"THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT SHAKESPEARE; IT'S THE PICTURES": A TEACHING-ORIENTED APPROACH TO SHAKESPEAREAN TEXTUAL ANALYSIS THROUGH FILM (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *MACBETH* V.5.15-28)*

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Following some current trends in teaching both Shakespeare (Hutchings 2012) and Shakespeare through film (e.g. Bueno 2004, Castaldo 2002, Crowl 2008, Deitchman 2002), the aim of this note is to present a practical in-class example of teaching textual analysis through film, which derives from my own experience of teaching a *Shakespeare on/through Film and the Arts* seminar for more than a decade. As a methodological case-study that might be adapted by other instructors, I will elaborate my point by discussing the textual intricacies of *Macbeth* V.5.15-28 and their filmic translation as done by Orson Welles (1948), Roman Polanski (1971), Trevor Nunn (1979) and Rupert Goold (2010) in an effort to highlight the importance of teaching how competent visual texts that offer the "reel" Shakespeare (Lehmann & Starks 2002) have to be based on an understanding of the textual "real" Shakespeare.

Keywords: *Shakespeare on film, Macbeth, teaching Shakespeare through filmic texts, visual translation.*

Seguindo certas tendencias actuais no ensino tanto de Shakespeare (Hutchings 2012) coma de Shakespeare a través do cinema (p. e. Bueno 2004, Castaldo 2002 Crowl 2008, Deitchman 2002), esta nota breve ten como obxectivo presentar un exemplo práctico de ensino de análise textual a través do cinema; este exemplo deriva da miña propia experiencia de impartir un seminario sobre *Shakespeare no / a través do*

Cinema e doutras Artes durante máis dunha década. Como caso de estudo metodolóxico que pode ser adaptado por outros profesores, elaborarei os meus argumentos docentes discutindo as complexidades textuais de *Macbeth* (V.5.15-28) e da súa tradución fílmica feita por Orson Welles (1948), Roman Polanski (1971), Trevor Nunn (1979) e Rupert Goold (2010), nun esforzo por destaca-la importancia de ensinar como os textos visuais competentes que ofrecen "Shakespeares" fílmicos (Lehmann & Starks 2002) sempre están baseados nunha comprensión do texto literario igualmente competente.

Palabras clave: *Shakespeare no cinema, Macbeth, ensinar Shakespeare cos textos fílmicos, tradución visual.*

1. PRELIMINARY WORDS[1]

At a social gathering, a woman shows Pacino her copy of A. L. Rowse's *The Annotated Shakespeare*. Because the tome is so impressively bulky, so canonical in appearance, Pacino has some irreverent fun with the title, calling it "the Anointed Shakespeare". Somewhat overlooked in the exchange is the imbalance of power between the woman and Pacino himself as star. She holds her ground, though, pointing out that the edition includes examples of Victorian illustrations of the plays; it's a beautiful book, she insists, with "great pictures". With unmistakable irony, Pacino replies: "That's what I like about Shakespeare; it's the pictures. I love the pictures."

Stephen M. Buhler (2002: 47)
"Documentary Shakespeare".

In the current process of change conducted in our country imposed by the standards of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) a certain re-thinking of the degree scenario has been promoted in order to relocate and give some order to the options presented to students (Bueno 2011). In an overall context of severe reduction this process has favoured, especially in degrees connected

with the Humanities as a field, I think that medieval and renaissance studies are suffering especially. Teaching medieval and renaissance contents nowadays is an interesting challenge, since we are usually forced to teach "more matter with less art", i.e. a wide literary period in just a semester. Curiously enough, the academic restrictions imposed on medieval and renaissance contents coincide with a moment of popular interest in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Contemporary artistic expression -novels, films, television series, comic books, etc- takes advantage of a certain (neo)medievalism/(neo)neoclassicism fashioned *a la* 'renaissance' that sells quite well. Aware of this fact, I think that, as experts on the period, we should claim to take part in this interest. Nobody will perform better than us when explaining the whys and wherefores of such an attraction.

Since the arts provide a fertile field of interest to which our students seem to be quite attracted (Burnett, Streete & Wray 2011), using the arts to teach these periods normally proves to be a powerful weapon to raise interest both in the arts themselves and in the periods we are all interested in. Following some current trends in teaching both Shakespeare (Hutchings 2012) and Shakespeare through film (e.g. Bueno 2004, Castaldo 2002, Crowl 2008, Deitchman 2002), the aim of this paper is to present a practical in-class example of teaching textual analysis through film, which derives from my own experience of teaching a *Shakespeare on/through Film and the Arts* seminar for more than a decade. As a methodological case-study that might be adapted by other instructors, I will elaborate my point by discussing the textual intricacies of *Macbeth* V.5.15-28 and their filmic translation as done by Orson Welles (1948), Roman Polanski (1971), Trevor Nunn (1979) and Rupert Goold (2010) in an effort to highlight the importance of teaching how competent visual texts that offer the "reel" Shakespeare (Lehmann & Starks 2002) have to be based in the understanding of the textual "real" Shakespeare.

2. THE "REAL" SHAKESPEARE: *MACBETH* V.5.15-28

> "but said something like 'Tomorrow is another day' … which would be today, right?"
>
> Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*.

The text is always at the beginning of every interpretation. William Hutchings (2012: 159-161)[2] has recently highlighted how the lines quoted above reflect in a deep and perfectly articulated way the intense feeling of a world on the brink of collapse. These lines (Clark and Mason 2015: 287-288) are the response to the news transmitted by Seyton, which cause Macbeth's desperation:

SEYTON
    The Queen, my lord, is dead.

MACBETH
    She should have died hereafter;
    There would have been a time for such a word.
    Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
    Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
    To the last syllable of recorded time;
    And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
    The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle,
    Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
    That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
    And then is heard no more. It is a tale
    Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
    Signifying nothing.

Seyton's words are formal and cold, direct, concise, almost unfriendly. They provoke in Macbeth a poetic response equally devoid of empathy, uncompromising in its brutal expression of life, empty of meaning for him. Macbeth's answer is certainly ambiguous from a personal point of view. Critics have discussed whether to understand "She should have died hereafter" as "well, this had to happen sooner or later" or as "she had to die later; it would have been more convenient", maybe when Macbeth was not so pressed by the physical and mental siege he was undergoing at that moment in the story. I see no reason why, since Shakespeare is the master of double entendres and ambiguity, we should not understand both meanings at once. It is very appropriate that in Macbeth's frame of mind, as in that of anyone in a similar mental state, both perspectives are given at the same time; and it is even more appropriate that the only phrase that Macbeth utters on the death of the woman who in a way encouraged his

aspirations is an ambiguous sentence, similar to those uttered by the Witches, who hide the truth under an interpretation in appearance uncertain. Both meanings articulate a sentence that constitutes a true reflection of the indifference Macbeth feels for everything human and states the existential void that dwells inside him. These lines also introduce two key concepts: time (hereafter, the future) and ambiguity: "such a word". Which one? Queen? Hereafter? Time? Well, one having to do with the three: 'Tomorrow', which appears below.

It is very clear that these first two sentences are at the same time connected with and separated from the rest of the speech. A sequence of three statements, parallel to the very three 'tomorrows' themselves, starts in "Tomorrow"; each one of them constitutes a path that leads to emptiness, to a progressive 'nothing' that ends literally with the existential void represented in that very word at the end of the speech: "nothing". Let us revise this thrice-repeated pattern (fig 1) as it offers a dramatic representation of how Macbeth sees life.[3]
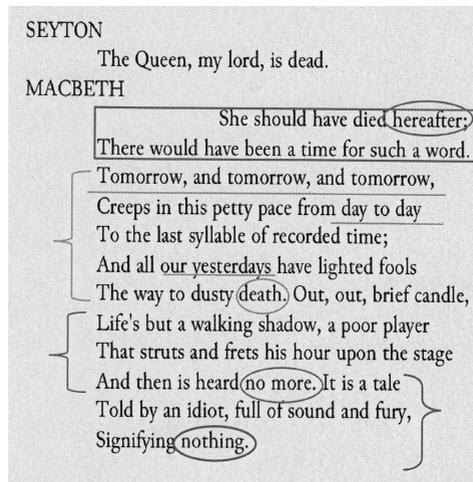

Fɪɢ 1. Patterns in *Macbeth*'s V.5.15-28

The first statement reduces 'time' to a sense of total emptiness and highlights the reduction with the intentional circularity of the three 'tomorrows' that get repeated once and again, blocking any

feeling of progress. As when young kids insistently pronounce the same sentence, repetition is an important device here because "Tomorrow" ceases to have content. For Macbeth there is no tomorrow, no hereafter; his tomorrow will be nothing more than a yesterday seen from today; or a today that was yesterday's tomorrow, as in Pynchon's aforementioned amusing statement on the popular saying. Time moves in an ignoble manner ("creeps, petty pace") towards the nothingness of death, a word which comes at the very end of the first statement. The past is just a heap of things, a sequence of days (of 'lights', something nominal and verbal at the same time) that ends in the elementary extinction of life itself, fragile and brief as a candle's light, the very candle that Lady Macbeth carried in her hands through the darkness of places and deeds in the central section of the play.

The image of that blown-out light opens the second statement. Lights project shadows and life itself is flat as a shadow. Shakespeare enhances this archetypical symbol enriching it with a reference to his own theatrical experience. In the context of a Shakespearean play "shadows" could refer to "actors". That is what he calls them many times in other plays and texts: an actor is a character, a persona, a shadow of a real person; so, for Macbeth the lives of people are brief and transitory, man's reality is as insubstantial as the reality of an actor, and both end similarly with the same silence: " no more".

In the third statement, Macbeth describes existential emptiness again, but the drama moves with dexterity to a wider area: narration, tales, storytelling. The narrative of life –a 'mere tale', that is, a simple story without much sense or meaning– unfolds its simplicity towards the obvious ending: "nothing". Thus, time, the play, the story it tells, all of them repeat the same pattern. All conclude with the same semantic equivalence: "death", "no more", "*no*thing". And these three endings are interchangeable in the statements because they are synonyms in such a context. The story will end with Macbeth's death; the play will finish with the nothingness of an empty stage, and our experience in life, being limited by time, one day will end too. The daily events so revelled in by Macbeth when he was at the peak of his ambition in the first sections of the play are now reduced to "sound and fury", grotesquely told by an idiot, a fool; but we should not forget that in Shakespeare, fools, idiots, outcasts, buffoons, gravediggers, are

always the holders of the truth. In the end the world burns and gets consumed until, as the Anglosaxons said, "eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð": all the earth contains comes to nothing.

This is only a brief extract, just a minute and a half of verse when it is performed, but it constitutes one of those key essential moments every director craves to represent correctly and powerfully. Language is the key to unlock the poetry hidden in this literary text, so understanding the text first will give the director the best starting point to display his own usage of filmic language. Let us consider, then, how the aforementioned four directors have visually understood this extract.[4]

3. THE "REEL" SHAKESPEARE: *MACBETH* V.5.15-28 THROUGH FOUR FILMIC 'TRANSLATIONS'

3.1 Roman Polanski, 1971

From a long shot, the camera speeds up to a close-up of Macbeth's face, placed on one side of the frame, with a blurred perspective of Seyton as a consequence of the shallow focus provided. This movement visually represents the jump from a general question to a particular feeling, something noted in the text by the first couple of statements. Then, after a jump cut, -which in film narrative always highlights an incoherent split between one scene and the next-, the camera begins to move following Macbeth in a close-up. As in the text, the first two lines and the beginning of the "tomorrow" section are at the same time connected and separated: connected by the topic and separated by the jump cut and the change of shot size and the camera movement; the camera follows Macbeth as he goes down the staircase, almost "creeping in a petty pace", to get to the bottom. At the end of the stairs, when "lighted fools" is pronounced, the camera stops, contemplating that very "light" itself that points the way to "dusty death", and it is here when the editing jump-cuts to a mid shot of Lady Macbeth's body. In a sequence of three abrupt movements, the camera pans from Lady Macbeth to the mourners and Macbeth himself declaring "out, out brief candle", highlighting thus the ambiguity marked by the text: physical and mental darkness,

existential emptiness. With "Life's but a walking shadow", Macbeth
starts to walk again under a *film noir* lighting, himself a walking shadow
which ends its walk with the aforementioned "nothing". There are
many other things worth commenting in this extract (the alternation
between real dialogue and voice over, the pauses), but this is enough
to highlight in the classroom how Polanski has captured the three
structural moments in the text, seen the connections they have and
offered a vivid translation of all that using filmic language to represent
what Shakespeare's language has stated.

3.2 Trevor Nunn, 1979

Trevor Nunn presents an approach in the tradition of Filmed
Theatre, almost a movie made in a soundstage for television; even in
such a theatrical perspective, Nunn displays a highly moving camera,
going –as Polanski did– from a mid shot to a close-up in which the
camera moves towards the face of Macbeth when the two initial lines
are said. Again, the camera gets the audience from the general
statement to the personal feeling; the difference here is that Macbeth
stares at us when declaring "there would have a time for such a word",
as if challenging us to solve the ambiguity. But, with the "tomorrow",
Macbeth moves his sight away from us, and gets lost in that repeated
"tomorrow" which symbolizes emptiness; the camera moves no more,
so the text is placed at the front of McKellen's performance. In fact,
that's the main feature of this version: Nunn chooses McKellen's
performance, a wonderful declamatory moment that springs from a
powerful knowledge of the keys of the text, a monologue that needs
no more mediation between the lines and the audience than that
provided by the actor's voice alone. The pause between "signifying"
and "nothing", which highlights the total emptiness of the word, and
the syllabic separation of "no-thing", which links the word as we saw
before with "death" and "no more" are especially interesting. A
theatrical option, but nonetheless coherent with the perspective
adopted by Nunn.

3.3 Orson Welles, 1948

In his quasi *neogothic*, highly expressionistic approach, Welles –as
happened in the previous cases– opts for moving the camera towards

Macbeth to highlight the transition from the general to the personal
sphere; but, in this case, he offers not a jump cut but a dissolve, which
in film narrative is used to enhance the connection between two shots
or scenes. At the beginning of the next scene we are still seeing images
from the previous one, so we carry content from one scene that
dissolves in front of us to a new one. Thus, "heareafter", "time" and
"word" are separated and linked to the "tomorrow" that initiates the
next scene. Welles emphasizes the text itself and this link we discussed
before. The voice over signals how the speech comes directly from
Macbeth's mind, a fact highlighted by the dissolve technique. The
entire subsequent monologue unfolds under a misty image, a very
evident visual metaphor for the mists that cover Macbeth's mind. The
static shot, the progressively overcast cloudy sky and the unseen
horizon signal the fact that there is no tomorrow, no hereafter, that
everything will conclude in an absolute "nothing", which is again
uttered by Welles with a pause between "signifying" and "nothing". A
powerful option due to Welles' highly narrative talent closely connected
here not only with his filmic dexterity but also with his radio narrative
skills and with his intelligent use of a very restricted budget.

3.4 Rupert Goold, 2010

This last example has been one of the students' favourites ever
since I began to use it in the classroom some years ago. Goold sets the
story in an indeterminate place and time, in a war conflict somewhere
between the Balkans, Chechnya and the end of World War II. Far
enough to provide the viewer with some distance but also close enough
to offer a recognizable scenario in which to unfold the plot of the play
as something thematically valid nowadays. In the corridor used by
Goold many other times in the movie to link scenes, to guide us
through the plot by using controlled lighting, Seyton tells Macbeth
the news, with an interesting jump between "The Queen, my lord"
and "is dead", a jump which involves a change of shot and an abrupt
hand-held documentary-style camera movement; the information
Macbeth receives is instantly connected by these two things with his
immediate reaction to these initial and important lines. The
aforementioned ambiguity of the sentence is emphasized by Patrick
Stewart's indifferent looks and mellow cadence when uttering
"hereafter". A pause is offered again between this and the beginning

of the "tomorrow" section; in its development Goold chooses to foreground the link between both moments, to accentuate the meaning the death of the Queen has for Macbeth in his emotional bottoming-out by turning the corridor lights off and by placing the dead body of Lady Macbeth in the scene but out of frame. One single "light" is left on Macbeth, and the rest is "nothing", utter darkness, as in the text. The monologue seems to be addressed to us and also to Lady Macbeth's corpse, as an indication of what could be found in that empty tomorrow. Here the camera stays fixed on Macbeth's face with a close-up, but in the third "tomorrow" a faint, uneasy music starts to be heard as a tune that spotlights the melancholy and gloom of the moment, as gloomy as the cold hospital-like, blue-steeled light that accentuate the shadows in Macbeth's face and turns his very expression into a shadow. The camera is fixed on Macbeth but shakes constantly, documentary-like, to highlight the content of the text, its meaning, its truthfulness. The pause between "signifying" and "nothing" stresses again the "nothingness" placed by Shakespeare at the end of the speech; Goold reinforces this idea by having Macbeth rising and going his way up the corridor, moving resolute towards that very emptiness itself, once drained and knowing the answer, his answer, to the empty meaning of his life at the end of his days. A powerful version indeed.

4. FINAL REMARKS: SHAKESPEARE THROUGH THE DISTORTING LENS OF THE MOVIE CAMERA

Film is a powerful tool to teach our students how to analyze and interpret both Shakespeares: the 'reel' and the 'real'. These teaching-oriented commentaries I have presented here just exemplify one of the many possibilities and techniques to offer such an analysis. There are many ways to approach the subject (i.e. same textual extract in different versions, full plays in different versions, individual plays in individual versions, readings, genres, etc). As I have said at the beginning, the important issue is always teaching how competent visual texts offered by the "reel" Shakespeare have to be based in the understanding of the textual "real" Shakespeare.

In their classic work on cinematic Shakespeares, Courtney

Lehman and Lisa Starks (2002: 9) asked an open question by saying: "indeed, what becomes of Shakespeare in the classroom when it is increasingly clear that to teach Shakespeare today, we must teach today's Shakespeare –as refigured through the distorting lens of the movie camera?" That is undoubtedly a very interesting question. When we have globally celebrated Shakespeare's 450th anniversary, his works and topics are totally relevant, he is more read than ever maybe because he is more seen than ever; that performative condition should not be forgotten when teaching the intricacies of Shakespeare's works in our contemporary classrooms.

NOTES

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[2] In section two of this note I offer a paraphrased reappraisal of Hutchings' reading of the lines (2012: 159-161), as I consider it to be one of the best succinct accounts of this section of *Macbeth* and most adequate for in-class use. The real in-class session presents a debate-like situation, where Hutchings'

point of view is peppered with my own reappraisal and the student's responses to these lines. The paragraphs in the written version presented in this note recall basically Hutchings' ideas paraphrased. Recently, Sandra Clark's point of view on the 'tomorrow' fragment of *Macbeth* has also proven to be quite useful for in-class use (Clark & Mason 2015: 60-62). Contemporary understanding of related concepts –such as the one illustrated by Pynchon's quotation– prove to be useful too in real in-class situations, as students are able to relate the experiences narrated by Shakespeare to their own, both personal and fictional.

[3] Figure 1 represents my own visual sketch of Hutching's "trinity of existential hopelessness" (2012: 159).

[4] Instead of inserting captions with selected highlighted shots of these four scenes, I have included in the reference list the URLs that guide the reader to the full clips containing the four scenes as they appear in the films quoted. When I delivered this as paper presentations for workshop panels at the aforementioned conferences, I played the four clips and worked on them with the members of the audience. Since this is a practical teaching-oriented note it is necessary to work with the scenes in an active way, so my account of the in-class summary of the analysed scenes needs to be complemented with their viewing. Readers are strongly encouraged to check the clips when revising this section.

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Macbeth (dir. Roman Polanski, 1971) https://youtu.be/h-XTgC34IQQ
Macbeth (dir. Trevor Nunn, 1979) https://youtu.be/4LDdyafsR7g
Macbeth (dir. Rupert Goold, 2010) https://youtu.be/HZnaXDRwu84