



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 Center¹ 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/>

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*² (1985), *Hamlet* in *J'embrasse pas*³ (1991) and *Richard III* in *Alice et Martin*⁴ (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?"⁵; 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"⁶. 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?"⁷, 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 surprising⁸. 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".



from this instance, there are no other moments when Benjamin is explicitly or implicitly compared with Gloucester. The reference to Shakespeare and the actual quotation should be understood here as “*effets de réel*”.⁹ They only illustrate Benjamin’s difficulties as an actor¹⁰. Shakespeare means highbrow theatre.

The allusion could consequently be defined as an “waterproof parenthesis” which does not really colour the rest of the film, which has no real function other than that of name dropping. Shakespeare could be seen as a guarantee of intelligence and education and takes on an almost ornamental function. Well, “a far cry from Shakespeare” indeed... Interestingly enough, in these examples, the playwright is not particularly praised.

The other allusions in the Shakespearean trilogy are *Romeo and Juliet* in *Rendez-vous* and *Hamlet* in *J’embrasse pas*. *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* are probably Shakespeare’s most famous plays, in France at least. It is no coincidence that they should both be quoted in Téchiné’s films. The plays have been obviously chosen because they are easily identified by an audience. It is for that very reason that *Hamlet* is quoted in *J’embrasse pas*.

The reference indeed helps us understand that the hero, Pierre Lacaze, is truly ignorant since, although he dreams to become an actor, he has no idea whatsoever who Hamlet might be. The allusion is consequently useful to the characterization of the young man: very provincial, not educated, he arrived in Paris “to be an actor” in the same way young people nowadays very often forget that fame requires talent, efforts and work. An interview of the scriptwriter (Jacques Nolot) actually enlightens us:

Like many provincial young men going up to Paris, I wanted to become a star, and thought that was easy. I first met a woman—who appears as Hélène Vincent in *J’embrasse pas*—who was a nurse. [...] When I was 19, I joined a lousy theatre class, which helped me understand I wasn’t a born actor. However, this class replaced the high school I didn’t go to. In the class, I first met Didier Flamand, my best friend, and then Roland Barthes thanks to whom I met Téchiné. I used to phone Roland and ask him: “Have

9. “Reality Effects” or “Effects of Reality”, Roland Barthes, “L’Effet de réel”, *Communications* n° 11, 1968, p. 84-9.

10. Mariangela Tempera has provided an analysis of the passage: “Benjamin’s homosexuality and Martin’s illegitimacy have pushed them to the margins of their father’s family life. [...] While Benjamin, the black sheep who has turned out well, taps into his childhood suffering to find the key to Richard’s lines, Martin is pulled into sharp focus. In the next scene, he will kill his father and start a dangerous descent into madness: if Shakespeare’s words apply to one character in the film, it is Martin, not Benjamin”, Mariangela Tempera, “Winters and Horses: References to *Richard III* on Film and Television”, in *Shakespeare on Screen: Richard III*, ed. Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, Rouen, Publications de l’université de Rouen, 2005, p. 71.

you ever heard of Pascal? Have you ever heard of Alain?” I might as well have asked: “Have you ever heard of Shakespeare?” He enjoyed that very much¹¹.

The first allusion to Shakespeare in the film does not mention the name of the playwright explicitly—only the title of a play is pronounced by the hero’s drama teacher:

*Pierre is on stage next to the theatre teacher, in front of the other students.*¹²

THEATRE TEACHER: Have you prepared a scene for us at last?

PIERRE: No, I haven’t... Perhaps later.

THEATRE TEACHER: What would you like to play?

PIERRE: Don’t know. Something easy, first.

THEATRE TEACHER: If you take the easy option, you’re off to a bad start. You’re going to learn Hamlet’s soliloquy. Does it ring a bell? “To be or not to be”?

PIERRE: Yes, yes of course. For next Thursday?

THEATRE TEACHER: No, I give you two weeks. You’ll need them. Let’s go back to work.

Pierre sits down, and turns to the girl next to him.

PIERRE: Could you write down what she said for me please? You know... The thing she said I must learn¹³.

Hamlet is obviously used as a cultural reference which should be understood by most people. The theatre teacher sounds very *blasé* when she says “Hamlet’s soliloquy—‘to be or not to be’...” Shakespeare could be understood as nothing more than the evidence that the hero does not belong to this world. Interestingly enough, the spectator is led to sympathize with the young man: of course anybody can identify “to be or not to be” but his ignorance is touching. If any average person knows the quotation “to be or not to be”, do people in general know the rest of the soliloquy, one may wonder? Can they identify it?

The following scene lets us hear the soliloquy a few lines after the very famous introductory words... and the viewers might honestly acknowledge that they would not have identified the passage, had the teacher not referred to it previously.

Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep –

11. My translation. Read the French interview at <www.vacarme.org/article283.html>.

12. The stage directions correspond to *my* description of the scene.

13. My translation. Time code: 00:32:21-00:33:47. Watch on YouTube at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPMV5ZrftOc> (*J’embrasse pas – I don’t kiss – Hamlet # 1*).

No more, and by a sleep to say we end
 The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to – [...]
 (3.1.58-65)

Est-il plus noble pour une âme de souffrir
 Les flèches et les coups d'une indigne fortune
 Ou de prendre les armes contre une mer de troubles.
 Et de leur faire front et d'y mettre fin ? Mourir, dormir,
 Rien de plus ; terminer, par du sommeil,
 La souffrance du cœur et les mille blessures
 Qui sont le lot de la chair...

If the allusion stopped there, there would not be much more to say—it would not be worth analyzing and could simply be defined as “ornamental”, another “*effet de réel*” devoid of any real function. But actually, the film offers its own edition and translation of the play, a “collation” of texts.

The quotation from *Richard III* in *Alice et Martin* was faithful to Jean-Michel Déprats's translation (which is actually acknowledged in the credits)¹⁴, a quite meaningless quotation in the economy of the film. Concerning *J'embrasse pas*, the quotation is worth commenting upon, precisely because it is expanded, and also because a very particular attention has been paid to the text. One translation seems to have been privileged. The hero carries the play everywhere he goes and we can identify it as one and the same book, and even catch a glimpse at the cover which shows Millais's *Ophelia*¹⁵ : it is Yves Bonnefoy's translation, published in 1957, here in its 1978 edition (see Plate 1).

This is the translation heard in the film: “les mille blessures qui sont le lot de la chair...” for “the thousand shocks that flesh is heir to...” But the translation is not respected faithfully throughout the film. The changes mean that the words have been chosen carefully: the importance given to the text is undeniable. If the director and scriptwriter have opted not to follow simply *one* translation, it must be meaningful.

Pierre and his mistress, who is much older than he is, are shown having sex in bed. She is in some kind of trance. After sex, she asks him:
 EVELYNE: You haven't come, have you?
 PIERRE: I don't mind.
 EVELYNE: I've never had so much pleasure.

14. *Richard III*, trans. Jean-Michel Déprats, Paris, Gallimard, Le Manteau d'Arlequin, 1995.

15. Millais, *Ophelia*, Tate Gallery, London, 1852.



Plate 1: Yves Bonnefof's translation in André Téchiné's *J'embrasse pas* (1991)

PIERRE: Have you slept with many men?

EVELYNE: I don't like men: their smell, their presence, their body hair... Hair above all disgusts me. With you, it's different, I like everything about you. It's become a real obsession. Once, when I was ten, I saw a man in his bathing suit on the beach... there were spiders sleeping on his chest... I started screaming. I was told that was hair. Do you mind my telling you all this?

PIERRE: No... (*He takes his book.*) Listen... Do you know... what "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to" means?

Evelyne, very surprised, stands up and starts getting dressed.

EVELYNE: I was wrong to insist. I shouldn't have come. I leave you with your book.

PIERRE: Could you open the curtains?

EVELYNE: I know you're eager to see me leave, but really...¹⁶

Although we can very clearly see him take the same book as earlier, which we identified as Bonnefof's translation, he does not say the words he had uttered in the street. He had said "les mille blessures qui sont le lot de la chair", Bonnefof's actual translation, but now he uses Guy de Pourtalès's: "les mille secousses naturelles qui sont l'héritage de la chair"¹⁷. Another translation has been chosen for this particular moment to fit within the

16. My translation. Time code: 00:39:22. Watch on YouTube at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBxyV14lFVvk&feature=related> (*J'embrasse pas* – *I don't kiss* – Hamlet # 2).

17. Guy de Pourtalès, "Trilogie Shakespearienne", *Hamlet, Mesure pour Mesure et La Tempête*, Paris, Gallimard, 1929.

context. Bonnefoy had translated "shocks" into "blessures" ("wounds") when Pourtalès gives "secousses"—an abrupt spasmodic movement, jerk or jolt. The quotation does not have an *effet de réel* function here. It helps the lady understand she has made a fool of herself, having some kind of body-jolting orgasm while her lover remained totally stoic, while he actually refused to take pleasure. She has been explaining how disgusted she was by men in general, without grasping how disgusting and repellent she is to him. She feels ashamed by the fact that he would rather spend his time reading than staying with her. The quotation is distorted through the translation because "secousses" suddenly takes a sexual connotation, which "shocks" does not have: "shocks" in Shakespeare refers to the hardships of life. Similarly, "chair/flesh" suddenly sounds much more sexual. The text is thus re-appropriated.

Again, we seem to find ourselves "a far cry from Shakespeare"... The translation was not chosen because it is a better one, but because it seems to agree better with the context. So, interestingly enough, quoting Shakespeare in a foreign tongue offers a large range of possibilities and a certain amount of freedom. Exactly the same phenomenon is reproduced later, when the hero finally recites the soliloquy at the theatre class. He is stumbling through his text until he eventually forgets his lines. The other students laugh at him¹⁸. When the teacher asks if anyone knows the rest of it, a young man stands up and says (in French of course):¹⁹

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought...
(3.1.85-87)

C'est ainsi que la conscience fait de nous tous des lâches²⁰.
C'est ainsi que la verueur première de nos résolutions s'étiolo à l'ombre pâle
de la pensée²¹.

The young man is to be taken as a convincing Hamlet. The quotation is a comment on the situation, explains the choice of this particular translation and actually carries a message addressed to Pierre by Hamlet himself: his place is not in a theatre, his desire to be an actor has declined. Quotations

18. Amongst them, we can see Grégory Herpe, an actor who was probably really learning the part at the time since he played Hamlet in 1992 in a production directed by Roland Bretten: <fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gr%C3%A9gory_Herpe>.

19. Watch on YouTube at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVvW52wGTsY> (*J'embrasse pas – I don't kiss – Hamlet # 3*).

20. Shakespeare – *Œuvres Complètes* (1857-1872), *Théâtre complet*, trans. François-Victor Hugo, 4 volumes, Paris, Garnier Frères, 1970.

21. *Hamlet*, trans. André Gide, Paris, Gallimard, 1949.

are thus agents of understanding. The phrase “verdeur première” does not exactly summon the same images as “native hue”. But André Gide’s “verdeur” has been preferred to Bonnefoy’s “natives couleurs” (native “colours”). “Verdeur” does not really refer to the colour green, which would have been different from “hue” anyway. “Verdeur” evokes a fruit that is green, unripe; the inexperience of young people (linked with the notion of immaturity), and above all echoes the vigour of a sprightly, uncouth young man. The purpose of the soliloquy is to reveal to Pierre that his naiveté and his ignorance led him to be mistaken about the nature of his desire.

Translations have been minutely read and examined, but this editorial process was not meant to find the most accurate translation, but the one which best echoes the thematic of the film: here, youth, spontaneity, deception and disappointment. Indeed, Pierre reduces the character to paper, the play to a book, and words to a text one must know by heart. The living aspect of the text is never highlighted. As in *Alice et Martin*, there is a kind of theatrical parenthesis in the film. The camera accompanies Pierre to the class, and shows us how he leaves it for good. One of the strengths of the allusion is tragic irony. He does not know Hamlet but shares common traits with him: his youth, his lack of initiative. There is a scene at the hospital in which Pierre complains to his friend about not understanding his lines and pretends to be sick. Without being influenced by the play, which he neither understands nor likes (he obviously has not read it from cover to cover anyway), he “fakes sick”, probably echoing Hamlet counterfeiting insanity. And when a young girl in the class later says “he’s a fake, he’s a simulator”, we do not really know about whom she is actually talking. Consequently, the hero is unable to be a good actor portraying Hamlet although he undeniably bears resemblances with him. When Pierre says “I’ve got a stomach ache” at the end of the scene in which he is mocked because he cannot remember the soliloquy, he is not faking any longer: his similarity with Hamlet starts to vanish.

Shakespeare’s text has thus received special editorial attention. It is materialized by a book which is identifiable, and the hero is several times shown having a hard time learning his cues: the play is reduced to a text deprived of physicality, of theatricality, a text which is difficult to understand, hence to remember.

This aspect echoes Juliette Binoche in *Rendez-vous*, who claims she does not understand a thing about the play *Romeo and Juliet*²². In both films, the apprentice actors complain about not understanding the play with the book in their hands, filled with words they feel unable to deci-

22. Time code: 00:56:33.

pher²³. The same editorial work has been carried out for *Rendez-vous*. The edition seen on screen is very clearly "Les Belles Lettres", with its red cover and a black leaf drawn on each page²⁴. The first quotations in the film actually actually are from this translation (for example, "If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep..." [ROM, 5.1.1-11] follows Koszul's translation for "Les Belles Lettres", "Si j'en puis croire l'œil flatteur de mon sommeil..."²⁵—but Juliet's "My only love sprung from my only hate..." (1.5.135-38) is not translated "Mon seul amour issu d'un seul être abhorré"²⁶ but "O mon unique amour né de ma seule haine..."²⁷, a translation by Pierre-Jean Jouve²⁷. Téchiné probably needed the play to be identified as an unfriendly object, easily carried, torn or thrown, and thus needed to show one book on screen. The editions may have been partly chosen for aesthetic reasons: Millais's beautiful painting for *Hamlet*, and Belles Lettres's classy red-cover collection. But both films offer collations of different translations, often using one which is less close to the original text but which offers its own new poetical dimension. Lines quoted *via* a translation enable a number of arrangements.

But the editorial collation does not imply praise, which may be considered surprising in a somewhat art-house film. Theatre people are depicted as vain and scornful. The Shakespearean allusion in Téchiné is not theatrical—it is essentially "bookish", disembodied, in-human. *Rendez-vous* shows the same puzzling treatment of translations: the book is so visually present, so conspicuous, that it is misleading. We take it for granted that one translation has been chosen, but this is not always the case, and we should not omit the possibility that the book has been chosen precisely for aesthetic reasons—for the elegance of its cover.

There is in *Rendez-vous* an image which is quite emblematic of the treatment of Shakespearean quotations in Téchiné (see Plate 2).

The page on the left corresponds to the English text—for the Belles Lettres edition is a bilingual one. Thus, the original lines are hidden: they no longer exist, and disappear behind the photograph of the character, the actor (Lambert Wilson interpreting Quentin, himself an actor interpreting Romeo) whose voice we can hear. The voice-over reads a translation which

23. Nina says "play", though, not "book": perhaps she, unlike Pierre, has understood the three-dimensional aspect.

24. *Roméo et Juliette*, ed. A. Koszul, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1967, first published 1925.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 199. Time code in film: 00:40:19.

26. Koszul, p. 57.

27. *Roméo et Juliette*, ed. Pierre-Jean Jouve et Georges Pitoëff, Paris, Garnier Flammarion, 1992, p. 93. The translation was written for a 1937 production, but Jouve revised it in 1955. The translation offers 12-syllable lines (or "alexandrines") which probably explains why it was chosen. Alexandrines echo French theatre and poetry.

is indeed faithful to the one published by “Les Belles Lettres” translation. However, it does not correspond to the page we can see on screen. Indeed, on the right page, we can read “*Roméo et Juliette*, Acte II, sc. ii”, but what we hear is Quentin/Romeo reciting 5.1.1. Once again, the film offers a composite text, a composite image of the play, a collation and re-creation. The English text is erased in favour of a French text which does not exist as such.

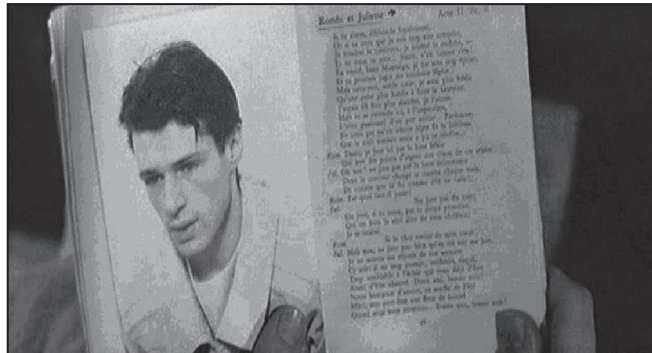


Plate 2: André Téchiné's *Rendez-vous* (1985)

With Téchiné, Shakespeare is never really performed on stage: what really interests him is to show actors struggling with the text. *Rendez-vous* ends with Nina (Juliette Binoche) backstage when the play is about to begin, when the bell rings. Pierre in *J'embrasse pas* is seen in a room, in the hospital, in the street, having trouble remembering his lines. In *Alice et Martin*, Benjamin (Matthieu Amalric) is in a bedroom when he declaims Gloucester's soliloquy, wondering afterwards if he did not overdo his role. Shakespeare seems to belong to an artificial circle, as opposed to the honest world of natural uncorrupted people. Interestingly, the adjectives used to qualify the plays in question are meaningful. In *Rendez-vous*, Scruzler, the stage director interpreted by Jean-Louis Trintignant, says about the play: “Je n'ai aucune idée sur cette maudite pièce, c'est pas la meilleure de Shakespeare, vous savez” (“How am I going to stage this damned play!?!... I haven't the foggiest... It's not Shakespeare's best one you know”). Apart from the debunking process which seems to be characteristic of the way Shakespearean allusions are treated in Téchiné, we can notice the adjective “maudite”, which means “cursed”. The play indeed is the victim of a curse in the film. In a previous staging of the play, the director had actually encouraged his actors (his own daughter and a young man named Quentin) to identify with Juliet and Romeo so much so that he drove them to suicide. Quentin survived but finally managed to kill himself before rehearsals started for a second run. In *J'embrasse pas*, Pierre says “Je ne

comprends rien à ce putain de bouquin". I would translate "putain" as "bloody" because the word is used as an interjection, but "putain" also means a "whore"—and Pierre will soon prostitute himself in the film, another element of tragic irony. On that very subject, Téchiné says:

What I found touching was the fact that he wanted to become an actor, and that, when he was eventually put to the reality test, his desire to transform his body into an artistic instrument became something else, since he turned his body into an instrument of pleasure and enjoyment for other people when he became a prostitute... Contrary to Juliette Binoche's journey in *Rendez-vous* who left her country life to hit the big city to become an actress²⁸.

To my mind, Hamlet's self-loathing and self-deprecating soliloquy resonates both in *J'embrasse pas* and *Rendez-vous*.

Why, what an ass am I? Ay, sure, this is most brave,
That I, the son of the dear murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a drab,
A scullion!—(*Hamlet*, 2.2.560-565)

Pierre in *J'embrasse pas* uses similar words to insult himself when he is alone. First, soon after his experience at the theatre class, he lives in the streets, and is robbed. His bag is stolen. He then goes to the public restrooms, sits on the toilet and says: "J'suis con putain, pourquoi je suis con?"²⁹ ("Why am I a fucking idiot?"). Later, towards the end of the film, while he is doing his military service, he insults himself in front of the mirror, in the toilet again: "Jamais tu feras partie de la société, t'as pas de couilles, t'es qu'un déchet, pauvre merde, t'aurais jamais dû naître!"³⁰ ("You will never become part of society, you have no balls, you're just a wretch, you're pathetic, you shouldn't have been born!"). Furthermore, the excerpt in which Hamlet calls himself "a whore", "a drab" and "a scullion" is particularly relevant here. Scullion has sometimes been read "stallyion/stallion", meaning "male whore"³¹. In his translation, Bonnefoy gives "bardache"³², a "minion", a "paramour", a passive homosexual, which is what Pierre is in *J'embrasse pas*, although he has certain limits and conditions, referred to in the title "I don't kiss"...

28. Interview in DVD (see footnote 3), "Bonus, Entretien avec André Téchiné".

29. Time code: 00:48:00.

30. Time code: 01:44:25.

31. See *Hamlet*, ed. Philip Edwards, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 142.

32. *Hamlet*, trans. Yves Bonnefoy, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 100.

But as far as “scullion” is concerned, it mostly refers to a “domestic servant of the lowest rank”³³: there is also a scene of insult in *Rendez-vous*, in which the ghost of Quentin, who used to be Romeo on stage, comes back to haunt Nina, forbidding her to don the part of Juliet. Being a ghost, he definitely echoes Hamlet, although (of course) Hamlet “the son” is never a ghost, his father is... But Quentin here undeniably has a “Hamletian” quality about him and is not Romeo-like at all, although *Romeo and Juliet* is the obvious intertext in the film. The way the ghost disparages Nina could also be reminiscent of Hamlet scorning Ophelia. Quentin mocks Nina, saying she is not fit for the part and recalling that in her first play, a boulevard farce or light comedy entitled *Thé ou Chocolat*, she was just a skivvy, the only thing she can be, thus echoing the term “scullion”.

Nina (Juliette Binoche) is seen learning her text (“My only love sprung from my only hate...”) She leaves the room. The camera follows her as she suddenly discovers Quentin’s ghost at the door. She runs in the opposite direction and opens another door, behind which Quentin appears again, with no special effect though. He pulls her hair and holds her firmly:

It’s no use bellowing, I won’t let you go... So you’re gonna be Juliet, you, the maid of lousy plays, you’re gonna play a princess. Alas, the play is about love. Love which, of course, you’re unable to feel. But which above all you’re too plain to figure out and too common to understand. Love I know because I dared pay the price. At the expense of my own life. And at the cost of hers. The real Juliet’s. The one and only. With you, the play will become a provincial farce. Perhaps that’s Scruzler’s intention after all. With him, we should be prepared for everything. You’ll get booed. Your name will be dragged through the mud and it will serve you right. You’re a pathetic self-centered actress who’d do anything to expose her dull and petty self. You’re squeezing my corpse dry and what’s more, you’re using her, who sacrificed her life for an Ideal which is beyond you and which you’re sullyng shamelessly! I forbid you to take her place, do you hear me, I forbid you to tarnish a story which does not belong to you³⁴!

He throws her onto the floor.

The ghost in *Rendez-vous* acts like a director leading her to face her shortcomings. As in *Hamlet*, he appears merely to tell the heroine what she already knows and thinks. But while the ghost in *Hamlet* indirectly leads Hamlet to put on a play, this ghost forbids the actress to perform.

It is difficult to conclude whether or not the ghost in *Rendez-vous* is an allusion to *Hamlet*. If we contextualize it within Téchiné’s “Shakespearean Trilogy” (as I called it), it appears somewhat likely, although the connec-

33. Edwards, p. 142.

34. My translation. Watch on YouTube at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=u05ERG3nDsI> (*Rendez-vous* – Roméo et Juliette Binoche – Ghost scene).

tion between the play and the film is tenuous. Still, Hamlet might possibly haunt *Rendez-vous*: if *Romeo and Juliet* is not Shakespeare's best play, as one character says, which one is?

Both Quentin and the young actor who appears in *J'embrasse pas* to remind Pierre of the words he could not remember by himself could be understood as young men embodying the Spirit of Tragedy or, perhaps, of Shakespeare himself. I mentioned a Shakespearean parenthesis in *J'embrasse pas*, which lasts about 15 minutes. What about the rest of the film? For example, I could have argued that Evelyne, the 40-something woman whose, one may say, "heyday in the blood is not tame" could be an avatar of Gertrude, both a maternal and lubricious figure, hence underlining the incestuous thematics of the play...³⁵ and that both *J'embrasse pas* and *Hamlet* are obsessed with the Oedipus complex. Indeed, in the film, Philippe Noiret represents a fatherly figure who appears in a somewhat ghostly way (as though he knew exactly where the hero was all the time) to prevent him from trading his charms. Eventually, when the hero understands that their relationship is based not on sexual attraction but on filial feelings, he decides to break all ties with him ("you sound like my father" he adds) symbolically killing him... I could have argued that the young woman he falls in love with (a prostitute), who is clearly distressed, sings at one point and is associated with liquids (urine, a river, a shower), may echo Ophelia—all the more so as "get thee to a nunnery" might mean "to a brothel". But is that enough to make *these* allusions to *Hamlet*, to relate them to the quotation? I am not totally convinced. *Hamlet* offers too archetypal a plot to identify other supposed "Hamletian" references in the film when the play is not clearly cited.

I thought it more interesting to study the way Shakespeare is treated, and at times roughly so, in three films which evoke the playwright. On the whole, some questions raised in one film find answers in another. For example, one sentence in *Rendez-vous* said by the hero to Nina is quite meaningful about the way theatrical references should be understood in André Téchiné's films: "Et l'amour, c'est pas dans ton théâtre de merde, c'est dans la vie" – "There's no love in your shitty theatre; love is in real life".

35. A motherly figure symbol of repellent, unrestrained and almost unnatural sexuality. She is clearly associated with Pierre's real mother because she reads a letter addressed to her.

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