

Travelling through the centuries

The intertextual relationship between *Shakespeare in Love*, *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love*

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The paper analyses the influence of John Madden's biopic *Shakespeare in Love* (GB/USA, 1998) on *Molière* (FR, 2007) and *Young Goethe in Love* (GER, 2010) by having a closer look at the intertextual relationship between the films. For this, it considers external and internal connections, referring to intertexts for the promotion and marketing as well as the use of content-based conventions for biopics on writers, literary sources and anachronisms. The analysis reveals that, although the French and German films take *Shakespeare in Love* as a source of inspiration, they rewrite the approach and transform it for an individual representation of their national subjects. This double effect points to a different, alternative strategy for adapting the literary life of the canonical author.

Keywords: biopics, film adaptation, film biography, intertextuality, writers

1. Introduction

Since the close of the 20th century, biographical pictures or “biopics” have experienced a momentous revival, the adaptation of a past literary life being among the most flourishing and attractive subgenres. The personal life of the author, the inspiration for his or her creative writing and the actual process of putting the thoughts and ideas on paper appeal to a large audience and, apparently, constitute the secret recipe for being nominated or receiving a much coveted Academy Award. The prime example for this is, undoubtedly, *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), directed by John Madden and starring Joseph Fiennes and Gwyneth Paltrow in the leading roles. With gross earnings of \$289,317,794,¹ *Shakespeare in Love* was a

1. All the data on the box office revenues in this paper are taken from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/>.

great box-office success and winner of seven Oscars, including one for Best Picture and Best Screenplay, among many other prestigious awards. Andrew Higson attributes this exceptional outcome to the fact that the film “could work at two levels simultaneously”, for it was “‘a literate crowd pleaser’, tapping very successfully into popular romantic culture, but also [...] engaging with literary culture in various ways” (Higson 2013: 109).

With this double “crowd pleasing” character, *Shakespeare in Love* is one out of a total of sixteen British and American film biographies on English male and female writers that were produced in the 1990s and 2000s and that share a series of characteristics, as highlighted by Higson (2013). Though the list includes other famous writers such as Virginia Woolf (*The Hours*), Jane Austen (*Becoming Jane*) or John Keats (*Bright Star*), it is the life of Shakespeare that attracted by far the largest audience.

The extreme success of the cinematic recreation and fictionalisation of William Shakespeare’s lost years in London may be one of the reasons for the high number of academic contributions generated since the release of Madden’s biopic at the very end of the 20th century (see, e.g., Lehmann 2002; Davis & Womack 2004; Lanier 2007; Freeman Loftis 2011). Still, there is something else about the Bard’s filmic life that has incited great interest among scholars and that makes it stand out among other literary biopics: its intertextuality (see, e.g., Klett 2001; Jiménez Aguilar 2013; Franssen 2014). The film is characterised by an extensive interconnection between different texts, which not only underlines Shakespeare’s own artistic talent and “strategy” – the rewriting of pre-existing sources – but also its inspirational power for postmillennial biopics. One example of this can be found in Cano López & García-Periago’s (2008) study which analyses the beginning, middle and end of *Shakespeare in Love* and *Becoming Jane* (2007) and identifies similarities in terms of content and visual depiction.

The present paper takes up this notion of intertextual inspiration by way of Madden’s biopic and explores in which way two other cinematic portrayals of national literary representatives from the 17th and 18th century respond to it: *Molière*, a.k.a. *Le Comédien malgré lui* (dir. Laurent Tirard, FR, 2007) and *Young Goethe in Love* (dir. Philipp Stölzl, GER, 2010).² Though both films failed to achieve

2. *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) was cowritten by Tom Stoppard and Marc Norman, who co-produced the movie together with David Parfitt, Donna Gigliotti, Edward Zwick, and Harvey Weinstein. The director of *Molière*, Laurent Tirard, was assisted by Laurent Sivot and the script was co-authored by Tirard, Fanny Valette, Grégoire Vigneron and Jean-Claude Jay, with Marc Missonier, Olivier Delbosc and Christine de Jekel acting as producers. *Young Goethe in Love* was co-written by Philipp Stölzl, Alexander Dydyna, and Christophe Müller, who also coproduced it together with Helga Sasse.

their predecessor's success at the box office,³ they do constitute interesting examples of intertextual relationships which point to a different, alternative strategy for adapting a literary life – especially that of a canonical author – for today's screen audiences. Hence, this article's aim is to show where and how exactly the connection to *Shakespeare in Love* manifests itself in the French and German biopics. In order to do so, it will consider three aspects of intertextuality. First, it will have a closer look at “external” intertexts for the promotion and marketing of the films, most importantly the film posters' layout. Second, it will focus on two types of “internal” intertexts. Here, the aforementioned conventions for Brit-lit biopics, determined by Higson, come into play as seen from a content-based perspective. This begs the question to what extent the biopics meet these codes and, therefore, create a generic interconnection and recognition. Third, the analysis will focus on the use of intertextuality within each of the films, referring to literary sources as well as anachronisms. For reasons of space it is not possible to analyse these aspects in great depth. However, the article intends to highlight how, through the intertextual connections to *Shakespeare in Love*, *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love* achieve a double effect: they suggest a similar, modern strategy of literary representation, creating a closer relationship between canonical author and audience; and simultaneously, they individually adapt and rewrite the same strategy so as to shed a different light on their national subjects.

2. Intertextuality

The concept of intertextuality, which is “key to textual intelligibility” (Aragay 2005: 21), enables us to analyse the outer and inner relationship(s) between different texts. Apart from construing “text” in a broad sense that goes beyond the initial application to literature, film adaptations – including biopics – are not one-sided *from-to* products but engage in a dialogue with a variety of sources, as highlighted by Robert Stam (2000) in his notion of intertextual dialogism. In Stam's view, film adaptations are “caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin” (2000: 66). Rodríguez-Martín, who applies this concept to the analysis of *Psycho* (1960), points to the dialogue's bidirectional character because in the “dialogic process”, which is automatically created, “both texts influence each other” (2013: 174). Since the turn of the millennium, this idea of alteration and rewriting is increasingly recognised

3. At the time of writing *Molière* had brought in worldwide grosses of \$10,878,867; *Young Goethe in Love* only \$5,788,728.

in film adaptation studies. Elliott, for instance, stresses the importance of a transformative model or process when talking about adaptations, meaning that film and novel mutually metamorphose each other (2003: 229). Aragay & López (2005: 201) emphasise that,

[s]tarting off from Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, derived from Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism [...] adaptation is a prime instance of cultural recycling, a process which radically undermines any linear, diachronic understanding of cultural history, proposing instead a synergetic, synchronic view of the mutual inf(lection) between 'source' and adaptation(s).

Intentionally using an intertext not only suggests taking up a pre-existing text but, furthermore, revisiting and remodelling it, which always implies change. Finally, Pardo García (2005: 238) draws special attention to the impact of texts, here adaptations, when stating that

[...] an adaptation is not only influenced by previous adaptations of the same text, which act as a sort of repository of images, motifs and themes, but also by contemporary adaptations of different texts which share a certain approach to adaptation, both visual and ideological, and are therefore also repositories of images, motifs or themes.

These notions are particularly interesting for the present analysis. As will be shown, the selected biopics, by taking different sources and spinning an extensive intertextual web, transform their subjects and incite a new response to their canonical personae, to the writing and, not to forget, to the audience. *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love*, by orienting themselves towards a 'contemporary adaptation', adopt the perspective of *Shakespeare in Love* and, simultaneously, contribute to the 'repository' of future biopics on writers.

3. Promoting the biopic

The promotion and marketing of a film is crucial to attract moviegoers, providing as it does information on aspects such as film production, film genre and, to a certain extent, film content. Ideally, a successful marketing campaign draws in more than just the usual suspects.

When we consider how *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love* were advertised, several elements are worth noting, first and foremost the film posters' layout and mood. Both the French and the German poster portray the male and female protagonists, highlighting the romantic aspects of the writer's life, as in the case of *Shakespeare in Love* whose poster features the lovers almost, tenderly, touching.

Whereas the poster for *Molière* divides the image into two and depicts the lovers independently of one another, *Young Goethe in Love* chooses the film's most romantic and passionate scene: the lovers kissing for the first time in the rain. This is perhaps less surprising, given that the films are promoted as romantic comedies, as their trailers also indicate. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a tag line as in *Shakespeare in Love* goes even further. *Molière* turns "Love is the only inspiration" into "True love has no script", while for the promotion of *Young Goethe in Love* a quote from the author himself, taken from his *Torquato Tasso*, is used: "Love grants in a moment what toil can hardly achieve in an age". A Swedish film poster creates an even more direct and explicit connection to the famous British/American counterpart by extolling *Molière* as a "comedy for everybody who adored *Shakespeare in Love*"⁴ (translation mine).

In the same spirit, director Philipp Stölzl, when asked in an interview with the German newspaper *Thüringer Allgemeine* (Oßwald 2010: §16) whether he considers his film the German response to the Oscar-winning precursor, replied:

Shakespeare in Love was definitely an example for us because it works in a similar way. The viewer encounters a fictitious story with an extremely handsome Shakespeare who represents a fiery film hero – I doubt this matches the real William. The movie approaches this great literary icon in a fresh and sensual way, addressing a broad audience that wants to be entertained. (translation mine)

A striking parallel is also the translation of the original titles. The German biopic's title *Goethe!* has been transformed into practically the same English wording (*Young Goethe in Love*), including young to indicate the author's age – an important detail for attracting the desired target group, as we will see. Moreover, the German poster for the French biopic leads the audience to expect a film about "the love adventures of Mr Molière" (*Die Liebesabenteuer des Herrn Molière*), emphasising above all the film's romantic aspect.

As we can see, both films – released nine and twelve years after Madden's Shakespeare biopic – play with the recognition that the latter accrued and in the case of Stölzl's biopic even openly refers to it as a source of inspiration. To increase audiences, marketing strategies deliberately create parallels to attract viewers that liked a film, and hence, should be tempted to watch similar films. It is little wonder, then, that the paratexts of *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love* include a series of open and hidden allusions to *Shakespeare in Love* meant to create recognition even before we get to the films proper.

4. See <https://www.cinematerial.com/movies/moliere-i796335/p/cdqac7sg>.

4. Conventions for Brit-lit biopics

How do these allusions then become manifest from “within”? In his article “Brit-lit biopics, 1990–2010”, Higson (2013) establishes a list of film biographies, produced during this period, that deal with the life of sixteen British and American writers and share some typical conventions. By doing so, he defines literary biopics in greater detail, lending them a generic framework. Molière and Goethe belong to a different film market within which they are characterised by their own national backgrounds, but since they follow specific generic features and, consequently, a well-known pattern, they create an intertextual bond. As Agger (1999: §5) states, “[g]enre, cultural traditions, and national and international relations constitute a broader notion of intertextuality which is practically indispensable in the interpretation of works’ significant relational features and the traditions to which they belong”. Therefore, we will now look at how the three selected films fulfil Higson’s criteria, assuming all along that *Shakespeare in Love* is a typical Brit-lit biopic.

Having considered some of the marketing strategies above, the first convention comes as no surprise: Brit-lit biopics “tend to adopt a romantic vision of key moments in the life of a writer” and refer to a social experience, namely a romance, as stimulator for the author’s fiction, as “fountainhead of the creative process” (Higson 2013: 109). The audience meets a young author who experiences a young love usually subject to difficulties and obstacles, e.g. illness or social conventions; consequently, a tragic or unfortunate ending is very likely to happen (2013: 109). In *Shakespeare in Love*, *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love*, the three – relatively – young authors (according to the opening credits, Shakespeare may be in his late twenties, Molière is probably twenty-two, and Goethe twenty-three) find their inspiration when encountering their muses. Both William Shakespeare and Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, alias Molière, suffer from writer’s block until they meet or remember their loves, Viola de Lesseps and Elmire Jourdain. Johann von Goethe, on the other hand, manages to finish and tries to publish his *Götz von Berlichingen*; however, it is only after making the acquaintance of Charlotte “Lotte” Buff, that he is launched on the road to success.

The romances certainly have inauspicious beginnings. Viola, as the daughter of a wealthy merchant, is promised and later on married to Lord Wessex, an impoverished nobleman. Her status is the complete opposite of Shakespeare’s, who, as a poor playwright, lives under the pressure to create a new and audience-winning play. Molière is no luckier: hired by the rich bourgeois Monsieur Jourdain as creative mentor in the conquest of an aristocrat’s heart, he falls in love with Jourdain’s wife Elmire. Although the couple is engaged in a passionless marriage, Elmire is committed to her social class and place. Goethe and Lotte, in contrast, are not separated by social convention, and at first it seems that their love has

fortune on its side. Nevertheless, as the daughter of a poor widow and the eldest of eight children, she is promised, like Viola, and later on married to Albert Kestner, a respected and affluent councillor at court who, as fate would have it, happens to be Goethe's superior. In addition to this focus on love and romance, it is also worth mentioning that these muses are all portrayed as strong-minded and witty women who stand up to the other sex (except for the father or authority figure), distinguish themselves by their self-confidence and cleverness, and show deep admiration for literature and theatre.

The second genre convention Higson identifies in the Brit-lit biopics is that they reflect a contrast or tension between, on the one hand, "biographical depth and historical substance" and, on the other, "the need to create a compelling cinematic drama with an engaging narrative" (Higson 2013: 110). Hence, they try to lend the writer and the facts surrounding his or her life authenticity and truth and, at the same time, they have to offer the audience something more than just the mere, and quite often unspectacular, act of writing. The three selected films follow this convention. They communicate to the audience right from the outset that what they are going to see concerns a real historical person, set in a real historical context: (i) they explicitly foreground the adaptation of a biography by giving the famous writer's name in the title, to capture the attention and provoke literary interest; (ii) they use opening credits to indicate date, historical period and setting as well as some introductory information on the author or situation; and (iii) they weave direct or indirect quotations from the author's works into the plot, with references to works and historical reality thereby serving as proof of authenticity. However, the biopics also "fictionalise a crucial moment in the writers' lives" (Carretero-González & Rodríguez-Martín 2012: 26). Apart from filling a biographical gap in *Shakespeare in Love* and *Molière*, by reconstructing a specific period of which we lack knowledge, they give us a plausible yet speculative autobiographical explanation regarding the writers' inspiration for one of their major works, whether *Romeo and Juliet*, *Tartuffe* or *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. For each of these a parallel with the writer's life is established, so that biography and work are interwoven, which Kiefer (2013: 38) refers to as the combination of creation and retrospective view. In the end, the writers become their own heroes and experience and suffer what these protagonists have undergone. In the process, the movies adapt not only the biographies but also the stories. Naturally enough, this fictionalisation and the possibility that the events could really have happened as portrayed increase the suspense and create a "compelling cinematic drama" (Higson 2013: 110).

Thirdly, Brit-lit biopics display the aforementioned 'hybrid' character, by combining different film genres – i.e. romantic, costume and heritage drama – and being directed at various target groups, "the 'literate' audience, the audience

for middlebrow costume drama; and the female audience for romantic drama” (Higson 2013: 109). Qualifying an audience more interested in costume drama as “middlebrow” may be somewhat inept. As defined in the Oxford Dictionaries, this term is still more often than not considered derogatory, designating something that is not that “demanding, involving, or having only a moderate degree of intellectual application”. However, it is true that in the biopic a variety of different tastes and preferences is covered. Apart from displaying the (romantic) life of Shakespeare, Molière and Goethe, and therefore dealing with a well-known “literary” subject, the whole *mise en scène*, speech included, is adapted to the historical period, providing insight into a country’s national past and cultural history. Whereas the first two of Higson’s conventions can be clearly identified in the films studied, this third characteristic is more difficult to grasp as the transition between one genre and the other is rather fluid. As Carretero-González & Rodríguez-Martín state, “[...] it is not always easy to establish the boundaries between the biopic and other genres, since a biographical film very often morphs into any other depending on the nature of the subject depicted” (2012: 22).

Establishing conventions carries the danger of judging all the literary biopics together. However, Shachar retorts that in the past their characteristics and function have somehow been neglected and they have been regarded “simply as another example of cinematic biopics and costume dramas or period dramas (often called ‘heritage’ films)” (2013: 199). For that reason, the genre approach helps to acknowledge the biopic’s importance and “*raison d’être*” and, what is more, makes it possible for the audience to recognise its instances. As Moine underlines, “[t]he naming of genres may seem ultimately arbitrary, but generic labels are also interpretive categories, revealing what we think films are about and, in the case of imported foreign labels, where we consider their formula to come from.” (2014: 55). As she notes, “different labels simultaneously reveal and propose interpretive perspectives through which films are both received and understood” (2014: 115).

Molière and *Young Goethe in Love* display the characteristics and distinguishing features of Brit-lit biopics when it comes to the scaffolding of their plots: the portrayal of romantic life and the interplay between fictionalisation and historical authenticity. They are recognisable as literary biopics, differentiating themselves from other film biographies and, at the same time, establishing above all a connection to *Shakespeare in Love* through the subject of the canonical author and the manner in which these conventions are embedded.

5. Intertextuality in the films studied

In order to highlight the embedding of these conventions, this section focuses on the films' use of direct intertextual references, mainly literary sources. Taking into account that it is the works that distinguish the authors, conferring fame and renown on them, forging the link between the personalities and what they wrote seems logical. In any case, we do expect literary biopics to quote the writer, and to expose us to his art because a literary biopic without reference to the protagonist's works would somehow be incomplete, perhaps even tedious, since the writer's life is sometimes rather uneventful. At the same time, these intertexts can also steer and influence the representation of the author to a large extent, emphasising parts of his personality or using them to construct the plot. Particularly interesting about the selected films is that they do not only embed literary works into the storyline but, moreover, make allusions to the present, integrating today's screen audience into the historical background.

5.1 *Shakespeare in Love*

Principally and broadly speaking, *Shakespeare in Love* revolves around Will – as he is called in the film – who, fruitlessly and under severe time pressure, tries to write his play *Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate's Daughter*. Fearing that he has already lost his gift, he meets Viola de Lesseps at her house party, falls in love and regains his inspiration. Parallel to the development of their romance, Will then composes *Romeo and Juliet* act by act, deriving the plot of the two star-crossed lovers from his own emotional experience – with a little bit of help from Christopher Marlowe. Because the play will be staged, the premiere being the film's climax, we can perceive this creation from a threefold perspective: Will and Viola's love story as they actually experience it in “real” life, the writing down of the story on paper, and the rehearsal and final performance. Since *Romeo and Juliet* is the major literary intertext, familiar elements are reviewed, e.g. parts of scenes, especially the balcony scene right after their first encounter, but also (slightly modified) quotes such as “I say a plague on both their houses”, during and outside the rehearsal. Even figures like the nurse make their appearance. Klett (2001) and Jiménez Aguilar (2013), who provided a detailed intertextual analysis of the play's presence in the film, spotted additional references to other works, notably *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as Sonnet 18 and 130, which are also visualised through characters, quotations or scenes.

However, what is especially interesting and notable about the film and distinguishes it from other literary biopics is that it “creat[es] a dialectical relationship

between past and present” (Klett 2001:25). By interweaving anachronisms into the plot the film establishes a connection to the current period, hence forging the link with today’s audience. For example, shortly after the opening of the film, the camera focuses on a mug in Will’s room, with the inscription “A present from Stratford-upon-Avon”. On the one hand, this anachronistic detail anticipates the author’s present fame and popularity, as the tourist magnet and *star* he will become; on the other hand, because Shakespeare uses this mug as a bin for his failed signature and writing exercise, it also ironically reflects on his past and future success as a playwright. Will’s green leather jacket or “punkish leather doublet” (Klett 2001:25) hardly fits the 17th century but shows him in a fresh, attractive and almost go-getting light. In addition, we see Will attending his weekly appointment with the psychotherapist Dr Moth: he lies down on a daybed to talk about his lost inspiration and the relation to his wife Anne Hathaway in Stratford. The allusion to psychoanalysis normalises the author, by representing him as a kind of John Doe rather than the genius the critical industry has promoted him into, a man who has ordinary worries and calls upon a specialist’s help to overcome them. Apart from this, the film interweaves puns into the dialogues. For example, right before the premiere of *Romeo and Juliet*, Will finds himself in a fix after the “female” lead dropped out. In despair he turns to Mr. Henslowe. But the owner of the Rose theatre, always forcing himself to be more optimistic, insists “The show must...”, whereupon Will asks him to finish his sentence with the words: “Go on”. As a run-on line both phrases spell out the contemporary judgement on the ruthless nature of show business, creating a parallel between the functioning and machinery of theatre, back then, and of film, nowadays.

Compared to *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love*, Madden’s biopic on the Bard is by far the most romantic of the three films, putting special emphasis on the relationship with Viola and showing how this love could have inspired the creation of *Romeo and Juliet*. However, Franssen (2014: 109), who strongly argues for the film’s American nature and its targeting an American audience with contemporary American themes, rightly qualifies this judgement:

For the modern groundlings, then, the film presents a simple romantic story with knockabout farce. The hero loses the girl, but gets the money, and the experience needed to write the first credible love tragedy. For the literate viewers, however, there is a feast of intertextual recognition, [...].

Just as Shakespeare in his lifetime used “prewritten texts” which he “variously adapt[ed], complicate[d], parodie[d], refute[d], subvert[ed]” (Lynch 1998: 4), so does this biopic creatively adapt the play with the aim of constructing an entertaining plot. Far from representing the real William Shakespeare it highlights different concepts attached to his canonical “character.” Hence, because of its

ahistorical nature and the many references to the present, the film can be regarded as a “mock-biopic” (Carretero-González & Rodríguez-Martín 2012: 26), reflecting on Shakespeare’s image and status as tourist attraction and institution in world literature. On the one hand, the film presents him as a “cultural icon whose non-diegetic life takes on all the baggage that comes with four centuries of criticism, adulation, speculation and adaptation” (Klett 2001: 28). On the other hand, as the Shakespeare industry grew, the question of the authorship of the works ascribed to him arose and Madden’s biopic gives a possible answer to it. By inserting visual, linguistic and situation-bound anachronisms, it somehow dissolves Shakespeare’s canonical aura and aims to “make him readily understandable to everyone” (Klett 2001: 27).

5.2 *Molière*

The French biopic’s plot focuses on Molière’s attempt to avoid prison. Having proven his comical talent, he has infiltrated into Jourdain’s household so that he can secretly help him win the marchioness’s heart. To keep Jourdain’s wife Elmire in the dark about his extramarital intentions, Molière is disguised as clergyman and private tutor, and, to make this role convincing, adopts principles that could not be more unworldly. It is precisely when introducing himself for the first time to Elmire that Molière spontaneously and without prior thought chooses the name “Tartuffe”, thus identifying one of the film’s principal intertexts. For contrary to *Shakespeare in Love*, Tirard’s film not only interweaves literary references into the storyline but is actually a combination of several of Molière’s plays, mixing different characters, plots and recurring motifs to fictionalise a six-month period for which theatre historians lack biographical evidence.

As a result of this mixing of plays, there are a number of narrative threads. Molière alias Tartuffe is the “devout swindler” based on the eponymous play. Unintentionally he embodies the religious hypocrite who uses the power of religion in his own favour, contrary to his pious beliefs. Elmire, too, is part of the story but, instead of appearing as stepmother, here she is the responsible and clever wife who at first despises Molière and his apparent views, but soon enough falls in love with him, even planning their joint escape. Monsieur Jourdain represents “le bourgeois gentilhomme”, a naive middle class businessman whose aim is to rise through the social ranks and become an aristocrat. In the film he not only takes writing and acting lessons with Molière to impress his beloved Celimène with a play especially written and performed for her, he also learns to fence, dance, paint and play music, as in the original play. Consequently, his figure highlights the false virtues and standards of the bourgeoisie. Another character taken from Molière’s

play is the scheming Dorante, who constantly flatters his friend Jourdain but in truth scorns and abuses him for his own purposes, e.g. for living above his means and conquering Celimène's heart. For her part, the coquettish and self-regarding marchioness, who loves to be the focus of attention and gossip in company, hails from *Le Misanthrope* rather than being modeled after Dorimène in *Le Bourgeois-Gentilhomme*. By adding her to the plot, Tirard fleshes out his satirical portrait of French aristocratic society with its feigned kindness and insincerities. Last but not least, the story of Henriette, the Jourdain's daughter, is taken from *Les Femmes Savantes*: it integrates the forced marriage with Dorante's son Thomas and its cancellation due to a little cunning invented by Molière. Finally, another interesting source comes into play: Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). As argued by Noel Peacock, who compares Ariane Mnouchkine's 1978 eponymous film version with Laurent Tirard's use of the play in *Molière*, the latter "himself explains that the main plot of his *Molière* is inspired by Pirandello's work *Six Personnages en quête d'auteur*, a play where the author is asked by his characters to write a piece about them" (2012: 473, translation mine). This intertext makes it not only possible for the writer to "meet" the figure that originated from his own pen, but it also assumes theatrical characteristics and notions, embedding a 20th century Italian play into the 17th century French setting of a 21st century film production.

Aside from these literary intertexts, *Molière*, too, makes reference to the present – although to a far lesser extent than *Shakespeare in Love*. However, what is particularly striking here is that the allusions grant the audience "superior" knowledge over the characters and the historical period. In one specific scene, Molière, under pressure to write a new comedy for the king but suffering from writer's block, stands on a table in a tavern and drunkenly proclaims that someday, people will know French as "the language of Molière". The whole tavern laughs at him and his unrealistic vision, considering him a dreamy fool that will never ever achieve his goals. However, we directly feel empathy with the author because today French is indeed proverbially dubbed Molière's language, as German is Goethe's and English is Shakespeare's. In another scene, the Jourdain family sits together with Dorante and Thomas to discuss the approaching marriage of their children. Thomas, unlike his father but like Monsieur Jourdain, is a merchant, interested in new ways of trading and expanding the market. He therefore explains that producing in Spain will lower the production costs and increase the profits. Dorante, who is much more convinced that the only strategy to attain wealth is by marrying rich, mocks his son and proposes ironically: "Yes? Why not China?" Here, we laugh at Dorante and his limited mindset though the "farce" his figure generates is also characteristic of the whole biopic.

Through this mosaic of intertextual references, the film works as satire, parodying the conditions, ideals and behaviours of different social classes by choosing a representative and imposing an excessive characterisation on him or her. In the process, Molière himself is transformed into an object of his own social criticism and observation, since he is closely involved with the people he most detests. Although one is not informed about the content of the intertexts, the social critique of human flaws is still identifiable due to the exaggerated performances, especially of Molière's uncomfortable and clumsy clergyman as played by Romain Duris but also the human flaws of Monsieur Jourdain (Fabrice Luchini), Celimène (Ludivine Sagnier) and Dorante (Eduard Baer). As a result, rather than being a portrayal of the author and his romantic life – which, in fact, completely fades into the background – *Molière* becomes a reflection of his art or “signature”. Franssen's conviction that inspiration is “based on texts rather than experience” (2014: 109) could not be more to the point: a good work – here a biopic – does not derive from the (author's) personal experience but from different sources that enrich the content and plot. *Molière* illustrates this perfectly: although the film suggests that Molière was inspired by his own life to write *Tartuffe*, in the end it is a patchwork of plots and characters that, put together and intertwined with each other, creates a new play in the style of Molière – a comedy the French author himself could have written because it ironically reflects his observation of the society and world he lived in. Viewed from this perspective, Tirard's biopic can be understood as the filmic counterpart to Edmond Geffroy's 1857 painting *Molière et les caractères de ses comédies*, assembling the “master” and his “creatures”. The only difference is that here, unlike in the film, the author is just a silent observer.⁵

This form of intertextuality has altogether the same effect as in *Shakespeare in Love*: it dissolves the canonical aura and makes us meet the author on equal, human footing. As Moine points out, “the epic spirit of Ariane Mnouchkine's *Molière* (1978) [...] is simply absent from the 2007 film by Laurent Tirard, who turns Molière into a character from his own comedies” (2014: 57).

5.3 *Young Goethe in Love*

In *Young Goethe in Love* the main literary intertext is *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), with the author in both coming to terms with the frustrated love for Lotte Buff and the tragic suicide of his friend Jerusalem. The film portrays the development and failure of Goethe and Lotte's affair and, to a lesser extent, Jerusalem's

5. For more information on the painting see <http://www.comedie-francaise.fr/histoire-et-patrimoine.php?lang=en&id=265>.

fate as an inspiration for the climax of the work. The fusion of the author (Johann) and his character (Werther) is most apparent as visualized in two key scenes. The first occurs after the encounter with Lotte and her spilling red wine on his jacket, when Goethe wakes up the next morning and remembers that he has nothing new to wear. Jerusalem then gives him a less than fashionable blue and yellow jacket and, therefore, symbolically lends him his role. The second scene comes towards the end, when Goethe writes down the ill-fated story and uses at first his own name Johann, only to cross it out and replace it with “Werther”, thereby exposing the influence of his experience as witnessed in the filmic fiction.⁶

This parallel is just one plot element. Intertextual references to other literary works by Goethe and other authors are used to represent the young Goethe and his inner struggle between, on the one hand, responsibility and the need to lead a “serious” life – imposed by his authoritarian father and society – and, on the other hand, his passion for writing and wish to make a career out of it. This conflict is reflected particularly at the beginning of the film. When sending the manuscript of *Götz von Berlichingen* to the publishers, Goethe is filled with enthusiasm and anticipation. He breaks the news to his friends and appears self-confident, still believing his first work will be published in record time. Two scenes provide a stark contrast to this one. When Goethe fails his important law exam, one of the examiners remarks that, instead of studying conscientiously and diligently, he is much more interested in the “junk” produced by “Lessing, Shakeslear⁷ or whatever those slobbish and dirty-minded people are called”. After the failed exam, Goethe’s father tries to bring his son back to his senses but when he sees him spend his time writing poems like the romantic “To the Moon”, which he considers kitschy and ridiculous “scribbling”, he questions even his son’s manliness. To make matters worse, his father opens the publisher’s negative answer which describes Goethe’s *Götz von Berlichingen* as a drama showing his hard work but lack of real talent.

Still, the film also relies on Goethe’s *Faust* and one of its most famous lines to support a scene that not only highlights his “creative” side but represents a situation the viewers – independently of their age – should be familiar with. Goethe and Jerusalem accidentally run into “redhead”, the latter’s unhappy liaison, now mistaken for Lotte. Instantly, Jerusalem falls in love with her but he is too shy to go a step further. Goethe then comes to his rescue and, adapting Faust’s introduction

6. In addition, Lotte constantly addresses Johann as “Werter Herr Goethe” (literally: valued Mr Goethe). The adjective in this, nowadays, antiquated form of address creates a linguistic association with the protagonist in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

7. Apart from allowing for a possible link with *Shakespeare in Love*, the examiner’s statement and mispronunciation of the English playwright’s name also convey the inferior status of the literary profession and of Goethe’s “literary nonsense”.

to Margarete, asks: “Fair young lady, may he make so free as to lend you his arm and company?” (Goethe 2001:71).

This scene from *Faust* is just one (content-related) example of an intertextual allusion through which *Young Goethe in Love*, like its predecessors, bridges the canonical author’s era and that of the present movie audience thanks to the hindsight it has of the writer’s entire literary output, including the works not yet written at the time the film is set.

The punctuation used in the film’s German title *Goethe!* is particularly conspicuous when it comes to linguistic and rhetorical strategies of updating the movie’s historical subject and finding a contemporary audience for it. The use of the exclamation mark indeed invites comparison with the plus sign in Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*, by equally implying a modernised and “fresh” version of the author in order to attract an audience that otherwise might not be interested. A related strategy seems used in Goethe’s gross reaction to his fellow students’ mocking remarks about the failed exam, as he draws “LECKET MICH!” into the snow which literally translates into “LICK ME!” At first glance, the phrase combines a modern “swear word” with older German, especially by applying the ending -et reserved for the second person plural. Particularly younger people will find this amusing, assuming that it represents an adaptation of Goethe’s language to the present. Nonetheless, the phrase is actually, in a slightly modified version, taken from Goethe’s *Götz von Berlichingen*.⁸ Furthermore, in the scene with his friends, where he shares his joy over having finished his play, the three young men drink to Goethe’s much anticipated success and invent the toast “Sturm und Trank”, literally “storm and drink”. Here the German literary movement “Sturm und Drang” is transformed into a rhyming toast, fitting the author’s description in the opening credits (“He talks a lot and drinks not little”) and showing him in an amusing and daring way. Last but not least, the film alludes to Goethe’s subsequent fame and popularity, during and after his life-time. In the final sequences, the author learns that his book *The Sorrows of Young Werther* has been successfully published. He enters a library and notices that several of its readers have copied his distinctive clothing style (Jerusalem’s blue and yellow jacket), thereby demonstrating the hype the writer and artist created. The movie thus reflects upon how fandom originates, how we as readers, viewers or fans respond to the popularity of a “star” and, at the same time, contribute to the construction of his image.

When we take into account the different literary and anachronistic intertexts of the selected films, *Young Goethe in Love* is probably the biopic most intent upon attracting a younger audience. Apart from speculating on how exactly the romance

8. The original states “[...] er kann mich im Arsch lecken!”, meaning literally “[...] he can kiss my ass!”

with Lotte could have inspired the writing of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, the film places special emphasis on the representation of a young Goethe, struggling with problems and situations many youngsters are familiar with, still far removed from the compulsory reading subject at schools. In contrast to Madden's Shakespeare and Tirard's Molière, Stölzl's Goethe has not yet found the road to success but is still dreaming of getting his works published and becoming a serious writer. By presenting him in a casual, amusing, sometimes clumsy and dreamy way, torn between self-confidence and self-doubt, like all adolescents, the canonical author is "de-glorified" and the youthful audience's identification with him made easier. Moreover, it is important to point out that, unlike the other two biopics, *Young Goethe in Love* includes verbal references whose reach is in all likelihood very culture-specific; that is to say, the film addresses a German-speaking audience able to identify and capture the puns (as opposed to more "international" puns in *Shakespeare in Love* and *Molière*).

6. Conclusion

This article proposed an analysis of the intertextual relationships between *Shakespeare in Love*, *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love* and the effects these create, both on the portrayal of the canonical author and on the 21st century audience.

In order to lay bare the intertextual connections, the analysis adopted a three-fold perspective, considering (i) allusions made in the films' marketing and promotion, (ii) the conventions for literary biopics as charted by Higson (2013), and (iii) intertextual references to literary sources and anachronisms within each of the three films. Though from different European cultural backgrounds and national film markets, the French and German biopic have both been shown to spin an intricate intertextual web. This web identifies them as literary biopics following "Brit-lit characteristics" but, more importantly, creating a strong connection to *Shakespeare in Love*. The way the authors' own works are interwoven and the strategy of including different visual, linguistic and situation-bound anachronisms to construct the plot result in a similar adaptation of a writer's life. By taking Madden's biopic as a starting point and inspiration, the two postmillennial films distance themselves from the average love story or "how the genius became genius" narrative. By using intertextuality – and intentionally and amusingly playing with the viewers' familiarity with *Shakespeare in Love* – *Molière* and *Young Goethe in Love*, too, travel through time: they cross different centuries and forge a link to the present, closing or at least reducing the temporal gap, making it possible for the audience to share the author's everyday experience of life, to make him descend from the literary "Olympus" and to catch a glimpse of what lurks behind

the canonical façade. Especially for younger generations whose only connection to the writers is the school syllabus, this fresh image represents a new way of accessing them and an opportunity to broaden or develop an interest in literary reading. Canonical authors are known to have a more *literate* audience (in the narrowest sense of the word) – increasing the *film* audience is an alternative way of approaching their creations.

Upon closer inspection, though, the extended intertextuality of these literary biopics also makes it possible to differentiate the writers' portraits and enhance the films' meaning. *Shakespeare in Love* reflects on the Bard as *public persona* as well as subject of research from today's perspective, mocking the different images that are attached to him and presenting the audience with a modern, 21st century version of Shakespeare. *Molière*, on the other hand, introduces the audience to the author's creation and work, paying tribute to the playwright's genius, by surveying his skills and recurrent motifs, rather than being a biopic about the life of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. *Young Goethe in Love*, finally, represents Johann Wolfgang von Goethe at the very beginning of his career, still unknown, in the hope of attracting a young audience that can personally identify with him and the situations experienced. These relative emphases and contextual settings, with allusions to the authors' cultural background, show that despite the similar strategy – the use of literary and anachronistic intertexts as well as the resulting “deglorification” – in the end, the actual representations of the three writers diverge. Hence, the French and German biopic take *Shakespeare in Love* as inspiration and basis to rewrite a writer's life for their own national symbols: they transform their own “canonical” images and lend them a new, fresh and unexpected personality, changing our perception of the author and drawing special attention to what may be the true purpose of these fictions: to provide pleasure and entertainment.

This double effect is what makes these modern versions of Shakespeare, Molière and Goethe take a different, alternative approach towards adapting literary lives. For these reasons, the three films studied can be considered examples for biopics that augur a new direction, “a new focus on the cultural persona of the author which is used as an avenue to explore recovered marginal histories and to challenge traditional forms of historical inquiry” (Shachar 2013: 201–202).

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