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ITALIAN DIRECTORS READ SHAKESPEARE: FILM ADAPTATIONS OF THE PLAY "THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"

Abstract: *Our paper analyses the Italian adaptations of William Shakespeare's play "The Taming of the Shrew," i.e. films from 1942 (directed by Ferdinando Maria Poggioli), 1967 (Franco Zeffirelli) and 1980 (Castellano & Pipolo, i.e. Franco Castellano and Giuseppe Moccia). We observe how the relationship between Katherina and Petruchio is shown and how the Shrew is changed or her actions are motivated. Our theoretical approach draws upon the classifications of film adaptations by Linda Costanzo Cahir, approaching the films in question as a literal, traditional or/and radical translation.*

Keywords: *The Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare, film adaptation, Ferdinando Maria Poggioli, Franco Zeffirelli, Castellano & Pipolo*

At the beginning, we would like to point out that there are three other Italian adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* that did not make it into the corpus of our work. The first is perhaps the earliest one in general, since the seven-minute silent film *La bisbetica domata*, i.e. "The Taming of the Shrew", directed by Azeglio Pineschi and Lamberto Pineschi, appeared in 1908 around the same time as the silent film by American director DW Griffith. Unfortunately, the Italian movie is lost. The same is the case of the second silent film, directed by Arrigo Frusta in 1913. The third movie is from 2004. It is Italy's first full-length stop-motion animated film, *Kate – The Taming of the Shrew*. We have not included it because it is simply not available to us. It may seem strange that the Italians have been so interested in this Shakespeare play, but the number of Italian adaptations is actually not that high – according to some statistics, from 1908 and the beginning of silent movies to 2010 and the teenage TV series *10 Things I Hate About You*, a total of 84 adaptations of this Shakespeare play was made. Here we focus on three Italian adaptations, films from 1942 (directed by Ferdinando Maria Poggioli), 1967 (Franco Zeffirelli) and 1980 (Castellano & Pipolo, i.e. Franco Castellano and Giuseppe Moccia).

As far as the theory of adaptation is concerned, we decided to follow the classification made by Linda Costanzo Cahir, professor at Kean University, given

that it takes into account previous classifications[1]. In her study "Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches" she first makes a distinction between adaptation and translation, arguing that film translation is a better term than film adaptations:

> *"To adapt" means to alter the structure or function of an entity so that it is better fitted to survive and to multiply in its new environment. "To translate," in contrast to 'to adapt,' is to move a text from one language to another. It is a process of language, not a process of survival and generation. Through the process of translation, a fully new text – a materially different entity – is made, one that simultaneously has a strong relationship with its original source, yet is fully independent from it.* (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 16)

Although we find this explanation fascinating and correct, especially in its insistence that the film based on literature is a separate work of art, we will continue to use the term "film adaptation" when speaking generally about those films, but we accept her classification of film adaptations/translations into three types, according to how much they differ from the original text:

1. literal translation, 2. traditional translation, and 3. radical translation[2] (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 16).

The Taming of the Shrew has often been described as one of Shakespeare's most controversial plays. There are even those who claim that Shakespeare is not the author of this comedy. At about the same time, around 1594, there was a play called *The Taming of a Shrew*, which was the first of two to be printed, and it has been speculated whether it was an inspiration for Shakespeare, an early version of Shakespeare's comedy, or a plagiarised version of his comedy. *The Taming of the Shrew* begins with a special Induction, that is not characteristic of Shakespeare. In it, the drunken tinker Christopher Sly is dressed in the clothes of a lord and is convinced that he is a lord. Then a comedy is played for him, a comedy about the marriage of sisters Katherina and Bianca, making the main part of the Shakespeare's play actually a *mise en abyme* or a play within a play. There is no resolution to the opening scene.

However, the main problem with this dramatic work is the treatment of women, which prompted many to judge this play misogynistic. Petruchio actually "tames" the shrew, that is Katherina, starves her, does not let her sleep, humiliates her in various ways, and compares her to property and animals:

> *I will be master of what is mine.*
> *She is my property, my chattel; she is my house.*
> *My household goods, my field, my barn,*
> *My horse, my ox, my ass, my all* (Shakespeare n.d.: Act III, Scene II)

[1] She mentions André Bazin, Geoffrey Wagner, Dudley Andrew and Louis Gianetti (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 16).

[2] This is, as author herself states, similar to John Dryden's categorisation of translations: line-by-line, paraphrasing, imitation. (16)

The tamed Katherina eventually agrees to everything her husband tells her, even calling the sun the moon and the old man a beautiful girl. In the end, she makes a speech about how only an obedient woman is a good woman, and compares the relationship between a wife and husband to that between a subject and a prince:

Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
Even such a woman owes to her husband; (Act V, Scene II)

Shakespeare scholars interpret this in different ways, some of them justifying it. Misogyny is not really characteristic of Shakespeare, and it is thought that it is actually being mocked here. It should be borne in mind that this play within a play is being staged for a drunkard who does not know where he is or who he is. Some see Katherina's speech as ironic. She is pretending because she is in love with Petruchio and wants a husband and a family of her own. In fact, her submission to him is her victory; it is how she keeps him under her control.

Even though "some feminists have seen the play as more of an exposure of a variety of issues and thereby a play of commitment, cleverly developed by Shakespeare" (Scott 2016: 128), it should be noted that there are those who think that the play is about violence and the brainwashing of women, and there are adaptations that further emphasise this. "Coloured by the feminist movement, Michael Bogdanov's 1978 RSC version, starring Paola Dionisotti, thus depicted the play's conclusion as a tragedy, with Katherine walking off stage as a broken woman, just as if she were Nora Helmer in Ibsen's A Doll's House" (Van Es 2016: 15).

It is interesting to mention that almost all the main characters of the play find their counterparts in the Italian commedia dell'arte (Petruchio – Cavaliere, Baptista – Pantalone, the servants are classical *zanni*, etc. – see Gay 2008: 23, 24), but our main focus here is on the relationship between Katherina and Petruchio. We try to observe how Italian directors read and changed this relationship in relation to the time in which they set the action of the film, i.e. in relation to the social context of the time.

We will start with what is probably the world's most famous adaptation of the play. It is a 1967 film by the Italian director Franco Zeffirelli (1923 – 2019), which is considered to be both an Italian and a British film, as it was shot in English, with mostly British actors. Franco Zeffirelli, "for whom, Shakespeare has been a constant source of inspiration" (Wray 2015: 144) was the first Italian director to be invited to direct at the famous Old Vic theatre in London. After the success of his stage production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, he was contacted by Richard Burton (1925 – 1984) and Elizabeth Taylor (1932 – 2011) with an offer to direct *The Taming of the Shrew*. Zeffirelli already had plans for a screen version of the comedy, but he wanted to cast Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren (Zeffirelli 2023: 251) in the lead roles. He agreed to work with the Burton-Taylor couple, and was particularly enthusiastic about Elizabeth Taylor's acting, saying that "she was both funny and sharp, and that a day with her was like a century with other actresses" (Saville 2011: 20:26). Her performance was to critical acclaim: "Howling her rage,

strutting crudely, running carefully dirtied fingers through a wig and spitting out the pentameter with fiery vividness, Elizabeth conveyed the spirit of both the verse and the shrew" (Spoto 1995: 316).

Zeffirelli's attitude can also be seen in his direction. Elisabeth Taylor's face is often in close-up, thus making her facial expressions the main tool of this film, and that is how we read the changes in Katherina, i.e. the moment when she falls in love with Petruchio and decides to agree to his demands. Zeffirelli also included a scene in which Katherina looks longingly at the children playing, which motivates her to "surrender" with the desire to have children of her own. Petruchio and Katherina love-hate relationship was mirrored by the similar relationship Burton and Teylor had. Zeffirelli thought that the cause of their "epic squabbles" on set was liquor and competition, and it was noted by Teylor's biographer that Burton hated the Hollywood she represented and she detested the English snobbism, but all that somehow fuelled the making of the great film: "And so it went, with bitterness and resentment now flashing around and between them, alternating with respect and mutual encouragement" (Spoto 1995: 317).

Figure 1. Elizabeth Taylor as Katherina (Zeffirelli 1967: 01:54:33)

But Elizabeth Taylor was not only an actress, she was also a producer, and in the final scene she imposed her will on Zeffirelli and Burton. They wanted Elisabeth/Katherina to deliver her speech about the ideal submissive wife ironically. She decided to be serious, arguing that it would show that Katherina was really in love

with Petruchio. But then she decided to leave the hall where the party was being held on her own, without his permission and without him, which would indicate that she is in fact the authority. This is supported by the scene at the table, where we see that he has stopped drinking because of her. However, everything remains ambiguous, left to the viewer's interpretation, just like in Shakespeare's comedy. This is probably one of the reasons why, despite some negative criticism, this film "still lays claim to continuing as the definitive adaptation" (Wray 2015: 145).

Zeffirelli reconstructed the old Padua, keeping all the characters from Shakespeare's comedy and all the main events, except the one from the Induction. Some, on the other hand, claim that the opening scenes of the film, the carnival atmosphere and the parody of everything are actually a substitute for the Induction, with the same function. Most of the Lucentio and Bianca subplot is cut, and some additional scenes (with almost no dialogue) with Katherina and Petruchio are added. So how do we classify this film? Constanzo Cahir says that literal translation "reproduces the plot and all its attending details as closely as possible to the letter of the book", while traditional translation "maintains the overall traits of the book (its plot, settings, and stylistic conventions) but revamps particular details in those particular ways that the filmmakers see as necessary and fitting" (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 16, 17). Zeffirelli's film is somewhere in the middle, but closer to a traditional translation. There are elements that are exactly the same as in the play, but this fidelity is not achieved "at the expense of the creative freedom and boldness of interpretations", that is usually the case in literal translations (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 19). On the other hand, there are changes, but they are not so great as to disfigure the core of the original.

The 1942 film by Ferdinando Maria Poggioli (1897 – 1945) sets the action in the exact same year. Almost all the characters are still there, though somewhat changed. Katherina and Bianca's father is now a rich tailor who would prefer a butcher to be Bianca's husband – simply because it means they will have something to eat during the war. Petruchio (here Petruccio) is an Italian who became rich in the United States, but "when he heard that the war had started," he returned to Italy because "Italy is Italy" (Poggioli 1942: 00:11:01). In order to justify the "taming of Katarina," that is Catina (her name is somewhat Italianized here), some significant changes are made. According to this version, Katherina/Catina and Petruchio had been friends since childhood, although they had quarrelled even then.

Petruchio uses reverse psychology on Katherina so that she chooses marriage herself. When, in the shelter, during the bombing, the crowd advises Petruccio to run away from Catina, she tells him that he will do what she tells him, which is to marry her. Poggioli's Catina seems bolder and more intelligent than Shakespeare's Katherina, so the ending is a little surprising – she slaps her sister Bianca, who has now become a shrew (like Bianca in the play), and the film ends with a cheerful song that seems to glorify domestic violence:

Capricious and half-crazy,
almost all of them are though,

these blasè girls
that only know how to say "No"!
– Would anything change them? – Yes!
– A good medicine to heal them? – Yes!
– A sure way to calm them? – Yes!
A husband and a stick,
that's it! Yes, yes!
And once they're married,
you don't recognize them anymore!
The tamed shrews are now brides
with virtues you can't ignore. (01:18:37)

But the secret lies in Catina's famous speech, which is the same in spirit as the one in Shakespeare's play, but slightly altered. In one part of it she says that a woman must be gentle, soft and obedient if she is to "get anything from a man" (01:18:10). It is in this sentence that Jacqueline Reich sees the banality and falseness of the song and the true meaning of the film: Catina agrees to the marriage in order to get something – she initially rejects the fascist, Mussolini model of marriage (submissive wife and dominant husband), but later seems to accept it in order to improve her social position (Reich 2008: 320). Here, too, the director, like Zeffirelli later on, chose to frequently use close-ups of the leading actress's face, since her facial expressions play an important role in her transformations, but is also a source of humour – Lilia Silvi (1921 – 2013) was the leading Italian comedienne at the time.

Figure 2. Lilia Silvi as Catina Minola (Poggioli 1942: 00:41:50)

Do aforementioned alterations make this film a traditional or a radical translation? Radical translation "reshapes the book in extreme and revolutionary ways both as a means of interpreting the literature and of making the film a more fully independent work" (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 19). Again, we are not sure. The changes are greater, especially when compared to Zeffirelli's version, but are they so extreme? Do the changes in the setting and the hidden commentary on the fascist regime make it so independent? This is another example of the lack of any classification of film adaptations. We need another type in this system, or at least a subtype of traditional translation.[3]

At least *Il bisbetico domato*, the third and final film to be discussed in this paper is clear in this sense. It is so far from the source text that it must be classified as a radical translation. In the seventies and eighties, the king of comic roles in Italy was Adriano Celentano (1938). Screenwriters and directors Franco Castellano (1925 – 1999) and Giuseppe Moccia (1933 – 2006), who worked together for forty years under the stage name Castellano & Pipolo, decided to take advantage of his popularity for their adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy. In addition to Adriano, they chose the most beautiful Italian actress of the time, Ornella Muti (1955), for the female lead.

The story was set in modern Italy, but the directors, who were also the screenwriters, did something unexpected – they switched roles. Adriano plays Elia Codogno, a rich farmer and winemaker who is a shrew (hence the masculine form "il bisbetico" in the title instead of the feminine "la bisbetica"), and Muti is Lisa Silvestri, a modern girl who will tame him. It is interesting that the official English translation of the title is *The Taming of the Scoundrel* and not *The Taming of the Shrew*, which shows that there was a desire to distance themselves from the original, but also a desire to keep some kind of connection.

This is enough to say that, in Costanzo Cahir's classification, this film falls under the category radical translation, i.e. an almost entirely independent work of art, although some would dispute that it is art, since it is a typical Italian blockbuster comedy of the eighties. The film is certainly commercial. It played on the popularity of the main actors, the simple and entertaining plot, but also on eroticism – there are several scenes, not very well motivated though, in which we see Ornella Muti half naked. Nevertheless, the film is far from bad. It is an interesting reworking of a classic play, and in the genre of light comedy it is certainly at the top.

[3] In defence of the author of this classification, it should be noted that she herself said that "while the three translation modes occupy distinct categories, it is not unusual for a film to incorporate a combination of these approaches […] even though the overall manner of any film translation of literature is predominantly accomplished in one of these three distinctive ways" (Constanzo Cahir 2006: 17).

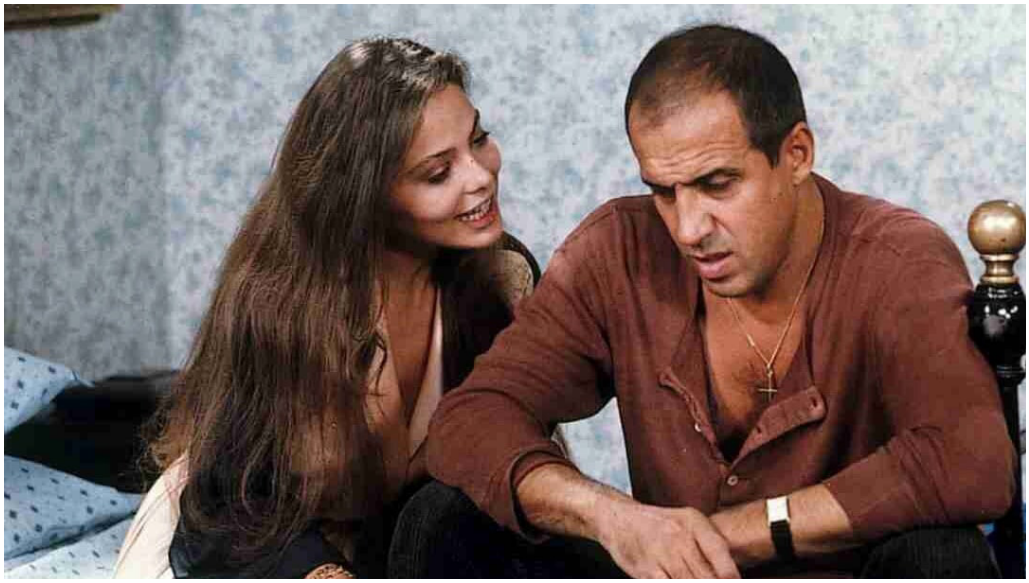

Figure 3. Ornella Muti as Lisa and Adriano Celentano as Elia (Castellano & Pipolo 1980: 01:04:05)

The main idea of taming one's future partner is retained. Several other motifs from Shakespeare's comedy are also retained – from those that are important (for example, Elia's rude rejection of women resembles Katherina's character) to those that are secondary to the plot (the quarrel between Lisa and her friend resembles the quarrels between Katherina and her sister Bianca, etc.). There even seem to be links with previous films. The destruction of the bedroom by Elia and Lisa is somehow reminiscent of the scene with Catina and Petruccio in his house in the 1942 film, even though it is one of the last scenes in the film. The film often comes close to the edge of bad taste, but somehow never crosses it. Even the dialogue at the end of the film, before the sexual destruction of the house, adds to the humour and underlines the character and change of the shrew:

Elia: Shall we get married? What is your answer?
Lisa: Yes.
Elia: Why are you laughing?
Lisa: You have never had sex before.
Elia: But I've read many books. (Castellano & Pipolo 1980: 01:42:18)

The changes are intelligently made and serve to bring the story in touch with modern times and also to enhance the comedic elements. Particularly interesting is the transformation of the "kidnapping" of Katherina from Shakespeare's play – here Elia does not kidnap, but throws Lisa out, by tying the bed to a tractor and dragging it through the village. Even the directors' bizarre solutions are somehow likeable. Two of them are particularly remarkable. When Elia realises that he loves Lisa, he

goes to a basketball game where she is with another man. To win her over, he has to tell her he loves her in front of everyone (the ultimate horror for him), but also help his village team win the game. And he does this by winning all by himself. It is probably a parody of the American sports movies or cartoons and comics about superheroes that were popular at the time – but it works, it's funny. He also has a black maid, which is certainly not typical of the Italian countryside. But her name (Mommy) and her constant pressure on him to get married and have children (she leaves the house right after Lisa, disappointed in him) clearly shows her role in the story. In addition, the directors took advantage of the popularity of the singer Edith Peters at the time.

The three films we have discussed in this paper illustrate three types of adaptation, or at least ways of combining three types of film translation. What they have in common is that they change, at least to some extent, the character of the Shrew and add motivations to the character's actions, even if they set the action in the same period as Shakespeare. They have departed from the original text, but in a way that shows that their directors understood the basic idea of the play, had the ability to translate that idea into the language of film, and found their own creative expression, which are the basic requirements for a successful film translation (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 30) They are thus involved in a series of different interpretations of this fascinating Shakespeare's comedy that, despite its flaws, has survived and is still popular today.

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