

Recycling *Macbeth*

by *Antonella Piazza*

Premise

Two uprooted suburban young men – one skinny (Pisellino), the other average build, in their underwear or bathing suits, from a deserted, abandoned beach – discharge their powerful Kalashnikovs towards the first target which meets their visual spectrum – a boat – which blows up spectacularly. This increases their hysterical, cocaine induced enthusiasm.

This image from Matteo Garrone's film adaptation (2008) of Roberto Saviano's *Gomorrah* (2006) has been haunting our imaginations since the publication of the book and the release of the movie. *Gomorrah*, the novel and *Gomorrah* the movie are an exemplary case of an immediate translation of a story of words into a story of images and of the contemporary interaction between the literary and the visual forms of representation and knowledge. This is an occurrence of synchronic interdependence, but the relationship of literature, the art of the word, with cinema, the art of the moving image, has also a diachronic dimension. It is in time and changes and develops with it. This will be an experimental attempt at tracing one of these developments. My project is establishing a genetic link which might tie together a classic of the canon of dramatic literature – *Macbeth* – a historical docu-fiction turned into a film – *Gomorrah* – and the movie genre of the “western noir” and present the three of them as *one* paradigm of the cultural process: the expression and the representation of radical evil.

I

**Gomorrah is not a Shakespearean movie.
But what is a Shakespeare movie?**

I really can't make a comparison between a movie-maker and Shakespeare. No movie that ever be made is worthy of being discussed in the same breath.

Orson Welles

Ornella Piazza maintains that the relationship between Shakespeare and cinema has been «a true love story»¹. It is also a lasting affair started at the birth

of the new medium with a silent *King John* by Sir Herbert Beerbhom Tree in 1899 and it still promisingly continues, so that «In January 2007, the Internet Movie Database identified William Shakespeare as writer of the screenplay or source play for 666 cinema and television productions»².

But this is a privileged and exceptional condition because literature and cinema did not always get along so easily³. At the start literature felt threatened by the capacity cinema seemed to have to cannibalize its capital and skills of narrations and made any effort to keep their fields of action separate, defending the autonomy of the two languages: the literary and the visual. The case of dramatic literature is somewhat in between literature and cinema: the fight for supremacy between word and image goes back to the confrontation between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones which ended up with a divorce. It is also true that the history of Shakespeare's theatrical performance can be described as an increasing turning – through time – of Shakespearean words and imagery into a spectacle which, by means of more and more sophisticated technologies, gained an unsuspected and encumbering supremacy until the advent of the movies. Cinema inherited from the stage, the language and forms of spectacular performance which the theatre had developed to satisfy the pressing requests for “realism” of its sixteenth century middle class audience⁴.

The Shakespearean movie describes an itinerary in time where the two partners—the bard and the cinema— exchange roles: while, in fact, at its start, the movie used Shakespeare – both on page and stage – to confer the new medium cultural dignity and authority, now it is Shakespeare that, thanks to his adaptations on the screen, is able to reach and regain large international audiences, escaping from the sometimes claustrophobic and deadening spaces of classroom texts and academic theatrical performances. Through film adaptation, on the one hand, Shakespeare recovers the constitutive popularity of the Elizabethan theatre – the multilayered composition of its audience, its communal, participative ways of composition, creation and performance – and, on the other, he is plunged into and involved in all those «series of forms outside and beyond the book which are provided by the technological, social and economic advances of capitalism in the last century-and-a-half: [...] photography, radio, cinema, television, recorded music. It is in such overlapping institutional spaces, traversing the whole “ecology of the media”, that contemporary cultural production takes place»⁵. If nobody believes any longer in the “death of the book”, today everyone, willing or not, has to recognize that the written word has lost the centrality it had enjoyed since humanism and the Gutenberg revolution. This does not imply as a necessary consequence that our present is passively dominated by images and visual culture. As Greenaway's masterpiece – *Prospero's Books* – makes brightly clear, words as well as images are all immersed in the whirl-

wind of the tempestuous technological revolution (started by the way in Gutenberg's times). But in his Shakespearean movie Greenaway warns that if everything still turns around the book, the bulimic visual richness and provocative sophisticated technology of its movie wait to be more consciously read and interpreted by a visually illiterate audience.

In the academic field the Shakespearian movie has received critical attention since the Thirties, and at the time (1936) on the pages of *The Listener* it was the object of a hot confrontation between the "purist" English actor-playwright Harley Granville Barker and the great film director Alfred Hitchcock who defended the cinema's right to afford Shakespeare's dramatic action a realistic location which was actually an extension – as Davies noticed – «of that conflict which had emerged within the realm of theatre some fifty years before»⁶. Shakespeare on Film has since then grown so extensively to become an academic field of its own. But what a Shakespeare movie has been, is and will be is still strongly debated. Most critics focus on the movie directors' strategies to associate the visual with the verbal. Jack Jorgen (*Shakespeare on Film*) first distinguished among three essential cinematic modes: the theatrical, the realistic and the filmic. Sarah Hatchuel makes a useful clear differentiation between film directors who translate Shakespeare's verbal images by "literal illustrations" (often the case of Lawrence Olivier's dramatic mode) and those who recreate visually Shakespeare's text by means of "metaphorical associations" (this is the case of Orson Welles's Shakespearean masterpieces):

Several forms of metaphors can be identified: those that can be noticed through repetition, insistence (for example, with close-ups, sequence shots or unusual angles) or amplification (with visual distortions such as enlarging effects). In Shakespeare films, the specificity of metaphorical associations resides in the absence of simultaneity between the visual and the verbal⁷.

When metaphorical association prevails (as in Welles's *Macbeth*) Shakespeare movie enters the history of the cinema and will both be influenced by and influence its language, forms and genres. What is, actually, at stake in one of the latest studies on Shakespeare on Film is precisely the project of writing a history of cinemabased on adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and of plunging it in that interdisciplinary, hybrid, multimedia context which makes adaptation coincide with the cultural process⁸. The practice of adaptation moves in two directions: if it gives Shakespeare's text a centrifugal movement, it also pays homage to it, through a performative action which, according to Manfred Pfister, reanonizes the text and gives back relevance to the literary canon⁹.

2

**If *Gomorra* is not a *Shakespeare film*,
it may be a “*Scottish*” movie**

... Stars, hide your fires,
let not light see my black and deep desires.
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see (1.4.48-53)¹⁰

«In the invoked starless night the [Macbeth’s] eye (figure of the rational, symbolic, daytime order) is not supposed to see the hand which will perform the act: the blind hand represents the instrument of the drive, of the night transgression»¹¹. Shakespeare’s shortest and most concentrated play, *Macbeth* is also his darkest. No wonder that it imbricates and is imbricated in the vicissitudes of the *noir*, a movie genre also *Gomorra* – a *noir docu fiction* – belongs to¹². After the postwar group of movies (by and large, from John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon*, 1941, to Orson Welles’s, 1958 *Touch of Evil*) – associated with this debated label, the *noir* has had several revivals and it is still with us. What binds together a very long list of movies in this definition is the pervasiveness of violence visualized by dark, misty atmospheres crossed by sudden lights: natural lightnings, street lights, car lights which tear up and reemphasize its pervasive blackness and sticky fogginess: «Fair is foul, and foul is fair. / Hover through the fog and filthy air» (1.1.11-12). That’s the first note the three witches strike on *Macbeth*’s violent battlefield and which will persistently haunt the text.

Violence and war had been Shakespeare’s main concerns in the *histories* of the Nineties where he had elaborated the bloody transition of England from the Medieval, feudal system to the early modern nation-state. In those plays the peace among the two warring feudal Roses, won by the first Tudor monarch, traced back the legitimate and prosperous Elizabeth I’s national dynastic line. *Macbeth* (1606) shares with the *histories* the warlike context of feudal clans¹³ – although further back in the past of Scotland and with the occasional task of individuating the new Stuart line of succession of the Scottish James I. But the Elizabethan England of the 1588 victory over the Spanish Invincible Armada was not the Jacobean England of the Gunpowder Plot (1605). While, in the first case, an international war, a national victory over another nation state is felt as the country’s final and liberating break with its archaic past, with its permanent state of internal civil wars – in the second, that first terroristic attack in modern history casts on the Scottish play its unmistakable aura of fear and claustrophobia, a sort of anti historical turn.

Macbeth, in fact, is not a historical play: to the slow, linear, overflowing representation of the past of the two tetralogies it opposes a lightening centripetal concentration. Against the balanced feud among two durable clans – the Yorks and the Lancasters – it contrasts the power struggle of an isolated individual, actually a villainous sterile couple, within a doomed, cyclical warfare among clannish families. The Macbeth couple is the archetype of the second of the two narrative structures of the noir: “the detective thriller” (or “hard-boiled” or “pulp”) and “the crime melodrama”. This *noir* centres on a couple whose crimes are not restrained by any institutional organism and where a she, the *femme fatale*, invariably brings both of them to destruction¹⁴. The focus on the Macbeths’ violent rise and fall and their psychic itinerary helps Shakespeare to bring to the fore violence (and war) as an anthropological archetype which makes of *Macbeth* a tragedy of history. Which may justify Lionel Abel who considers the play Shakespeare’s only true tragedy¹⁵.

Likewise, historical, topical allusions – the Second World War, the cold or the Vietnam war – no longer help explaining the emergence and the revivals of the *noir* in the history of cinema. Orson Welles, one of the greatest *noir* filmmakers, had probably caught this aspect of genre when in his *Macbeth* (1948) emphasized the a-historical, tribal dimension which he had already performed in his “Voodoo” *Macbeth* (1936) with Federal Theater Project’s Negro Unit. The movie papier-mâché castle, presided by the weird sisters from start to finish, with its large open doors, entrances and exits, inner and outer steep stairways, does not allow a clear cut separation of the inside from the outside, of public spaces from private ones which might guarantee a defense from outer and inner violence¹⁶. Although Welles’s as well as the other two auteur *Macbeth* adaptations – Akira Kurosawa’s *Spider Web Castle* (1957)¹⁷ and Roman Polanski’s (1971) – choose as the settings of their films large territories of a pre modern past, Shakespeare’s medieval Scotland is already dislocated. If *Macbeth* is the Scottish play – Courtney Lehman maintains in “*Out Damned Scot*”. *Dislocating Macbeth in Transnational Film and Media Culture* – it is not a Scottish movie. Welles had been forced to translate the Scottish accent of his dialogues into English, *Spider Web Castle* features a Japanese Middle Ages, while Polanski shot his *Macbeth* mainly in Wales. The displacement of the Scottish background in the premodern settings of these classical adaptations and in the post modern spaces of the contemporary *Macbeth* movies share with the western genre the projection into unexplored territories and betray an anxiety about time and history:

Indeed – Lehman argues – [...] Scotland and more specifically, the dislocated “Scotland” that figures so prominently in twentieth century media adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, suggests a compelling metaphor for the transnational playground wherein the challenges and possibilities of globalization may be traversed (p. 231).

So *Macbeth* movie adaptations are redefined as *noir westerns*:

As in the traditional western genre, these films cannot be interpreted apart from the landscapes against which they emerge. But Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is neither a traditional nor a neo-western of the Reagan/Bush Sr. era; it is, rather, a "northern" western in both its topological and sentimental climate, which is to say, *Macbeth* is a noir western [...] (p. 233).

Gomorra – both the text and the movie – shares with *Macbeth* and its old and more recent film adaptations the same anxious feeling of displacement and is to be considered the latest transformation of the *noir western*.

Blood (and fear) is the colour which prominently and permanently stains the screen of both *Macbeth* and *Gomorra*: archaic blood ties of parenthood, an endless list of killers, an uninterrupted chain of murders, revenges and illicit traffics form an inextricable web which blacks out any possible distinction between inside and outside [Macbeth's castle – especially in Well's adaptation, as it has already been noticed – and the bunker palace of Camorra clans are both political, public places and private prisons], between public and private dimensions (nuclear families and kin-clans), gender identities and relations (are the witches men or women? Who is the man and who is the woman in the Macbeth couple?), psychic health and madness. Are the witches real or hallucinations? «Or have we eaten on the insane root/That takes the reason prisoner?» (1.3.82-83), Banquo wonders as any cocaine addict camorrist might have doubted.

The witches' equivocations are the overwhelming resulting note of the endless states of warfare of both Shakespeare's and Saviano's textual dimensions, a condition of confusion between right and wrong, between good and evil, courage as a mystification of fear, persecutor and victim, life and death – a dimension René Girard would call a condition of fearful indifferenciation caused by a violent mimetic crisis when anybody fights against anybody else.

What further encourages the association between the two texts – the literary and the visual – is their spatial dislocation, as I was hinting before. First of all Saviano's title *Gomorra*, the biblical archetype for the corrupted community, does not so much project on the local Neapolitan Camorra an archetypal doom, but, on the contrary, displaces a localized corrupted violence on a much larger and indistinct space. Saviano presents Naples and its surroundings only as the war front of the criminal world of the Camorra which hosts the military apparatus, but its activities – the theatrical text reads – «concerns all Italy, the whole world». That is why Neapolitan criminal organizations prefer to be referred to as "the system" rather than as Camorra.

So Saviano's choice for his title, *Gomorra*, offers an apocalyptic horizon which reveals dimly that the local camorra shares with the deterritorialized global dimension the same savage and violent power dynamics for expanding its capitals and markets.

In the cultural process of movie adaptations *Macbeth* reaches out for the same displaced dimension of *Gomorra* in numberless *film noir* subgenres: western noirs, gangster and mafia movies (sometimes with parodic splatter elements as in the case of *Scotland, PA*). Scotland features, in fact, in these movies not as a real geographical location, but as a «powerful metonymy for a place that is everywhere and nowhere in particular». If in Ken Hughes' gangster *Joe Macbeth* (1955) up to William Reilly's *Men of Respect* (1990) *Macbeth*'s Scotland is relocated in post war prohibitionist America of Italo-American mafia, in later decades and in the new millennium that space is interiorized in a dimension where in the *noir* – according to Copjec – “drives” have substituted “desires”:

The old modern order of desire, ruled over by an oedipal father, has begun to be replaced by a new order of the drive, in which we no longer have recourse to the protections against “jouissance” that once the oedipal father offered – Which is to say: we have ceased being a society that attempts to preserve the individual right to “jouissance”, to become a society that commands “jouissance” as a civic duty. “Civic” is, strictly speaking, an inappropriate adjective in this context, since these obscene importuning of contemporary society entail the destruction of the “civitas” itself (Lehman, p. 233).

In 1999 Bogdanov's *Macbeth*, more than in any previous adaptation, Duncan, the boss father, symbol of “senile capitalism”, gets what he deserves, as he embodies a tyrannical micro fascism as the operative principle of small clans widespread on a post-industrial territory, sign of the threatening and spreading global condition of social and territorial fragmentation.

In the foggy climate of diabolical undifferentiation of *Macbeth* Scotland and its liminal movie adaptations and in the criminal outlaw dimension of *Gomorra* no Girardian sacrificial victim, able to contain violence and restore order and law, seems to be offered either to the reader or to any of its characters. The texts are, in fact, not concerned in justifying sacrificial victims, parricide and explaining murder and violence imbrications at the origin and as the basis of human communities. In Bogdanov's adaptation

After *Macbeth*'s encounter with the witches, the scenery that begins in the province of the wide open spaces of the western shifts almost exclusively into interiors-large, vacant, postindustrial spaces that once served as the urban playground of film noir, which, in the noir western, have become a metaphor for the dark corners of unexamined conscience. This is the psychic landscape that Dean MacCannel identifies

with “senile capitalism, a capitalism that has forgotten its once enabling relationship to democratic ideals” (Lehman, p. 236).

So in a violent time of “equivocation” and spreading criminal unlawfulness the urgent question which underlies both the Shakespearean text and movies and *Gomorrab* is: what is a man¹⁸. In both works violence is presented as that radical evil which Hannah Arendt identifies with the twentieth-century totalitarian regimes. They are, in Arendt’s view, a horrifying and banal time of equivocation which does not differentiate victim from persecutor because they are, as human beings, both exposed to destruction, deprived, as they are, of that liberty which the philosopher identifies with moral agency, that is the human capacity of discerning good from evil. According to Arendt if distinctions such as between dark and clear or heavy and light are *relative*, the difference between good and evil is *absolute*¹⁹. That seems the repressed unconscious of these cultural products²⁰.

They unconsciously strive for a way out of the centripetal drive of their haunting and deadly dimensions which confound not only war and peace, good and evil, but also life and death. Scotland has become a tomb: «Alas, poor country,/Almost afraid to know itself/ It cannot be called our mother, but our grave» (4.3.165-167) and the agenda of one of the typical Camorra men reads:

Everyone I know is either dead or in jail. I want to become a boss. I want respect when I go to a store, I want to have warehouses all over the world. And then I want to die. I want to die like a man, like one who truly commands. I want to be killed (*Gomorrab*, p. 114).

David Bell, in *The Death Drive: Phenomenological Perspectives in Contemporary Kleinian Theory*, associates Hannah Arendt thinking to the speculations of psychoanalysis on the death drive:

There is a correspondence – she argues – between Arendt’s work and contemporary thought on the death drive. Acts of genocide give expression to the death drive as a manifest activity, but the requirements of such phenomena come from the most insidious annihilation of the capacity of thinking which creates a careless, indifferent world, a terrible moral emptiness where an unleashed violence can rage free of any impediment. Arendt’s work on the trial against Eichmann has as its subtitle “the triviality of evil” not because evil is trivial, she means that the most malignant actions are realized by empty minds, devoid of thinking and passion.

«Life’s but a walking shadow... it is a tale /Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing» (5.5.24-28)²¹. If the state of emergency of Macbeth’s tyranny and spreading violence in clannish Scotland may be compared to a

nineteenth century totalitarian regime, likewise *Gomorrah*'s criminal global market is to be identified with a state of totalitarianism. Again David Bell claims:

The dogma of the free market reveals, in my opinion, evident totalitarian elements: you cannot question it, it filters into all forms of life and does not acknowledge any limits. The idea of democracy falls to pieces and changes into the freedom of buying or not buying. It is – in one of Hannah Arendt's expressions – *of a state devoid of words, of moral emptiness*. [It] gives an external justification to the omnipotent affirmations of the right to triumph on others... [which] supports a narcissistic psychic structure, unconsciously favouring fratricidal impulses and insuing the terrors of guilt and paranoid anxiety.

3

Taking sides: What is to be a man. Women in *Macbeth* movies and *Gomorrah*

Despite their obvious differences in production values and genre, these films more importantly suggest an attempt to map – “cognitively” and culturally – the co-ordinates of a new frontier that is not about taking “the high road” over “the low road” but, rather, about Scotland as a metaphor for the *road not taken*, a once and future landscape suspended between the imperatives of warfare and welfare, waiting upon our direction (Courtney Lehman, p. 231).

Accidentally Hannah Arendt – at the end of a lesson given in the United States in the mid nineteen sixties – quotes the horror of Macbeth's murder of Duncan as one of the fictional examples by which we can distinguish good from evil, take side, occupy a moral stand. Gaining and keeping a “conscience” is, in her thought, the only containment and check against the dangers of annihilation and “undifferentiation” in times of crisis. In her opinion ours is the first generation of the Christian era which does not believe in “future states” and to figure conscience as an organ which does not allow any longer to be tossed about by the fear of an eternal punishment or the hope of an eternal reward. Our is the first generation – she continues – for which this is not an élite's problem, but a phenomenon which concerns the great mass of people. In other words – she concludes – it is difficult today to imagine that people still believe that a divine voice talks to their consciences. So, self evident examples, either offered by fiction or reality, become, in Arendt's opinion, a criterion for anyone provided with a healthy mind to grasp the absolute difference between good and evil.

In the case of *Gomorrah* it is the creative writer – both its fictional projection in the book and the movie and in real life – who manages to escape the centripetal force of criminal warfare and offer an example of integrity

taking the side of life against death. At the end of his novel Saviano says that his journey through the wars of Gomorrah has taught him that death is revolting, it stinks.

Is there anyone able to gain a position out of the “charmed” circuit of Macbeth’s warlike Scotland and offer an example of integrity? Macduff is the thane who takes on himself the task of killing the tyrant: he enjoins Macbeth: «Despair thy charm» (v, 7, 42) and cuts his head off. But Macduff too is guilty: «Sinful Macduff! They were all struck for thee. Naught that I am, /Not for their own demerits, but for mine, /Fell slaughter on their souls» (iv, 3, 225-228). Auden in his Shakespearean lesson on *Macbeth* considers the secrecy of Macduff’s wife and children’s abandonment so unexplainable that he doubts about the integrity of the Shakespearean text. But Macduff, not the play, lacks integrity. His wife charges him with wanting «the natural touch» (4, 2, 9). Macduff, of course, is not guilty for sacrificing the private to the common welfare, but for excluding emotions²² from his identity and his conscience as he seems later to recognize:

Macduff: [...] What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
At one fell swoop?
Malcolm: Dispute it like a man.
Macduff: I shall do so,
But I must also feel it as a man (4, 3, 218-224)

In the early modern age the rising modern companionate nuclear family was becoming *the* private place (the home) of an ideal coexistence and reconciliation of feelings and duty, of love and obedience, of emotions and reason and *Macbeth* is, after all, also a *domestic tragedy*²³. Families undoubtedly play an important role in the Scottish play and wives, either as a persecutor – Lady Macbeth – or as a victim – Lady Macduff – feature prominently.

Macduff’s children’s and wife’s slaughter is the utmost example of the soldier Macbeth’s murderous fury. «All is the fear and nothing is the love» (4,2,12), Lady Macduff laments. Ironically and paradoxically in *Macbeth* it is a woman who answers to the crucial question of what is to be a man, by offering an example of human integrity. In the world of equivocation of the play Lady Macduff is the only one who seems to have no doubts about what is right and what is wrong.

Son: What is a traitor, mother?
Lady Macduff: Why, one that swears and lies. (4, 2, 49-50)

Lady Macduff is aware that in a world of reversal of values, in that “hurley burley” she lives in there is no place for truth, good or beauty:

I have done no harm. But I remember now
 I am in this world, where to do harm
 Is often laudable, to do good sometime
 Accounted dangerous folly. Why then alas,
 Do I put up that womanly defence
 To say I have done no harm? (4, 2, 72-77)

As quite invariably is the case with Shakespeare, the dimension she draws her wisdom from is Nature: no bird, even the most rapacious, would fly away and leave his nest unprovided with food as her husband has done because – she complains – he lacks the “natural touch”. Lady Macduff is the one in the text who contrasts the utter sterility and unnaturalness of the text with the creative, nurturing, fertile, caring values of nature.

The unsexed Lady Macbeth seems to occupy the diametrically opposite side. Her self-representation as a mother who tears from her milking breast her trustful smiling baby’s tender gums and smashes its brain is the most terrifying icon of unnatural perversion²⁴. Her murderous agency seems so unshakable and radical that Freud himself in a 1916 essay on Lady Macbeth is forced to admit his failure in finding a cause for the breakdown of such a psychic iron structure. But there is a hint which might have helped Freud. After a prolonged absence, Lady Macbeth reappears utterly deprived of agency, absent even to herself and, evoking Lady Macduff, keeps repeating: «The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?» (5, 1, 36). This line connects her breakdown with Lady Macduff’s and her children’s slaughter. After being the promoter of Macbeth’s first murder, she gradually distances herself (and is distanced by) from her husband’s chain of blood and has no part in Macduff’s family’s murder. But from her unconscious, together with the primal trauma, Lady Macduff – a mother – resurfaces as an excess Lady Macbeth can not contain: «The Thane of Fife had a wife».

What we have been describing as Lady Macduff’s example of fertile, maternal integrity seems first to work with the unmotherly Lady Macbeth although unconsciously in a process of psychic mirroring counter identification. She sees in her husband’s most brutal deed the extreme outcome of her matricidal provocation when the brutal carnage of creatures as innocent and defenceless as the trusting baby she had evocated comes true. Her madness and her later suicide are her female part’s rejection of the sterile system of permanent and continuous warfare.

The connection between the two wives is caught, interpreted and elaborated explicitly in many Macbeth movies, especially in recent western noir or gangster/mafia adaptations by means of film editing techniques. Lady Macbeth’s conversion to pity, desperate depression and suicide following mother-and-son’s murder is there emphasized, in spite of or because of the

debased context of bloodthirstiness and unleashed violence of the movie genre. This is one of the many cases in Shakespeare movies where montage – one of the most expressive elements of cinematic language – reveals itself as an instrument of interpretation, adaptation and translation of the verbal into the visual.

In *Jo Macbeth* (1955), a classical *gangster noir*, Lady Macbeth, the *femme fatale*, the dark lady (Ruth Roman keeps changing her smashing siren dresses from white to black and viceversa,) meets Bruce/Lady Macduff (a middle class mother/wife from the fifties) in the first part of the film and anxiously worries about her baby's crying while Lady Macduff reassures her. In the second part a strange scene has Lady Macbeth getting off a car driven by a chauffeur and holding in his hands a doll dressed as a spouse in white, which she is bringing to Lady Macduff and son as a sign of reconciliation between their husbands, the following shot shows her getting out of the main door of the Macduff's house horrified in finding mother and son just slaughtered by her husband's killers. This scene is immediately followed (underlining the causal connection) by her sick in a white bed and taken care of by Jo Macbeth and a doctor who advises to apply to a psychiatrist. She will die soon after by shooting herself and/or by being shot accidentally by Jo.

In *Men of Respect* (1990), a colour mafia movie, in *The Godfather's* style, the undaunted lady provokes her husband's ambition on the bed: she, dressed up, erotically massages Padrino Battaglia (John Turturro)'s naked body. She reappears in the second part, immediately after the sequence where on a Sunday, while "Duffy" is treacherously kept on the phone for business, mother and son decide to go to the zoo anyway without him and blow up after starting the car engine. In the following sequence Ruth /Lady Macbeth is again in bed, but depressed and in tears. Her husband gets from the floor the *Daily News* which in the front page as a banner headline has *CAR BOMB KILLS MOM AND SON*. Soon after she'll commit suicide cutting her veins in a bath tub which she had worn out by dint of washing it and that is now full of her blood²⁵. In the glossy Australian adaptation of Geoffrey Wright (2006) Lady Macbeth learns from TV news that her husband had a wife and her child brutally slaughtered and then breaks down. Keeley Hawes, the actress who plays Lady Macbeth's role in the series of *Shakespeare Retold* (1996), dreamily tells about her baby's death to the restaurant guests while her husband is planning the murder of Lady Macduff and her two children.

In his book Roberto Saviano has a chapter devoted to Women. As in *Macbeth* they are presented either as bosses, gaining leading positions in the "system" – the so called Lady Camorras – or as victims.

Adaptations and genre transformations are cultural processes where fiction and reality influence each other. In *Gomorra* men as well as women

mimic the mafia and gangster movie models of power: Immacolata Capone, a Lady Camorra, leader boss in a building firm, is escorted by girls who drive a yellow Smart, who exhibit smashing yellow dresses and yellow-rimmed glasses, shaping their images on Uma Thurman who wears yellow overalls in *Kill Bill*, where for the first time a movie has a woman who is a first-class killer. No wonder that one of the latest offshoots of *Macbeth* you can find on line is a *Kill Bill Macbeth*!

Coda On Recycling

Witches traffic in parts of dead bodies (in Polanski's movie they play with a hand holding a knife) and recycle them in the cauldron. Both *Macbeth* and *Gomorra* –western noirs – insist obsessively on what is residual: garbage, rubbish dumps, obviously connected with the excess of consumerism, the explosion and overflowing of what is left over. The witches' dealing with the remains war produces reminds the striking episode in *Gomorra* where a container in the port of Naples opens and frozen bodies of dead Chinese fall off, revealing that Camorra too traffics in dead bodies. What has to be disposed of threatens to overwhelm everything and become the system. In Bogdanov's movie (1999) *Macbeth* at the end is not beheaded, but thrown out in a waste dump, uncannily ready to be recycled. Recycling is, in this case, a centripetal force, a threatening drive of repetition. But recycling as a metaphor for adaptation, rather than repetition, points to metamorphosis as meaning not just a change of surfaces, but, as Rushdie maintains, the emergence of our deepest nature through the hybridization of media and other forms of knowledge.

Notes

1. O. Piazza, *Letteratura e cinema*, Spazio Tre, Roma 2005, p. 309.
2. D. Rosenthal, *100 Shakespeare Films*, BFI screen guides, BFI Publishing, London 2007.
3. Virginia Woolf thought that adaptations of literary works by the cinema would be to the detriment of both arts and hers was a position she shared with the authoritative review "Close Up" until the arrival of the sound movie which gave cinema the status of an impure, "mixed" art (words, sounds, images and new technologies – a status defended by André Bazin).
4. That allowed the theatre to turn full circle to experiment and work on its own more peculiar forms of expression.
5. C. MacCabe, *On Impurity: the Dialectics of Cinema and Literature*, in J. Murphet, L. Rainford (eds.), *Literature and Visual Technologies*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2003, p. 18.
6. A. Davies, *Shakespeare and the Media of Film, Radio, and Television: A Retrospect*, in S. Welles (ed.), *Shakespeare Survey. An Annual Survey of Shakespearean Study and Production* 39, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987, p. 2.

7. S. Hathcuel, *Shakespeare, from Stage to Screen*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 19.
8. A. R. Guneratne, *Shakespeare, Film Studies, and the Visual Cultures of Modernity*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008.
9. M. Pfister, "In states unborn and accents yet unknown": *Shakespeare e il canone europeo*, in A. Piazza (a cura di), *Shakespeare in Europa*, CUEN, Napoli 2002, pp. 67-91.
10. All the quotations from *Macbeth* are from Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, a cura di A. Serpieri, Giunti, Firenze 1996.
11. «Nella notte invocata senza stelle l'occhio (che sta per il razionale, il simbolico, l'ordine diurno) non dovrà vedere la mano che compirà l'atto, la mano cieca che rappresenta lo strumento della carica pulsionale, della trasgressione notturna», William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, a cura di A. Serpieri, Giunti, Firenze 1996, p. 31 (my translation).
12. The notion of the *noir* as a genre is much contested and disputed in film criticism: it is most often considered a label by which French leftish *intelligentsia* defined a group of American postwar Hollywood movies—stretching by and large from John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) to Orson Welles's (1958) *Touch of Evil*. They were considered the other side, the dark side of the self-celebratory American way of life Hollywood embodied with its unfailing happy endings.
13. Feudal and camorra share this word clan which, often associated with kin, point to the priority of blood, familiar relations over any others.
14. G. Canova (a cura di), *Enciclopedia del cinema*, Garzanti, Milano 2005, p. 874.
15. L. Abel, *Metatheatre*, Hill and Wang, New York 1963.
16. Welles's movie already establishes the paradigm of the *noir* (which is also an often recognized as a specific effect which distinguishes filmic from theatrical languages): external visual images translate themselves into internal, mental visions with no mediations.
17. Kurosawa's *Kumonosu jō* has also been translated as *Throne of Blood*.
18. Paradoxically *Macbeth* is the one who says: «Prithee, peace./I dare do all that may become a man./Who dares do more is none». (1.7.45-47)
19. H. Arendt, *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, Random House, New York 2003.
20. Ours is the first generation – Hannah Arendt states in one of her moral lessons – that obedience to an external metaphysical voice is no longer what guarantees human ethical, moral behaviour.
21. The name of *Macbeth* is evoked in more than one place in Arendt's thinking. Arendt, though arguing that Eichman was not an ardent sadist as *Macbeth* or *Iago*, connects *Macbeth* to Eichmann, who did not commit his crimes for an excess of ideology, but for an absence of thought.
22. Contemporary psychoanalytic thought insists on the role of emotions—often marginalized in its tradition, in the cognitive process. See M. Rustin, *Learning about Emotions: the Tavistock Approach*, in "The European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling and Health", vol. 6, n. 3, September 2003, pp. 187-208.
23. See my *Quarto: Onora il Padre. Tragedie domestiche sulla scena elisabettiana*, ESI, Napoli 2000.
24. The question that in 1932 L. C. Knights provocatively formulated against the Bradleian character-based criticism, «How Many Children Had Lady *Macbeth*?» seems still waiting for an answer in the psychoanalytic imaginary. See C. Chillington Rutter, *Remind Me: How Many Children Had Lady *Macbeth*?*, in P. Holland (ed.), *Macbeth and its Afterlife*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 38-53.
25. Also Wright's adaptation has the lady committing suicide in a bath tub.