

## André Téchiné's "Shakespearean Trilogy"

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This paper is a contribution inspired by Mariangela Tempera's original and ambitious project to establish an extended catalogue of Shakespearean allusions in cinema and popular culture. A number of us at my Research Center<sup>1</sup> are working with Mariangela Tempera on this project, focusing on Shakespearean allusions in French cinema. This research raises many questions. First, to what extent is an allusion worth analyzing? Can any "to be or not to be" quotation be considered an interesting reference to Shakespeare? Is the fact that the text is necessarily translated problematic? Can we identify the translation(s) used? Is it possible to understand why one was chosen rather than another? What is the function of the allusions? Are they to be limited within the scene in which they appear? Isn't there a danger of over-interpretation, of trying to make it "work", and being tempted to understand the film only through Shakespeare, with a narrow view of things... because in the case of allusions—and that is something Shakespeareans sometimes find hard to accept—Shakespeare is at the service of someone else's imagination, and not the other way round.

Shakespearean quotes in films should be treated differently from, say, mythological allusions in Shakespeare: mythology is the very stuff, the very material, Shakespeare shapes and fashions, whereas Shakespeare is seldom French directors' primary interest.

My contention is that, to understand the meaning of the references to *Hamlet* in French director André Téchiné's film *J'embrasse pas*, the best way to contextualize them is not to compare them with other references to *Hamlet* in other French films, but to compare them with other Shakespearean allusions in other Téchiné's films. Shakespearean allusions in Téchiné are worth investigating, but I would not hold that true for any

1. IRCL, The Institute for Research on the Renaissance, the Neo-classical Age and the Enlightenment is a joint research centre (UMR 5186) of the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). <[www.ircl.cnrs.fr/](http://www.ircl.cnrs.fr/)>

quotation in any film. I believe that some are quasi meaningless. In Téchiné though, they are recurrent and involve actual theatre staging and would-be actors. Téchiné's three Shakespearean allusions—*Romeo and Juliet* in *Rendez-vous*<sup>2</sup> (1985), *Hamlet* in *J'embrasse pas*<sup>3</sup> (1991) and *Richard III* in *Alice et Martin*<sup>4</sup> (1998)—are to be treated together if their significance is to be understood fully. *Hamlet* holds a central place in what I would call Téchiné's "Shakespearean trilogy". Oddly enough, nobody seems to have been interested so far in the function of Shakespeare in Téchiné. In each one of these films though, there is a character who wants to be an actor, and is asked to learn a passage from a Shakespearean play. The aim of this paper is to characterize clearly the way Shakespeare's quotations and references are used by André Téchiné, and to try and offer food for thought about a possible methodology of the treatment of the allusion in cinema.

In *Alice et Martin*, Alice asks her roommate, Benjamin, who is a struggling actor, "What's dubbing like?"<sup>5</sup>; he answers "Oh, c'est rigolo, ça change de Shakespeare...". The English subtitles in the DVD give the following translation: "It's fun. A far cry from Shakespeare"<sup>6</sup>. The French "Ça change de Shakespeare" also implies that dubbing, although it is repetitive, enables him to have a break from Shakespeare whom he seems to find tedious. Later, he recites *Richard III*'s "Winter of Discontent" to Martin, his half brother, and asks: "Was I a ham?"<sup>7</sup>, which implies that he is not quite sure how he should approach the part, that he is not certain he understood it. Martin tells him that he does not look like a monster at all, so his choice is surprising<sup>8</sup>. Benjamin then gives the key to the way the quotation should be interpreted: "I was made to feel like a black sheep and I finally became one. That's why we're close. Bastard and faggot". But apart

2. *Rendez-vous*, 1985. Directed by André Téchiné. Screenplay by André Téchiné and Olivier Assayas. France: Alain Terzian / « T FILMS ». DVD mk2, 2006.

3. *J'embrasse pas*, 1991. Directed by André Téchiné. Screenplay by Michel Grisolia, Jacques Nolot and André Téchiné. France, Italy: Maurice Bernart, Jean Labadie, Jacques-Eric Strauss et Alain Centonze / BAC Films. DVD Studio Canal DVD, 2006.

4. *Alice et Martin*, 1998. Directed by André Téchiné. Screenplay by Olivier Assayas, Gilles Taurand and André Téchiné. France, Spain: Christine Gozlan, André Martin, et Alain Sarde; DVD Studio Canal / Optimum World, 2009.

5. Time code: 00:39:06.

6. I am quoting the translation given by the English subtitles in the DVD, see footnote 4.

7. Time code: 01:12:17.

8. The idea that actors cannot successfully "create" characters who are initially different from their personality is recurrent in Téchiné. In an interview made for the *J'embrasse pas* DVD bonus features, Téchiné actually explains that ideally he would have liked the young actor Manuel Blanc, who had never played in a movie before, to discover the scene and his lines at the last moment. The film was also shot according to the chronology of the story in order to follow his progress realistically. Téchiné does not seem to like "character parts" or "rôles de composition".