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(Article begins on next page)

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Romeo and Juliet from page to screen: A multilateral model for the analysis of three Italian films

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Abstract

The article examines three Italian film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Castellani (1954), Freda (1964) and Torre (2000). As the tragedy of the lovers was originally an Italian tale that reached Shakespeare through translation and rewriting, this article explores the journey of the story back to Italy through a process of translation into a different medium, interpretation and re-appropriation by Italian directors. The transposition from page to screen is seen as a process of translation and is analysed adopting the 'star-like' model suggested by Cattrysse, which looks for the models or semiotic devices that have affected the production of a film. The article analyses the interpretations given by the Italian directors and identifies the different 'source texts' that might have influenced the translation from page to screen.

Keywords

Re-appropriation; Star-like model; intertexts; translation studies; film adaptation; Shakespeare; Italian directors; interpretation

Introduction

This article examines the translation of *Romeo and Juliet* from page to screen in three Italian films: Renato Castellani's *Giulietta e Romeo*/*Romeo and Juliet* (1954), Riccardo

Freda's *Romeo e Giulietta* (1964) and Roberta Torre's *Sud Side Stori* (2000).[1] Since Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 version is internationally renowned and studied (see Donaldson 1990; Pilkington 1994; Rothwell 1999; Davies 1996; Levenson 1987; Jackson 2000 among others), this article will focus on some neglected Italian adaptations.

The analysis adopts Cattrysse's target-oriented model (1992, 1997, 2000), which stems from the premise that since 'a film adaptation *functions* firstly as a film within a specific filmic context' (emphasis in the original) (1997: 223), it should 'be studied as a set of discursive (or communicational, or semiotic) practices, the production of which has been determined by various previous discursive practices and by its general historical context' (1992: 61–62). Elements such as other films, directorial view, target audience, norms and conventions in the cinema, other arts, other literary texts, previous stage or film versions, all constitute other 'source texts' or semiotic devices that bear an influence on the target film. A traditional, binary relationship between source literary text and film is thus discarded in favour of a 'multilateral', 'star-like' model (Cattrysse 2000: 258): the film adaptation is placed at the centre, surrounded by a series of source texts that point towards it. This method avoids judgemental comments and the issue of 'fidelity' to the literary source, and rather attempts to reveal the reasons for the differences between literary text and film. Since film adaptations often mediate not only the literary source text but also other literary models or alternative sources, the differences from the main source text are just as meaningful as the analogies between them, and should not be treated as unfaithfulness but as evidence of the influence of other models. The role of the researcher is to identify the norms that have functioned as sources for the film, which can be explicit or hidden. For instance, scholars should look 'for markers which may give

some clue of intertextual or intersystemic relations' (Cattrysse 1992: 64). The role of intertextuality in films (see Cartmell 2000a; Stam 2000; McFarlane 1996) is evident in the case of adaptations of the same literary text, where all the previous adaptations constitute a large hypotext to which the film-maker can refer (Stam 2000: 66). Another fundamental factor that affects the transposition from literary text to screen is the director's interpretation. How a director reads the play determines the way in which the play is translated on screen, which parts to cut, alter or add, and whether to adopt other intertexts. Each film, like each performance and translation, is a reading, a director's re-interpretation of the text that is conditioned by the surrounding context in which and for which the translation is made.

As the tragedy of the lovers was originally an Italian tale that reached Shakespeare through translation and rewriting, this article explores the journey of the story back to Italy through a process of translation into a different medium, interpretation and re-appropriation by Italian directors. This article will analyse the different readings given by three Italian directors and identify the 'source texts' and models that have impacted on the translation from page to screen, determining deviations from Shakespeare's play.

Renato Castellani's *Giulietta e Romeo*/*Romeo and Juliet* (1954)

In 1954 Castellani directed an Italian/British production with British protagonists and a cast of British and Italian actors. It was the first colour film version of the play and the first to be shot on location. Being an exponent of neorealism, Castellani preferred authentic settings, non-professional actors and believable young protagonists.[2]

Although the film won the Venice Film Festival as best film that year, critical response was, and still is, divided, and mainly centred upon the issue of faithfulness to

Shakespeare versus freedom of the cinema as an art form.[3] Manvell argued that the success of the film was due to the audience's response to 'a splendidly colourful reincarnation of fifteenth century Italy in Technicolour [while] there were few present in the audience […] who cared one way or the other whether the film kept reasonable faith with Shakespeare' (1971: 97). If judged in terms of how faithful it is to its literary source, the film can be easily seen as a deformation and a betrayal of the Bard's masterpiece.[4] Brode's comments on Castellani's desecrative cuts and changes to Shakespeare's play are a clear example of this attitude:

> Castellani felt free to drastically cut the original. Missing were memorable lines in the balcony scene, almost all the low-comedy relief (particularly Peter and the Nurse), as well as the Queen Mab dream speech, Mercutio himself reduced from Hamlet-like pre-existential voice to bit player. With the apothecary gone, Romeo stabbed himself rather than accomplish the deed with poison. Likewise, the director liberally added material, including a scene that explains why Friar John fails to deliver an all-important message to banished Romeo. (Brode 2000: 50)

These modifications and the supposed 'unfaithfulness' to the play are not arbitrarily made: they are 'meaningful infidelities'. Castellani's treason is a deliberate act: excisions as well as additions are due to the director's interpretation and they point towards the several other elements that he used as source material.

As testified by some of his collaborators, Castellani's aim in making the film was twofold: to translate the play into cinematic language and to give more emphasis to the Italianness of the story (Martini 1956). Thus, first he adjusted the text to the new medium through cuts, because in the cinema words are often secondary to visual effects and the full text cannot be fully performed since the film would become too lengthy.[5] Through the trimming of several lines this adaptation lasts about 134 minutes and thus conforms to

the cinematic convention that the average expected length of a film should be approximately two hours (Jackson 2000: 17). Second, in order to 're-create' an Italian atmosphere Castellani eliminated all the aspects that for him were 'not Italian' and not realistic, i.e. Elizabethan elements typical of Shakespeare's language such as poetry, complex wordplay and witticism. Sonnets, rhymed verse and the extensive use of the conventional language of Petrarchism[6] are important linguistic features of the play. Since they contrast with realism, they were removed by the director. Castellani's attitude towards the text agrees with that of most Italian translators, Shakespeare scholars and directors up to the mid-twentieth century, who perceived the play's literariness as an unnatural, conventional, exaggerated trait typical of Elizabethan times and not worthy of being transplanted into Italian culture – despite its origin in Italian literature (see Minutella 2005). The play is also rich in bawdy language. Witticisms and vulgar wordplay abound in the speeches of Mercutio and the young men. They are explicit in the rude jokes of the male servants in the opening scene and in the several sexual allusions made by Mercutio, but also by Romeo and Benvolio (see, for instance, the 'contest of wits' in Act 2, Scene 4). Women also enjoy sexual innuendo, since the Nurse, Juliet and Lady Capulet make reference to sexual pleasure and desire (see, for instance, Juliet's 'epithalamium' in Act 3, Scene 2). Bawdy talk, wordplay and sexual allusions, like the use of poetry, are important linguistic and thematic hallmarks of the play which Castellani perceived as too conventional, unrealistic and not Italian, and which thus had to be removed. This is the reason why several speeches are abridged or missing in the film.

In order to highlight the Italianness of the story and take the tale back to its Italian roots Castellani went back to the Italian sources of Shakespeare's play – two short stories in particular. Luigi Da Porto's *Istoria novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti con la loro pietosa morte, intervenuta già nella città di Verona nel tempo del Signor Bartolomeo della Scala* (1530) was his main reference point, but the film also bears similarities with Matteo Bandello's *Giulietta e Romeo* ([1554] 1993).[7] The story in its Italian versions is read as a domestic tragedy of individuals: the focus is on Romeo and Juliet and their conflict with their families. The lovers are left alone, since secondary characters are given less importance. For instance, Marcuccio (Mercutio) only appears briefly at the ball, where he is described by Giulietta as a young man with cold hands (in Da Porto) and as an entertainer among his male friends (in Bandello). He does not make any speeches or vulgar jokes, and he is not Romeo's best friend. Giulietta's cousin Tebaldo (Tybalt) is one of the most aggressive of the Capulets who is killed by Romeo during a fight between members of the two families. 'Il Conte di Lodrone' (Paris) is mentioned only after the lovers' secret marriage, and the Nurse does not exist. Another element worthy of attention in the Italian novelle is the character of Giulietta: she is 18 – much older than in Shakespeare's play – she is presented as determined and self-conscious and her relationship with her parents is described in detail. Also of particular interest is the representation of the friar in the Italian versions. He is generally seen as an ambiguous character and his hypocrisy is stressed on several occasions. However, unlike in Shakespeare's play, in the novelle he does not desert Giulietta in the tomb: he is crying and trying to comfort the girl when suddenly she holds her breath and dies. Another

fundamental difference in the final scene is that the lovers talk to each other before Romeo's death.

A comparison of Castellani's version with Shakespeare's play and the Italian sources reveals that several characters and episodes in the film are moulded on the native Italian tradition of the tale rather than on the Bard's text. What follows is an excursus of the aspects which are an apparent 'betrayal' of Shakespeare but a derivation from and faithfulness to the Italian novelle and to Castellani's interpretation.

Mercutio's character is particularly affected by the director's excisions, since he is deprived of his importance and reduced to a minor role: his 'Queen Mab speech' is absent, his closeness to Romeo eliminated, and his witticisms censored. This is a clear influence of the Italian sources. The diminished importance of Mercutio also contributes to changing Romeo's character, who becomes more solitary, romantic and less playful – in line with the novelle, which focused on the lovers, and did not show Romeo with friends.[8] The novelle function as a model for the film also in Castellani's choice to describe Juliet and her environment in more detail than Romeo and his, and in the characterization of Juliet. The director's cuts appear to be directed to portray Juliet as romantic but less passionate than in the Shakespearean text, since exaggerated behaviour, conventional language and sexual allusions are removed. Poetic language and wordplay – typical features of the play which were not present in the Italian novelle – are expurgated from the film. In keeping with the traditional romantic and sanitized view of the story, Castellani seems to emphasize the purity of Romeo and Juliet's love. He avoids any sexual explicitness in their relationship, both in words and in images: all the references to sex in Shakespeare's play are excised.

Another deviation from Shakespeare having Da Porto as its model is Friar Laurence's plan to reunite the lovers. His scheme to take Juliet to Mantua during the Easter procession, disguised as a monk, is directly borrowed from the novella. Castellani also adds a wedding scene which uses some lines from Shakespeare but is directly inspired by Da Porto's description, as well as a funeral procession for Juliet.

A character that is subject to interesting alterations is Friar Laurence, who differs from both Shakespeare and the novelle. Castellani clearly sees him as a good-hearted and well-meaning person: any behaviour or words which might put him in a negative or ambiguous light are eliminated. The friar's words to Juliet in the final scene (I dare no longer stay) and his cowardly behaviour in the tomb are cut. He does not desert Juliet, but remains next to her, praying. The references for this scene are the Italian texts. However, the friar's extremely positive and slightly naïve image in the film is different from the character in the novelle, where he is more ambiguous and a hypocrite. The source behind this interpretation of the friar by Castellani is another model belonging to Italian literature: the character of Fra' Cristoforo in Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*. Although Castellani did not explicitly acknowledge such derivation, the use of Manzoni's character as a model is evident. One scene in particular resembles an episode in the Italian novel: Friar Laurence meets Juliet in the convent and hugs her, then says in Latin to Friar John '*Omnia munda mundis*' – meaning that for the pure of heart everything is pure – and closes the door. This sequence is directly derived from Chapter 8 of *I promessi sposi*.[9] Friar Laurence's character is influenced by Manzoni's Fra' Cristoforo, and Friar John by Fra' Fazio. Friar John's role is expanded by Castellani through two models: *I promessi sposi* and Cukor's 1936 adaptation. This film appears to be another

source text for Castellani's version. Castellani interpolates a scene in which Friar John goes to Mantua and is detained inside a sick man's house, which is extremely similar to one in Cukor's film. A further added element that seems to derive from Cukor is a scene in which Juliet sees Paris before the ball, in the Capulets' house. Derivation from Cukor seems plausible also for the scene of Juliet's funeral procession – which is not described in Shakespeare's play but is portrayed in a similar way in the previous adaptation. Juliet's funeral procession may also have other source models, such as Da Porto's description or Garrick's theatre version, which contained this scene and influenced performances throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, while the procession in Castellani's film reminds the spectator of Cukor's adaptation, they also both bear resemblance with the Italian painting *Il funerale di Sant'Orsola* by Carpaccio. It might thus also be possible that both Castellani and Cukor were visually inspired by the same work of art.

Another very important, explicit model for the film was Quattrocento Italian art. On a visual and aural level – in terms of costumes, setting, photography and soundtrack – Castellani imitated Renaissance Italian paintings, sculptures, architecture and music, since he wanted to recreate an authentic Italian atmosphere. Both covert allusions and overt references to fifteenth-century Italian paintings can be found in various scenes and in all the costumes.[10] For instance, the dress Juliet wears while waiting for the Nurse derives from the painting *La Madonna del Parto* by Piero della Francesca; Juliet's night gown was inspired by *Venus and Mars* by Botticelli and Juliet's position while she is reading a book recalls the Virgin Mary's posture in *The Annunciation* by Leonardo (see Ghenzi [1954] 1979: 61–62; Martini 1956). The presence of lily branches in some scenes

portraying Juliet is also an influence of Renaissance art that carries symbolic value. The lily is a Christian symbol of purity, innocence and virtue associated with the Virgin Mary and with the Archangel Gabriel, and often appears in Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation. Allusions to fifteenth-century Italian culture and literature are a further meaningful interpolation by Castellani aimed at rendering the film's atmosphere more 'Italian'. For instance, the music composed by Roman Vlad for the ball was inspired by the rhythms of sixteenth-century Italian dances, while the lyrics of the song are taken from an Italian sonnet by Boiardo. The fact that the song is based on a sonnet might be an attempt by Castellani to point out the importance of Petrarchism in Shakespeare's play, although it tends to be downplayed in the dialogues of the film.[11]

The film's textual cuts, alterations and expansions are clear symptoms of other models used by the director. Different elements have strongly affected the production of this adaptation, thus sometimes overruling Shakespeare's play. Da Porto's novella constitutes a powerful source model and interpretative filter that determines deviations from Shakespeare's text and shapes the director's reading. Together with Da Porto and Bandello, Italian literature and art represent important sources, and Cukor's previous film version clearly functioned as an intertext for Castellani's transposition on several levels.

Riccardo Freda's *Romeo e Giulietta* (*Los Amantes de Verona*) (1964)

The next film to be discussed is *Romeo e Giulietta*, directed by Freda in 1964.[12] Freda was a controversial director who was strongly against the fashion of neorealism, to which he preferred American 'spectacular' films such as adventure and western films which made audiences dream (Della Casa 2001: 7, 1999). For him cinema was action and

emotion, and it had to depict the extraordinary rather than the everyday. He was not interested in common, real, people, but in heroes (Freda, in Faldini and Fofi 1979: 356).

Freda's version of *Romeo and Juliet* is never mentioned in studies on Shakespeare on film, or in the introductions to the various editions of the play. Very little information on this adaptation is available even in critical works on the director. The film is a Spanish/Italian production with Italian, Spanish and English-speaking actors.[13] Analysis reveals that Freda followed Shakespeare's narrative structure quite closely and that his alterations to the play and the style of filming are clear influences of the genres the director liked most, and of his interpretation of the story. Despite being a costume drama, the film contains features of various genres and several sources can be identified.

The pre-credit sequence immediately points towards one of the models for this adaptation: western films. The movie opens with a panning shot of a field surrounded by mountains in which a group of men on horseback (the Capulets) are destroying some fences, allowing the enclosed cattle to escape. The loud, alarmed bellowing of cows and the whinnying of horses prevail. A second group of men arrives and a fight with swords and arrows ensues, the only words uttered being 'I Capuleti!'. A man is hit by an arrow and falls off his horse to the ground; the camera freezes on the image of his bloodied face; music begins then the title '*Romeo e Giulietta*' appears, followed by the credits. Derivation from Shakespeare is declared in the title, but the director highlights that it is a 'free rendering'. This sequence also seems to suggest that this version is different from the traditional depiction that one might expect. The two families are conflicting rich land and cattle owners living in Verona during Renaissance times. With Shakespeare's words completely eliminated and Benvolio and Tybalt absent, chases on horseback, fights and

blood – which are recurrent elements in westerns – prevail. The film's use of violence to take control of the herd is another theme borrowed from westerns.

Adventure films also come to mind in other scenes. The director modifies the episode in which the servant asks Romeo and Benvolio to read the invitation to the Capulets' ball. As Peter enters an *osteria*/saloon, some servants of the Montagues make him stumble. A fight ensues between the Capulets and the Montagues, and Peter loses the guest list, which is found by Romeo. Most of Shakespeare's dialogue is omitted, and this brawl clearly recalls saloon sequences with fist-fights in western movies: the men fight, plates, chairs and tables get broken, one man falls off a balcony, another one is thrown into the air.

Another inserted scene, which brings to mind adventure films, shows Romeo fleeing from Verona at dawn. Having descended from a stone wall, he is stopped by a group of armed guards, but he manages to escape by hitting them, jumping on a horse and galloping away, through the gates of the town and through the fields. The guards chase him on horseback, but Romeo hides inside a crevice in a rock; they pass by, and the camera focuses on his satisfied smile. This scene, which is more than two minutes long and is accompanied by orchestral music (Rachmaninoff's piano concerto n. 2, movement 3, *Allegro scherzando*), contains traces of several models. Adventure films are evoked through non-stop galloping horses, chases, the centrality of the landscape and the portrayal of the hero. The setting – woods, mountains and red rocks – reminds spectators of spaghetti westerns, which were shot in the same Spanish locations. The employment of quick camera movement, long silences, close-ups of Romeo and operatic music to underscore the character's mood and create suspense are traits borrowed from Sergio

Leone's films. On the other hand, the portrayal of Romeo as a handsome, positive hero seems more in keeping with the protagonists of traditional American westerns than with Leone's anti-heroes.

Freda's characterization of the lovers is worth reflecting on. Romeo, who is frequently seen through close-ups, is defined through his actions rather than his words. His bravery is given emphasis – his adventures accompanied by music – while several of his speeches are eliminated. The addition of scenes and the cutting of some lines – with the complete omission of poetic language and wordplay – contribute to making him more concrete, but also more idealized. Juliet is presented as a strong-willed young woman. This is achieved by highlighting her desire to commit suicide in Friar Laurence's cell and by retaining part of her 'potion speech'. Cuts to poetry and wordplay result in a simplification of language, but also in a sanitized and idealized character, akin to Freda's depiction of Romeo. The relationship between the lovers is also emptied of any sexual connotation. The purity of their love is stressed through images and through romantic music which underscores the lovers' meetings.

As in Castellani's adaptation, nobody engages in bawdy wordplay. All the play's sexual allusions are censored in this film, which follows the Italian tradition of the story in its absence of vulgar language and wordplay. Freda retains Romeo's close friendship with Mercutio and Benvolio. However, the young men do not make any vulgar puns. While the comical aspect and bawdy language are eliminated from the text, Freda maintains some comedy by giving more importance to the servant Peter, who is played by an Italian comedian who had worked in films with Totò. This points to another source

that might have slightly influenced Freda – Cukor – who gave similar importance to Peter.

The scene in which Juliet drinks the sleeping potion makes reference to another model for the film: horror movies. A bright red light surrounds Juliet, the camera focuses on her face, on her blue eyes, then on the red liquid and her lips in an extreme close-up. This framing and the predominance of red convey a sense of tragedy, of death. The scene with the Apothecary, which was omitted by Castellani, is also imbued with tension by Freda, who adds a visual reference to death through a skeleton and a skull. The last scene also bears the influence of horror films, because of the presence of lightning, red and blue lights, thunder and extreme close-ups of terrified faces. When Romeo arrives outside the church, a long fight with Paris starts, its dramatic quality enhanced by music and darkness. When Paris falls dead and Romeo enters the church there is thunder, and lightning illuminates the church with a bright blue light, then darkness descends again. When Romeo sees Juliet's body loud thunder amplifies his terror.

The final scene deserves further comments. Friar Laurence arrives too late: he descends into the tomb accompanied by dramatic music, the camera zooms in on his terrified face and the film ends with the audience sharing his point of view: a close-up of the dead lovers. This is a reference to a previous horror film by Freda, *Lo spettro/The Ghost* (1963), in which the actor playing Friar Laurence (Umberto Raho) had the role of a priest. Raho appeared in the final dramatic scene, commenting that evil is inside each of us (Della Casa 1999: 81). The two sequences are strikingly similar, and the horrified silent face of Raho might be a reminder of his words in *Lo spettro*, and a suggestion of a final comment to the story.

Music contributes to creating Freda's reading in terms of romance, adventure and terror: scores by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff highlight the romantic and dramatic moments amplifying the protagonists' feelings. Music themes underscore the scenes of Romeo's flight from and to Verona, the lovers' encounters, as well as the fights and the final scene. For instance, the romance of the lovers' first night and their sad parting at dawn are emphasized by the lyrical, melancholic operatic theme of Rachmaninoff's Piano concerto n. 2, movement 2, while the following scene in which Romeo escapes from Verona chased by the guards is accompanied by the fast tempo, agitated rhythm and tension of movement 3. The use of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* (Fantasy overture after William Shakespeare) and *Francesca da Rimini*, op. 32 (Fantasy after Canto V of the 'Inferno' from the *Divine Comedy*) are particularly interesting, as the former is a reincarnation of the story, and the latter is inspired by another famous love story belonging to Italian literature. Freda thus combines Shakespeare's play with one of its musical reincarnations and ties it into an Italian tradition of doomed romance.

Freda follows the traditional interpretation of the story as a domestic tragedy centred around the idealized lovers, who are seen as heroes, and he mediates Shakespeare through other intertexts, including his favourite cinematic models – adventure, western and horror films, long chase sequences, fights, dramatic images – previous films, and a dark view of human nature. While no particular directors or works are directly quoted, there are cross-filtrations from different genres. Visually, the film makes use of some conventionalized, recurrent images and elements of the western, i.e., mountains and fields; the tight-bodied dresses of women and fist-fights in saloons; the use of bow and arrow; the dominant presence of horses; close-ups of the positive hero. The film shares

with spaghetti westerns, and Leone in particular, the use of the same locations, and of long, wordless scenes with close-ups of the protagonist and dramatic music. The presence of several scenes with horses, chases and brawls, as well as Romeo's portrayal as an adventurous, clever, strong young man – reminding us of adventure films – are also in keeping with Freda's style, with his idea of cinema as action and with his interest in heroes.[14] The horror genre, to which the film also relates, is evoked through the use of colours, light, music and camera movement, as well as through direct references to Freda's film *Lo spettro* and the exploitation of some typical visual tropes. Cukor's adaptation functions as a source model for the characterization of Peter, while this film shares with Castellani's version the reference to theatre through the casting of a Shakespearean actor,[15] the removal of wordplay, bawdy language and poetry, the adding of a death in the opening scene as well as the detachment of the Prince from the people of Verona, since he always appears in his palace.

Roberta Torre's *Sud Side Stori* (2000)

In the year 2000 the female Italian director Roberta Torre decided to film the play. Her musical *Sud Side Stori* (2000) exploits the status of *Romeo and Juliet* as a classic text and uses it only as an intertext, by means of quotations and allusions, in a game of inversions and subversions of names and roles. Torre transposes the story temporally and spatially, plays with the Bard's text, with the tools of the cinema, and interacts with the spectators by referring to other famous reincarnations of the tale and to the context of production. This almost playful approach, and a style which is a mixture of parody, grotesque, kitsch and pastiche, are intertwined with a political interpretation of the story, as the film focuses on ethnic conflict.

The film is set in contemporary Palermo, where Romeo and Juliet are a white man and a black woman who are separated by prejudices and 'who fight for the right to love each other precisely because they are different'.[16] Toni Giulietto is an untalented Sicilian rock singer, while Romea is a Nigerian woman who has just arrived in Palermo with a group of illegal immigrants and who is forced to work as a prostitute. The arrival of the 'Africans' – mostly women – sows confusion among the native Sicilians, and the domestic tragedy turns into a tragedy caused by racial tensions between Sicilians and African immigrants.

A brief analysis of the title, the main characters and the plot of the film will clarify Torre's attitude towards *Romeo and Juliet* and towards contemporary Italian and American culture. The title *Sud Side Stori* is a clear ironic reference to the famous musical *West Side Story* (1961), from which the film borrows also the genre, the ethnic conflict and the names of some characters. Toni Giulietto's name refers to *West Side Story*'s Tony, while his fiancee is called Maria – the female protagonist in the American musical. The name Toni is also linked with the Italian rock singer Little Tony – an Italian version of Elvis Presley – who appears in the film as Giulietto's idol. At the level of the story, the film presents similar actions and characters, which are adapted to an Italian context and comically distorted. Juliet's parents are turned into Giulietto's three obnoxious unmarried aunts, while Romea's friends are called Mercutia and Baldassarra (female versions of Romeo's best friend and faithful servant in the play). Juliet's arranged marriage with Paris becomes Giulietto's ten-year engagement with Maria, who is not a 'pretty flower' but a sad overweight bulimic girl. The Prince is represented by the mayor of Palermo, who is promoting a campaign of tolerance, integration and peace. The

Nurse is absent, but Little Tony might be viewed as her surrogate because of his role as Giulietto's helper (he brings Romea to him so that they can spend the night together). A figure which is perhaps an ironic and negative version of Friar Laurence – as he enacts a similar function of 'helper' and creates strange potions – is *u zu' Pippo*, the owner of a tavern whose clientele consists exclusively of men who drink and possibly have sex together. He is a 'dodgy' man with a strange metallic voice who sits inside a big wine bottle-shaped confessional and warns Giulietto that his love for Romea will cause him trouble. Romeo's banishment for killing Tybalt becomes Romea's exile from Palermo with all the 'Africans', because she is accused of the death of Zu' Vincenzo – a man who was in love with her and supposedly had a heart attack while having sex with her. Zu' Pippo gives Giulietto a sleeping potion which will make him seem dead, and enable him to escape and free Romea. However, in 'Africa' Romea reads in a newspaper about his death, runs back to Palermo and stabs herself by the body of her beloved. Giulietto wakes up too late, but he accidentally dies, shot alongside his three aunts by two mafia killers. After a close-up of the dead lovers, we hear the breaking news about the gunfire, then a journalist appears on the screen and comments on the lovers' tragedy using the play's final lines.

The film presents a web of intertextual relations with the play, other film adaptations, Torre's previous production and contemporary society. While it directly hints at *West Side Story*, Shakespeare's play is used as a subtext. The Bard's words are present only in three instances. After the first meeting, Romea uses a line uttered by Romeo during the balcony scene.[17] She later pronounces an adaptation of Juliet's famous lines: '*Oh Giulietto, Giulietto! Perché sei tu Giulietto?*'. Finally, the journalist adopts the

Prince's last words as a comment on the lovers' sad story.[18] This closing sequence is also a clear quotation from Luhrmann's 1996 *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*, in which the same lines were read by an anchorwoman. A further allusion to Shakespeare's text can be found in the lyrics of a song that reduce and trivialize Juliet's 'potion speech', where she expresses her fears before drinking the sleeping potion.[19] The film also contains several instances of self-referentiality, as Torre refers to her own production.[20] In *Sud Side Stori* – like in most of her works – women are dominant figures: Romea is more determined than Giulietto; his family consists of three aunts; Mercutio and Balthasar are turned into women; there are two female narrators, Giuseppona and Santa Rosalia.[21] Torre uses the interview technique: some scenes resemble interviews, such as when the black women, all prostitutes, seem to directly talk to the camera, answering questions about their lives.[22] This is another link with her previous work.[23] Another instance of self-reference is the presence of journalists and of non-professional actors.[24]

An important feature of the film is Torre's exploitation of stereotypes. She resorts to racial and sexual stereotypes and exaggerates them, so that the spectator almost feels disturbed. When the Sicilian women see the black women, they shout 'the cannibals!' and Romea is described as similar to a black panther. In various scenes she is portrayed as beautiful but dangerous – she is a symbol of lust. This presentation draws upon racist stereotypes which associate black people with savages and wild animals, stress the 'bestial sexual license of the African' (Bhabha 1983: 18) and oscillate between fear and pleasure.[25] Racist comments become even fiercer when Giulietto's aunts realize that their nephew is attracted to Romea. The white women call the black women 'disgusting niggers', 'monkeys', 'dirty niggers'; they believe that they eat cockroaches, mice and

worms, that they never wash themselves and that they stink. The 'others' are seen as dirty, polluted and dangerous. However, stereotypes are also adopted by the African women, who think that Italian women only care about food. Torre reduces black people and women to a few exaggerated traits, and presents these comments in a comical way.[26] Sexual stereotypes are also exploited by Torre, especially in her presentation of Romea in the 'balcony scene', where she is in the street and Giulietto on the balcony. The camera guides the spectator to see her through the man's eyes. After a first close-up of her face, the camera swiftly cuts to her feet in high heels, then slowly moves upwards to linger on her long, beautiful legs, her short pink dress and her face again. Camera movement and slow motion define Romea as an object to be looked at, desired and 'consumed'. This is in line with Mulvey's argument that 'women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact' (1975: 11). Torre's use of the camera in portraying Romea foregrounds the voyeuristic 'white male gaze to such an extent that we must find it uncomfortable and therefore question its omniscience' (Minutella 2003: 366).

Analysis has shown that Torre's film addresses contemporary relevant issues such as the exploitation of black women, immigration, racism and a view of women as sexual objects, refers to many models and makes use of racial and sexual stereotypes through a style which is often over the top and grotesque. The director 'presents the stereotype as a cartoon-like, ridiculous reduction, and might be viewed as using extreme reductiveness in order to validate the need to deconstruct our stereotypes, our ways of "viewing" a film, and our position as spectators' (Minutella 2003: 370). Torre's narrative technique also has a distancing function: while in the other adaptations the narrative voice is covert –

events narrate themselves so that the viewer is more involved with the story – in this version there are two overt narrators who intervene and directly speak to the viewers, telling them how to interpret what happens. These obtrusive narrators break the illusion of reality and make the audience more alert. Torre's choice of names, themes, camera movement, narrative technique and exaggerated style seems to aim to distance the audience from the story, in order to render them more aware of the issues at stake, more able to observe and judge the events, stereotypes and prejudices portrayed, and more prone to play with her game of parallels, quotations and subversions. Shakespeare's text becomes one among many sources which are intertwined in this film, a pretext to address serious problems in an ironic way.

Conclusion

This article has shown that Cattrysse's star-like model is useful in understanding how Shakespeare's play is transferred to screen. Considering the differences from the literary source as symptoms of other norms that have influenced the making of the films has shed new light on the adaptations, their directors and their various sources. The Italian film adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* analysed in this article exemplify different interpretations of the play and bear traces of several models. As far as directorial view is concerned, as directors rethink *Romeo and Juliet* in terms of their own views and socio-historical context, significant ideological shifts come to the play in production, and it is possible to identify some main international trends in interpretation. An important question thus needs to be answered: how should we position these Italian adaptations in relation to interpretations and international theatre and film productions of the play? A well-developed tradition deriving from the Italian sources of the tale sees the play as a

domestic tragedy and a romantic story, with a focus on family relationships and on the idealized lovers. With their emphasis on the love story and their elimination of wordplay and bawdy language, Castellani and Freda seem to read the story in line with the native Italian tradition, in terms of domestic tragedy, with an idealized and perhaps sanitized view of the lovers. In the mid-twentieth century an interpretation of the play in terms of contrast between generations emerged. The emphasis shifted from the lovers to the feud, from love to hatred.[27] A political reading has also come to the fore in international productions since the 1950s. Directors have used the play to make political statements related to their contemporary environment, interpreting *Romeo and Juliet* as a tragedy of individuals caught up in conflicts of different types. As a result, 'the theme of ethnic or social hatred has become the dominant one in *Romeo and Juliet*. The play has come to symbolise bitter blood-feuds everywhere' (Loehlin 2002: 79). A fourth, recent, interpretation reads the play as a canonical text, a myth, a classic that can be referred to or quoted without being fully used. *Romeo and Juliet* survives as an intertext and is combined with other texts. Films using this approach have been termed 'cinematic offshoots' (Howard 2000). Torre's film combines these last two approaches. First, it represents a political reading as ethnic difference and racism form the barriers between the lovers. Second, it constitutes a rewriting of a myth because the status of Shakespeare's play as a canonical text allows her to use it only as raw material from which to develop a film which 'quotes' very few lines from it.

In re-appropriating the story of the Italian lovers, each director reinterpretes Shakespeare's play through his or her own sensitivity, laying emphasis on specific aspects, mediating it through other sources and being affected by specific conventions.

The three film adaptations attempt to comply with the cinematic convention of the 'ideal running time of less than two hours' (Jackson 2000: 17) since they all last approximately two hours.[28] This is an explicit model which is usually followed in Shakespeare films and which determines excisions. The omission of some actions and speeches in all the versions analysed is partly dictated by the need to adhere to this convention, while other excisions are due to each director's interpretation of the story. For instance, due to media differences all adaptations omit Benvolio's description of the opening brawl, and Friar Laurence's final recapitulation of the lovers' story, since films prefer to 'show' what literary works 'tell'.

All three films have been shown to refer back also to several filmic and non-filmic intertexts that constitute a body of semiotic devices and models that condition the relationship with the literary text. Several extra-literary factors impinge on each film, such as the native Italian tradition of the story, cinema conventions, each director's own past production, previous film versions, other rewritings and other film genres. In particular, Castellani created an Italian Renaissance setting and atmosphere, interpolated overt references to Italian art and literature and made allusions to previous films and theatrical tradition; Freda's version has western, adventure and horror film affiliations through its appropriation of iconic signifiers and camerawork technique and quotes from previous films; Torre's desecrating offshoot, which addresses contemporary concerns, is highly self-referential and creates intertextual references to the play and to other films. The translation from page to screen of *Romeo and Juliet* is a complex decision-making process in which cuts, alterations, additions to Shakespeare's playtext, camera movement, the setting, the choice of music and costumes are always meaningful since they contribute

to creating a specific reading of the story and are symptoms of alternative sources and cross-filtrations.

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Notes

[1] While Castellani's film is quite well-known by the international public, Freda's and Torre's versions are almost unknown. For full details of the films see Castellani (1954), Freda (1964) and Torre (2000).

[2] The leading roles were played by Susan Shentall (19) and Laurence Harvey (25), who were much younger than Norma Shearer (34) and Leslie Howard (42), the stars in George Cukor's 1936 adaptation. The fact that Flora Robson, playing the Nurse, was an experienced theatre actress seems to have created problems for Castellani, who preferred to 'mould' his actors (see Martini 1956: 142).

[3] On this debate see Rothwell: 'bardophiles despised Castellani's *Romeo and Juliet* because it put movie making ahead of the text, while the cinéphiles saw it as a work of art independent of its

literary source' (1999: 126). Brode maintains that it is difficult to judge Castellani's film because 'as cinema, it's terrific; as an adaptation of a great play, it's terrible' (2000: 51).

[4] Film adaptation discourse, like traditional normative translation discourse, has often focused on the question of fidelity, looking for equivalencies between source and target text. Terms carrying negative connotations such as 'infidelity', 'betrayal' and 'loss' abound in the language of adaptation criticism, as well as in translation studies and Shakespeare studies. However, fidelity as an evaluative criterion has been criticized by many scholars (see Stam 2000, 2005; McFarlane 1996, 2000; Whelehan 1999; Vincendeau 2001; Boose and Burt 1997, 2003; Jackson 2000 among others).

[5] As pointed out by Jackson, 'during its theatrical career for diverse reasons the play's text has been trimmed and parts of it reshuffled – particularly in the final two acts' (2000: 31). On the performance history of the play see also Levenson (1987), Wells (1996) and Loehlin (2002).

[6] Petrarchism is intended here as the use of a style that imitates Petrarch, by adopting the sonnet form and the elements typical of its rhetoric, such as oxymora, hyperboles, conceits, paradoxes, typical metaphors related to the sun, the moon, the sea, fire, the use of the blazon to describe the physical features of the beloved woman, as well as witty conceits and wordplay. *Romeo and Juliet* contains various sonnets (e.g. the choruses in Acts 1 and 2, Lady Capulet's comments on Paris in Act 1, Scene 3, and the shared sonnet between the lovers at the ball, in Act 1, Scene 4). Moreover, throughout the play rhyming verse and the tropes of Petrarchism are used by various characters: rhetorical devices such as oxymora, hyperbole, repetition, metaphors, anti-thesis and the 'blazon' to describe the physical features of the lover are typical *topoi* adopted by many of the characters, especially by Mercutio and the women, sometimes even with a satirical intent. For discussions on the presence of Petrarchism in *Romeo and Juliet* see Levenson (1982), Pasternak Slater (1988), Whittier (1989), Roberts (1998), Clemen (1951), Mahood (1957), Levin (1960), Wells (1996), as well as the English editions and Italian translations of the play.

[7] On Castellani's project and aims in making the film see Ghenzi ([1954] 1979: 40), Martini (1956) and Nicolai (1986). As reported by Martini and Nicolai, Castellani's original intention was actually to make a film from Da Porto's novella. He had written a first screenplay based only on the Italian work, but this first project was not accomplished and he finally decided to adopt Shakespeare's version. It is unclear whether the choice requiring Shakespeare to be more prominent was Castellani's or the production company's (Martini 1956: 37–46; Nicolai 1986: 223–24).

[8] Note that in the novelle Romeo's cousin, Benvolio, was not mentioned at all.

[9] In that chapter Agnese and Lucia go to enter the friary with Renzo to see Fra' Cristoforo, and Fra' Fazio says that women are not allowed in. Fra' Cristoforo replies '*Omnia munda mundis*'. In Castellani's film, when Juliet goes to the friary for confession, she enters the cloister and asks Friar John where Friar Laurence is, then enters his cell. When Friar John sees Juliet hugging Friar Laurence he stands by the doorway coughing, as if to point out that such a behaviour is against the rules. Friar Laurence says in Latin '*Omnia munda mundis*' and closes the door. The camera focuses on Friar John, who repeats the words wondering about their mysterious meaning.

[10] On Castellani's use of Renaissance art in scenes and costumes see Ghenzi ([1954] 1979) and Martini (1956), which contain photos of the works of art that inspired the director. About 500 costumes were designed by Leonor Fini following Castellani's suggestions. The women's dresses and hairstyles, as well as the men's clothes, are taken from several paintings. Capulet closely resembles Henry VIII in the portrait by Holbein (see also Minutella 2005: 235–55).

[11] During the ball a man announces that a boys' choir will sing a song based on a sonnet by Matteo Maria Boiardo entitled 'Io vidi su quel viso primavera'. This addition is another reference by Castellani to Quattrocento Italy, this time through literature, as Boiardo lived in Ferrara in the second half of the fifteenth century and became famous for his poetry, his sonnets and 'L'Orlando innamorato'.

[12] Freda made about 50 films, experimenting with all sorts of genres. He directed costume dramas, historical films, several film adaptations of literary works, horror and adventure films. He became famous for his horror films. He made the first Italian horror film in 1957, *I Vampiri*, under the pseudonym of Robert Hampton.

[13] The leading roles were played by Geronimo Meynier and Rosemarie Dexter. The film was shot on location in Spain for the externals and in Italy in the Titanus studios in Rome (Della Casa 2005). I am grateful to Stefano Della Casa for providing me with information on this film and on Freda.

[14] Some critics argue that Freda was almost obsessed with spectacular scenes and with horse races, and that horses for him were even more important than actors (Della Casa 2001: 11; Gervasini 2003).

[15] Carlo D'Angelo, playing the Prince, performed in several Shakespeare plays and used to dub Laurence Olivier.

[16] Roberta Torre, in an interview, http://www.labiennaledivenezia.net/57mo…e2000/skd_film.cfm?LanguageID=IT&ID=203, accessed 18 February 2002, quoted in Minutella (2003: 364).

[17] She says to her friends that '*Amore è allontanato da amore con la stessa tristezza come i ragazzi che vanno a scuola*'/'But love from love, toward school with heavy looks' (Act 2, Scene 1, Line 203). These words are later repeated by Santa Rosalia, the patron saint of Palermo, who is a second narrator.

[18] '*Questo mattino reca una lugubre pace. Il sole per il dolore non vuole mostrare il suo volto. Partiamo di qua per parlare più a lungo di questi tristi eventi. Alcuni saranno perdonati, altri puniti. Perché mai vi fu storia più triste di quella di Toni Giulietto e della sua dolce Romea*'./'A glooming peace this morning with it brings:/the sun for sorrow will not show his head./Go hence

to have more talk of these sad things;/Some shall be pardoned and some punished./For never was a story of more woe/Than this of Juliet and her Romeo' (final sestet: Act 5, Scene 3, Lines 305–310).

[19] Giulietto sings '*Ho un triste presentimento. Dormirò? Forse no. Chissà se tornerò*'/'I have a sad feeling about this. Will I sleep? Maybe I won't. Who knows whether I'll be back or not'.

[20] For information on Torre's filmography see http://www.vitagraph.it/torre.htm, accessed 18 September 2008.

[21] The short films *Hanna Schygulla* (1992) and *Femmine folli* (1993) have female protagonists. In *Angelesse* (1994), Torre interviews seven women living in Palermo, in poor and degraded neighbourhoods, who talk about their lives, family, tradition and their subordinate role to men.

[22] Torre explained that she wanted these scenes in the film to look like interviews, as the stories told by the women were actually real (Gualerzi 2000).

[23] Interviews are conducted also in *Angelesse* (1994), *Il cielo sotto Palermo* (1995) – an interview with two anonymous prisoners in a jail in Palermo – *Spioni* (1995) – where some children living in a 'mafioso' neighbourhood explain what 'mafia' is for them.

[24] The journalists appearing in the film actually worked for a Sicilian TV channel. Similarities can also be traced with her previous feature film, the musical *Tano da morire* (1997) which was set in Palermo, showed mafia people, adopted the interview technique and inserted TV news reports.

[25] On racist stereotypes and the construction and representation of 'otherness', see Bhabha (1983). Bhabha defines the stereotype as 'a false representation of a given reality' (1983: 27) and he sees 'ambivalence as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power' (1983: 18). On racism and representation in the cinema, see Stam and Spence (1983). On the notion of stereotype, also see Dyer: 'stereotypes, one of the mechanisms of boundary maintenance, are characteristically fixed, clear-cut, unalterable. […] you are condemned to a stereotype' (1977: 29).

[26] On Torre's presentation of Sicilian women in the film see Minutella (2003).

[27] On this change of focus in the second half of the twentieth century see Loehlin:

> In the latter half of the twentieth century, *Romeo and Juliet* was transformed, in production and perception, from a play about love to a play about hate. Modern productions have tended to emphasize the feud over the love story, and have used it to comment on a variety of social ills: from the competitiveness and greed of the parents, to the sexual aggression of the young men, to ethnic or cultural differences as a source of conflict. (2002: 66)

Zeffirelli's famous 1968 film is an example of reading in terms of generation clash, which also raises and addresses issues of male bonding, sexuality and homoeroticism, which were relevant to his time and lifestyle.

[28] Castellani's version is a little longer, since it tries to compromise between the length of Shakespeare's playtext and that of a classic Hollywood film, while Torre's adaptation – being an offshoot, and an Italian musical 'tragicomedy' – and Freda's film – which is a mixture between costume drama, western and horror films – are shorter.