the economic and social aspirations of a vast and restless underclass with a democratic system dominated by corrupt and often criminalized politicians. Although there is some attempt (through dialog, camerawork, and the title song "Omkara," which occurs early in the film) to cast the protagonist as a sympathetic proletarian champion, most of the action does little to refute Dolly's father's assessment of him as a goonda ("hoodlum") — a thug recruited as an enforcer by a local demagogue (Lutgendorf).

Indeed, *Omkara* offers a balance of both what is characteristic of Shakespeare's play *Othello* in India's contemporary socio-political situation, and of Bollywood's trade filmmaking equally. The first one by offering an open, self-claimed adaptation of the tragedy of *Othello*, whereas still maintaining the aesthetics, cultural readjustment, and essentials of a traditionally cinematic, big-budget Bollywood *mise-en-scène*. The biggest challenge the film proposes, however, is perhaps not so much in terms of the aesthetics of the film, but on how it transforms the play's key themes and characters into modern-

day India. As in *Maqbool*, Bhardwaj adapts Shakespeare's characters into local ones written mainly into Hindi and the Khariboli dialect, including their names, which are suggestive of their Shakespearean archetyped traits, in the same way the Parsi theatre initially did with India's local versions of the English playwright in performance.¹¹

Omkara's dramatic conflict, as in *Othello*, lingers on the problematization of Othello/Omkara's identity — not as racially different, but caste-wise —, and how it will play a critical part in Desdemona's and, consequently, Othello's own death, but it does so from India's own political and historical reality: "*Maqbool and Omkara* work inside historically critical representations of Indian politics in which corruption is severely censured [...] Bhardwaj elaborated on the idea of appropriating Shakespeare as a political weapon via ideologically loaded images" (García Periago 62). In terms of plot and character, this is seen in how Othello, Iago and the other men serving the Duke of Venice become in *Omkara* police-like enforcers at the service of Bhaisaab, a political mobster who everyone seems to admire regardless of the criminal practices of his party and protectors. Much like the play, the beginning of *Omkara* takes us to the conflictive love affair between the Moor and Desdemona, replicated by the story of Omkara Shukla — or Omi, as everyone calls him —, a half-caste Brahman played by Ajay Devgan, and Dolly Mishra, his fair-skinned and university educated admirer, who belongs to a richer family and higher position within the Brahman caste, played by actress Kareena Kapoor. In this sense, the play's marker of difference, race, is altered to become 'Indianized'. The alterity and otherness created in the play is still elicited, and supported by how the play's structure is mirrored too by the film's plot, which reflects the progressive intensification of Othello/Omkara's alterity.

One of the difficulties when discussing racism in *Othello* has been to fit Shakespeare's and his contemporaries' inclusion of a 'Moor' or 'moorish' character and how racism appears in the play around such figure, into our contemporary understanding of racism. The conflictive duality of a Moor as a racial Other; one that has adopted the ways and Christian belief of the Venetian society, and the identity of which is made only sense of through his tales of the past — a mythology or fictionalization of a from 'rags to

¹¹ Not only was Parsi theatre the way Shakespeare's drama was introduced to Bollywood, or Mumbai cinema as García Periago elaborates in "Shakespeare, Bollywood and Beyond", but it is considered to be one of the key influences and sources of what later became Bollywood film-making too.

riches' of sorts — will become advantageous for Iago to discourage Othello of everything the Venetians and himself had created. Lynda E. Boose further elaborates on this duality:

Othello [i]s a dually constituted subject, a walking contradiction [...] Othello has converted to Christianity, has adopted the Venetian language, and, like the Venetians, imagines himself in opposition to the infidel/Turk. Desdemona, apparently once frightened by his darkness, has found his humanness in the stories of his suffering; Brabantio has invited him into his home; the Duke has entrusted him with nothing less than leadership in the defense of Venice from outside invasion. In terms of the theological and cultural categories, Othello is a Venetian. And yet once his Ensign has raised the flag inscribing Othello within the difference of skin color, all the presumably meaningful differences Othello has constructed between himself and the infidel collapse. Thus alienated, he becomes the alien (Boose 38).

The course of this process is also conveyed in the film as Omkara's own background is explained. At first through rumours — later proved real to an extent — that he is of a lower caste than most of the village because of the mixed-caste marriage of his mother and father, and then through the eyes of the disgusted figure of the film's Brabantio, Dolly's father and lawyer Raghunath Mishra, who is aware of his background and reputation. Omi's half-caste will prove to be a social condition which will become relevant to him throughout the film, as he will be constantly challenged because of it by his inferiors, such as Langda/Iago, but also because it will be the reason why he and both the truthfulness of his marriage will be condemned by Dolly's father, and doubted by Omkara himself. We can see this during the first exchange between Omi and Dolly's father in (00:09:50), where he tells Omi: "Even dogs show more character... Omi! Was my daughter the only girl left in the province? Actually, it's my fault...I had forgotten you are a half caste. That bloody slave girl had borne you... right? Bloody bastard!", to which Omi replies: "You are right as always sir... Wish you knew that your own daughter's heart beats for this half caste." Even if later in the film, the audience is made aware of the true origin of Omkara, Raghunath's obvious frustration and furious response to the news as the film's equivalent of Brabantio, suffices to know that whatever mixing

of castes took place, it is enough to make his marriage with Dolly a hierarchically unequal one.

Raghunath's rejection, like Brabantio's, will become the trigger of Omkara's self-questioning, and for his doubting of his power and jealousy to begin. Not long after the conversation between Dolly's father and her future husband takes place, the film follows the steps of the play with Raghunath's meeting with Bhaisaab in (00:13:48), where he tries to stop the impending elopement between the two lovers, and not only Omi's social condition, but also his occupation as a gangster, and Bhaisaab's gangster at that, is mentioned, a conversation clearly reminiscent of Brabantio's own cry for help to the Duke of Venice. Unlike in the play, however, the film insists on the social repercussions that becoming involved with someone of inferior caste and morally questionable occupation will entail for their respectable family of Brahmans: "You think she would've eloped with this gangster willingly. Our home fire's been hushed since yesterday... The whole community's slandering us... How can you expect me to hand over my precious jewel to that monster?! He's a damn half caste at that! I have no more will to live... I need justice, Bhaisaab!". After that, Desdemona's speech is replaced by images of Dolly falling in love with Omkara, and of her broken engagement with Rajju, the film's substitute for Roderigo.

An example of the film's taking creative liberties with the play while never violating the original text, is that what in the play appears mentioned as Brabantio's preference for Roderigo before Othello for his daughter, the film turns into an arranged marriage between Dolly and Rajju as socially appropriate and caste equals. Such a minor change, while enhancing the perils of Dolly's love for Omkara in the film, also gives Roderigo the psychological roundedness and motive that will later be used by Langda/Iago in order to persuade him to collaborate with his scheming. Dolly's confession to her father is accompanied by a series of flashbacks of the day she found Omkara severely injured and how she fell in love with him as she tended his wounds and helped him recover, while a song is repeatedly played in the background with the cryptic message "Don't trust what your eyes see/Your eyes will betray you". We also see through this flashback (which evokes Desdemona's confession of having fallen in love with him through his story, much like Act I, Scene Two, but instead of Brabantio's accusations to Othello's wicked and Moorish mysticism, in the film Omkara is left silent as Dolly assumes discursive power for the first, and last time: "God knows how it all began...How

I lost my heart to Omkara. I was in love, but it was too late...". These are followed by images of her in her engagement celebration to Rajju/Roderigo and, at last, her confession of how she "followed the tune of her heart", and eventually chose dishonour and Omkara's love, over living in desolation by being married to someone she didn't love, thus confessing her love to Omkara.

Raghunath's speech culminates in the following scene, (00:20:35) where after Dolly's confession, and finally resigned, he gives Omkara his blessing on their marriage: "She who can dupe her own father, will never be anyone's to claim", Bhardwaj's modification of Brabantio's lines in the play "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see/She has deceived her father, and may thee" (I, iii; 314-315). Raghunath's words will haunt Omkara throughout the film and, like Langda's manipulative discourse, they will undermine his authority and power in the pre-established hierarchical society of rural Meerut, eventually making him question his trust in Dolly, as well as his value to her due to their caste difference. Furthermore, it is Raghunath's caste prejudice, and Omkara's lack of belief in his identity beyond caste, that once worsened by Langda's resented villainization of Omkara, will lead to his fall into fatal jealousy. As in Shakespeare's play, the source of Langda's obsession to ruin Omkara is hinted at already at the start of the film, when he tries to stop Omkara's sabotage to Rajju and Dolly's wedding. However, it is not until Kesu's promotion takes place in (00:31:50) right after Omkara is made general by Bhaisaab in a scene of spectacular traditional Indian fashion, that his intentions are made obvious. Nevertheless, the audience is made aware of his dislike during his conversations with Rajju, before he becomes determined to interfere with his marriage, as he feels rejected by someone of an inferior caste not only by him being his boss, but because Omkara, his long-time friend, rejected him. As Omkara himself says after he makes Kesu his second in command in the ceremony of his own promotion, "he's like a brother, he will understand", not even taking into consideration Langda's opinion on his choice.

The plausibility of Iago's/Langda's manipulative alterations of the truth needs also to be considered, as it is linked with Othello and Omkara's self-fictionalization respectively, and which Greenblatt calls "narrative self-fashioning":

If Iago then holds over others a possession that must constantly efface the signs of its own power, how can it be established, let alone maintained? [...] I think, in what we have been calling the process of

fictionalization that transforms a fixed symbolic structure into a flexible construct ripe for improvisational entry. This process is at work in Shakespeare's play, where we may more accurately identify it as 'submission to narrative self-fashioning' (Greenblatt 234).

This is evidenced both in the play and film, as Langda knows Kesu's wish to be forgiven by Omkara and earn his approval back after his drunken episode, as well as being aware of Omkara's increasing jealousy of Kesu as a socially valid suitor for Dolly, whom she had attended college with. So, Langda takes advantage of this by instigating false rumours and biasing Omkara's perception of Kesu and Dolly, and his own, by slandering them as 'adultery'. This very same judgement, like Iago's, is the one that intersects with Omkara's perspective and triggers suspicion in him when he sees Kesu leaving his house after the political endeavour has been cancelled (1:12:26), and confirms Omkara's biased judgement as Langda's makes a fake phonecall to prove Kesu guilty, and consequently make him jealous. Even if most of Langda's plans, like Iago's, include highly questionable evidence — which in the film is turned into incriminatory pictures, or fake and manipulated phonecalls to accuse Kesu and this revenge for his rejection — as Greenblatt says, deep down "he has no evidence, of course [...] but he proceeds to lay before his gull all of the circumstances that make this adultery plausible" (Greenblatt 234).

Last but not least, the film also addresses gender issues of Meerut's rural traditionalism, just as the play does, and particularly female duty and obedience to the belligerent, patriarchal power embodied in fathers and specially husbands, with the characters of Desdemona and Emilia as Dolly and Indu (Konkona Sen Sharma) respectively. Both Shakespearean characters, but especially the latter, have been described as incorporating early or proto-feminist views in the play. Desdemona complains early in the text of her divided duty of obligation towards her father and her husband alike, but ends up being submissive to both, and obeying one as much as the other, while Emilia remains a silent and compliant witness for the first half of the play.

Nevertheless, the women seem to exchange their discourses — or lack of them — as the play progresses. The second half of the text shows Emilia voicing her critical views of marriage and women whom she make responsible of adultery particularly, as

she becomes more assertive in contrast with Desdemona's submissiveness when facing Othello's jealous accusations. Emilia's speech is one of the most remarkable interventions in the play: "Let husbands know / Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell / And have their palates both for sweet and sour/As husbands have. What is it that they do / When they change us for others?" (IV,iii; 98-102). Similarly, the film evokes Desdemona's speech of a woman's "divided duty" (I, iii; 95-204) in the scene where Dolly finally discloses her feelings for Omkara to her father and Bhaisaab in (00:15:00). Even if Dolly's vindications are hardly direct or assertive on their own, the film exemplifies in its own terms the play's mistreatment of her and the other women, in the hands of Brabantio/Raghunath, Iago/Langda, and the polluting, conservative and prejudiced doctrine they both will activate in Othello/Omkara. As Dolly initially mentions, her unwillingness to disobey her father was once defied by her own feelings, and in hopelessly trying to avoid disobeying both her heart and her duty, she eventually decided to act on her own will. Nevertheless, when Omkara starts to question her love for him, claiming she means to make fun of him, or use it as a façade to be with other men, she appears to need to remind him of how she had left everything she had and was once — the privileges of a young, promising, well-off and educated Brahman woman — just to be with him. Dolly's abandonment of her social status and privileges, and even isolation, is emphasized by her paleness, which, in comparison with the rest of the film's characters, specially Omkara, becomes a symbol of her higher social origin, as well as of the traditional values of modesty, virtue and purity that Desdemona is associated with.

Smaller details in the play denote Desdemona and Emilia's different views on marital affairs and what each female character thinks, since the mistreatment of women is a constant feature in the text. The same happens in the film. At one point Dolly says to Indu while cooking: my grandma always said the way to a man's heart was through his belly, to which Indu replies, "My grandma always told me to aim bit lower", as the two women appear cooking and commenting on their cooking skills in (00:41:58). They are later complimented by Omi, once again emphasizing traditional gender roles in the film, as linked with the marital status.

Omkara's internalization of Langda's persuasive discourse will juxtapose a distortedly-constructed image of women as temptresses and objects of sexual desire with Dolly's innocence, given her lack of involvement whatsoever in any of the liaisons with Kesu that Langda insists Omkara should believe. Omkara himself, like his Shakespearean

counterpart, will eventually grow unable to make sense of his own marital situation, overcome by social prejudice. Propelled by Langda's malignant scheming and his jealousy of Kesu, he will begin to question Dolly's fidelity and intentions rather than everyone else's: "Now tell me, why am I a fool? – Because what's a gorgeous girl like you doing with a brute like me?! And witch? – Because at times I feel, deep down, your beauty's all evil and twisted". Omkara's uncertainty culminates with the disappearance of Dolly's waistband, a family heirloom of his which functions as the replacement of Desdemona's 'virginal' white handkerchief, and that all the married women in his family wear during marriage. As in Shakespeare's text, Indu is coerced to help Langa, his motives unbeknownst to her even when Dolly tells her Omkara "hit her out of love", as a consequence of having lost the waistband that she had lost, to which the older woman replies that all women, regardless of what they do, are always thought to be guilty rather than innocent. As Indu's words predict, the disappearance of the waistband, together with Langda's verbal and physical manipulations throughout the film, will lead to the wedding massacre at the end of the film.

Having followed closely the events of the dramatic text, *Omkara's* final moments become significantly relevant to both the play and the film itself, taking us finally to Dolly and Omkara's traditional Hindi wedding, where Dolly's fate will become sealed as she imprints her hands in red against the wall, as if foreboding her own death. A vengeful Omkara and a reluctant Dolly reunite at their wedding, while Langda and Rajju plan Kesu's death after succeeding in making Omkara believe he was having an affair with Dolly in yet another one of Langda's superposition of conversations, scheming, and lies. Shortly after, Omkara takes over Othello's strangling of Desdemona, smothering the still clueless yet accepting Dolly to death with a pillow, as Raghunath's words, "she who can dupe her own father will never be anyone's", are repeated one last time as a voice over, marking Omkara's defeat under Raghunath words, Langda, and the pressure of societal expectations and prejudice, which are eventually tragically absorbed by him, and grow into the deadly jealousy and undermining insecurity that lead him to assassinate the newlywed Dolly. Nonetheless, and on a more vindicative note, as Indu discovers her repented brother over the dead body of Dolly (02:19:00), she quickly realizes what her husband and her own mistaken judgement have led to, and she slaps Langda as he confesses to Omkara that "The bitch wants to kill me, God knows why! She must have been having an affair too!... Think what you must. My truth and my lies have all got

blurred.”, the equivalent of Iago’s last words in Act Five, Scene Two: “Demand me nothing: what you know, you know”. After that, Omkara, repented of his actions and overwhelmed by the truth, commits suicide, followed by the return of Indu into the scene, this time seeking her own revenge and punishing her husband with a bar while she cries, and in what could be a revival of the myth of the goddess Kali, finally taking Langda’s life away.¹²

Thus, as García Periago declares regarding Bhardwaj’s film, “the exploitation of endless analogies between the play and film points to a stress on Bollywood cinematic fidelity to the Shakespearean text” (91), in this revision of traditional Bollywood’s technique and conventions, in a reunion of India’s postcolonial or ‘postdiasporic’ cinema, and England’s literary traditionalism. By recuperating and connecting once again with England’s most adapted playwright, and doing so from the Indian perspective, not only does Shakespeare’s text become renewed and more powerful than ever, but it also incorporates and reinforces what is representative of both cultures. In the case of *Omkara*, this combination has succeeded completely in representing and conveying what is essential and representative of *Othello*, but also in reimagining the play in a ‘divergent’ way within the dramatic and cinematographic language of Hindi cinema, an unexpected and less familiar format for the Western Shakespearean audiences which is nonetheless slowly acquiring the relevance it deserves within the field of Shakespearean studies, and film adaptation in general.

¹² The Indian goddess Kali is associated with time, death, and battle, usually portrayed as a warrior goddess always brandishing a weapon or knife. According to several Indian myths, she is said to have eliminated the troublesome demon Rakbatija who no one could stop, and to having punished thieves and criminals.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

It is necessary, after having seen three examples of divergent William Shakespeare in film, to take a step back in order to revisit the initial purpose of this project, and consolidate the ideas and concerns expressed in the introduction; namely, why the concept of a ‘divergent’ Shakespeare in film needs to be addressed and discussed, as a past and current evolutive step in the whole of Shakespeare adaptations. This study has departed from the premise that existing criticism on Shakespeare film adaptation has almost exclusively focused the Shakespearean films that are nowadays considered classic representations of the playwright’s texts, which were produced especially in the 90s boom of Shakespeare film adaptations. This has meant an abandonment, neglect or general lack of interest in the other Shakespearean films that were produced in the late 90s and in the last twenty years, which present us a divergent, modernised, plural, denouncing and culture-specific Shakespeare, while also bringing to life what is known and familiar of his plays.

The films discussed and attempted to analyse in this study, are the result of the popularity that Shakespeare gained during the 90s boom of big-budget adaptations such as Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet*, and of the ambitious creativity and experimentation of films such as Baz Luhrmann’s pop-cult modernisation of the romance of *Romeo and Juliet*, *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*. This has resulted in a number of adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, into particular cultures, ideologies, social realities, and contexts in general, that in merging with the play, become testimonies of what has become, and how Shakespeare can make sense to us too as spectators in the late 20th and 21st century, while maintaining its literary and potentially subverting essence. To this aim, this study has focused on three examples of this divergent Shakespeare, along with the film, literary and Shakespeare criticism that has been considered relevant or informative for each chapter.

The first chapter, devoted to analysing and discussing the Italian film *Caesar Must Die* (2012) in relation with the play of *Julius Caesar*, has aimed to analyse the film’s intertextual relation with the play, along with some of the most relevant elements that come into light in adapting the play into the heart of a Roman high-security prison. This study has followed the steps set by Maria Valentini’s critical essay. Valentini is one of the first academics to have shown interest in the film, or ‘docudrama’ as an adaptation of

Julius Caesar and whose work has been essential to this study both for her contributions to the critical writing on the film and on how the play's themes of as honour, masculinity, and power are dealt with, and for having become part of the discussion on the less popular and commercial adaptations of Shakespeare. In this section, the work of the Taviani brothers alongside with notions of adaptation by Linda Hutcheon, and of intertextuality and hypertextuality by Robert Stam, have informed the terminology and understanding of the film, as an adaptation of *Julius Caesar*. Also, the critical work of W.B Worthen on drama and performativity has been of help to understand why an adaptation such as *Caesar Must Die* is as successful and 'faithful' as any other adaptation, and to look carefully at how the setting of the film — also supported by the ideas already developed by Valentini —, the prison of Rebibbia and its inmate do not interfere with but rather mirror the drama and the preoccupations of the classic Shakespearean characters.

Chapter Two, devoted to Alan Brown's homosexual take on the romance of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Private Romeo* (2011) explores how in an American military school Brown's political denunciation of the 1993-2011 "Don't Ask Don't Tell" US policy perpetuating the discrimination against the LGBTI community, resonates with the restrictiveness of the family feud and society of Verona. Another contemporary adaptation — but which does not simply modernise the famous story of lovers — that takes from a starting point a homosexual Romeo and Juliet, whose love is not only forbidden, but also punished by society and the military. This second chapter not only has aimed to explore how the politics of gender and sexuality are made the subverting focus of this adaptation, but also how Brown's film responds to a need to renovate and reinvent the Shakespeare and the dramatic conflicts that we already know, into the social reality that, as 20th-21st century spectators, we are exposed to and which concerns us, and for some is equally restrictive. With the help of the critical work by Robert Appelbaum on *Romeo and Juliet*, and the contributions by Bryan Reynolds and Janna Segal on fugitive readings of the play, together with Brown's own comments on the film, this section has tried to compare and analyse how Shakespeare's text has been used to create a more contemporary space for the tragedy of prohibited love; a space that both inside and outside the film, tries to escape heteronormativity and repressive heterosexuality, and questions the self-imposed firmness of masculine identity, while creating a positive space for homosocial desire and homosexuality.

Chapter Three offers an analysis of Vishal Bhardwaj's Bollywood adaptation of *Othello*, *Omkaara*, as part of the vast and world of Bollywood and Hindi cinema, one of

the main producers of adaptations of British literature. This chapter has aimed to compare and examine, how racial Othering and the problematization of the main characters' constructed villainization in *Othello* function, together with the treatment of female characters of the play in a context of authoritarian patriarchy and the inclusion of proto-feminist discourses. In order to explore the subject of Othering in the context of Indian society and caste hierarchy that the film exhibit, Rosa María García Periago's thorough writings on Bollywood and Shakespeare have been of incredible help, also to understand the Indian Shakespeare through history, and to have an overview of how postcolonialism has lead to India and Britain's cultural, and literary relationship. Aided also by the work by Lynda E. Boose on Othering and the problematization of Othello's race as a strategy against constructed Othering rather than sheer racism, and of Stephen Greenblatt on the use of Iago's villainizing discourse to distort the constructed identity of Othello, has allowed for this study to contextualize the same elements and circumstances that make these possible in *Omkara*. Finally, with the analysis on the film and assisted by García Periago's own analysis on Bhardwaj's films, this chapter has also aimed to show how replacing Venice for the rural India in the film, enables and allows for the further questioning on obedience to patriarchal authority and the proto-feminist discourses of Emilia/Desdemona which take place in the play, are made visible too in the film.

Should anyone be further interested in the topic of 'divergent' Shakespeare on film, or on which other films could qualify as 'divergent', the book *New Wave Shakespeare* uses the concept of 'new wave' to organize similarly the adaptations of the last 25 years which evidence new approaches that have been taken to the 'staging' of Shakespeare on cinema. Also, apart from other 'divergent' films that this study has mentioned or referred to, it is perhaps worth naming other 'divergent' adaptations which deserve equally our time and attention both of the spectator and of the student or academic of Shakespeare, but also of adaptational studies in general. To name a few, such films include, but are not limited to the Justin Kurzel's seemingly historical yet altered *Macbeth* (2015), Billy Morrissette's black comedy *Scotland PA* (2001), the BBC mini-series *ShakespeaRe-Told* (2005), any of the other Bollywood adaptations of Shakespeare by Bhardwaj, and other non-western, or independent cinema adaptations of Shakespeare. It seems also that feminist readings and reinventions of Shakespeare have finally come into the screen with adaptations involving feminist views or a much-needed change of perspective from the traditional, to the female one. Such as the recent film *Lady Macbeth* (2006), an adaptation by William Oldroyd of a novel by Nikolai Leskov inspired by

Shakespeare's famous character, or the upcoming film *Ophelia* (2018), directed by Claire McCarthy, which will be taking as a starting point the story of *Hamlet*, but from the perspective of one of Shakespeare's most popular female character, Ophelia. Last, but not least, on more general terms, this study not only has aimed to initiate and address the need for a discussion on Shakespeare's 'divergent' adaptations, but also to instigate and encourage the curiosity and openness to them, and to consider the 'divergent' adaptations, adaptations as valid, provocative and representative as any other screen Shakespeare.

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Treball de grau

Declaració d'autoria

Amb aquest escrit declaro que sóc l'autor/autora original d'aquest treball i que no he emprat per a la seva elaboració cap altra font, incloses fonts d'Internet i altres mitjans electrònics, a part de les indicades. En el treball he assenyalat com a tals totes les citacions, literals o de contingut, que procedeixen d'altres obres. Tinc coneixement que d'altra manera, i segons el que s'indica a l'article 18, del capítol 5 de les Normes reguladores de l'avaluació i de la qualificació dels aprenentatges de la UB, l'avaluació comporta la qualificació de "Suspens".

Barcelona, a 12 setembre 2017

Signatura:

