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Madeleine Seaman

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1 Introduction

Talking to my cousins in Australia a few years ago, I came face to face with what can probably generally be termed the ‘teenage attitude’ toward Shakespeare. They were both around 15 year-old at the time and ‘doing’ Shakespeare at school. They were attending different schools in different towns yet their opinion of Shakespeare was the same. He is dull. I had to point out to them that as a theatre-studies student I was the wrong person for them to come to with their complaints and that I harboured absolutely no sympathy for their claimed sufferings. I encouraged them to try and see beyond the, admittedly often rather complex, Shakespearean language, and to settle for understanding perhaps only half of what is being said, but therefore to enjoy the half they did understand. For I find it perfectly acceptable, when approaching Shakespeare for the first time in one’s life, to do just that. If one gets too caught up on the details of this complex, poetic language, the whole exercise becomes a strain which makes comprehension of the written word even harder.

It was this conversation with my cousins that got me thinking about how Shakespeare is probably seen throughout high schools around the world. Having grown up in Austria myself, I never experienced it first hand (but I do remember thinking Goethe was a bit of a pain, and yet his 18th-19th century German is certainly easier to understand). But having been exposed to Shakespeare in a positive way from an early age by my parents, I never felt his plays to be ultimate heralds of boredom.

In my thesis I want to focus on a few of those Shakespeare adaptations which set out to capture the imagination of the young audience of today, and which I believe succeed in making these Elizabethan plays more accessible.

Yes adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating. This can be seen as an artistic drive in many adaptations of so-called ‘classic’ novels or drama for television and cinema. Shakespeare has been a particular focus, a beneficiary even, of these ‘proximations’ or updates.¹

At this point I would like to emphasise that the ‘field of Shakespeare adaptations’ as I would like to call it, is a very large one, and that I do not aspire to cover it in its entirety. I will be

¹ Sander, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation: The New Critical Idiom*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2006. P. 19.

dealing exclusively with movie adaptations and even here I will merely pick out a few representatives to work with: Baz Luhrmann's epic "Romeo + Juliet" (1996), Julie Taymor's "Titus" (1999), Michael Almereyda's "Hamlet" (2000), Channel 4's "Twelfth Night" (2004), "Much Ado About Nothing" from the BBC's 2005 TV mini-series *ShakespeaRe-Told* and the Royal Shakespeare Company and Gregory Doran's "Hamlet" (2009).

When deciding on which adaptations I should work with for my thesis, I was originally determined to steer clear of Baz Luhrmann's already-all-too-often-dealt-with "Romeo + Juliet". With its by now 17 years of age it can hardly still be counted amongst the current, edge cutting adaptations of today. However during my period of research I was quickly proven wrong. When I talked to people about my thesis topic and explained how I was writing about modern Shakespeare adaptations, the usual response I got was: "Oh, like Leonardo DiCaprio's 'Romeo and Juliet'?" I came to realise that there was in fact more to this picture than I had suspected. Obviously it must have done something extremely right for it, after all these years, to still be the only Shakespeare adaptation of our age to successfully make a name for itself. Moreover, it is the only adaptation the general public (and by that I mean people who do not otherwise deal with Shakespeare and his works) has actually seen and probably also the only one they have even heard of. Now, if you think about it for a second that really is impressive! So from having been (in retrospect ashamedly) rather anti towards this particular adaptation and the hype that I can remember all too vividly which circulated around it during and also long after its release, I actually became an ardent advocate of this brilliant piece of work.

I came across Julie Taymor's "Titus" for the first time during my exchange semester at Sydney University. I attended a lecture on Shakespeare there and leading up to the exam the lecturer (Huw Griffiths) organised public viewings of all the plays we had dealt with in that semester. Of course we had all been required to read the plays, but Griffiths was of the opinion that plays were foremost there to be seen and a film adaptation was certainly better than nothing. So on a hot summer's day in November I tore myself away from the beach and sat myself down in the darkened lecture hall with only a few other interested students. And for the next two and a half hours I was mesmerised by the magic which is Julie Taymor's "Titus". I had already been extremely intrigued by the play upon reading it for the first time, but seeing it brought to life like that really got my enthusiasm going. I thought: this is what young people should be shown at school. For, what more is it than an extremely artful, Shakespearean splatter movie? And if only youngsters could be made to realise that this too was Shakespeare, they would be certified Shakespeare lovers for the rest of their days.

Michael Almereyda's "Hamlet" was also one of the films Griffiths arranged to be screened while I was studying in Sydney. Unfortunately I was unable to attend this showing, but when doing my research for this thesis I remembered the passion with which Griffiths spoke about this adaptation and bought the DVD to then be enthused myself. Particularly intriguing is Almereyda's use of modern technology to tell this five hundred year old play.

What first got my undivided attention when watching Tim Supple's "Twelfth Night" was the music score. The song "O mistress Mine" of Feste the jester's, with lyrics by William Shakespeare and music by Nitin Sawhney immediately became stuck in my head for the next half a year. Furthermore I liked the adaptation's approach to racial integration issues in England.

The BBC's mini series *ShakespeaRe-Told* intrigued me and I would say it was a key element for getting me started on the whole idea of this thesis. I was already very familiar with two of the plays of the mini series ("Much Ado About Nothing" and "A Midsummer's Night Dream") and was tickled pink by these versions' approach to the plays, doing them all in modern day English. The series raises questions like: What is an adaptation? When do we still speak of an adaptation? Is it more important to 'get the message across' or to present an 'authentic reproduction' of the original? What influence do media and their marketing strategies have over us?

Gregory Doran's "Hamlet" starring David Tennant was then the movie which sealed the deal for me. An unabashed fan of David Tennant's work, I awaited the release of the DVD version with heightened anticipation. And when I realised its marvellous linkage to "Doctor Who" (more of which later in the chapter on casting), and what this meant for millions of "Doctor Who"/David Tennant fans around the world, I knew there was enough material here to keep me busy for quite some time.

Overall I chose these adaptations because of their immediate interest to young people of today and because I saw in each one of them an approach to the art of adaptation (and adaptation precisely for these young people), which I felt raised them above others of the same genre. This is the reason why such adaptations as "Richard III" (1995), "Love's Labour's Lost" (2000) and "The Merchant of Venice" (2004), to name but a few, did not make the cut. They are all of them wonderful adaptations in their own right, but from a young person's point of view perhaps equally as dull as their original plays. "Richard III" starring Ian McKellen as Richard III is set in a 1930s England between the World Wars, a time which suits the play perfectly, but not one with which teenagers of today can much identify. Kenneth Branagh turned his "Love's Labour's Lost" into a romantic Hollywood musical with classic

Broadway songs from the 1930s, a form which I now find most enjoyable. But when I first saw the film at age sixteen, I remember wishing it would ruddy well just end, as I found it so excruciatingly boring I could barely keep my eyes open. “The Merchant of Venice” starring Al Pacino as Shylock and Jeremy Irons as Antonio was left in the time and setting it was originally written for. A beautiful and brilliantly played movie, but historic costume dramas are simply not what youngsters are out to see.

My work is structured according to topics rather than plays, therefore none of the movie adaptations will be dealt with in its entirety. Instead I have chosen to discuss and analyse nine larger topics which I believe to be of interest, importance and relevance for modern day film adaptations. First however, I dedicate an entire chapter to the question of why adaptations are so important and what in fact it means to adapt; and prior to that I insert a short theory-infused chapter, but the main bulk of my paper will consist of a list of topic categories which I have named thus: “Space”, “Soliloquies”, “Eavesdropping and the Art of Spying”, “Economical Shakespeare”, “Marketing”, “Casting”, “Teaching Methods”, “Language” and “The Language of Pictures”. Most of the time within each topic category I deal with the relevant films straightforwardly, one after the other; but occasionally, depending on which method is appropriate for clarity’s sake, I sub-categorise, and clump together several relevant movies under an homogenous heading.

2 The Theory

Before I embark on my journey through the ups and downs, the ins and outs of Shakespeare adaptations, let me first lay down a few ground rules. Definitions must be made and a context for further interpretation created. The ultimate goal is to find a suitable definition of the word ‘adaptation’ for the purposes of this thesis, but along the way it will be necessary to tackle definitions of other words and phrases first.

In her book “Adaptation and Appropriation. The New Critical Idiom” Julie Sanders states that the definition of ‘adaptation’ encourages

[...] a wide vocabulary of active terms: version, variation, interpretation, continuation, transformation, imitation, pastiche, parody, forgery, travesty, transposition, revaluation, revision, rewriting, echo. As this list of terms suggests, adaptations and appropriations can possess starkly different, even opposing, aims and intentions; as a result, adaptation studies often favour a kind of ‘open structuralism’ along the lines proposed by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsests* (1997: ix), readings which are invested not in proving a text’s closure to alternatives, but in celebrating its ongoing interaction with other texts and artistic productions. To this end, sequels, prequels, compression, and amplification all have a role to play at different times in the adaptive mode.²

This “open structuralism” is the approach I too have chosen. For when dealing with such old and popular texts as those of Shakespeare, they have already gone through such a multiple of adaptations which are impossible to ignore in the creation or viewing of any new adaptation. This is what Sanders means when she suggests “sequels, prequels, etc.” also have a part to play in the forming of a definition for the word ‘adaptation’. The supposed founder of this way of thinking, Gérard Genette, likes to compare an adaptation to a palimpsest and I could not agree more with him.

What is a palimpsest? Two dictionary definitions read as follows:

“**Palimpsest** (a manuscript [usually written on papyrus or parchment] on which more than one text has been written with the earlier writing incompletely erased and still visible)”.³

“**Palimpsest**: (Gr. *palin*, again; *psēstos*, scraped) a re-used papyrus or parchment manuscript in which the original text has been washed or scraped off and a new one substituted”.⁴

² Sander, 2006: 18.

³ *Word Net: A lexical database for English*. (7 July 2011).
<http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=palimpsest>.

It is like a form of recycling. Instead of using a brand new parchment, an old one is simply cleaned and used again. What does this mean for Shakespeare's plays when transformed/adapted for the screen? In the same sense moviemakers will not always create new stories, but will often take existing pieces of work from literature, an already existing 'manuscript' and add their own work to it. The play is the original 'manuscript' which, for purposes of creating a new 'manuscript' has been 'overwritten', but the original will always be recognisable underneath. This can be done infinitely often, either always using the original 'manuscript' upon which to overwrite, or indeed using already 'overwritten manuscripts' again. In such cases not just the original, but also its reworking will be recognisable in the newly created work.

Considering adaptations as palimpsests means there exists in your mind a ping-pong game between the original, already experienced work and the new adaptation of this work. Ideally a director will set up a miniature table-tennis table in your mind for the ensuing ping-pong match between the original, already experienced work, and the new adaptation which is his or her work. Of course all this happens without the viewer's explicit knowledge. The match may even take place secretly in the confined space of the subconscious.

I almost feel I could stop right here and leave the definition of a palimpsest to stand as a near perfect definition of an adaptation. But I will not. I will continue a little further for better understanding and clarification. As Genette has already been mentioned I will add another aspect which he deems necessary when dealing with an adaptation: intertextuality. What is intertextuality? Genette's basic definition of the word 'intertextuality' is the "presence of one text within another"⁵. In its simplest form this is the 'quote'. In a less explicit and less literal form this is the 'reference'. In the case of an adaptation the original source is ever present, without it there would of course be no adaptation. In this form 'intertextuality' is essentially like a palimpsest.

Shakespeare's own 'original' pieces of work were already subject to such adjustments and re-writings or over-writings of the same material. There are no fewer than three "Hamlets" handed down to us through the ages, and almost all of his works exist with at least some alterations depending upon which 'original' publication, be it a Folio or Quarto, you look at.

⁴ Codex Gigas. (7 July 2011). <http://www.kb.se/codex-gigas/eng/Long/Glossary/>.

⁵ Genette, Gérard. *Palimpseste: Die Literatur auf zweiter Stufe*. German trans. Wolfgang Bayer, Dieter Hornig, my own translation into English. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001. P. 10.

Shakespeare now exists in an environment of textual multiplicity. The text is multiple, iterable, subject to an inevitable law of change. It is never original, always copied. The grounds on which a priori assumptions could be made about the automatic superiority of one text over another have disappeared: so texts remain to us as plural, relative to one another, not severed into separation by some absolute judgment, but embedded in a network of differences. The text gives us no direct access to any pure space of authorial intention, for someone has always already got there before us.

This is immediately apparent when looking at post-Shakespearean appropriations. But to take an obvious example, even the Jacobean *Hamlet*, with its three incommensurable published texts, its mysterious relation to a lost ur-*Hamlet*, its multiple and discordant sources, presents a model of textual instability and mutation. In the early modern period we see *Hamlet* being continually re-written, passing through a plurality of texts; we know that more than one *Hamlet* play appeared on the stage; and we can with reasonable confidence surmise that as both “play” and “text,” [sic] *Hamlet* existed in a contested multiplicity of modes and manifestations.⁶

For a better understanding of what makes an adaptation what it is, Descartes came up with a very useful comparison. I found these metaphorical thoughts (like the one above) in Graham Holderness’ “‘Dressing Old Words New’: Shakespeare, Science, and Appropriation” and I feel it illustrates nicely what I am trying to say.

When Descartes addressed this same problem, he deployed the figure of beeswax, an example lying easily to hand in the form of the stick of sealing wax in his desk. At first glimpse, wax is a piece of solid matter with definable properties — density, temperature, acousticity. It bears sensory traces of its own history, being redolent of honey and pollen:

Let us take, for example, this piece of wax which has just been taken from the hive; it has not yet lost the sweetness of the honey it contained; it still retains something of the smell of the flowers from which it was gathered; its colour, shape and size, are apparent; it is hard, cold, it is tangible; and if you tap it, it will emit a sound. So, all the things by which a body can be known distinctly are to be found together in this one.⁷

But when heated, the wax changes shape, color, taste, smell, and transmutes from one state of matter, solid, to another, liquid. All the empirical evidence suggests that in terms of physical properties perceivable by the senses, this object has undergone several radical changes of state and condition:

But, as I am speaking, it is placed near a flame: what remained of its taste is dispelled, the smell disappears, its colour changes, it loses its shape, it grows bigger, becomes liquid, warms up, one can

⁶ Holderness, Graham. “‘Dressing Old Words New’: Shakespeare, Science, and Appropriation”. *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*. Vol. 1, no 2, 2005. (5 May 2011). <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/cocoon/borrowers/issue?id=7149>. P. 6,7.

⁷ Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*. Trans. F. E. Sutcliffe. London: Penguin, 1968. 108. Cited in: Holderness, 2006: 7.

hardly touch it, and although one taps it, it will no longer make any sound. Does the same wax remain after this change? One must admit that it does remain, and no one can deny it. What, then, was it that I knew in this piece of wax with such distinctness?⁸

Since to the senses, “wax” is a discontinuous and incommensurable sequence of changes, and yet the observer continues to know it as wax, the identity of the object is not in itself, but in “an intuition of the mind”: “Certainly it could be nothing of all the things which I perceived by means of the senses, for everything which fell under taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing, is changed, and yet the same wax remains”⁹. Descartes goes on, of course, from these observations to prove that he himself exists, since although he can doubt anything about wax, he cannot doubt his knowledge of it: for “it cannot be that, when I see or . . . think I see, I, who think, am nothing”^{10, 11}.

Even though it is hard to believe that a ‘thing’, a piece of work, is still related to its source after having undergone so many alterations, etc., that is precisely what Holderness is implying; try as it might, it cannot deny its origins. Wax is always going to be wax, whether hot or cold, just like Shakespeare is always going to be Shakespeare whether performed on stage, on the silver screen or in pantomime on the streets of Turkistan.

In his book “Redefining Adaptation Studies” Richard J. Hand sets five definitions for an adaptation. He calls them the “five creative strategies of adaptation”¹²: Omission, Addition, Marginalization, Expansion, Alteration.¹³

In the strategy of “Omission,” [sic] narrative or textual material is removed when a source text is dramatized. In “Addition,” narrative or textual material not in the source text is introduced in the adaptation. In “Marginalization,” thematic issues are given less prominence in the dramatization. In “Expansion,” thematic issues suggested in the source text are given more prominence in the dramatization. In “Alteration,” themes, textual style, narrative events, and details are modified.¹⁴

These are no doubt very competent guidelines when defining an adaptation, but I feel that the aspect of the underlying presence of an adaptation’s roots, so beautifully portrayed in Genette’s definitions of palimpsests and intertextuality, is missing here.

⁸ Descartes, 1968: 108.

⁹ Ibid.: 109.

¹⁰ Ibid.: 111.

¹¹ Holderness, 2006: 7, 8.

¹² Hand, Richard J. “‘It Must All Change Now’: Victor Hugo’s *Lucretia Borgia* and Adaptation”. Eds. Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw, James M. Welsh. *Redefining Adaptation Studies*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010. 17-30. P.17.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Linda Hutcheon divides her definition of an adaptation into only three points, but in a way these are more all-embracing than Hand's five. She defines it from "three distinct but interrelated perspectives"¹⁵ (and I now paraphrase):

Firstly it can be seen as a formal entity or product, in which case an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work. This 'transcoding' (here meaning the equivalent of translating) can involve a shift of medium (poem to film) or genre (epic to novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view. This may often induce a different interpretation.

Secondly, it can be viewed as a process of creation. To adapt means to (re-)interpret and then to (re-)create; this is known as either the act of appropriation or salvaging, depending on your perspective.

And thirdly, adaptation seen as the process of reception makes it a form of intertextuality. They are experienced as palimpsests through our memory of another rendition of the same piece.

In her book "A Theory of Adaptation", Hutcheon summarises these points as follows:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work¹⁶

These three points crop up in all the Shakespeare adaptations I deal with in this thesis: therefore for my understanding of an adaptation, at least for my purposes here, I would need to combine these three approaches.

And last, but not least, let us have a look at the word's Latin roots. To 'adapt' derives from the word 'adaptare'¹⁷, which means 'to fit', 'to adjust'. And there we have it. When adapting something, you must, when it comes down to it, make it fit; make the adaption fit its new environment, be it through omission, expansion, addition, intertextual engagement, or any number of other forms listed above. "The adaptation of Shakespeare invariably makes him 'fit' for new cultural contexts and different political ideologies to those of his own age."¹⁸ The ways leading there are multiple, the results even more so.

So, to surmise, what is my definition of an adaptation? All of the above.

¹⁵ Hutcheon, 2006: 7.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 8.

¹⁷ Dict.cc.: *Dictionarium Latino-Anglicum*. (4 Feb. 2013). <http://browse.dict.cc/latin-english/adaptare.html>.

¹⁸ Sanders, 2006: 46.

3 Why Adapt?

The question ‘why adapt?’ incorporates many different components: why adapt a play from the stage to the screen at all? But also why adapt, in the sense of changing the original, not only by transferring it from one medium to another, but by making active alterations in length, scene chronology, pacing, language, location, etc.

During my research for this thesis I came across a letter that Alfred Hitchcock wrote in response to objections to film adaptations of Shakespeare published in an article by the well known actor, director, producer, playwright and critic Harley Granville-Barker. The original article and Hitchcock’s response were both published in 1937 when mainstream movies were only just taking off. Nonetheless this piece of cynical writing does not seem all that dated, as Mr. Granville-Barker’s views are still kept alive by many today. It sums up nicely why plays should make the jump from stage to screen and it is such a juicy piece of writing, composed by such an esteemed pioneer of the cinema, that I felt making selected references to it would not have done it justice. Therefore, despite its length, I will quote the letter here (almost) in its entirety:

Critic Harley Granville-Barker, in a feature article headed ‘Alas, Poor Will’ (The Listener, Volume XVII, 3rd March 1937), argued that ‘Shakespeare either does not want pictures, or if he does he makes them in his own fashion. All questions of quality apart, the two arts in their nature and their methods, it seems to me, are radically and fatally opposed’. What follows is Hitchcock’s reply [sic].

Shakespeare was an imaginative playwright – he wrote his scenes as taking place in forests and ships at sea. He had almost the scenario’s writer’s gift for keeping the story moving from setting to setting. But, for all his flow of imagination, sixteenth-century stagecraft let him down. It could not rise to the settings of forests and ships at sea – it had not the skill to build him Macbeth’s castle as a fitting background for his drama.

Shakespeare, undaunted, used another device. Perhaps inwardly he pined for scenery, but, deprived of a paint brush, he put his colours into the words of his plays. In poetic metre he called upon his actors to make up for the loss and describe the scene supposedly around them in words. A clumsy device, perhaps, but he had no other way out, and all through the years the stage has not once tried to help him. And Mr. Granville-Barker has no intention of doing so today.

The cinema has come to Shakespeare’s rescue. This ‘baby’ of artistic expression has seen stage directions in Shakespeare’s poetry where decades of theatrical craftsmen have only seen words. The film-makers have today given Shakespeare a forest where he asked for it – a courtyard where his action pleaded for it (and was denied it) – a banquet hall where Mr. Granville-Barker would have only a trestle table with three planks laid across it.

[...] ‘Shakespeare’, said Mr. Granville-Barker, speaking on behalf of Shakespeare, ‘does not want pictures’. Speaking on behalf of pictures, I say they don’t want Shakespeare. The cinema can do without Shakespeare. The stage and the screen both have their range, with the difference that the screen’s range is unlimited. The stage can go so far, but beyond that it comes up against a solid wall. Its power of dramatic expression fails. In its attempt sometimes to surmount this barrier, it produces pitiful results. Stagecraft is so limited that it just can’t imitate the devices of the screen.

The screen, on the other hand, can take a novel, a story, a biography and most certainly a play – and improve it. Adaptation from the stage is an everyday occurrence. Can it be said that the stage has successfully adapted anything from the screen?

The great power of improvement that the screen holds is used with a certain judiciousness by film-makers. Their territory is enormous – the subjects which they can take and produce as films on the screens of the world are legion. But they temper their enthusiasms with a certain caution for, above all, the film must still retain its universal appeal. The general public will not be talked at, and will never allow themselves to be forcibly educated from the screen. Therefore in the world of films and film-production it is the public’s appetite that must first be appeased – their natural craving for romance, drama and comedy that must be sated. This naturally handicaps experimenting with films as an art form.

The art of Shakespeare and the art of cinema, Mr. Granville-Barker says are radically and fatally opposed. He is being polite. He means why the devil are the films meddling with Shakespearean art. Why don’t they stick to their own art form? He forgets that the stage has had Shakespearean art for over 300 years. The juvenile film industry, in comparison, still has 300 years to go. Therefore, to draw level and in its constant search for an art of its own – its constant probing for something new in ideas – its adoption and discarding of new sources – it lighted on Shakespeare.

Novelty is the essence of successful film, and the cinema took Shakespeare as something new to present to its millions of filmgoers. It was a bold step, for to the majority of the public anything connected to Shakespeare is as dull as ditchwater. Mr. Granville-Barker will not understand this. I do not expect him to. With due credit to the playwright, the world of Shakespeare lovers (ruled by Mr. Granville-Barker) is a very little one compared with the world of cinema enthusiasts.

What is poetry to the busy housewife but a lot of nonsense and something they teach her kid at school? To the man in the streets Shakespeare is something very dull and too pregnant with classroom memories to smack of entertainment. To the modern girl *Romeo and Juliet* may certainly be the top in love stories, but she would not be able to follow the dialogue of the sixteenth century. In other words Shakespeare spells considerable gloom to the average mind of today.

The screen, therefore, took a heavy gamble when it filmed Shakespeare. Hollywood made a projectile, as it were, to break down the barrier of public prejudice. Briefly, the cinema condescended to make Shakespeare palatable. That may be rather blunt, but it is perfectly true. It is no use adopting the rather sacred attitude of Mr. Granville-Barker towards Shakespeare when you are banking on entertaining millions of cinema-goers. With Shakespeare anathema to the man in the street, the trestle table and carefully-dictioned

poetry methods of Mr. Granville-Barker won't do. They would seal the fate of Stratford's playwright once and for all in the minds of the cinema-going public.

[...] What has Shakespeare on the film done? Earned the undying hatred of Mr. Granville-Barker, alone on his trestle table. But the cinema has popularised Shakespeare. In one showing of ROMEO AND JULIET round the country, more people will see a work of Shakespeare than will ever attend stage Shakespeare in a year.

Mr. Granville-Barker's little world will swell with the addition of thousands of new Shakespeare lovers in a matter of weeks. Countless members of the general public will develop a new regard for Shakespeare – may become Shakespeare fans. To them the works of Shakespeare will assume new meanings, new comedy, romance, adventure. And what is going to popularise Shakespeare in England? I am afraid Mr. Granville-Barker will never admit it. The answer is – The Cinema.¹⁹

Hitchcock certainly takes a radical view towards the matter and he perhaps gives the theatre less credit than it deserves. First of all, writing a play in lyrical prose and poetic verse should not have to endure being called a “clumsy device”. Shakespeare's language has been and remains an inspiration to us all and it is because of his poetic style that he became so well-loved to begin with. And it is also not fair to say that “all through the years the stage has not once tried to help him”. For over the years playhouses have indeed made quite a number of attempts to visualise Shakespeare to the best of their ability. Max Reinhardt for one became well known for lavish stage sets such as his production of “A Midsummer Night's Dream”. He produced numerous stage versions of this play, the first in 1905, an outdoor performance in Salzburg in 1932, in Oxford in 1933 and in Hollywood in 1934 to name but a few. The film for Warner Brothers came out in 1935²⁰. These all date from before the Granville-Barker – Hitchcock correspondence took place. Nor is it fair to suggest that the stage's “power of dramatic expression fails”. Hitchcock's words are harsh and unfounded. Stage productions have other values than those of the movies. It may not be able to compete in claims of realism, but it has its own devices for creating a dramatic expression.

But the premier point which Hitchcock wants to get across is that without the movies Shakespeare plays would suffer a rather heavy blow in today's day and age. And I believe that The Master of Suspense is right and makes his point quite well. He relishes poking the finger at Granville-Barker and therefore keeps the air of his letter light hearted while making a

¹⁹ Hitchcock, Alfred. “Much Ado About Nothing?”. *The Listener*. Vol. 17, no. 426. 1937. 448-50. Cited in: Gottlieb, Sidney (ed.) and Hitchcock, Alfred. *Hitchcock on Hitchcock: Selected Writings and Interviews*. Berkeley, Ca. [et al.]: University of California Press, 1997. 179-183.

²⁰ Bilderback, Walter. “Shakespeare in Hollywood: Notes on Max Reinhardt”. *Ken Ludwig*. (29 Jan. 2013). http://www.kenludwig.com/news/articles/shakespeare_in_hollywood_notes_on_max_reinhardt.php.

strong case for his cause. Only someone with enough self-confidence and a sizable dose of good humour could have come up with such a response:

[...] ‘Shakespeare’, said Mr. Granville-Barker, speaking on behalf of Shakespeare, ‘does not want pictures’. Speaking on behalf of pictures, I say they don’t want Shakespeare. The cinema can do without Shakespeare. The stage and the screen both have their range, with the difference that the screen’s range is unlimited.²¹

Beyond arguing that the screen offers Shakespeare production a much wider range of possibilities he further argues, quite convincingly, why the adapting of Shakespeare to the medium of film is a perfectly acceptable, if not vital, form of experiencing his plays in the 20th century and beyond. “The film-makers have today given Shakespeare a forest where he asked for it – a courtyard where his action pleaded for it”. Towards the end of his article, Hitchcock also broaches the idea of in effect marketing the old bard’s words thus appealing not only to his already existing fans, but also to the busy housewife, the man on the street and the young school girls and boys at school, thereby managing to “make Shakespeare palatable”. And this of course is the exact point which I want to bring across in my thesis. The key is to introduce the uninitiated to Shakespeare, but not to “forcibly educate” them. The statement: “the general public will not be talked at”, is true. It is quite a natural reaction immediately to lose interest in something as soon as one believes it may be educational and therefore not ‘hip’ enough. After all, who were the coolest kids in class? Certainly not the goody-goodies with their hands raised at every question sitting in the front row. However up until that point, as long as one could linger under the impression that Shakespeare is simply something cool and ‘totally far out’, one was perfectly content to enjoy it and subconsciously to learn from it. Therefore the filmmakers must sooth the general public and appease “their natural craving for romance, drama and comedy” and circumnavigate their opinion that this might just be “as dull as ditchwater”. Once that has been done one is left with a lot more artistic freedom than was perhaps anticipated.

Film is the leading medium of the 20th and 21st centuries and Shakespeare has to move with the times. I believe Hitchcock was right in assuming that “in one showing of ROMEO AND JULIET round the country, more people will see a work of Shakespeare than will ever attend stage Shakespeare in a year”. Of course that is not to say all other mediums should be dropped and shoved under the carpet. Shakespeare was and always will be a playwright and not a scriptwriter, and since the medium of the (stage) play has been around since antiquity, I

²¹ Hitchcock, 1937: 450.

doubt it is going anywhere soon. But film and television do dominate today's entertainment world and only the foolhardy would wish not to be part of that. "Yes adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating".²²

So, how to go about it? Just film a stage production and put that on screen? Yeah sure, that will work well enough, but will it be interesting? 'No' I dare claim is the indisputable answer to that question. Naturally I am not suggesting that a stage production is uninteresting. Not at all! But a stage production should stay a stage production because as soon as you convert it to a different medium it loses half its credibility. Like it or not, a piece of work transferred from one medium to another must conform to the gravitational laws of the new medium. Otherwise you are left with some kind of half-finished 'wannabe', something which can be considered, as at its best, a ghost of its original. And therefore you need to (yes, this is a must!) adapt, with all the cuts, appropriations, compromises, extensions, elaborations, associations, modernisations, etc. that go with it. You have to 'make it fit'. However even after complying with all this necessity, the result is still not automatically a 'good' adaptation. Of course, labelling something as 'good' or 'bad' is giving in to subjectivity, but one can also make these assumptions according to such hard facts as box office sales, popularity, endurance, etc. An adaptation has to be set apart from its original; like a child has to make its own way in the world, it is surely influenced by its parents and yet its own person. Alain Resnais suggested that making an adaptation without changing anything "is like reheating a meal"²³ and eventually everyone gets bored of leftovers. Robert Stam compares the process of adapting to that of an evolutionary mutation:

[...] if mutation is the means by which the evolutionary process advances, then we can also see filmic adaptations as "mutations" that help their source novel "survive." Do not adaptations "adapt to" changing environments and changing tastes, as well as to a new medium, with its distinct industrial demands, commercial pressures, censorship taboos, and aesthetic norms? And are adaptations not a hybrid form like the orchid, the meeting place of different "species?"²⁴

Stam's wonderful excursion into the world of botany offers us a rare collection of ideas worth noting. He speaks of evolutionary processes, "mutations" which help the original source, or,

²² Sanders, 2006: 19.

²³ Stam, Robert (ed.). *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Malden, Mass. [et al.]: Blackwell, 2005. P. 16.

²⁴ Stam, 2005: 3.

as in our case, the original text, “survive”. This follows the second of Linda Hutcheon’s three point definition of an adaptation: “a creative act of salvaging”.²⁵

Hitchcock, being an established man of show business, did not leave out financial considerations in his campaign for adapting Shakespeare with enough romance, drama and action as necessary to keep the masses interested. When you are “banking on entertaining millions of cinema-goers” obviously you have to know what is going to sell; and Hitchcock certainly knew what ingredients make a movie sell. Hutcheon also makes a plea for always considering both ends of the adaptation scale:

Obviously, the creation and reception of adaptations are inevitably going to be intertwined – and not only in commercial terms. Because audiences react in different ways to different media – thanks to social and material differences, as Ondaatje imaginatively suggests – the possible response of the target audience to a story is always going to be a concern of the adapter(s).²⁶

Catering for the largest audience group possible is going to be the movie-maker’s goal. Targeting the younger generation is always going to provide you with a higher ticket sale than say, the middle aged or elderly. It is this sector of society which is most likely to spend free time hanging out at the cinema. Filmmakers like Baz Luhrmann and Julie Taymor and Michael Almereyda no doubt had this in mind when creating their adaptations of “Romeo + Juliet”, “Titus” and “Hamlet”. I will tackle this subject in greater depth in the chapter on marketing.

Moving away from finances, Hutcheon goes on to suggest that “radio, television and film have radically increased our exposure to stories and therefore, some claim, our ability to comprehend them”²⁷, and also that this exposure has led to an increased appetite for stories. And not necessarily for an infinite flow of new stories, but perhaps a desire to hear and see the same ones again and again. Hutcheon asks us: “what is the real source of the pleasure derived from experiencing adaptations *as adaptations* [sic]?”²⁸

[...] the appeal of adaptations for audiences lies in their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty. Novelist Julian Barnes satirizes part

²⁵ Hutcheon, 2006: 8.

²⁶ Ibid. 114.

²⁷ Thompson, Kristin. *Storytelling in film and television*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2003. P. 79. Cited in: Hutcheon, 2006: 114.

²⁸ Hutcheon, 2006: 114.

of this appeal in *England, England* when his French theorist character describes the joys of a theme park as its “*rivalisation* [sic] of reality”: “We must demand the replica, since the reality, the truth, the authenticity of the replica is the one we can possess, colonize, reorder, find *jouissance* [sic] in”²⁹. While parodying various French theorists, Barnes also put his finger on one of the sources of the pleasure of replication – and adaptation – for audiences. Freudians too might say we repeat as a way of making up for loss, as a means of control, or of coping with privation. But adaptation as repetition is arguably not a postponement of pleasure; it is in itself a pleasure. Think of a child’s delight in hearing the same nursery rhymes or reading the same books over and over. Like ritual, this kind of repetition brings comfort, a fuller understanding, and the confidence that comes with the sense of knowing what is about to happen next.³⁰

Keeping this in mind, it is not the amount of adaptations of the same material which is in some cases the problem, but just the fashion in which they are done. An adaptation should strive for “difference as well as repetition”.³¹

I will end this chapter with the words of librettist, playwright and adapter for musicals and films, Terrence McNally: “The triumph of successful operas and musicals is how they reinvent the familiar and make it fresh”.³² And, as Linda Hutcheon rightly says, “the same could be said of any successful adaptation”.³³

²⁹ Barnes, Julian. *England, England*. London: Jonathan Cape. 1998. P. 35.

³⁰ Hutcheon, 2006: 114.

³¹ Ibid.

³² McNally, Terrence. “An Operatic Mission: Freshen the Familiar”. *New York Times: Arts and Leisure*. 2002. (29 Jan. 2013). <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/01/theater/music-an-operatic-mission-freshen-the-familiar.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

³³ Hutcheon, 2006: 115.

4 Space

This chapter does not deal with the anti-gravitational perplexities of outer space, sorry to disappoint. Nevertheless I would like to start this weighty part of my thesis off with a bang. In the following pages I will examine the space, in the sense of room or location, in which some Shakespeare adaptations take place.

A major and inevitable change in transposing a theatre piece from stage to screen is the change of the space in which it is performed. In the traditional sense of theatre or at least in the one we have come to know since the establishment of Elizabethan theatre houses in the 16th century, the performance is linked unequivocally and unconditionally to the stage. Sure, every plot can claim to take place in another location, and with the aid of stage sets and props (and of course in the case of Shakespeare above all, words) this can also be more or less convincingly conveyed, but ultimately it is played out on the stage of a theatre house. When put on screen these plots can take place wherever they like – for real. Either in the location suggested by the scriptwriter or playwright respectively: in Verona, at the court of Denmark, on an isolated island; or the movie-maker can be more liberal with his or her interpretation of Verona and its equivalent of today and turn the Danish court into a New Yorker business company for instance. Of course, this re-interpreting and re-locating of the plot can also be done on stage, but there it is still played out on the stage it was first written for. Even Shakespeare himself was already very aware of his limitations and pointed this out in his famous prologue to Henry V:

“ [...] But pardon, and gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?”

Henry V (prologue 8-14)

The space in which a story is told is very revealing of its essence, which is really all that counts and not so much the original location intended by the playwright. I will adopt a very schematic approach in the following pages, listing the adaptations of interest one after the other, in turn looking at each adaptation's general relocation of the plot and then at several more specific examples of the use of space within that location.

4.1 Romeo + Juliet

"Romeo + Juliet" is full of cleverly comprised shifts and changes in location. The entire storyline is relocated from Verona, Italy, to Verona Beach, a fictitious city made to look like a mixture between Mexico City and Miami with strong resemblances to Rio de Janeiro, situated possibly somewhere along the border between North and Latin America. Verona Beach is a rough place, unofficially ruled by two large Mafioso-like families, the Capulets and the Montagues. Like in the play the city's allegiance is split between the two houses. Their businesses are spread throughout the city; their logos on the tops of the largest skyscrapers dominate the skyline.

By creating his fictitious location fully from scratch, Luhrmann allows himself the possibility of also creating his own reality; a reality which is strongly based on our own, with many similarities, but with its own laws and sense of justice to suit his needs. It is a heightened, stylised reality. This needed to be the case to make many things work without the audience giving up on their belief in this world created. For instance the fact that everyone (at least everyone of any importance in town, i.e. the Capulets and the Montagues) carries a gun, no questions asked. Or Juliet's supposed death. In our real world an autopsy would have been carried out which would quickly have revealed the whole thing to be a hoax. But because the movie is set in a reality with its own boundaries similar to our own, but not exactly the same, we are more willing to be tolerant towards such conduct and to accept these things as given.

Throughout, humorous little Shakespeare quotes and references are scattered, constantly reminding us of this film's origins. With such bill board advertisement as "Prospero [here the name of the scotch whiskey advertised], Such stuff as dreams are made on"; a quote taken from "The Tempest" (IV.i.156,157). The slogan of a brand of bullets reads: "shoot forth thunder", a quote from "King Henry VI: Part 2" (IV.i.104). The pool hall Romeo and Benvolio visit is called "Globe Theatre", the beach bar is named after Rosencrantz ("Hamlet") and I even spotted a beach shack named "A Pound of Flesh" (Shylock desires a pound of

flesh off of Antonio in payment for his debt in “The Merchant of Venice”). It is questionable what goods might be sold there.

4.1.1 The Petrol Station

A fairly simple, but effective change was made to the opening scene of “Romeo + Juliet”. The play calls for a confrontation between the young lads of the houses Capulet and Montague at a market place. In today’s western world, young people do not tend to hang out at market places that much any more, so a change of location was required to make the scene fit into today’s society. Luhrmann opted for a petrol station; in a sense a very similar kind of location. It is a place you go to in order to purchase certain goods (petrol or even a packet of cigarettes or potato chips), but it also provides that same kind of ‘meeting place’ quality that a market place would have had at the end of the 16th century. Members of every class of society, of every age and background need to pass through here. And like a market place, it too has the same potential for danger because of this clash of people coming together on one spot. It is the worry of many an elderly citizen to have to go down to the corner shop at the petrol station for a carton of milk or tin of cat food on a Sunday afternoon and to successfully circumvent the gang of hoodies who seem to have nothing better to do with their time than to congregate at such places and shout out crude remarks at each and every passer by. At the same time this new location provides the perfect setting and enough open petrol for an added and rather dramatic action sequence which ends with Tybalt setting the entire petrol station alight.

4.1.2 Sycamore Grove

The significance of this location lies in its actual setting on the coast of Vera Cruz in Mexico and in the act of nature that hit it during the shooting of the movie and also its reference to the theatre stage.

Two important scenes take place here. It features as the location for our first glimpse of Romeo. He is portrayed as being, in stark contrast to his rowdy cousin Montagues and friends, the quiet, poetic type, who prefers to hang out in solitude in a romantic setting, writing sonnets to his then sweetheart Rosaline. On the beach front Luhrmann built the ruins of a grand theatre, a proscenium with the stage and part of the auditorium still in tact, and it is sitting up on this stage that we first meet our protagonist. Apparently once a magnificent

construction, elegant and noble, it is now completely dilapidated, a mere shadow, or fragment of its former glory with a huge hole blasted through the back of it. It has about it something poetic, yet sad. It reflects the mood of our young and troubled, lovesick hero and the soft, red glow cast on it by the setting sun only intensifies this atmosphere.

The other pivotal scene which takes place here is Mercutio's death. It is played out 'traditionally' as if on the stage of a theatre, just that this is exchanged for the stage of the dilapidated Sycamore Grove theatre. The protagonists of this scene take their positions on the stage in a constellation strongly reminiscent of a classical theatre production, while the others settle down in the old auditorium. The thrill of this particular location is that it stands on the beach, with a genuine hurricane building in the background. Naturally Luhrmann could not foresee let alone plan this weather phenomenon, but it in no way lessens the impact that such an atmosphere has on such a scene of already heightened tension. Baz Luhrmann and several other productions members talk about the making of the movie on the audio commentary to the DVD of the movie from which I got most of my information for this scene.

After Mercutio has been mortally wounded by Tybalt on the sand in front, he climbs back up onto the stage to recite his next line (in answer to Benvolio's question "art thou hurt" [III.i.93]): "ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch" (III.i.94). He stands centre-stage, front, faces the audience (or at least his imaginary audience; several rows of empty seats, but also the few minor Capulets and the Montagues) and strikes a dramatic pose: over-acting at its finest. For also within the play Mercutio is putting on a performance at this point, trying to conceal from his friend the fact that his wound is indeed more than just a scratch. However, once the realisation of his immanent death sets in, his tone changes and he speaks the all too famous line "A plague on both your houses", likewise on stage, before he steps back down onto the beach and stumbles away from the arch. Now the full scale of the outdoor location can unfold and the hurricane takes its course. The wind picks up, pagodas, newspaper stands, sun umbrellas, etc. go flying, dust and sand blow thorough the air as the real tempest is about to hit. Later digital clouds were added for continuity's sake, but everything else is as it was on the day.

Luhrmann makes full use of the wide open space he has here and shoots most of this scene in a wide shot with scattered close ups here and there. As soon as Romeo realises Mercutio is in fact dead, he jumps up and runs full pelt (back stage as it were) into the far distance, closely followed by his cousin, who suspects the worst. Luhrmann lets the action continue in the distance instead of zooming in or cutting to a close up shot, leaving dead Mercutio lying

in the sand in the foreground, getting covered by whipped up sand at an unsettlingly fast pace. This allows the viewer to take in the full scene, the epic intensity of the drama linked to the (in fact) real danger of the brewing hurricane. Not wanting to discredit Luhrmann's artistic decision, I must however point out that at this point in the movie many of the choices regarding camera shots had logistic reasons. The film crew only had a small window of time in which to film this sequence and it was just bad luck (or in retrospect, good luck) that the hurricane hit the coast precisely then. Furthermore the entire beach set had been built specifically for the making of the movie and would certainly be destroyed in the storm. So the resolution was made by the movie makers and actors alike to push forward with the scene and shoot it in one take before the hurricane fully hit, destroying everything.³⁴

4.2 Hamlet (2000)

The setting for "Hamlet" has shifted from the court of Denmark to the business world of New York. Denmark the country is replaced by Denmark the company. The opening shot of the movie is filmed out the back of the skylight of a car, driving through the streets of New York. Seen from this angle the city looks oppressive and sinister. From subtitles superimposed onto this image which clue us in on the back story we learn that the action takes place in New York City in the year 2000. The King and head of the Denmark Corporation has just died and in an act of rash judgement the late king's widow has taken his younger brother's hand in marriage. We also discover that Hamlet, the king's son, has returned from university and that he suspects foul play. "Hamlet" does not have a prologue, which might have performed the same function, so therefore Amlereyda inserts this opening sequence as a substitute to ensure he does not lose his audience before the movie even gets started, as it were.

After having established what has happened so far, he continues to ascertain more exactly where we are now. We are shown the unmistakable Times Square in New York and on one of the big electronic billboard's the Denmark Corporation logo flashes alongside advertisements for Panasonic, NBC and the latest Clint Eastwood movie. The next shot shows the entrance to the Elsinore Hotel, the company owned hotel and home to the House of Denmark. This is where the story will take place. Inside Claudius is currently holding a press conference to reassure the public of the company's future. He has replaced his recently deceased brother as the new CEO of the Denmark Corporation and while he was at it he took his brother's wife as his own as well. He also assures the gathered press that the attempts of young Fortinbras to

³⁴ William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet*. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Perf. Leonardo DiCaprio. Twentieth Century Fox, 1996. Audio commentary track. DVD (1999), 01:00:40 - 01:04:18.

take over the company have been squelched. Cut between our first glimpse of Hotel Elsinore and Claudius' speech is a very short sequence of some of Hamlet's home video footage which he likes to compile as a form of self-expression, like a video diary. Tidbits of Hamlet's speech from act II (II.ii.295-308) are spoken here as a voice-over:

I have of late, wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth. What piece of work is man, how noble in season, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals – and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?

These lines are originally intended for the ears of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but since they are very revealing of Hamlet's current emotions they work well as an introduction to our anguished hero.

The first official scene of the movie is Claudius' acceptance speech which is portrayed as a press conference in this production. Almereyda chooses to skip the first scene of the play where Hamlet senior's ghost appears for the first time, to then weave it into the plot at a later point in time: a decision I can only welcome. Personally I have always found this scene to be out of place as an opening. It is a difficult scene to pull off at the best of times let alone in a Hollywood adaptation of the play, positively inviting prejudice before the first scene has even played out.

4.2.1 To Be or Not To Be

Hamlet's soliloquy starts out as a voice-over. However the audience is not helped along any further here. We have to sit this one through, as it were. Striking in this scene is Hamlet's lethargic contemplation of life and death in what appears to be a Blockbuster video store exclusively featuring movies of the action genre. This creates a nice contrast to Hamlet's inability to, indeed, act. He has sworn to avenge his father, but does not seem to be able to pull himself together enough to do anything about it. And for the past few scenes he has been toying with the idea of suicide, but again, cannot make up his mind whether he should go through with it or not. Hamlet is obviously a man of words, not action, and an exceptionally confused one at that.

But this feeling of hopelessness, of overwhelming indecision, is one familiar to us, the humble audience. Maybe not necessarily concerning such weighty matters as what Hamlet has to deal with here, but the comparison Almereyda makes to that of finding yourself 'lost'

in the aisles of your local video rental store, is an intriguing one. Is it the incomprehensible abundance of choice which lames us when trying to decide on tonight's movie viewing? Is it because we have seen it all before and are sick to death (excuse the pun) of having to settle for the same old over and over again. Who knows? In any case however the familiarity of the location and the situation actually makes it possible for us to relate to Hamlet in this significant and otherwise really quite abstract scene.

4.2.2 The Pool Scene

Business is done at the pool. It has become a bit of a cliché in gangster movies for the big boss to receive his business associates at the side of his pool, usually situated outside the boss' large L.A. villa. Here we get a slightly different take of the same idea. The pool is located on the top floor of the Denmark Corp. skyscraper with a view out over Manhattan. What does this set up imply for the scene? First of all by translating the play from a kingdom to a modern day business world, the characters lose their natural hierarchy; for even though there is a certain hierarchy within a firm, it is not automatically as strongly pronounced and structured as that of a kingdom. This structure needed to be installed additionally and this scene serves that purpose. Somehow, even nowadays, having a pool is a definite status symbol and still seems to mean you have made it in life. Therefore the blunt interpretation of this scene is that Claudius is the top guy, the boss and a busy man. If you want to do business with him, you have to come to him whenever it suits him best, wherever that might be, no matter who you are. Consequently we see Claudius doing laps when Polonius and Ophelia arrive to discuss Hamlet's condition. They are made to stand there and watch while their extremely fit boss athletically heaves himself from the pool and dries himself off, never once letting this seemingly compromising situation scratch at his authority, making the others feel embarrassed on his behalf.

Secondly this set up gives Ophelia another possibility to come in contact with water. In this rendition Ophelia makes quite a number of appearances in connection with water. Standing at the pool's edge she fantasizes over throwing herself into its tempting water to escape her father's incessant blabbering and the apparent mess her life has become. I will divulge more on this subject in the chapter "The Language of Pictures".

4.3 Much Ado About Nothing

“Much Ado About Nothing” basically could be set anywhere. A quaint love story like this one is not about the where, but about the how. All that is needed is a friendly, likable environment to help the purpose of the story along. In the ShakespeaRe-Told version we find our favourite arguing couple and all their friends, family and enemies as employees at the local TV-broadcasting network. Even though this is an environment most of us would not actually be too familiar with, we believe that we are. We see these same news reporters everyday reporting local, familiar news, we may have even met the one or other at the butcher’s counter or walking the dog; and therefore we feel like we know them and the work they do. More importantly however, is the perfect surroundings for all sorts of spying and accidental eavesdropping situations that this location provides. As in so many of Shakespeare’s plays, here too this is a key element to the plot line and so the plentiful video cameras, open mikes and the like at everyman’s disposal, come in very handy. Once again though this brings us into the area of another chapter’s topic; for further reading please look up “Eavesdropping and the Art of Spying”.

4.4 Titus

Probably the most noticeable and remarkable aspect of the space in which Julie Taymor has set her “Titus”, is its historical genuineness. Filmed partly in Rome and partly in Pula, Croatia, Taymor makes use of existing ‘Roman’ ruins as a backdrop and an anchor to the play’s origins and fuses these with semi-modern to contemporary architecture, costumes, motor vehicles, etc., thereby creating a world (much like our own) which incorporates all the ages; not only their architectural styles and fashions, but also their political and social convictions.

Taymor’s approach to bridging the gap between Shakespeare’s 16th century play and a 21st century movie adaptation thereof, is to introduce a prologue in which a comparable space in our reality is created which then flips over to the space created for the brutal reality of Titus Andronicus. In “The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film”, Carol Chillington Rutter describes the opening sequence of Titus as

[...] an extra-textual riff proleptic of things to come, establishes a boy’s own world where violence has been naturalised to domestic interiors. An eight-

year-old kid, home alone, sits at a 1950s American kitchen table that's covered with after-school food and toys, a miniature military arsenal in plastic: tanks and aeroplanes, gladiators, GI Joes, futuristic robots. The scene frames a continuity between history, consumption, violence and play. When play tips into frenzy and the child begins trashing the table, he triggers (somehow) apocalypse: a huge explosion.³⁵

Equal amounts of blood and gore and suggested cannibalism (the first shot of the boy shows him taking a bite out of a sausage) are introduced on the boy's typical American suburban kitchen table in the form of splattered jam and cake, spilled milk and juice, sprayed flour and lots of ketchup all over, as is later shown in this the goriest of Shakespeare's plays (and in style most like that of the revenge plays of his contemporaries: Thomas Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy" and "Arden of Faversham" or Christopher Marlowe's "The Massacre at Paris" to name but a few). The boy (later to become young Lucius) is also no stranger to all forms of violence and he treats his toy soldiers with as much cruelty as one might expect from a fanatical war criminal on acid. Even though these are just toys which he is mishandling, we, the audience, somehow feel a certain degree of sympathy towards them and are appalled and disgusted by his actions. We are shocked, but nonetheless this scenario is not that unfamiliar to us: and this is exactly the link that Taymor is looking for. For, the brutality which we are confronted with in "Titus Andronicus" is one more likely found in the horror or splatter film genre of today than in a quality piece of work such as a Shakespeare adaptation. And it is the likes of these genres with which we are confronted on a daily and fairly normal basis nowadays.

4.4.1 The Coliseum

The story "Titus Andronicus" takes place in a man's world. The only women (three in total and only two of importance) take in opposing corners in a triangle of extremes. Lavinia is the epitome of goodness, whereas Tamora is the herald of evil and the third female, the nurse, is portrayed as being an annoying spinster and in her only and ever so brief appearance she is first compared to a pig and then killed. Even though Lavinia and Tamora are both strong women they have to submit to the male-dominated social structure around them. None of the women survive. But I actually want to talk about men.

³⁵ Rutter, Carol Chillington. "Looking at Shakespeare's Women on Film". Ed. Russel Jackson. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007. 245-266. P. 263.

This play is about masculinity, about warriors, politicians, fathers, brothers: the twenty-five sons of Titus Andronicus, twenty-one of them corpses; the two sons of the dead Caesar, competing for empery; the captive sons of the vanquished Goths, marked for sacrifice; the senators and men of Rome, trying to make the best of things.³⁶

Therefore a setting appropriate for male conduct is needed. When a real explosion detonates in the kitchen, the boy fails to see the jest in it and is suddenly struck by the reality of such war games. Out of nowhere a 19th century strongman appears who either kidnaps or saves the boy (it is hard to tell) from the burning house and brings him to an empty coliseum where he victoriously presents his catch to an invisible, yet audible crowd. All that is left of the boy's house is the front door and one lone, mud-covered toy soldier. The boy picks this up whereupon suddenly an entire army of real, life-sized soldiers appears, all identical to the boy's toy. The abandoned coliseum is the perfect location for men to live out their male urges. Because of its ingrained history, it automatically incorporates everything which the play is about: merciless, impulsive, gruesome brutality. By shooting the scene in a genuine antique coliseum the non-fictionality of the ensuing brutality is brought before us. We are once more offered a link to reality for us to cling to. And then the men are brought out on parade.

The first ten minutes of Taymor's film focus almost exclusively on male bodies: mud-daubed, helmeted, like clock-work toys in triumphal procession; wounded, amputated, like monumental statues brought back to life in the baths as water pours over them; obsolete, their tomb-swaddled bodies shoved into wall vaults as if into bread ovens; their empty boots, lined up as if on parade, ritually strewn with sand.³⁷

The movie begins (essentially) and ends in a coliseum. At the beginning the coliseum is empty and slowly fills with the boy Lucius' toy soldiers come to life who then in fact turn out to be Titus Andronicus' army of soldiers returning from victorious battle. The auditorium of the coliseum remains empty. The end takes place once again in this same coliseum. The dinner table where Romans and Goths had come together to feast on what turns out to be Tamora's sons (whereupon several murders take place, wiping out all protagonists save Lucius), is miraculously transported back into the same coliseum we saw at the beginning of the film and for the first instant it is empty still. But then just as miraculously an audience appears. Ordinary people dressed in present-day clothes fill the stalls and watch in silence as the final scene is played out before them. Marcus addresses them directly with the lines: "You

³⁶ Rutter, 2007: 263.

³⁷ Rutter, 2007: 263.

sad-faced men, people and sons of Rome” (V.iii.66). Mirroring the scene from the beginning, the 19th century strongman who once had lifted Lucius Jr. to the invisible cheering crowd as if he were a prized conquest, now lifts a little cage containing Aaron’s son. The crowd remains silent and simply looks on; suddenly it is just a play played out on a stage in front of a live audience. It is returned to its original form.

We the actual audience are also returned, namely to the place where the story started, which gives us a sense of closure. It is left up to us (similarly to what Puck suggests in the epilogue of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”) to pass judgment on the characters and to decide which deeds in the story were right or wrong. It is also left up to us to decide how much of the story we see as relevant to the world we live in today, whereby Taymor strongly hints at it being extremely current by having Lucius Jr. carry Aaron’s bastard child and all the possible evil that goes with it into the sunset and into the future.

4.4.2 Ravished Lavinia

Surely one of the play’s most disturbing, and one of the movie’s most visually impressive scenes, is that of Lavinia’s rape. As in the play, the rape itself is not shown, but we come upon the uneven threesome after the deed has been fulfilled. We find ourselves in a sparse, swampy landscape, dead tree trunks protruding out of the mud, the sun is burning down, hot and unforgiving. Lavinia is standing on one such stump, as if she has become part of the tree. Her hands have been cut off and in their place she now has twigs growing out of her bloody stumps.

It is paradoxical that we should find Lavinia trying to ‘hide’ in such a wide open space. But, like Taymor’s work as a whole, this scene’s ambition is to be aesthetically pleasing and to be understood metaphorically. The landscape mirrors her body, soul and her state of mind: dead, harsh, barren with nowhere to hide. It sets a strong contrast to that of the previous scenes which all took place in lush green forest. Even though in reality the cool, shady serenity of the forest offered little more safety than Lavinia’s present ‘hide-out’, we nonetheless feel it might have harboured better luck for her. At least it gives that impression. We can see the thick forest bordering the marsh, forming a ring around it. It sets Lavinia’s fortune apart from that of everyone else. Plenty of others are mercilessly killed, but her fate is possibly worse: to be so horribly disfigured and then left to live.

The comparison of Lavinia’s mutilated body to that of a mutilated tree is not one of Taymor’s own interpretations, but a simile already established by Shakespeare. When Marcus

comes across his niece after her rapists have taken their taunting and mocking leave of her, he compares her chopped off arms to branches:

Speak, gentle niece, what stern ungentle hands
Hath lopped and hewed and made thy body bare
Of her two branches, [...]
(II.iii.16-18)

And later:

O, had the monster seen those lily hands
Tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute
[...]
(II.iii.44-45)

Lavinia's literal semi-morphosis into a tree is comparable to that of Daphne's transformation. However, whereas such an act saved Daphne from the pursuing Apollo, here it is the result of such a pursuit.

4.5 Hamlet (RSC)

I do not believe however that Shakespeare adaptations always have to be flashy to be believable and interesting for the younger generation. Unlike Julie Taymor's approach in adapting her own theatre production of "Titus Andronicus" from a few years previously, the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2009 TV movie of "Hamlet" is essentially a one to one filming of their successful stage production from the previous year. Almost the entire film takes place in the one room, the throne room. All in all there are a total of six other sets and all of them except the graveyard scene are interiors. Whereas in other movie adaptations a lot of weight and importance are laid on ingenious, original setting, here the RSC went with the argumentation that less is more. The play is stripped down to its bare essentials, all the focus is laid on the spoken word and its delivery. The brilliance of this set lies in its ability to be unobtrusive, to serve its purpose without drawing attention to itself and yet still not be dull. Set in a kind of undefined, neutral present, the costumes are elegantly contemporary with allusions to the early twentieth century thrown in every once in a while, in the form of two token guards whose pseudo-traditional make-believe uniforms, make them look like Victorian life guards. The throne room's black, glossy appearance is likewise hard to assign to any specific era, but possesses a sort of omni-imperial grandeur. However the period in which it is

set, is fairly irrelevant in this adaptation. Basically it is kind of modern so as not to seem stuffy, but not explicitly so, so as to be distracting.

In this chapter I have regularly strayed into the territory belonging to other chapters, but this is hard to avoid because a film's 'space', its setting, incorporates so much else of what makes each production what it is. With space comes time, the era in which the story takes place; time tells us so much about how characters will or should interact with each other and how they fit into the society created or already existing within that space. Time determines which props are appropriate, which costumes suitable and which locations are fitting. All of the above listed settings are so varied from one another, yet all of them share the same aptitude to gel with the story they are supporting.

5 Soliloquies

Why do I feel it necessary to have a chapter purely dedicated to soliloquies? A soliloquy is really quite an abstract, theatrical form which I believe may be even more alienating to a young audience of today than the rest of the gibberish spoken in a Shakespearean play. But the wonderful thing about film adaptations is that they possess a number of possibilities for bringing precisely this form of speech into a much more ‘acceptable’ or let us say ‘realistic’ form than the stage ever could. In this chapter I will focus solely on the adaptations of “Hamlet” as this is also the play with the highest percentage of soliloquies per act. Hamlet speaks as many as seven throughout the play.

I will discuss some of the perhaps more ‘classical’ approaches as well as those that go hand in hand with the new medium of film. By ‘classical’ I mean soliloquies that are recited into nothingness, truly as if the character were talking aloud to him or herself. Current technical equipment allows for a broader interpretation and approach to the genre of soliloquies. For instance the mode of video diary is used repeatedly in both adaptations as a way of speaking your own thoughts to yourself.

In his paper “From play-script to screenplay”, Russell Jackson clarifies the definition of a soliloquy:

Another point of coincidence or collision between the spoken word and the shown image in Shakespearean film is the soliloquy. The theatrical convention, allowing access to a character’s ‘private’ thoughts, depends on that character’s ability to address the audience directly. With the tragic heroes in particular this conventional means of access to their interiority has been essential to a critical tradition celebrating the plays as studies in psychology. The speeches are perceived both as technical tests, and as a measure of the performer’s emotional (even spiritual) range and capability in the role. Film has other means of access to the characters’ interiority, to which speech may even be hindrance, and has little (or at least, very selective) use for direct address to the audience.³⁸

Let us take a closer look at some pin point examples starting with the older of the two adaptations:

³⁸ Jackson, Russell (ed.). “From Play-Script to Screenplay”. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007. 15-34. P. 25.

5.1 Hamlet (2000)

Aspects of the movie may seem dated now, but others are more current than when the movie was released. Hamlet's form of choice for self-reflection makes use of the video camera. The concept of a video diary had not in fact yet been developed in the year 2000, or in any case was not yet in common usage, but that is precisely what Hamlet does: he keeps a video diary.

Moreover, Almereyda's Prince is an experimental filmmaker, a category of artist that disdains even the limited commercial market cultivated by 'independents'. Hamlet's cluttered apartment contains various kinds of film and video technology, used not as means to make a living, but as instruments of self-reflection and self-understanding. The film opens with Hamlet's film of himself expressing his personal misery ('I have of late lost all my mirth') and his disillusionment with the world ('A sterile promontory').³⁹

Like his homemade videos, a collection of film material either self-made or out of an archive, jumbled up and strung together, so are the scenes, soliloquies and speeches throughout the movie. All the material used in this "Hamlet" production is original Shakespeare, just not necessarily in the order he wrote it. But as I have already pointed out in the theory section, Shakespeare was prone to doing this himself.

For Almereyda's Hamlet, the personal video is *the* technology of interiority among a variety of modern media, including telephones, television, photography, film, and so on. All but one of Hamlet's soliloquies are framed as video sequences that he has composed. As he dies, we see his life flash back in the same grainy black-and-white collage.⁴⁰

The "to be or not to be" soliloquy is introduced bit by bit; or, as it were, the "to be or not to be" theme. First we see Hamlet watching a video of a Chinese philosopher give his views on what it means 'to be'. So even though this is not yet the soliloquy, our ears immediately prick up when we hear the words 'to be'. After all, we are watching Hamlet and everyone knows (literally everyone: "to be or not to be" is the most quoted quote in history around the world) these famous lines are bound to come up sometime. So now we are put in the right frame of mind for the much awaited soliloquy, and by listening to his philosophy we discover another

³⁹ Keyishian, Harry. "Shakespeare and Movie Genre: The Case of 'Hamlet'". Ed. Russel Jackson. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007. 72-86. P. 82.

⁴⁰ Rowe, Katherine. "'Remember Me': Technologies of Memory in Michael Almereyda's 'Hamlet'". Eds. Richard Burt, Lynda E. Boose. *Shakespeare, The Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2003. 37-55. P. 46.

angle on Hamlet's own thoughts concerning the same matter. While this is running on the TV in the background, Hamlet is looking at footage he has shot of Ophelia. So while the Chinese philosopher is suggesting that it is impossible for us to be alone that instead we must 'inter-be' with everything around us, we see Hamlet wanting to be (or shall we call it inter-be?) with Ophelia. Shots like this help us to understand that their relationship is genuine, no matter what her brother and father might think. She is always on his mind.

Next (after we have in silence observed Hamlet's visit to Ophelia's apartment to give her a love letter he had agonised over at a diner moments earlier, only to be interrupted by Polonius' arrival: this being the very letter Polonius finds and later reads out to Claudius and Gertrude), the first tentative beginnings of the actual soliloquy are made. Hamlet watches and re-watches the first few seconds of a video recording he made of himself holding a pistol up to his head in various different positions (up to his temple, under the chin, in the mouth) while asking himself the question 'to be or not to be'. Not only does this ease us into the most famous of all soliloquies, but it also makes it unmistakably clear what it is about: death, suicide; and the moral and practical dilemmas that may go with it. But before the actual soliloquy starts we are first witnesses to further contemplations that Hamlet has on the matter of death and to more of Almereyda's passion for mixing and matching Shakespeare's lines.

The next scene takes place on one of the higher floors of the corporation's skyrise. Instead of reading a book (as is described in the play), Hamlet is once again playing a video (of himself) back at himself (a snippet of something Hamlet says at the beginning of the play to Horatio: "So, oft in chances in particular men ..." [I.iv.23-35]), when he is interrupted by Polonius. Suddenly we find ourselves in the midst of act two of the play where Hamlet calls Polonius a "fishmonger" (II.ii.174). Their short dialogue ends with Hamlet claiming that Polonius (upon Polonius stating he will now take his leave of Hamlet) cannot take anything from him which he would not more willingly give, except his life. Morbid thoughts are obviously ever on his mind and after this startling 'confession' to wish to end his life, he proceeds to pull a gun and march into what must be his uncle's office, with the supposed intent of killing him. (Unfortunately) Claudius is not there.

After a brief interlude, during which we see Polonius unwittingly putting his nose into everybody else's business and Ophelia having her own fantasies about death, we finally return to the now full "to be, or not to be" soliloquy, a good ten whole minutes after it was initiated; this time inside a Blockbuster video store. I have already dealt with this scene in great depth in the chapter on space and will refrain from repeating myself.

In contrast to this extremely prolonged soliloquy, Hamlet's "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy (IV.iv.32-66) for instance, is delivered in a fairly straightforward fashion. No cuts and jumps, no modern technology, Hamlet simply recites the soliloquy in its entirety while the camera follows him around the aircraft. Ah yes, perhaps no fancy technology is used to portray his speech, but the whole scene does take place aboard a plane heading for England.

5.2 Hamlet (RSC)

This entire production is built up on a much simpler notion and the same can be said of the soliloquies. Comparable to what may well also be considered a classical approach to reciting a soliloquy on stage (i.e. directly to the audience), Hamlet also speaks directly to us the screen audience by speaking directly into the camera; a simple approach, but an effective one. I do not feel that this breaks the tension, the reality which is created on screen, the invisible fourth wall, or whatever you want to call it. If anything, it intensifies it. Well, like it would be done on stage, but more so because we see him up so close. This makes a difference and creates an extraordinary intimacy with the audience. Apparently Max Reinhardt was a fan of the cinema for exactly this reason.

In July 1935, when Max Reinhardt returned to Vienna after filming *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Hollywood, he expressed his delight that the sound film would allow an immense audience to appreciate the subtleties of the most intimate conversation: the cinema now had the potential to become *Kammerspiele für die Massen* ('chamber theatre for the masses') [sic].^{41 42}

Of course by having the camera up so close the audience automatically watches the action much more scrupulously, which requires a very different acting style from on stage and forces the actor to really make each thought work. So it is indeed primarily Tennant's ability to capture and hold our attention that makes this simplistic approach work so well. However I still believe that in addition to his remarkable acting abilities, another reason why this works (and here I am veering into the topic of another chapter) is his fame. Because we are watching such a familiar face, because he is more like an old friend talking to us than just some stranger sprouting odd lines, we are more inclined to listen to him and watch him. A connection

⁴¹ Reinhardt, Max. Interview taken from: *Neues Wiener Journal* (28 July 1935), reprinted in: Fuhrich, Edda, Prossnitz, Gisela (eds.) and Reinhardt, Max. *Max Reinhardt: Die Träume des Magiers*. Vienna [et al.]: Residenz, 1993. P. 175. Cited in: Jackson, 2007: 17.

⁴² Jackson, 2007: 17.

already exists between Tennant and the audience, albeit in the form of another character. After all half of Great Britain spent four years of their lives watching this man every Friday night on TV.

“O that this too, too solid flesh would melt” (I.ii.129-159). Hamlet starts this soliloquy off by speaking aloud as if to himself. The camera approaches him slowly as he stands, sunken to the floor in the middle of the room, like a silent observer coming closer. At the line “But two months dead” (I.ii.138) he suddenly turns to the camera and continues speaking to the lens. He is not surprised to see us there, the audience, so we have to assume he was aware of us the whole while and was indeed speaking to us from the beginning. Doing so automatically turns this soliloquy into a monologue; for as soon as the character is in fact addressing someone else than him or herself, we can not technically still call it a soliloquy. An online dictionary defines a soliloquy thus: “A dramatic or literary form of discourse in which a character talks to himself or herself or reveals his or her thoughts without addressing a listener.”⁴³ But it seems theatre people and filmmakers alike do not feel such a definition must be followed so minutely. And indeed this becomes the ‘standard’ form of deliverance for Hamlet’s soliloquies; a mixture between talking to himself and to the audience. “O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?” (I.v.92-112) being another candidate for that form. But also the popular voice-over is made use of and, as in Almereyda’s adaptation of the same play, this Hamlet also uses a little hand-held camera to make a video diary of himself.

In “To be, or not to be” (III.i.56-89), the camera acts again as a silent observer. It stays right close to Hamlet’s face throughout the soliloquy, but always moving ever so slightly so as not to become a static listener. We see Hamlet in silhouette when he speaks the first lines. Then the camera slowly comes closer and swerves around to face him from the front. Hamlet still seems lost in thought up until the line: “- ay, there’s the rub”, when he realises that even in death, so like a long sleep, he cannot find sure peace of mind if dreams were to come to him even then. As in his previous soliloquies Hamlet now suddenly looks directly into the camera and continues his philosophising by addressing us. Because he is speaking directly to us and we are face to face with him at such proximity, we are also more inclined to listen. And David Tennant truly makes sense of every line. The intensity with which he speaks them compels us to sympathise with him, thus listening to his every word all the more.

⁴³ *The Free Dictionary*. (22 June 2012). <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/soliloquy>.

[...] When a character in a film does speak directly to camera, the effect is a radical disruption of the sense of fictional space – the intimation of a whole world beyond the camera’s range, of which we are being shown a part – and is potentially far more momentous (and alienating) than direct address to a live audience from an actor on stage. Usually, when a film character must be seen to reflect, she or he will look to the left or right of camera, the eye-line depending on the demands of continuity and with respect to what is understood to be in the space ‘off’. Speaking to the lens has a distinctive effect and has to be used sparingly and strategically.⁴⁴

However speaking directly into the camera is not reserved exclusively for soliloquies. All asides are likewise spoken into the camera, to the audience. For instance the soliloquy “Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying.” (III.iii.73-96) (film, 1:52) combines several of the above mentioned methods. When Hamlet comes across Claudius praying he sees an opportunity to stab his uncle, but then decides otherwise. Hamlet speaks the first line as if it were an ‘aside’, as a voice over. However when Hamlet briefly glances into the camera he acknowledges that his thoughts were indeed heard by the audience and were in fact ‘thought’ (spoken) for their benefit. This supposed ‘aside’ in fact turns into a short soliloquy. The lines below are spoken as a voice over. Then Hamlet lets his uncle be and once he is away he speaks the rest aloud and partially into the camera again.

And now I’ll do’t. And so a goes to heaven;
And so am I reveng’d. That would be scann’d:
A villain kills my father, and for that
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.

The soliloquy “O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” (II.ii.543-601) found its way to the chapter on eavesdropping and spying and stayed there. That leaves us with two remaining soliloquies to take a look at to bring the total up to an impressive seven. “Tis now the very witching time of night” (III.iii.379-390) and “How all occasions do inform against me” (IV.iv.32-66). Hamlet speaks both of these into his hand-held, old fashioned camcorder, in a video diary style. On and off we see Hamlet through his own camera. In these instances it is as if he were looking directly at us again even though technically he is talking to himself through the medium of film.

⁴⁴ Jackson, 2007: 26.

Especially in “Hamlet” productions so much weight is laid on the play’s soliloquies that they can really make or break a night of theatre. In this chapter I hope to have shown the seriousness with which this form is also treated in film and the range of possibilities which this medium opens up for it.

6 Eavesdropping and the Art of Spying

Eavesdropping comes as naturally to Shakespearean characters as crossing the road. I exaggerate a little, but the act of purposefully spying on one another, or just ‘accidentally’ overhearing some vital information, is as common and almost as frequently made use of in Shakespeare plays as that of direct conversation. On stage such an undertaking mostly involves some kind of canvas or small bush for the characters cumbersomely to hide behind. It is quite ironic that Shakespeare has so many scenes throughout his plays in which people spy on each other, and modern technology makes this so easy to do, and plausible at that. In fact it is seen as perfectly normal to spy and primarily be spied upon with CCTV cameras leering down at us from every street corner. In an interview Michael Almereyda himself commented on the self-referential quality of his film and its use of surveillance cameras especially in the context of the Ghost’s appearance and for monitoring Hamlet.

A lot of the play is about people spying on each other and being watched and playing parts and being aware of themselves playing parts. And that corresponds to contemporary reality where cameras are [omni] present and images within images are [omni] present, at least in the city. So that seemed like a natural way of mirroring things that were going on in Shakespeare’s text.⁴⁵

Surveillance cameras, regular cameras, audio recording devices and two-way mirrors are all used for getting information out of or bringing information across to someone; all of these are ‘modern’ methods in their own right. But more straightforward approaches are used as well. Simply by updating the space you automatically create a wide new array of humorous and original locations for eavesdropping to take place.

6.1 Hamlet (2000)

Despite Almereyda’s conscious use of CCTV cameras to more realistically anchor his Shakespeare adaptation in the 21st century, there are in fact not that many instances where they are employed. Only a couple of very short sequences draw on footage taken from these cameras. The Ghost is first sighted over the CCTV monitors which Bernardo and Marcella (here Marcellus’ role is given to a woman) use in their watch over the Elsinore Hotel. Horatio has joined them and together they catch a glimpse of the late king in surveillance footage of

⁴⁵ Almereyda, Michael. “Interview with Michael Almereyda, Writer-Director of ‘Hamlet’”. *PopMatters*. (20 Jan. 2012). <http://www.popmatters.com/pm/review/hamlet2/>.

the lift. The Ghost's further appearances occur 'live' in front of the characters and not on a screen. Polonius briefly glances into the watching camera after Hamlet has referred to him as a fishmonger and in an 'aside' he speaks his belief that the boy is driven mad by his love for Ophelia, which we see from the other side of the camera, on the monitor. It might not be much and never in direct connection with a 'spying scene', but it is enough for us to realise the characters are being watched at all times, their every move taken note of. This device is certainly taken greater advantage of in the RSC's "Hamlet".

Almreyda's spying equipment of choice is the bug. Ophelia gets 'wired up' by her father and Claudius before she is sent to confront Hamlet about their now past relationship. What ensues is the 'get thee to a nunnery' scene. Hamlet discovers the microphone on her body and disconnects it. We do not get to see her instigators' reaction to this.

6.2 Hamlet (RSC)

In this production we find three different forms of camera. The one with which the movie was filmed; this one provides us with our perspective and is of course non-diegetic. Then there are two other kinds of cameras used which are diegetic: 1. numerous surveillance cameras installed around the palace and its grounds, and 2. a retro 9 mm film camera (or in any case a camera with cine-camera effect) which Hamlet uses during the performance of "The Mousetrap". Each of the diegetic cameras has its moments when our view is shot from their perspective and we look through their eyes, so to speak.

In this production too, surveillance is taken for granted in the state of Denmark. CCTV cameras are set up in every corner of the palace for security purposes. However, as we know all too well from the world we live in today, this 'protection' can be used against us at any given moment. There is a fine line between safety and privacy violation. We find this same ambiguous overlapping at the royal court in Denmark. The CCTV cameras take on the form of a separate character. This 'character' becomes a major presence throughout the movie, always with a slightly altered purpose.

We are initially introduced to this 'character' in the first scene of the movie. The sentinels Francisco and Bernardo (soon to be joined by Marcellus and Horatio) are standing guard. To assist them there is a CCTV camera mounted to the wall through which we also catch a few glimpses. In fact this is the very first shot of the movie. The camera's jolted movement,

panning the corridors, accompanied by the associated noise that goes with it (like the zooming sound of a camera, but without the effect of actually zooming in), create rather a spooky atmosphere. However no ghost appears. At least not at first and when it does finally arrive we do not get to see it because the (non-diegetic) camera becomes the ghost, therefore we are looking out onto the scene from the ghost's perspective. So the characters interact with the camera, which in a way is as if they were interacting with us, the viewers. As the director, Gregory Doran, points out on the DVD commentary, the opening scene of Hamlet is one of the most difficult in the whole play. There has to be this high tension there from the beginning, but the play has only just started, we do not know what is going on (theoretically at least) and then suddenly a ghost appears (!). Of course we do know what is going on because everyone (essentially) knows the play and is waiting for the entrance of the Ghost, this ethereal character which is so tricky to portray. Therefore I find this solution rather intriguing. On first watching this adaptation, I, as an audience member quite familiar with the material, started to get a little annoyed that we were not shown the ghost. For everyone is a little 'jump-happy' at heart, and, after all the films of the genres horror, thriller, gore and co. with which a young person of today is bombarded, we are unaccustomed to being denied the pleasure of *seeing* the frightening object in question. Therefore when we finally do get to see it the effect is all the greater, as at that point we are no longer expecting it. It goes like this: the Ghost has come and gone and we have settled back to listen to Horatio explain Denmark's political situation to us, we are off our guard when suddenly from behind him and on the beat of a warped cymbal, Hamlet's late father appears. We also jump because we have made the false assumption that we will be seeing the Ghost in the CCTV camera, as this has become a fairly common method of showing ghosts on screen. But here it is the other way around; when we do eventually get to see the ghost, the security camera does not capture its image.

Another use to which CCTV cameras are put is specifically to spy on Hamlet. As they are already in place, the step to abusing their function is a rather small one and easily made. Hamlet becomes aware of them and the eyes that might be watching him through them.

6.2.1 To Be or Not To Be

In the "To be or not to be" scene the surveillance camera is likewise ever present, but it is not in fact that which is used for spying on Hamlet; at least not by Claudius and Polonius. When at some point the CCTV camera makes its little 'zooming' noise, it catches Hamlet's attention

and that is the moment he asks Ophelia where her father is, correctly guessing he is watching them, but falsely assuming that it is through the camera. He speaks his next few lines directly up into the surveillance camera, wanting to prove to Polonius that he has seen through his ruse. In fact Polonius and the King are observing the young couple from behind a two-way mirror. Occasionally we are granted a look through the mirror from the other side, which makes for a nice image as we simultaneously get to see the reflection of Claudius and Polonius in the glass looking out as well as the subject of their observation. Polonius too seems perplexed at the realisation that someone else might be spying over the CCTV camera. Throughout the movie the feeling of a presence watching is ever being conveyed and up until now one always assumed this to be King Claudius. But now we cannot be so sure anymore as he is behind the two-way mirror with Polonius; unless Claudius is concealing, even from him, the fact that he has every inch of the castle under constant surveillance and that he makes 'good' use of this surveillance. It is left open to the audience to decide on this point.

After repeatedly urging Ophelia to get herself to a nunnery, Hamlet departs for a brief while. Polonius emerges from behind the mirror to 'comfort' his daughter and send her on her way. When Hamlet returns and suddenly sees Polonius standing in front of the mirror he had been hiding behind moments earlier, Hamlet now comes to the correct conclusion and even puts his face right up to the glass and tries to peer into where his uncle is still hiding.

Now that Hamlet is conscious of the intrusive cameras, he is wary even of being 'alone', removing them from the room when he wants to make certain he is not overheard. Before his soliloquy "O what rogue and peasant slave am I!" (II.ii.544-601), Hamlet does just that. The upbeat to this soliloquy goes as follows: "Ay, so, God be ye. Now I am alone." The first sentence is still addressed to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who then depart; the second is spoken directly into the (non-diegetic) camera, spoken to us the audience, after Hamlet instantly tears down the surveillance camera and destroys it as soon as the others have left the room. Only so can he be certain of really being alone without unwanted eyes watching his every move.

6.2.2 The Mousetrap

The play within the play is contrived by Hamlet for the sole purpose of spying on his uncle, whom he hopes to catch out by having the players act out a murder scene which mirrors that of his late father. Shakespeare suggests that Hamlet merely keeps an eye on his uncle

throughout the play in the play. In this adaptation Hamlet however goes so far as to film his uncle's every move with a small old fashioned hand-held camera. This is where the third type of camera view comes into use. Hamlet places himself opposite Claudius, across from the make-shift stage, so that his actions simply look like he is making a recording of the play "The Mousetrap". Again the film audience gets to see the scene from the general non-diegetic camera's perspective as well as from Hamlet's, through his hand held (diegetic) camera. The shots filmed through the diegetic camera have a decided retro-look, in a smaller format and with lines and splotches running through it. Hamlet appears to be paying his uncle back for the constant surveillance he is under. Claudius does not like this, or the play, and when he has interrupted it, by rising from his seat and walking over to Hamlet, he gives him a warning look. A look that tells him not to meddle in his affairs, not to go sticking his nose into the event of his father's passing, nor to make private documentation of the king's appearance.

6.2.3 The Closet Scene

'The Closet Scene', as it is referred to, is the scene in which Hamlet confronts his mother in her bedroom about her dishonest behaviour towards her late husband, his father. It is also the scene in which Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius, who had withdrawn (with the Queen's assent) to a hiding place within the bedroom in order to listen in on the conversation between the Queen and her son. This production sees Polonius once again hiding behind a mirror. This time (one would hope) it is not a two-way one: that would be creepy indeed to have such a construction installed in the Queen's bedroom.

6.3 Twelfth Night

"Twelfth Night" too makes use of surveillance cameras for purposes of spying on and plotting against. Malvolio is the victim here. Maria, Fabian, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew set up a camera and plant a microphone in a little alcove in the palace garden especially for the occasion. It is used to spy on Malvolio when he comes across a love letter he supposes to be from his mistress, but which in fact came from Maria's hand with the intent purpose of luring the gullible Malvolio into false assumptions. The non-diegetic camera keeps switching back and forth between the sorry site of Malvolio getting increasingly more caught up in the false love letter and his betrayers hidden away in a room somewhere in the palace. They can see and

hear everything the dotting butler says and being so far apart from him they can roar with laughter at every line he utters without fear of being heard themselves.

But the camera was installed solely for spying on Malvolio. Once he has left the scene Olivia and Cesario take his place in the garden. Even though Fabian and Sir Toby (Sir Andrew, at the sight of the two together, having gotten up and departed to salvage what hope is left of winning Olivia for himself) would quite readily spy on them too, Maria draws the line and switches the camera off. This is after all not “Hamlet”, but a comedy in which too much malicious undercover work would certainly spoil the mood. It is turned on again to watch Malvolio’s transformation into a cocky, smiling, yellow-stockinged and cross-gartered wearing fool as he makes his advances on the stunned Lady Olivia.

6.4 Much Ado About Nothing

In “Much Ado About Nothing” spying, accidental eavesdropping and trickery are just as much key elements for making the plot come together, as in so many other of the Bard’s plays. And in the play’s newfound setting in a local news studio this feat has found its natural environment.

6.4.1 Fooling Benedick

For setting up Benedick the matchmakers take full advantage of all the microphones, film cameras, loudspeakers, intercoms, monitors and headphones at their disposal. Initially he is lured out of his dressing room through the intercom. Once he has taken the bait and snuck into the central news studio to find out more about Beatrice’s supposed feelings for him, a particularly comical scene ensues as all of these technical communication and observation gadgets are put to full use. The tricked can hear everything that is said, while the tricksters can see the whole slapstick scene unfold in front of them.

6.4.2 Fooling Beatrice

The beguiling of Beatrice follows a much more traditional path, in the sense that no 21st century technology is used for the purpose. Instead the ladies’ toilets, at a bar where Hero’s hen night is being hosted, are used as an everyday location where a lot of gossip is exchanged between women and therefore just such a bit of juicy information could easily be overheard.

We see that technical equipment is frequently put into action for these scenes with only a few scenes interspersed which manage to make do without. With time these approaches will become less of a novelty and more and more the norm as our everyday lives incorporate an increasing amount of electronic devices. In the examples I have brought here however such measures were still rather new and exciting and all the more relevant for their age.

7 Economical Shakespeare

Another important aspect to take into consideration when making an adaptation for the 21st century audience is the amount of Shakespeare that you put into a Shakespeare adaptation. People's attentions spans have changed. They have indeed decreased, it is true, but I do not feel this should be 'blamed' for cuts done to some dialogue. Too much of a good thing is not a good thing; not for the audience, nor for the new medium for which you are catering for. Therefore you should be economical with your Shakespeare text.

The most obvious difference between a screenplay and the text of an Elizabethan play is the number of spoken words. In writing for the mainstream cinema it is axiomatic that dialogue should be kept to a minimum. What happens in a scene – as the director's traditional command indicates – is 'action'. Syd Field, an influential teacher of screenwriting skills, insists that 'a screenplay is a story told in pictures, and there will always be some kind of problem when you tell the story through words, and not pictures'.⁴⁶

An example hereof can be seen in the ShakespeaRe-Told version of "Much Ado About Nothing". The following passage indicates that Beatrice and Benedick were indeed once an item and he jilted her in some form or other.

Shakespeare (II.i.257-264):

Bene. Oh God, sir, here's a dish I love not! I cannot endure my Lady Tongue!
D.Pedro. Come, lady, come, you have lost the heart of Signor Benedick.
Beat. Indeed, my lord, he lent it me a while, and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one. Marry, once before he won it off me with false dice, therefore your Grace may well say I have lost it.

The opening of the ShakespeaRe-Told version follows the line of showing what is only spoken about in the text (and scarcely at that) and shows us precisely what happened: The two had obviously arranged to meet for a date and after getting themselves meticulously ready (each in their own fashion) she arrives at the restaurant while he instead makes his way to the airport. There she receives a text message from him cancelling the date (and to add insult to injury a waiter brings her a bottle of champagne with the message: "The gentleman said to tell you: no hard feelings."). The ShakespeaRe-Told's solution is both effective and time saving. It gives us a brief back-story to the main characters and also a glimpse of what these two

⁴⁶ Field, Syd. *The Screenwriter's Problem Solver*. New York, NY: Random House Publ. Group., 1998. P. 56, 78. Cited in: Jackson, 2007: 16, 17.

characters are like. All of it vital information and all told in pictures rather than words while the opening credits role.

Another example would be Hamlet's surprise visit to Ophelia's extremely artsy Manhattan loft apartment on her birthday. No lines are spoken (as Shakespeare did not write any for such a scene and no lines were added that were not his), but it is clear that he comes by to deliver a tender love letter (which we saw him composing moments earlier and heard him recite on his way to her apartment: "To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia". [II.ii.109,110]). They are busy canoodling in Ophelia's dark room when the lovers are interrupted by Polonius who has likewise come by to surprise his daughter with two helium-filled balloon adorned with birthday wishes. You can see the tension between the characters and Polonius' obvious indignation at finding Hamlet there. He leaves in a hurry and as Ophelia makes to follow him to the door Polonius stops her, the love letter falling to the floor which he unabashedly picks up and reads.

This is how scenes are often added that are not actually in the play. Do I hear a cry of disbelief? Not only do the makers of adaptations change sets, time, view points and language, they also add new material? Yup! But that is the way the movies work: "show rather than tell".⁴⁷

Of course they do not just make up new story lines. They film parts of the story which are known only by report, which may have occurred sometime in the past or in a sub-plot. However why were whole plot lines reduced to such minimal regard and time on stage in the first place? Was it because Shakespeare thought these scenes to be of less importance, or because the means of staging in the Elizabethan age made it impossible to perform many of these scenes, or was there simply not enough time to properly include all of this information? There is a good reason why Shakespeare's plays have the poetic form that they do. Every detail of the story had to be put into words; every emotion, every gesture, every step of the way. Stories were created through words. Well, today stories are created through pictures. Additionally, precious time can be saved by showing rather than telling as more information can be given at once through pictures.

A common practice in film adaptations is also to jumble the scenes up a bit to tell the story in a manner better suited the new medium. In "Hamlet" (2000), scenes, speeches and soliloquies are jumbled to suit Almereyda's needs. In fact the whole film can be seen as a full length home-movie of Hamlet's. Essentially Hamlet's movie-making reflects Almereyda's

⁴⁷ Jackson, 2007: 28.

“Hamlet”. Through heavy cuts and compositing the story can be told the way the maker wants. The material is all genuine, but editing can change its meaning, even if only ever so slightly, to suit the creator’s needs. Indeed the credits for Hamlet’s home-made movie “The Mousetrap” are exactly those we saw at the beginning of this movie. In the one case the name ‘Hamlet’ appears as the filmmaker’s name and in the other as the title of Almereyda’s film. In both cases we see the same bright red background with “Hamlet” written in big bold letters across it.

For the particularly bold-hearted one could even go so far as to interpret this entire adaptation as Horatio’s tale of Hamlet after his death. After all, Hamlet does charge him with the task at the end of the play and Horatio is a university mate of his, so therefore most likely also an artsy film student.

I dare say every film (and every theatre production as well) makes cuts of some form or other and in film more so than theatre as, as I have already mentioned, it is part of the process of adapting to the new medium.

There are as many means of adaptation as there are fish in the sea and all of them legitimate as long as they are interesting. (Well, I guess even those which are not interesting are strictly speaking *legitimate*, but if they are not interesting then why bother?). However how best to go about making such an adaptation is any man’s guess. If I may draw a comparison to the world of opera here (a booming market which thrives on wild and daring adaptations), Christoph Clausen includes Catherine Clément’s observations in his paper “Shakespeare in Opera”:

Forgetting Shakespeare in Shakespearean opera is both a necessity and an impossibility. An audience’s reluctance to break free from Shakespeare is a sure recipe for spending an evening in outraged agony. A composer’s unwillingness to break free from Shakespeare is an equally sure recipe for dramaturgical disaster, the opera crushed by the sheer fame of the play.⁴⁸

I believe just such an approach should be implicated for any adaption, be it opera, musical, dance, play, book or film. It harkens back to the notion of an adaptation being a palimpsest. The original will always underlie its adaptation, but one must let that original fade away if one is to grant the adaptation full growth.

⁴⁸ Clément, Catherine. *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988. Cited in: Clausen, Christoph. “Shakespeare in Opera”. Eds. Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, Joerg Helbig, Jurgen Klein. *Shakespeare in the Media - From the Globe Theatre to the World Wide Web*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010. 89-102. P. 89.

Staying on the subject of opera for a while, I would like to use the views of one of its greatest contributors to point out the controversy which will probably always exist between an original work and its adaptation: the desire to want to stay true to the original and to create something new out of that original. The Romantic opera composer Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) was a true lover of Shakespeare's work. Kobbé's Complete Opera Book states that:

Berlioz's life-long enthusiasm for Vergil was second only to his love for Shakespeare; in point of fact, both contributed to the libretto of *Les Troyens*, the former to the narrative of the love of Dido and Aeneas as told in the first, second and fourth books of the *Aeneid*, the latter to the interpolation of the scene for Jessica and Lorenzo from *The Merchant of Venice*, which provides words for the great love duet between Dido and Aeneas in Act IV.⁴⁹

So avid was his love for Shakespeare that when he visited London in 1846,

[...] he expressed his consternation that, as he saw it, some considered themselves sufficiently superior to Shakespeare to 'correct [] and augment []' his plays. Such 'rogues', he wrote in a letter to Joseph-Louis Duc, 'should have their bottoms publicly spanked'.⁵⁰

Great is the irony that he went on to do just that years later in numerous of his own masterpieces (correct and augment, not publicly spank those who did). "Les Troyens" is inspired by "The Merchant of Venice"; Berlioz wrote the libretto to his opera "Béatrice et Bénédict" himself, after Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing". Kobbé, or the Earl of Harewood as the case may be, writes: "The story is an adaptation of a shortened version of Shakespeare's play, which preserves the spirit of the comedy, but omits the saturnine intrigue of Don John against Claudio and Hero".⁵¹ His work "Tristia" is supposedly inspired by "Hamlet". And his large scale choral-symphony "Roméo et Juliette" (librettist Émile Deschamps) is clearly based on Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet". His strong opinion of the intended fate of those who tamper with Shakespeare's work from twenty-six years previously had obviously waned and he himself came to commit the very 'crime' which he had formerly so fervently condemned. Even the well-meaning and pure at heart will eventually have to admit that change is not always a bad thing.

⁴⁹ The Earl of Harewood (ed.). *Kobbé's Complete Opera Book*. 10th edition. London: Bodley Head, 1987. P. 613.

⁵⁰ Hector Berlioz, letter to Joseph-Louis Duc, 1846, trans. David Cairns. Quoted in: Gross, John (ed.). *After Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 2002. P. 295. Cited in: Buchanan, Judith. *Shakespeare on Film*. Harlow [et al.]: Pearson Longman, 2004. P. 90.

⁵¹ The Earl of Harewood, 1987: 620.

8 **Marketing**

When I set out to write my thesis I intended this topic to only make up a fifth of the whole work at the most. But this sector just kept growing and growing, more and more chapters falling under the auspices of marketing. Once the work was done and I could step back and have a look at what I had created, I realised I could just as well have named my thesis ‘Marketing Shakespeare’. Because when it comes down to it, that is all anyone who makes an adaptation of Shakespeare is doing, namely marketing the good man to the best of their abilities. Marketing, in a way, is simply doing the same thing an adaptation process does: it ‘makes (the marketable product) fit’. But I did not want to leave it that way, for even though you could list most or all of these chapters under marketing, you do not have to; they can also stand on their own, and that is what I opted for in the end. After all, my intention for this thesis was to write about adapting methods to suit the current young generation’s taste, and not to get tangled up in too much of the economical aspect. That is why you find this chapter back in its reduced form, merely a building block instead of the actual puzzle.

Creating cutting edge film adaptations is all very well, but there is not much point if no one sees them due to lack of awareness. Any show, exhibition, festival or performance of any sort needs some sort of promotion, and the better the promotion the bigger the revenue is likely to be. This model of cause and effect is one Baz Luhrmann is very much familiar with. At least in the area of Shakespeare adaptations he leads the way when it comes down to giving his movies just the right pitch.

When creating something in the entertainment industry one ideally hopes to sell to the masses without selling ones soul to the devil. No, I am just kidding, the devil has long since given up bargaining with souls and now prefers to do so with solid cash. In the entertainment world you want to try and sell to the masses without selling out to your artistic aspirations. Therefore one has to keep those masses in mind while creating the entertainment and cater to their needs. There is a difference between churning out some kind of cheap trash that will sell for sure, and recognising the audience’s intellect and ability to absorb and take an interest in a work of quality. I do not want to sound pretentious: all I am saying is that in 1996 Luhrmann created a Shakespeare adaptation which, amongst other qualities, also appealed to the teenage generation who were, shall we say, not your regular Shakespeare audience. He however did not shy away from promoting his adaptation for what it is, giving it the full title of “William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet”.

What Luhrmann does is this: “[...] he makes it into a recognizable contemporary cultural object, and shows himself alert to the sensibilities of an audience whose taste and feelings are conditioned by the culture in which they are immersed.”⁵² In the 90s MTV with its colourful, fast cut music videos was at the forefront of this culture.

Each of the adaptations I take into account here in this chapter chose a different approach for bringing their source text up to date and consequently also marketing them in their own fashion. “Romeo + Juliet” immersed itself in the teenage pop culture of the 1990s and appealed to its followers; “Hamlet” (2000) went haywire with technology; ShakespeaRe-Told’s “Much Ado About Nothing” modernised not only the language, but also several plot lines to be better suited to today’s society; “Twelfth Night” became an appealing learning tool for secondary pupils in Great Britain and around the world, and “Titus” and both “Hamlets” laid value in the importance of casting popular contemporary actors in the leading roles, “Titus” also succeeding in the “splatter and gore” film genre.

Any strongly altered adaptation is going to receive a lot of criticism; there are still plenty of Granville-Barkers about.

The conventional language of adaptation criticism has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply that the cinema has somehow done a **disservice** [sic] to literature. Terms like “infidelity,” “betrayal,” “deformation,” “violation,” “bastardization,” “vulgarization,” and “desecration” proliferate in adaptation discourse, each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium.⁵³

Luhrmann’s “Romeo + Juliet” is considered by many to be a slanderous rendition barely worthy of the name Shakespeare, and they would be quick to describe it with the above mentioned terms. I expect the reason for such a negative view may well lie in the felt betrayal of the respective audience’s original notion of the play’s essence.

[...] it is important to move beyond the moralistic and judgmental ideal of “fidelity.” At the same time, we have to acknowledge at the outset that “fidelity,” however discredited theoretically, does retain a grain of experiential truth. Fidelity discourse asks important questions about the filmic recreation of the setting, plot, characters, themes, and the style of the novel. When we say an adaptation has been “unfaithful” to the original, the very

⁵² Anderegg, Michael. “James Dean Meets the Pirate’s Daughter: Passion and Parody in ‘William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet’ and ‘Shakespeare in Love’”. Eds. Richard Burt, Lynda E. Boose. *Shakespeare, The Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*. London [et al.]: Routledge, 2003. 56-71. P. 60.

⁵³ Stam, 2005: 3.

violence of the term gives expression to the intense sense of betrayal we feel when a film adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, or aesthetic features of its literary source. The notion of fidelity gains its persuasive power from our sense that (a) some adaptations are indeed better than others, and (b) some adaptations fail to “realize” or substantiate what we most appreciate in the source novels. Words like “infidelity” and “betrayal” in this sense translate our feeling, when we have loved a book, that an adaptation has not been worthy of that love.⁵⁴

However what is considered a betrayal of one’s love for the play by some is a new found appreciation for others. As I have already hinted at in the introduction, Baz Luhrmann’s achievement of successfully creating a Shakespeare movie adaptation which seems set to last the ages is indeed an impressive one. Many factors come together to make it so: a visionary director, a young, attractive cast at the start of huge careers and an audience which was willing to go to any lengths, even sitting through the two and a half hours of Shakespeare, to see their teenage crushes. And the movie could not so often be compared to a MTV music clip if it were not for a soundtrack to fit the bill. Music plays quite a major role in this adaptation. It is hip, it is catchy, it is loud and funky and heartbreakingly romantic when it needs to be. It strikes a chord with youngsters and became a very successful merchandising product of its own.

In a piece for *Variety* (“Fox doth use its wiles to sell Shakespeare”), John Brodie claims that “[m]uch credit for the pic’s surprising success was the studio’s understanding from the outset that this was a teen picture, not a movie for eggheads”⁵⁵ (1996). Apart from the somewhat quaint use of the word “eggheads”, Brodie expresses here what many reviewers identified as Luhrmann’s condescending to his audience. But this view is itself simplistic and unsophisticated. In making Shakespeare’s play “acceptable” to a contemporary audience, a filmmaker will find it necessary to disguise, gloss over, or entirely repress much in the play that might be off-putting or incomprehensible.⁵⁶

In fact Luhrmann claims what his own aim was “to do a sort of Elizabethan interpretation of Shakespeare” (2001: DVD Special Edition).

Luhrmann has claimed, with a seeming absence of irony, that his goal was “to do a sort of Elizabethan interpretation of Shakespeare” (2001: DVD Special Edition), which would in part explain his insistence on retaining

⁵⁴ Stam, 2005: 14.

⁵⁵ Brodie, John. “Fox Doth Use Its Wiles to Sell Shakespeare”. *Variety*. Vol. 365, no. 2, 1996. P. 15.

⁵⁶ Anderegg, 2003: 61.

Shakespeare's language – or, at least, a reasonable percentage of it – rather than creating a verbal language of his own [...] ⁵⁷

Luhrmann was not only referring to the language however, but above all to his interpretation of it. It is known that Shakespeare was very 'contemporary' for his day, and a lot of what he put on stage might well have seemed spectacular and flamboyant at the time. Therefore Luhrmann felt his approach to be all the more legitimate *because* of its loud and outrageous characteristics.

To recall what Hitchcock had to say about Shakespeare on screen: "[...] the cinema has popularised Shakespeare. In one showing of ROMEO AND JULIET round the country, more people will see a work of Shakespeare than will ever attend stage Shakespeare in a year."⁵⁸ This could certainly be said of this "Romeo and Juliet".

8.1 Marketing Romeo

Luhrmann chose well when he cast Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo. In 1996 the then 22 year old actor was already making a name for himself. In 1994 he had received an Oscar and Golden Globe nomination in the category Best Supporting Actor for his role in "What's Eating Gilbert Grape" after having already gained some acclaim for his performance in "This Boy's Life" alongside Robert De Niro⁵⁹. What Luhrmann could of course not predict was just how big DiCaprio's name was about to get. Already a rising star and girls' heart-throb following the release of "Romeo + Juliet", Leonardo DiCaprio's fame went through the roof in the wake of the success of the most expensive movie ever made up to that date, "Titanic" (1997), in which he starred alongside Kate Winslet. "Titanic's" tidal wave victory at the box office (excuse the tasteless joke) ensured that DiCaprio's face to be instantaneously recognised by all ages around the world. Teenage girls and young women took their adoration for him so far that a craze coined as 'Leo-Mania' was started. Posters with DiCaprio's face lined the walls of every teenage girl around the world. I can vouch for the correctness of this statement as I was at the time a young teenage girl myself. I did not in fact belong to the followers of the Leo-worship (I must have been one of only a handful), but I do remember seeing 'Leo-shrines' in many of my girlfriends' bedrooms. This hysteria lasted for years after

⁵⁷ Anderegg, 2003: 60.

⁵⁸ Hitchcock, 1937. Cited in: Gottlieb, 1997: 183.

⁵⁹ "What's Eating Gilbert Grape". *IMDb [Internet Movie Database]*. (30 Jan. 2013).
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108550/?ref_=sr_1.

the “Titanic’s” release, guaranteeing Leonardo DiCaprio, “Titanic”, and DiCaprio’s other film starring him in a romantic role, “Romeo + Juliet”, lasting fame. One could say that the film “Titanic” was possibly the best thing that could have happened to Shakespeare at the turn of the 21st century. Teenage girls can be extremely strongheaded and will let nothing come between them and their unattainable, silver screen sweetheart; not even Elizabethan English. I believe this to be an additional reason for this adaptation’s lasting popularity; its immediate success was extended by another couple of years thanks to ‘Leo-mania’. It was quite an astounding phenomenon. And I figure it is because of this phenomenon occurring in the mid to late 1990s that this one Shakespeare adaptation has achieved what no other has, and made its way into the general public’s subconscious. If that is not marketing at its best then I do not know what is!

8.2 Much Ado About Nothing

I must insert a little explanatory blurb here to clarify certain name changes. ShakespeaRe-Told modernised several of the names and depending on which work I am referring to (whether it is Shakespeare’s play or the film adaptation), I use the names as stated therein. Claudio becomes Claude, Leonato becomes Leonard, Don Pedro becomes Peter and Don John simply becomes Don.

I have to admit that the makers of ShakespeaRe-Told’s “Much Ado About Nothing” did not stop at (simply) exchanging the bard’s words for new ones, they also (unforgivably) changed part of the story, as the original would have seemed old, stuffy and totally out of place in the new setting. Again one might ask oneself whether such drastic alterations are legitimate and I cannot deny I feel they may have gone a little too far here. But that is not up for debate. The fact is that they did it and the question is: why? Let us look at some examples:

In Shakespeare’s “Much Ado About Nothing” Claudio’s sudden change of heart after finding out about his beloved’s supposed unfaithfulness, comes as a great shock and leads to an extremely sudden change of pace, mood and, in fact, genre. Up until this point the play has thrived off good humour, amusing banter and quick wit. Suddenly the story changes in heartbeat from comedy to tragedy. Claudio is wild with rage after what he thinks to have seen the night before (Hero encouraging the advances of Borachio, when in fact it was Margaret in her mistress’ clothing), and he is furthermore blinded by Don John’s intentionally malevolent accusations. He curses his bride, shunning her at the altar. Her father quickly follows suit,

disinheriting his disgraced daughter. This kind of irrational behaviour cannot be understood or tolerated by today's society, into whose consciousness the pro-feminist movement has already long since settled itself. Just as unbelievable is Hero's supposed sudden death of a broken heart. Such unwieldy concepts needed to be changed if the process to a modern adaptation was to be completed. And this is really where the adaptation takes a drastic turn away from the original. Hero is equipped with a strong will of her own. She does not take Claude's accusations of infidelity lying down and gives him a piece of her mind. When push comes to shove and a little squabble ensues between Hero and Don (whose motivation for ruining her life she, furthermore, would like to know), she is knocked over and hits her head on the sharp edge of a socle, genuinely and seriously hurting herself. She faints and does not regain consciousness until some time later. Throughout Leonard remains loyal to his outraged and wrongfully accused daughter. Don's motivation for wanting to sabotage the wedding is also more grounded in reality than simply wanting to do evil. Combining Conrade, Borachio and Don John's characters all into one gives Don more depth and makes him a much creepier villain because now it is a matter of just him and his messed up little mind. He has become obsessed with Hero ever since years ago she once spent out of pity a night of passion with him. She does not reciprocate his feelings of love, so he would rather no one had her at all. The biggest change comes at the very end. The character of Claudio (in the play and film) comes across as a bit of a wet fish. Forgiving and then rewarding him at the end of the play always seems undeserved and unfair. So therefore in this adaptation to top it off, Hero, on recovering from her head injury, decides not to go through with the marriage to Claude. Instead she treads the path of the emancipated woman, liberating herself from all the men in her life who claim to 'own' her.

Essentially it remains the same story and presumably it is legitimate to argue that had they not made these changes this modernisation would have been riddled with major flaws.

8.3 Hamlet (2000)

"Hamlet" (2000) has an altogether different feel about it. Whereas "Romeo + Juliet" is geared up to be a big, box office hit, "Hamlet" (2000) is content with being a relatively low budget⁶⁰ art-house production.⁶¹ Almereyda went the full hog in supplying just about every scene with

⁶⁰ McEvoy, Sean. *Shakespeare: The Basics*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006. P. 114.

⁶¹ Burnett, Mark Thornton. "'To Hear and See the Matter': Communicating Technology in Michael Almereyda's 'Hamlet' (2000)". *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 42, no. 3. 2003. Uni. of Texas Press. 48-69. Digitalised by JSTOR. (1 Feb. 2013). <http://hamletguide.com/film/pdfs/burnett.pdf>.

the most modern technological equipment of its time: telephones, answering machines, faxes, mobile phones, cameras, video cameras, surveillance cameras, televisions, computers, laptops, microphones and miniature audio-recording devices. This not only keeps us strongly anchored in the present, but it also opens up a whole new method of storytelling. It enables a much more interwoven and overlapping storyline, which allows for constant self-reflection and for a form of communication we are much more familiar with today.

Almereyda uses technology throughout the film to highlight the impersonal, disconnection of his characters: Hamlet surrounded by his bank of video monitors, looking for manufactured images to guide him; Claudius delivering nasty orders by cell-phone; Hamlet's "Get thee to a nunnery" rants as a series of cruel, angry phone messages; Gertrude and Claudius making out while pumping Rosencrantz (Steve Zahn) and Guildenstern (Dechen Thurman) for information on speaker-phone; death edicts delivered on laptops. Claudius, Gertrude, and Polonius are always surrounded by sterile, ultra-modern surroundings. Ophelia's mad-scene is delivered during an art opening at the Guggenheim, which embarrasses Gertrude more than it moves her.⁶²

This is however not the only form of modernisation which took place to market the film for the younger generation. The film has a tendency to show more than is in the play. There are also many cuts, but the parts left in undergo further elaboration. Almereyda seems keen on giving us more information on the main characters so that we may better understand their actions in the story. He thereby also turns the plot into more of a love story than was the original. Many of the added scenes (which are of course free of dialogue as Almereyda only used Shakespeare without any additional text) show us more of Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship. A bit of a love story always sells better than a story without.⁶³ Recalling what Syd Field said about storytelling on film: "a screenplay is a story told in pictures"⁶⁴.

Even the decision to turn Marcellus into Marcella and make her Horatio's almost entirely mute girlfriend actually goes beyond a timid attempt at trying to introduce at least one more female face into the otherwise heavily male dominated play. Firstly this change was surely made in order to appeal to the female viewers, boosting their numbers in the movie, but it does more than that: it creates more of a back-story for Horatio. We do not really know very much about Horatio. He is Hamlet's best friend... and that is about it. Marcella may not be the most inspirational character ever created and she really has not got much to say, but she

⁶² Abele, Elizabeth. "Hamlet: movie review". *Images: A Journal of Film and Popular Culture*. (1 Feb. 2013). <http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue09/reviews/hamlet/>.

⁶³ See: Freedman, Barbara. "Critical Junctures in Shakespeare Screen History: The Case of 'Richard III'". Ed. Russel Jackson. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007. 47-71. P. 30.

⁶⁴ Field, 1998: 56. Cited in: Jackson, 2007: 17.

serves her purpose, which in this adaptation is to flesh out the character of Horatio a bit more. Also it eliminates any unwanted speculations concerning Horatio and Hamlet's relationship. Normally the two friends are portrayed as being very close, Horatio being seemingly the only person who really understands and cares for Hamlet. Here they are more like mates and not best friends. Hamlet's greeting of him when Horatio first arrives from Wittenberg is most subdued (in fact Hamlet seems a lot happier to see Rosencrantz and Guildenstern later on). Unfortunately this means that Horatio's final words of the play lose their gravity.

Another key feature of this adaptation's pursuit of appealing to the younger generation is its approach towards some of the lengthier, unwieldy scenes of the play. Almereyda simply divides these scenes into smaller sequences and spreads these sequences out over several different locations or forms of relaying the scene. This method correlates with the average short attention span of today's audiences. The "get thee to a nunnery" scene provides us with a good example:

The scene is interrupted when Hamlet finds the microphone that Ophelia is wired up with. She leaves in a flushed hurry. Hamlet speaks the last of his lines from this scene on to Ophelia's answering machine. She listens to this recording at home while quietly and solemnly burning Polaroids of Hamlet over the bathroom sink. By doing this, Almereyda achieves several different things at once. First of all the scene is cut to a shorter, more compact length. Next, it also includes a location change to keep the pace of the movie moving and finally it simultaneously allows Almereyda to show us yet again more back story. We see, and do not have to just imagine, Ophelia's immediate reaction to Hamlet's rejection of her. This is all accomplished within the same scene.

The conversation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with the king and queen about young Hamlet is held via telephone-conference on speaker-phone while the royal couple make out. And the 'closet scene' also ends over the telephone. Hamlet has already left with Polonius' dead body, when, as an afterthought, he calls his mother from a pay-phone handily placed in the corridor down which he is dragging the body down.

These are just a handful of ideas in the field of marketing for this genre. Weighty aspects such as the thought put into casting just the right actor to live up to the play's and the audience's needs, and ways in which students come to approach Shakespeare at school are handled in the following chapters even though they themselves follow the same line of thought associated with marketing. The topic of Shakespeare's language could I believe also just as well be

categorised under the heading of “Marketing”, but “Language” has so much to say for itself that I felt it could well stand all on its own. This is followed by its little brother “The Language of Pictures” which obviously shares the same genes as its big brother, but has developed a quite separate personality.

9 Casting

The recent success of the history play cycle at the Royal Shakespeare Company, built from a cast of home-grown company talent, few of whom boast much in the way of name recognition outside theater circles, led some to believe that this phase of Britain's most recognizable theatrical institution may mark a turning away from star vehicles such as last year's *King Lear*, with Ian McKellan. The announcement that the *Hamlet* that would define the 2008 season would feature David Tennant, star of the BBC's hit show *Doctor Who*, produced much cynical muttering about bottom lines in the face of the rebuilding of the new Royal Shakespeare Theatre, and some genuine concern about the selling out of the solid and expressly theatrical company in favor of something shinier and more easily marketable, built around TV celebrity.⁶⁵

Many believed Tennant was solely cast “to put bums in the seats”⁶⁶, but with the world's financial crisis the way it is and with various financial problems which the RSC was experiencing of its own (the construction of a new theatre, etc. [see Hartley, 2009: 1]) who can blame them? But furthermore are not these argumentations also legitimate grounds in favour of casting this celebrity? As Andrew J. Hartley further points out, it is understandable for people to harbour concern when what are essentially screen actors are put on stage. Acting styles vary; a screen actor's relationship with a live audience can come across as unnatural. In the case of David Tennant however, these doubts are unfounded as he was in fact already a well established Shakespearean actor and member of the RSC before his career in the TV business took off.

Be that as it may, why should the RSC not have made a killing out of their ‘star casting’, while at the same time producing a tremendously successful “Hamlet” of equally stunning quality? Why does the one have to exclude the other? And on top of all that what is the harm in turning the fact that David Tennant was also the star of the BBC series “Doctor Who” to their advantage? I believe that precisely this intriguing collision of theatre and screen is what makes this “Hamlet” production so interesting. *Unique* is the word needed here. When else has there occurred so successful a match between old and new?

Its immediate relevance makes it all the more accessible and popular today. In ten, twenty years time Tennant may have lost some of his household recognition quality and thereby lose his pulling power. But that is ok. Adaptations are made for the present, not for eternity;

⁶⁵ Hartley, Andrew J. “Time Lord of Infinite Space: Celebrity Casting, Romanticism, and British Identity in the RSC's ‘Doctor Who Hamlet’”. Eds. Christy Desmet, Sujata Iyengar. *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*. Vol. 4, no. 2, 2009. (5 May 2011). <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/cocoon/borrowers/issue?id=7149>. P. 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 2.

Shakespeare himself has that area covered. There will be plenty of new renditions made by then to fill the space of Tennant's Hamlet.

In "Shakespeare on Film" Judith Buchanan writes about how the movie's surroundings will automatically influence the viewer's impression of it. Let us make a short detour to Julie Taymor's "Titus": Taymor embraced the association the broad audience already had of her leading man, Anthony Hopkins, with his being a ruthless, psychotic butcher of human flesh. Hopkins is best known for his portrayal in "The Silence of the Lambs" (1991) and "Hannibal" (2001) of Hannibal Lector, who is widely considered to be one of the most disturbing villains in film history (in 2003 he was officially chosen as the number one movie villain by the American Film Institute⁶⁷). As a result of this, the general public automatically associates Hopkins' face with a sick, creepy psychopath. Hopkins's role as Titus, an equally unsettling character, compulsive and bloodthirsty, whose sense of justice leads him coldheartedly to kill two of his children and serve his enemy her sons for dinner, could only benefit from this preconditioning.

Similarly, David Tennant's success as The Doctor in the BBC's long-standing cult-series "Doctor Who", influenced the way in which people perceived his interpretation of Hamlet and indeed the way in which the RSC production and the subsequent television film thereof were marketed.

For clarification's sake I feel it is necessary at this point to say a thing or two about the status and significance of the cult TV show "Doctor Who" in British society today and in the past. "Doctor Who" has been around almost as long as Shakespeare himself. Okay, maybe I'm exaggerating a little here, but the fact is, it has been around for an extremely long time and still remains popular today. In a way a certain comparison can be drawn between the change of style within the show, which yet stayed true to its original essence, and the way in which Shakespeare plays, or should I say productions, have developed over the centuries. A certain similarity can also be found between the two in their sense of 'britishness'. Shakespeare however generally covering the more revered, 'traditional' British culture, and "Doctor Who" the British pop culture.

"Doctor Who" was first broadcast in 1963 and remained a popular television show until 1989. It then took a little break from the air, to then be revived in 2005.

⁶⁷ AFI's: 100 Years 100 Heroes and Villains. (28 Jan. 2013). <http://www.afi.com/100Years/handv.aspx>.

Throughout, the show was unique in targeting children and adults simultaneously, blending scary stories and the politics of the day with campy humor, and held a diverse audience until interest finally waned and the show was cancelled. By this time, however, the program had become the longest running sci-fi show in television history and an essential component of British popular culture, its galloping, spacey theme music, the Daleks, and the look and sound of the TARDIS (the Doctor's time-travelling spaceship fashioned to look like a 1950s police call-box) firmly engrafted in the national consciousness.⁶⁸

The new series was introduced with a mixture of the familiar and warranted old, with new special effects, with better script writing (the show has been showered with numerous awards, including several BAFTA's [British Academy of Film and Television Arts] awards for best drama series and best writing for television) and possibly with 'cooler' (and indeed sexier) actors. It "instantly catapulted the show back into the forefront of British pop culture"⁶⁹. Following Christopher Eccleston's one season's portrayal of The Doctor, Tennant took over the role in 2006. The show and his personal popularity went through the roof and he remained The Doctor until 2010.

To provide a vague idea of the mark which this cult sci-fi series has left on the British nation one need only look at the viewing figures for the four decades it has been on the air. Averaging somewhere between seven and eight million viewers each week, they have shot up over ten million on numerous occasions.⁷⁰ Furthermore, one must take into consideration the many spin-off shows around it ("The Sarah Jane Adventures", "Torchwood" and the animated series "The Infinite Quest" to name but a few), merchandising galore (books, magazines, toys, figures, clothing, household equipment, etc. - I myself am sporting a TARDIS shaped tea cup on my desk as I write) and the hysteria with which actors starring as The Doctor (but in particular David Tennant) are greeted wherever they go. The show is frequently described as a significant part of British popular culture. In 2007 a reviewer from The Times even went so far as to say that "Doctor Who" was "quintessential to being British".⁷¹ In my thesis I will only deal with the character of the 10th Doctor, played by David Tennant.

Now let us return to Hamlet and the reason why this production seemed so closely entwined with the television series. First of all a number of parallels can be drawn between the

⁶⁸ Hartley, 2009: 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ *The Mind Robber: A Doctor Who Emporium and Erstwhile Boutique of Nonsense and Ramblings About Daleks, the TARDIS and Other Stuff*. (1 Feb. 2013). <http://www.themindrobber.co.uk/ratings.html>.

⁷¹ Jinman, Richard. "Why Are the British Obsessed With Doctor Who?". *GBMag*. (1 Feb. 2013). <http://greatbritishmag.co.uk/lifestyle/coffee-break/why-are-the-british-obsessed-with-doctor-who>.

characters of Hamlet in the play and The Doctor in the sci-fi series. Both have a twisted relationship to death. Hamlet is very much aware of his mortality and toys with the idea of suicide. In a way the same can be said of Time Lords (the alien race to which The Doctor belongs). When mortally wounded they have the ability to regenerate (possibly the fact that they have two hearts has something to do with is), mostly in the shape of a new body, thereby practically living on indefinitely (and allowing the makers of the programme to simply exchange one actor for another without any worries or fuss). But Time Lords could, if they so wished, chose not to regenerate and die. Taking the comparison one step further, I believe one can safely say their minds are alike in the sense that they are both ever teetering on the verge of insanity. Hamlet's tendencies to the unhinged are well known, but the Doctor is also not unfamiliar with outbreaks of apparent madness. As David Tennant portrays him, The Doctor likes to talk extremely rapidly, which often comes across as being no more than gibberish. But of course it is not gibberish. Time Lords have a much greater intelligence than we Earthlings, so sometimes he gets carried away in his thoughts, which us 'lesser' people cannot so easily follow. This often gives the impression he is talking more to himself than with the people around him, a trait also associated with Hamlet. Below are listed a couple of exemplary 'mad scenes', of Hamlet and of The Doctor:

Hamlet (IV.iii.16-25):

King. Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Ham. At supper.

King. At supper? Where?

Ham. Not where he eats, but where he is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'er at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service – two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.

Hamlet (IV.iv.52-55):

Ham. Farewell, dear mother.

King. Thy loving father, Hamlet.

Ham. My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh; so my mother.

"Doctor Who", thirteenth episode ("Journey's End") of season four (of the new series), 02:32-02:50. The Doctor has been mortally wounded and his body has gone into its regeneration modus. Normally this conduct causes The Doctor to transform into another form, but in this instance he stays the same. This is his explanation for that:

The Doctor

You see. I used the regeneration energy to heal myself, but as soon as that was done I didn't need to change. I didn't want to, why would I? Look at me! So, to stop the energy from going all the way I siphoned off the rest into a handy bio-matching receptacle, namely my hand. My hand there. My handy spare hand. Remember: Christmas Day, Sycorax [an alien life form whom The Doctor had to stop from invading the earth on Christmas Day in the episode "The Christmas Invasion"], lost my hand in a sword fight? That's my hand. What do you think?⁷²

In the same episode the minutes 14:02-16:43 are further representative of the similarities between The Doctor's and Hamlet's behaviours:

The Daleks have just thrown the TARDIS into the boiling hot core of the planet they inhabit in this episode, with Donna (The Doctor's companion throughout season four) still situated in inside it. Finding itself in mortal danger, the TARDIS starts to 'come alive' and telepathically gets Donna to touch the hand into which The Doctor had siphoned off the surplus regenerative energy from earlier. Once connection has been established between a living being and the cut-off hand full of Time Lord energy, the hand can grow itself another body, and suddenly Donna comes face to face with The Doctor's clone inside the TARDIS. He is an exact replica of The Doctor, but with some human features he took on from Donna (he has for one thing, only one heart). Donna, understandably, is completely baffled as to what has just happened, and when she tries to protest she is confronted with a tidal wave of some of The Doctors finest quick-fire wit:

The Doctor #2

Sssh! No one knows we're here. Gotta keep quiet. Silent running, like on submarines, when they can't even drop a spanner. Don't drop a spanner. [of the suit he has just put on:] I like blue. What d'you think?

Donna

You. Are. Bonkers.

⁷² *Doctor Who: Journey's End: The Script*. Writ. Russel T. Davis. Perf. David Tennant. *Doctor Who*. Seas. 4, ep. 13, 2008. (6 Feb. 2013). <http://www.thewriterstale.com/scr.html>. P. 2.

The Doctor #2
Why, what's wrong with blue?

Donna
Is that what Time Lords do? Lop a bit off, grow another one? You're like worms!

The Doctor #2
No, I'm unique. There's never been another like me, not ever. Cos all that regeneration energy went into the hand. Look at my hand! Love that hand! But then you touched it, wham! Instantaneous biological metacrisis, I grew, out of *you*. Still. Could be worse.

Donna
Oy! Watch it, space man!

The Doctor #2
Oy! Watch it, Earth girl!... Oh. I sound like you. I sound all sort of... rough.

Donna
Oy!

The Doctor #2
Oy!

Donna
Oy!!

The Doctor #2
Spanners! Sssh! ⁷³

Having the dialogue written like this on paper really does not do it justice. Like a play it really needs to be seen to be fully appreciated. But I believe it gives at least a vague idea of the comparison I am trying to make.

Let me point out further comparisons. Hamlet seems to be more in the know than all the other characters. He knows of his father's murder, he perceives his mother's treachery and his uncle's plotting. The Doctor knows almost everything there is to know about anything. Being a time traveller of around 950 years of age he naturally has a great advantage over others in this respect. Also both characters have intangible, vague relationships to their girlfriends (Ophelia, Rose, Martha). And while I'm in the zone of making comparisons between the two

⁷³ Ibid.: 16.

and their stories let me indulge in one more: both have arch enemies who have robbed them of their family and sense of security. Hamlet's ultimate enemy is his uncle Claudius who killed his father and on whom he seeks revenge. The Doctor's ultimate enemy are the Daleks, a race of emotionless, destructive aliens who destroyed The Doctor's home planet Gallifrey and his entire race, leaving The Doctor the last remaining Time Lord in existence.

I have already alluded to various similarities between the characters of the Doctor and Shakespeare's Hamlet, but the comparisons do not stop here. A fan of the sci-fi series watching this production of Hamlet will not only be constantly reminded of the show because of the same actor playing both leading roles, but also due to certain 'looks' and elements which can be found in both pieces of work. Andrew J. Hartley refers to several of the other actors from the Hamlet production who had also played smaller roles in past Doctor Who episodes. Such connections however may only be made by hard-core Doctor Who fans. For the less fanatical, obvious echoes from the show are Hamlet's 'look', his clothing and his footwear. Tennant's Doctor wore a tight fitting, dark suit with Converse-like sneakers to go with it (an image he coined for himself). Tennant's Hamlet appears wearing, perhaps not exactly this outfit, but one which is close enough to remind us of the other. We are reminded of The Doctor's handling of his electronic screwdriver after the "Mousetrap" has ended and Hamlet first talks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and then Polonius (1:45:00-1:45:50) playing around the while with his recorder. Such parallels may be by intention or coincidence. Indeed there is no telling whether they are there for all to see or simply in the minds of a few crazed fans (me included). But there is no possible doubt about there existing a link between the play and the TV show, even if it only existed in the public's power of association. This link was in fact intentionally strengthened when the filmed version of Tennant's "Hamlet" was aired on BBC1 on Boxing Day (26th December) of 2009, in between the two parts of Tennant's final performance as the Doctor ("The End of Time", which aired Christmas day and New Year's Day). This meant that for a large chunk of the British television viewing population there was a seamless transition from The Doctor to Hamlet and back to The Doctor again.

But as I have said before, it is unreasonable to expect audiences to shelve their sense of an actor's performative past during a production, especially if - as in the case of Tennant - much of the audience came specifically to see this particular actor *because of* those past performances.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Hartley, Andrew J. "Remembering the Actor: Embodied Shakespeare and the Individual in the Audience." *Shakespeare Bulletin*. Vol. 25, no .3, 2007. 41-51. Cited in: Hartley, 2009: 5.

Critics who continued to oppose the RSC's casting decisions for the 2009 stage production of "Hamlet", even after it was hailed as a genuine success, both by the audience and other, less conservative critics alike, belong to that breed of people who live in a dream world and regard Shakespeare as some kind of a holy shrine which only the pure at heart may enter; descendants of Mr. Granville-Barker no doubt (see chapter "Why Adapt"). But that is not what Shakespeare, or any art form for that matter, is about. It is there to be enjoyed by anyone who appreciates it and if that happens to be the masses then all the better. After all, let us not forget that in the 16th, 17th centuries Shakespeare did actually write for the masses and he, just like so many artists today, used every trick in the book to get his audience not just into the theatre, but also to sit down (or stay standing, depending on their position in the theatre), shut up and listen. For just because something is popular does not mean it is automatically of inferior quality or any less worthy of sophisticated appreciation. And facilitating more (and young!) people to this appreciation can only be met with approval and support. It is without a doubt that David Tennant's mere presence in the play ensured that hundreds, if not thousands, of young people ventured into the theatre who would otherwise have considered such an undertaking as dangerously dull. And it does not matter for what reason they were there; whether it was to catch a glimpse of their heartthrob in the living flesh, or to explore further talents of said heartthrob. What counts is that they were there and with Mr. Handsome appearing in almost every scene, there is a very good chance they came away with a positive attitude towards Shakespeare, which will, with a little luck, stay that way for many more plays to come in the future. Andrew J. Hartley, who had the good fortune to see such a performance live, has this to say of Tennant's fans and the effect they had on the rest of the audience:

When I saw the show, there were a disproportionately large number of young people in attendance, particularly teenaged girls. Tennant's appeal has evidently spread from the stereotypical adolescent male, sci-fi geek to something broader and sexier. Many of these audience members were so thrilled to see their hero in person that the theatre positively thrummed with delighted energy. Some would not have been out of place chasing Ringo through *A Hard Day's Night*, and their engagement with the actor as celebrity was perhaps — as some of the skeptics suggested — too totalizing for them to engage with the story and the role, but these fans were, I think, in the minority. What the fan audience's delight brought to the theater as a whole was a willingness to see the humor, to enjoy it, even where it shot between moments of darkness, introspection, and tragedy. This refusal to be overly weighted by the play's seriousness — particularly in the second half — intoxicated the audience and made for a more celebratory experience and a joyous connection with the protagonist. This in no way — at least from my

experience and the majority of people I spoke to — undermined the seriousness of the play. [...] It was a revelation, and one that I doubt I could have had without that crucial element in the audience, the same element that jammed the barriers at the stage door in the hundreds, autograph pens and programs in hand, breathlessly waiting for Tennant to appear.⁷⁵

On a more whimsical note: there is one more instance in which The Doctor meets Shakespeare. In this case, literally. In the “Doctor Who” episode “The Shakespeare Code” in the third season of the revived series the show takes its own comical stab at solving the many mysteries revolving around Britain’s most renowned playwright. The Doctor and his companion Martha Jones travel back in time to 1599 to meet Shakespeare in person. It is an episode full of humorous references to past and future (post 1599) Shakespeare work. It (mockingly) solves such questions as that of Shakespeare’s suspected bi-sexuality (in this episode Shakespeare fancies both Martha and The Doctor), who the Dark Lady was (Shakespeare is so taken with Martha Jones that she inspires him to make up a Sonnet right there on the spot and dedicates it to his “dark lady”⁷⁶), where Shakespeare’s inspiration for the witches in “Macbeth” came from, why the sequel to “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (“Love’s Labour’s Won”) was lost to the world to come and how come he decided to write “Hamlet”. The episode is also full to the brim with awe of the literary genius for whom The Doctor has great respect.

This particular episode, apart from being a thoroughly enjoyable forty-five minutes, has further qualities. I have already mentioned the importance with which both Shakespeare and “Doctor Who” stand rooted in the British culture, and therefore to have them united thus is patriotism at its highest.

In this chapter I have ended up almost solely talking about the “Hamlet” starring David Tennant when in fact so many Shakespeare adaptations make extremely interesting choices in their casting department. Almereyda’s “Hamlet” likewise cast an array of movie actors very popular among youngsters. For whatever reasons, this adaptation however never received the same amount of attention for its cast as, say, “Romeo + Juliet” or the RSC’s “Hamlet”. Other noteworthy casting decisions are not listed here because I have instead threaded them into other chapters, leaving this one a pure sanctuary of David Tennant fan dedication.

⁷⁵ Hartley, 2009: 6, 7.

⁷⁶ *Doctor Who: The Shakespeare Code*. Writ. Gareth Roberts. Perf. David Tennant. Seas. 3, ep. 2, 2007. 42:40.

10 Teaching Methods

What we must not lose sight of, is that Shakespeare was a playwright and is therefore first and foremost meant to be seen in performance and not read as a book. Too often is this fact neglected when it is taught to kids at school, where the plays are more often than not simply read out loud in class without the pupils once seeing them performed on stage. Understandably this is not necessarily such an easy feat to accomplish with a class of anything between twenty to thirty kids and possibly miles away from the nearest theatre that might or might not be playing Shakespeare at that exact time. This is where film adaptations come into the game. But seating a class of impatient fourteen-year-olds in front of a two hour adaptation (no matter how ‘good’ Shakespeare aficionados might find it) is still no guarantee for grabbing their attention. I realise I might well be painting a darker picture of the teaching profession than it deserves and I am sure no English teacher of today will tackle the, undoubtedly rather weighty, subject of Shakespeare without some skill and preparation. However, there is one approach which circumnavigates the cumbersome factor of having to come to grips with Elizabethan English in order to understand what is going on. The BBC’s four part mini-series *ShakespeaRe-Told* focuses just on the plot and leaves the Elizabethan language away completely: a drastic approach, but I believe for the purpose it serves, a legitimate one. One tends to forget that at the age of roughly eleven to nineteen one is way more interested in the story of a play than in its poetic language. The window of opportunity for getting a young person’s attention and approval of something as old and stuffy as Shakespeare is an excruciatingly small one. And for the vast majority of kids nowadays that window will probably only be coming round once in a lifetime. Therefore it is crucial, for their own benefit, to make as much use of that tiny window as possible, no matter by what means. This is why I feel such films as the *ShakespeaRe-Told* series count as genuine adaptations. But more on that subject in the chapter “Language”.

Author of the award winning fantasy trilogy “His Dark Materials”, Philip Pullman is an advocate of such approaches for educational purposes as Linda Hutcheon points out in her book “A Theory of Adaptation”. He calls it the “worthiness argument”⁷⁷, motivating children to read books or plays which they have seen as entertaining adaptations. Harry Potter is the perfect example for this phenomenon in today’s time. The young wizard with the lightning bolt scar, was certainly already a ‘pro-reading’ activist before the movie adaptations came out, but since their release the number of converts he has won for this campaign has only

⁷⁷ Pullman, Philip. “Let’s pretend”. *The Guardian*. Issue: 24 Nov. 2004. (10 Feb. 2013).
<http://www.guardian.co.uk>. Cited in: Hutcheon, 2006: 118.

increased. And the same can also be said of the film adaptations of the popular children's books, the "Narnia" series. Adaptations encourage kids to read, however Hutcheon argues that there is still more to it than that:

[...] this get-them-to-read motivation is what fuels an entire new education industry. The new film adaptation of C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is accompanied by elaborate teaching aids, from lesson plans to Web-based packages to material for after-school clubs. Today, hardly a book or a movie aimed at school-aged children does not have its own Web site, complete with advice and materials for teachers.⁷⁸

So this missionising is not only all done in the name of a good cause, but there is more money to be made off it too. But so be it, such things can go hand in hand and benefit from each other at the same time.

Precisely this kind of educational aspiration was ground for Channel 4's 2003 television film adaptation of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night". They set out to produce a Shakespeare adaptation which would find appreciation with today's younger generation and encourage further contact with his work. "[...] teachers and their students provide one of the largest audiences for adaptations."⁷⁹ Therefore great emphasis was put on creating an approach which would break with the notion that Shakespeare was something for "white, middle-classed, middle-aged audiences"⁸⁰.

Set in a 21st century multi-cultural London, each of the noble households belongs to a different ethnic group. This adaptation tackles issues of racial integration by not making them an issue. The intermingling of so many people of such varied ethnic and racial backgrounds reflects the reality of today in many parts of the UK and indeed around the world. Viola/Cesario and her brother Sebastian, who, in this interpretation, come to England as refugees of a military coup, are of Indo-Aryan origin. The household of the Duke of Orsino are all of African origins and Olivia's household is Caucasian. Not only does this multi-cultural casting reflect the society we live in today, it also makes for an interesting angle on the story. Well actually to be more precise, it emphasises the already existing angle which Shakespeare took in the first place, which is that the twins were washed up on a shore very foreign to them, far from their homeland. This means they surely would look and act

⁷⁸ Hutcheon, 2006: 118.

⁷⁹ Ibid.: 117.

⁸⁰ Gesua, Rachel (producer). *21st Century Bard – The Making of Twelfth Night: The Business of Film*. Prod. Rachel Gesua. Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2003. 11:46.

differently to the people of Illyria. The scriptwriter of Channel 4's adaptation puts his finger on why such an ethnically diverse cast better portrays what the play is about, and offers an explanation for the course of action the characters take.

Sebastian and Viola are shown in the way that they assimilate themselves to the society that they came to and also the values that they themselves bring to that society. And I think that's an interesting point for our multi-cultural society today.⁸¹

The twins have to accommodate to the ways of Illyria in order to survive, but it is the habits and values that they bring with them from their homeland that makes them so attractive to both Orsino and Olivia. Some of the lines spoken between Viola and her twin brother and Antonio are even translated into Hindi-Elizabethan as a nice added touch of truly immersing the story into the time and place it has been adapted to.

The DVD is now available at the Channel 4 store, in the educational section, and it comes with an accompanying DVD titled "21st-Century Bard: The Making of Twelfth Night", that consists of four short 'makings of' that explain the workings of the different production departments, featuring interviews with the filmmakers and actors, and explaining the process of adapting a play from paper to the screen. All these featurettes are intended specifically for use in the English classroom and film studies, and are built up in a simple and easy-to-understand manner. Moreover Channel 4 provides a sixty-five page Word document full of helpful blow by blow educational bonus material concerning such topics as: curriculum relevance, synopsis, reading, staging and screening distinctives, notes on building film grammar, cutting text and editing film, sound, Feste and his songs, dramatic cruxes, study of comedy, comparing film versions, and a detailed in depth examination of one particular scene. This list is also featured, under the heading "Programme Notes", on Channel 4's website for the production and its documentary.

Channel 4 was very aware of the age group it was catering for and made quite some effort to appeal to their taste. Nitin Sawhney was hired to write the musical score, and, as I mentioned in the introduction, for me this was a decisive factor for recognising its appeal when I watched the film aged about eighteen. Nitin Sawhney, himself a British-Indian, has become one of Britain's leading musical artists of today. As a musician, producer and composer he

⁸¹ Bannerman, Andrew (screenwriter). *21st Century Bard – The Making of Twelfth Night: The Business of Film*. 2003. 6:20.

covers a wide-range of musical genres and is always striving to fuse together disparate musical types. He has received numerous awards in the world of international music for his work. On his website he is described as being:

“[...] arguably the busiest, most versatile and most sought after composer and producer around. Now signed to Universal Publishing, he has made 9 studio albums, for which he has been nominated for a Mercury Music prize, won a MOBO [“Music of Black Origin” award], 2 BBC Radio 3 awards and a Southbank show award, amongst 15 others. He has scored over 40 films for cinema and television, with an Ivor Novello nomination [award for honouring excellence in music writing, presented by the BASCA, the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors] for best score leading to his recent much acclaimed Orchestral music to the BAFTA nominated BBC series “The Human Planet”, Mira Nair’s recent film “The Namesake”, two film scores for live performance by the London Symphony Orchestra and a biopic about Jean Charles De Menezes.”⁸²

And the list goes on. He was already a well established DJ before he started exploring other forms of music-making, and his nine studio albums all received critical acclaim from critics and club-goers alike. So, undoubtedly, Sawhney and his music were and remain popular among youngsters today, and the incorporating of his compositions into this adaptation adds appeal for the target audience.

Feste, the Jester of the play, becomes more of a pop star in this rendition. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew know his music well. They take great joy in playing his records and in having the pleasure of listening to and also playing with the man himself in their den. The actor who plays Feste, Zubin Varla, is also of Indian origin and seems, in this film, to mirror all that Nitin Sawhney stands for.

In this interpretation, music (beside love) is the one element which connects all the different cultures. Therefore the soundtrack consists of an array of music rooted in Indian, Western and African styles, combining all the cultural groups.

The production team made sure it had a good mix of actors experienced in stage and film, who could provide some points of recognition for the younger generation. Parminder Nagra, well known for her performance in Gurinder Chadha’s extremely hip movie “Bend It Like Beckham” (2002), takes on the role of Viola/Cesario. Chiwetel Ejiofor, who plays Orsino, is known in the UK for his roles in TV series and such films as “Dirty, Pretty Things” (2002) alongside Audrey Tautou. Michael Maloney, David Troughton and Claire Price are

⁸² Nitin Sawhney. (2 Feb. 2013). <http://www.nitinsawhney.com/nitinsawhney/Home.html>.

Shakespearean stage actors, as well as on-screen performers. Naturally having a famous cast does not ipso facto teach an audience to appreciate Shakespeare, but as I observed in the chapter on casting, for the inexperienced viewer it is helpful to see a familiar face on the screen.

The other adaptations I discuss in this thesis all have certain teaching traits, but these are more of a pleasant side-effect than explicitly placed there from the start. Being appealing to a young audience is in itself sufficient ground for a sophisticated work to call itself educational, thus overcoming a great initial hurdle and teaching us that Shakespeare need not be old and stuffy.

11 Language

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation or quick change?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds strange?
Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed?
O, know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:
For as the Sun is daily new and old,
So is my love still telling what is told.

(Sonnet 76)

It remains a heated debate whether an adaptation of a Shakespeare play which does not use his original language can still be considered Shakespeare. Well I feel one can just as well ask whether a translation of a Shakespeare play into another language remains Shakespeare. What exactly is it that I see when sitting in a performance of “Viel Lärm Um Nichts” at the Burgtheater in Vienna? Certainly not Shakespeare; he did not write plays in German, right? I have done my research: he did not.

Cynics will say if one is only interested in the stories of Shakespeare plays, then one really is not interested in Shakespeare at all, because most of the time they are not his original stories. Yes, this is true. However it was Shakespeare’s take on these stories which has made it through the ages. Anyone who watches a ‘Romeo and Juliet-like’ story is going to recognise it as a take on William Shakespeare’s version.

We retell – and show again and interact anew with – stories over and over; in the process, they change with each repetition, and yet they are recognizably the same. What they are not is necessarily inferior or second-rate – or they would not have survived. Temporal precedence does not mean anything more than temporal priority. Sometimes we are willing to accept this fact, such as when it is Shakespeare who adapts Arthur Brooke’s versification of Matteo Bandello’s adaptation of Luigi da Porto’s version of Masuccio Salernitano’s story of two very young, star-crossed Italian lovers (who changed names and place of birth along the way). That awkwardly long lineage points not only to the instability of narrative identity but also to the simple but significant fact that there are precious few stories around that have not been “lovingly ripped

off” from others. In the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception.⁸³

The reason why translations into German are considered legitimate is a) because they are old (I am referring to the commonly used 19th century German translation by Schlegel and Tieck). It seems time provides things with a seal of authenticity. However some brave souls have dared to suggest that just because the Schlegel-Tieck translation has been used up until now, it does not mean there is no room for improvement. But while translations by Thomas Brasch, Roland Schimmelpfennig or Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel (et al.) are partly considered interesting, they generally still run up against a wall of criticism by Shakespeare conservatives.

And of course the other reason German translations are considered valid is b) German speakers would not be able to understand Shakespeare’s plays. “Learn English” I hear you say. Quite, I could not agree more. Unfortunately this is easier said than done and therefore, for the time being, the problem of language remains. Now I believe one can just as easily argue that today’s young generation does not understand Elizabethan English. Sure, young generations in the past would have found it equally baffling, but perhaps they were more willing to (or had no choice but to) put in the extra time and effort required to make sense of 16th century poetical banter. Let us be honest: Elizabethan English is very much like a foreign language to the English speaker of today. It is a language that needs to be studied before it can be understood. But, not surprisingly, not everyone is going to voluntarily sign up for that extra class in Shakespeare English. Should these kids (even though there are not only children who fall into this category) go through life void of the joys of Shakespeare? Well, that would be a possibility, but a crying shame as well. Here is an idea: let us translate Shakespeare’s words into a form of English that everyone can understand today. That is just what the maker of the BBC TV series *ShakespeaRe-Told* did. In 2005 they broadcast four movie adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, the clue being that they were retold in a setting and in a language that was accessible for everyone. Needless to say, this move was not greeted by all with open arms. Former BBC Director-General Alasdair Milne was quoted as saying:

I think it’s preposterous and perverse and foolish to reject the greatest dramatist that has ever lived and have him rewritten. Some clown was quoted as saying the other day he was making Shakespeare more accessible. He’s

⁸³ Hutcheon, 2006: 177.

been accessible, for Christ's sake for 400 years and they don't need to do that⁸⁴.

If I may point out, it is also no new feat to create a Shakespeare adaptation which strives to fall so far from the trunk. At the beginning of the 20th century silent Shakespeare movies were quite popular (1899 "King John", 1910 "The Merchant of Venice" and the perhaps slightly better known "Hamlet" from 1920 starring, rather unusually, the Danish actress Asta Nielsen as Hamlet to name but a few⁸⁵) and after 1923 radio adaptations were regulars on the wireless in the UK. In the one case the audience had to make do without pictures to back the story up; and in the other case the audience was denied Shakespeare's text in its entirety. Sure they had the odd caption, but let us be honest, a silent movie adaptation of Shakespeare really only tells its story through pictures and not words which traditionally is what this great playwright is all about.

The BBC adopted four of his plays and marketed them under the name of ShakespeaRe-Told. "Macbeth" is set in an exclusive star-chef restaurant. Duncan is a renowned TV chef who now sits back to relax and reap the benefits of his good name as the manager of the establishment, while Macbeth, who has taken over the position of head-chef, does all the work. The transition from a house of kings to a house of kitchen-chefs works very well since a hierarchical structure is kept firmly intact, from manager, over head-chef and a string of sub-chefs to the apprentice, dishwasher and cleaning staff. "The Taming of the Shrew" may well be considered one of Shakespeare's most difficult and out-of-date plays for today's audience. The story of the attempt to break a strong woman's will so that she conform to the ideals of a perfect wife and bend herself to the will of her husband, is not seen gladly in today's feminist society. The result of this adaptation is all the more impressive for that. Kate, a striving, ambitious politician in Britain's government is forced into thinking about marriage for the benefit of her image in high ranking politics. "Much Ado About Nothing" takes place in a local British television news studio. It is a small studio with a friendly atmosphere, all the employees are like family to one another or in fact truly related. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is relocated to a family retreat village. This adaptation is noticeably different in that it makes no attempt to excuse the obvious magical elements. It is left intact as a fairytale, and the audience may either take it or leave it.

⁸⁴ Milne, Alasdair. "Knives Are Out for the BBC Bosses: Former Director-General Alasdair Milne Gives Raymond Snoddy His Frank Opinion of the Men Who Have Been Running the Corporation Over the Years". *The Independent*. Issue: 9 Jan. 2006. (7 Feb. 2013).
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/knives-are-out-for-the-bbc-bosses-522177.html>.

⁸⁵ Buchanan, 2004.

Just how ceaseless and open-ended are these processes of “textual development and mutation?” If a “work” can undergo an almost infinite process of textual transformation, how can we be sure it's the same “work”? At what point does textual variance produce not a mutation, but a new text? When dealing with “appropriations” of Shakespeare, since they are also the work of other writers, are we still dealing with Shakespeare? Can we keep on “dressing old words new” and simultaneously regarding them as the same old words?⁸⁶

This is a question everyone will have to have to answer for themselves. There is no right or wrong. There is also no good or bad: but let us, for the sake of argument, say that there is. In that case I believe this piece of work to be good. To maximise the pleasure of watching such a drastically altered adaptation, the creators went to great lengths to reward those audience members with an already existing grasp of Shakespeare's original work. True to its form, this palimpsest in fact lets the original work shine through quite clearly. The cunningness of this modern language adaptation is that it tries literally to translate the Shakespearean language into modern day English. I mean *literally* literally. If one is familiar with the play one will find oneself constantly chuckling over the clever translation from 16th to 20th century English. Graham Holderness uses the moulding of metal as a nice metaphor to describe the many changes a Shakespeare play can undergo while still remaining Shakespeare:

If *Hamlet* is like a metal, then the changes it undergoes entail no fundamental chemical change and are produced by an interaction of internal properties and external forces. Iron hammered into rods, or copper into wire, remain unmistakably, elementally, iron and copper. *Hamlet*, hammered, squeezed, bent, wire-drawn — re-edited, interpreted, performed, adapted, travestied, re-written — remains elementally *Hamlet*.⁸⁷

ShakespeaRe-Told has undergone just such a process. It is paraphrased Shakespeare, but an example of paraphrasing at its best, sticking a lot closer to the original script than one might assume. Throughout the film it is possible to read along in the play and marvel at the ‘new’ Shakespeare spoken on the screen. The same metaphors and symbology are used, or at least their 21st century equivalents. Below I have listed a few examples, and a few more for good measure. Please bear with me. Each comparison is cannier than its predecessor. I have stuck to the quoting style I have hitherto applied using the format for each text which is customary

⁸⁶ Holderness, 2005: 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid.: 9.

in its original form: the common play form for Shakespeare and script form for ShakespeaRe-Told.

Shakespeare (I.i.107-109):

Beat. I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick: nobody marks you.

Bene. What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

ShakespeaRe-Told (13:00):

Beatrice
I'm amazed you're still talking, Benedick,
nobody's listening to you.

Benedick
Beatrice, you're still here!

Time passes, tricks have been played and matches are made. Benedick, upon hearing that Beatrice is supposedly hopelessly in love with him:

Shakespeare (II.iii.215-235):

Bene. [...] Love me? Why, it must be requited. [...] I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me because I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour? No, the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.

ShakespeaRe-Told (38:55):

Benedick
Well I suppose I'll just have to love her back.
Yeah, there'll be some fun at my expense of course, but a man's allowed to change his mind as he matures. Love's just one of those things a man grows into, like jazz and olives and I'm not going to let a few sarcastic remarks change the way I feel. After all, the world must be peopled. When I said I'd die a bachelor, I just didn't realise I'd live this long.

The happy day has arrived for Claudio and Hero's wedding. Tricks have once again been played, but this time of the damaging sort. Claudio believes his bride to be unfaithful and proclaims:

Shakespeare (IV.i.30,31):

Claud. There, Leonato, take her back again. Give not this rotten orange to a friend.

ShakespeaRe-Told (1:10:20):

Claude
I don't want her. She's rotten goods.

Shakespeare (IV.i.33):

Claud. Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
[...] (IV.i.40,41):
She knows the heat of a luxurious bed:
Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.

ShakespeaRe-Told:

Claude
Look at her, the blushing bride all innocent.
You'd never guess from that face what a dishonest little tart she really is.

The wedding is off and catastrophe has ensued. Beatrice and Benedick find themselves alone together for the first time since they have awoken feelings for each other.

Shakespeare (IV.i.255-289):

Bene. Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?
Beat. Yea, and I will weep a while longer.
Bene. I will not desire that.
Beat. You have no reason, I do it freely.
[...]
Bene. I do love nothing in the world as well as you – is not that strange?
Beat. As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you, but believe me not; and yet I lie not; I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing.
[...]
Beat. Why then, God forgive me!
Bene. What offence, sweet Beatrice?
Beat. You have stayed me in a happy hour, I was about to protest I loved you.
Bene. And do it with all thy heart.
Beat. I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest.
Bene. Come, bid me do anything for thee.
Beat. Kill Claudio!
Bene. Ha, not for the wide world!
[...]

Beat. O God that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place.

ShakespeaRe-Told (1:12:57):

Benedick

You're crying.

Beatrice

Yes, and I intend to cry a little longer.

Benedick

I hate to see you cry.

Beatrice

Well, don't worry. It's not your fault. Not this time anyway.

Benedick

You know, there's nothing in this world I love as much as you. Isn't that strange?

Beatrice

Almost as strange as if I were to say I loved you.
[...]

Beatrice

I'm sorry Benedick.

Benedick

What are you sorry for Beatrice?

Beatrice

You've caught me at a very unhappy time. I was about to say I loved you too...

Benedick

Well, say it then.

Beatrice

I love you so much I can hardly breathe.

Benedick

Beatrice, I'd do anything for you. Anything you ask, anything.

Beatrice

Kill Claude!

Benedick

Except for that maybe.
[...]

Beatrice
I swear Ben, if I were a man I would eat his heart.

I believe these examples show well enough how closely the script to ShakespeaRe-Told's version stuck to the original while creating a whole new text.

And so we find ourselves back at the beginning, ShakespeaRe-Told closing the three hundred and sixty degrees to the full circle. This example of an adaptation brought to its extreme also poses as a palimpsest of the highest degree.

[...], it is the very endurance and survival of the source text that enables the ongoing process of juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operations of adaptation, and the ongoing experiences of pleasure for the reader or spectator in tracing the intertextual relationships. It is this inherent sense of play, produced in part by the activation of our informed sense of similarity and difference between the texts being invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise, that for me lies at the heart of the experience of adaptation and appropriation.⁸⁸

11.1 Decoding Shakespeare's language

ShakespeaRe-Told's approach is certainly a drastic one in the quest to make Shakespeare understandable for today's generation and not everyone will want to, or indeed should, tread the least challenging road to success. Interesting and well done as the ShakespeaRe-Told series is, it can never claim to be as close to the real thing as, well, as the real thing. Most Shakespeare adaptations however, which indeed see themselves as direct adaptations and not merely as films based on or inspired by his plays, do keep the original text. Luhrmann made the decision to keep Shakespeare's language, albeit it rather drastically cut and with the odd shifting and reorienting of dialogue fragments to suit his needs, or to be more precise, the needs of the film. In fact unusually this became one of his primary marketing gimmicks, portraying Elizabethan language as some kind of urban gang slang. For certainly there are ways of keeping to the original language and yet still ensuring that an audience hitherto unfamiliar with its poetic style will be able to follow the storyline and furthermore genuinely

⁸⁸ Sander, 2006: 25.

to understand what is being said. The prologue to his “Romeo + Juliet” offers us a nice example of such an approach.

11.1.1 The Prologue in “Romeo + Juliet”

The opening sequence is used to show the power of media in the world of Luhrmann’s “Romeo + Juliet”, and indeed of our world today, but furthermore it is used to ease us into the language gently, or give the audience “a chance to acclimatise” as Baz Luhrmann puts it in his commentary on the DVD. The prologue is spoken twice, once with the written word accompanying the spoken; and then in conclusion the written word is repeated at high speed. It is as if Luhrmann were taking us by the hand and leading us step by step through each line and its meaning. Let me now do the same here for sake of clarification:

Two households both alike in dignity
(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene)

Well that is an easy one to start out with. We are shown the two households’ family trees, the Capulets and the Montagues, and it is established that the movie takes place in Verona Beach.

From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

Snapshots of armoured police jumping out of helicopters, street rows, clashes between the police and civilians. And always brief glimpses of newspaper headlines, spelling out what is being said.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life,

Here the Montague and Capulet parents are shown, all of them looking grim and hateful like convincing foes should. Only the first take of the prologue is spoken in its entirety (and even this is cut slightly leaving out the last two lines), all of the repeats thereof end here. For completion’s sake however let me copy out the rest of the prologue as shown in the adaptation:

Whose misadventur’d piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents’ strife.

The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage.

Luhrmann also goes to great lengths to ensure we know exactly who's who from the very beginning, and he does not shy away from being blatantly obvious about it. He literally labels every character at their first appearance as a form of opening credits (with the exception of the main characters, Romeo and Juliet, who will probably never need an introduction), freezing the picture briefly on their faces: "Fulgencio Capulet, Juliet's father", "Gloria Capulet, Juliet's mother", etc. (the first names are made up, but I think we can let that one pass).

Bringing the story up to date makes it more accessible for today's audience. Not just because they are more familiar with that kind of setting, but also because it helps the decoding of the language. At the same time the pictures Luhrmann has created are so full of context that even without dialogue they could stand on their own and the viewer would still be able to follow the story. A particularly good example for this is the petrol station scene at the beginning of the movie (or 'gas station' as it is called in the movie to suit its American setting). See the chapter "The Language of Pictures".

Taking Shakespearean metaphors and making their lines meaningful to an audience of today is an important step in ensuring you do not lose your audience in every second scene. Shakespeare was king of metaphors and similes, and every one of his plays is bursting at the seams with them. In the fourth scene of act one Mercutio talks of Queen Mab, the midwife of the fairies:

O then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomi
Over men's noses as they lie asleep.
(I.iv.53-58)

In the original play it probably merely stood as a metaphor for lovers' (sexual) dreams. Further along in his monologue Mercutio explains Queen Mab "[...] gallops night by night through lover's brains, and then they dream of love" (I.iv.70,71). However for an audiences of the 20th and 21st centuries (we must not forget that "Romeo + Juliet" is still a product of the past century), Mercutio could just as well be describing the effects of some form of drug (and

by the sound of his description, is already heavily under its influence himself). And indeed that is exactly what this sequence is about in Luhrmann's version: Romeo and his friends get high on ecstasy before crashing the Capulet's party. This also gives way to a perfect explanation why the Capulet's party is so off the wall: either because Romeo's perception has been so strongly modified by the drug, or indeed because everyone else at the party is likewise tripping on MDMA (the intoxicating substance methylene dioxy methyl amphetamine commonly known as ecstasy).

And just in case it has not already been made perfectly clear by Mercutio's explicit monologue what this little white pill is, Romeo drives the point home by actually speaking it out and saying "Thy drugs are quick" (V.iii.120). Yes, this line is actually not meant to make an appearance until the final act just before Romeo drinks the poison bought from the apothecary ("[...] O true apothecary, Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die." [V.iii.119,120]), but let us not be too pedantic about it.

11.1.2 Titus

In Taymor's "Titus" it is the initial lack of Shakespeare's language (or any language for that matter) which later on helps us to understand, or at the very least accept it. A full six minutes pass before the first words are spoken. This time is filled with impressive and meaningful imagery, choreographed movement, historic architecture and a strong visual introduction to some of the main characters: Titus himself, his son Lucius and, of lesser importance, Lucius junior. She creates a cushion for herself and her cause, a film spoken in a long gone language, hard to understand and so full of subtle innuendos, double meanings and hidden symbolism that some scholars dedicate their entire life's work to deciphering its meaning. This cushion consists of six minutes, during which time she succeeds in so fully capturing her audience that, come the first speech, it is already so far enthralled that it will now listen and do its best to make sense of just about anything that is thrown at it.

As I have already hinted in the chapter "Soliloquies", when referring to David Tennant's beautiful eloquent delivery, most of the time it comes down to the actor's ability to breathe meaning into Shakespeare's lines. It is an ability shared by many accomplished men and women of the trade around the world and yet still so many adaptations fail to bring these to the screen. This is when it becomes necessary to help the understanding along with filmic

devices such as used by Taylor and Luhrmann or to apply a total remodelling as in the ShakespeaRe-Told series.

12 The Language of Pictures

To further a better understanding, all of the filmmakers these productions have included a fair bit of telling imagery. All imagery is telling of something of course, but in some cases more can be interpreted into it or perceived subconsciously. The word ‘symbolism’ springs to mind, but I shy away from using this term as it brings so much unwanted baggage with it. Instead I will speak of the ‘language of pictures’, because, as with spoken language, more is often implied than first meets the eye. However I will not be able to completely avoid the word ‘symbol’. What I am referring to here is, in a way, another form of decoding the spoken language and story. For instance, Juliet is a herald of goodness and therefore appears at her daddy’s ball dressed as an angel. Romeo, her knight in shining armour who proceeds to rescue her from this dull life she is living, literally appears as a knight in shining armour. These are simple ‘signposts’, an age old trick of the trade in film and theatre alike; they remain unobtrusive and yet effective.

Our society is programmed to recognise and associate symbols with specific situations, characters, attitudes and behaviours. We see a symbol and quite automatically make the link to its designated association; be it a situation, an object, a reaction, a smell, etc. Sometimes one symbol can have multiple associations. Precisely this occurrence can also have its use. Double meanings are a found feast for many an artistic creator (movie maker, etc.). Of course this is no new realisation I have stumbled across; this phenomenon is an established tool used throughout our society in literature, advertisement and films alike.

Let me kick-start this topic off with “Romeo + Juliet”. Through his imagery Luhrmann establishes a strong affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church, bordering on religious extremism. A giant figure of Christ with outstretched arms looms over the city of Verona Beach; every room, personalised weapon, piece of jewellery, car and street corner is adorned with either a cross, an image of the Virgin Mary, of Christ, of angels or of them all together, climaxing in the final scene where Romeo and Juliet complete the deadly deed in a church full to bursting point with hundreds of neon crosses of all shapes and sizes. All of this religious symbolism becomes a main visual focus in the film (the “+” in the title “Romeo + Juliet” is even formed to the shape of a cross); and is used not to underline the community’s religious belief but to create the strict structure of an established institution within which extremism can take its course and be recognised as a serious power not to be meddled with.

12.1 Water's Wildy Ways

Juliet's element is water. She is the calm, quiet pool in a hysteric world gone mad. Her mother spins around like a tornado, her father explodes like a volcano. Everything around her is loud, fast moving and grotesque. We are first introduced to Juliet during the last minute preparations for her daddy's ball that evening. The film is sped up slightly to emphasis the chaos that is otherwise the Capulet household. Juliet's Mother, soon joined by her nurse, is desperately trying to find Juliet before the guests arrive to inform her about her intended coupling to the handsome, young and successful Paris. After one final cry of "Julieeeeeet!" from her nurse, we finally see a head shot of the wanted person. She is completely emerged in water and therefore no sound can disturb her quiet contemplation; her long hair elegantly swirling around her, her eyes are open and looking inquisitive. This shot lasts only a few seconds before she jerks her head out of the water and we see she had been taking a bath. One gets the impression she might do this regularly to escape, at least for a few seconds, the world around her.

The next instances where Juliet's path crosses water are also both in connection with her love to be, Romeo, both of them very memorable scenes. The one is Romeo and Juliet's first encounter, the second is their second encounter. After Romeo's first dizzying impressions of the Capulet's ball (high on ecstasy) become too much for him, he dowses his head in a sink full of water in the men's room (this is filmed from under water looking up into his face, mirroring Juliet's entry into the film from under her bathwater). This dunk is surely not a classy thing to do, but it is effective: immediately the raging insanity falls away and the first chords of the famous Romeo and Juliet theme song are heard. This body of calming water leads us straight to another, the aquarium. In the Capulet's lavishly decorated mansion the men's and ladies' rooms are separated from one another by a huge glass aquarium. Seemingly the water and the fish within it have a calming effect on Romeo who is drawn to it and spends some moments staring into it, watching the fish swim by. He is not the only one fascinated by the quiet, peacefulness of the fish and it is through this wall of water that Romeo and Juliet see each other for the first time.

This is a fragmenting world of conspicuous wealth, kitsch consumption, urban dereliction, ubiquitous violence and nostalgia: the beach is an *ubi sunt* [sic] location, with its abandoned Sycamore Grove bandstand staring out to sea, its tawdry ferris wheel [sic], its carnival-colony of down-and-out boardwalk entertainers. 'The boys' own the streets and speak Shakespeare like some crazy gang-rap; Juliet is the film's still centre: her precise 'I'll look to like, if looking liking move' exasperates her pill-popping *Dallas* socialite mother

who, on speeded-up film, is whipped into her Cleopatra costume like a cartoon character. Juliet is such a square! But she's also sane. Her element is water (against the conflagration on the streets), and Romeo surfaces from his Ecstasy trip – 'Queen Mab' here is slang for class-A drugs – to fall in love with her through a wall of floating angelfish.⁸⁹

They become a little better acquainted at the ball and so taken is our young hero by the beautiful girl that he comes back to find her later that night. The famous balcony scene ensues: only this scene, like so many, does not follow the conventional story-telling thread. There is a balcony all right, and it leads to Juliet's bedroom too, but even though Romeo makes a start to climb up the ever-handly trellis under the balcony, the lovey-dovey scene itself takes place in the pool below. She comes out into the garden to reflect wherefore Romeo is Romeo, and is lingering by the pool when the boy in question surprises her from behind and they both fall into the water. The rest of the scene is carried out inside the pool.

There is one more significant scene which circles around water and that is Tybalt's death. Juliet of course does not appear in this scene, but I feel it is not without reason that her personal element is linked here to her cousin's death, because this tragic event affects her life so strongly. A few hours ago her life had been going so well and suddenly her newly married husband shoots and kills her beloved cousin, this demanding Romeo's banishment from Verona Beach and her immediate marriage to Paris which in turn drives her to seek the advice of Friar Laurence which results in her and Romeo's death. End of story. So, it really is the turning point of the tale and the blow which seals the young lovers' fate.

Tybalt's death follows immediately on Mercutio's (for an exact recounting of that scene see the chapter on Space). Romeo shoots him in the chest three times and he falls backwards into the fountain outside the city monument. Tybalt's death and simultaneously the act of his body hitting the water (his arms spread out from his body, mirroring the giant Christ figure towering above him) have a sobering effect on the vengeance-driven Romeo. Directly upon this, the madness of the ever increasing heat wave (both meteorological and emotional) is broken by the long awaited rainfall; it is a relief after the stormy dry heat. It is still raining when a solution to Romeo's mounting problems is found by the friar, and Romeo leaves to take his farewell from his love before his departure to Mantua.

More obvious is Ophelia's linkage to water in "Hamlet", drowning being her method of choice for suicide. Almereyda makes strong use of this in his "Hamlet" (but then again, in the

⁸⁹ Rutter, 2007: 262.

RSC's rendition, there is not a single prior association between Ophelia and any body of water). However, what Almereyda does is not wait until the end (Ophelia's end I mean) to introduce Ophelia to water, instead he interweaves the water theme in connection with Ophelia throughout the movie. And while the water theme follows her wherever she goes, so does the thought of suicide.

The earliest we see her in connection with water is while she is waiting for Hamlet at the before agreed on meeting place: the fountain outside the Denmark Corporation skyscraper. She does not necessarily have suicide on her mind yet, but this fountain will later become the site she chooses for it. The thought probably first enters her mind when her babbling father drags her along to a private consultation with the king and queen at the corporation's private swimming pool, where he proceeds to show and read out parts of the love letter Hamlet had written her. Unlike in the play, she had not given her father the letter willingly, and even now she still makes a vain attempt at trying to get it back from him. However there is no arguing with her daddy when he is on one of his rants, so she quickly gives in and instead bemuses herself by balancing along the edge of the pool. There she fantasises about jumping into the pool, either out of a desire to end her life, or simply to get away from her father's incessant rambling.

The next time we see Ophelia she is being wired up by her father with the intention of sending her to Hamlet to return his gifts to her and so be able to follow his reaction. Inserted between this scene and the next, is another water-shot, (a few seconds show a small man-made waterfall) keeping Ophelia's water theme and her desire to end it all upright.

And then, as it should be, she finally does go through with it and is found drowned in the fountain outside Hotel Elsinore where at the beginning of the film she was initially disappointed by Hamlet's non-appearance for their date.

12.2 Customised Costumes

Costume balls are always a good opportunity to dress each character in a costume representative of their true, and often hidden, identity. This is easily done by dressing them to look like famous personalities from popular culture and history, known for their distinctive characteristics. Immediately we associate the characters in the movie with those they are dressed as.

Luhrmann works with strong symbology and stereotypes. This is another method to ensure that even complete Shakespeare novices will be able to follow the storyline. The costumes at the Capulet's masked ball (which becomes a fancy dress in this version) could not be more meaningful. Romeo appears as a knight dressed in shimmering armour to rescue his sweet angel, Juliet, dressed in pure, innocent white. Patricia Tatspaugh points out that "Luhrmann is preoccupied with creating a distinctive aura for Romeo and Juliet. Costuming Romeo as a medieval knight and Juliet as an angel for Capulet's fancy-dress extravaganza, Luhrmann offers a bold visual statement."⁹⁰ This is in fact how the bard himself has the lovers describe each other in the play. Juliet calls Romeo 'knight' after she hears of Tybalt's death by her husband's hand. She speaks to her nurse: "O find him, give this ring to my true knight / And bid him come and take his last farewell." (III.iii.142,143). And earlier in the play, during the balcony scene, he refers to her as an 'angel': "O speak again bright angel" (II.ii.26). Luhrmann presents to us mum and dad Capulet wielding their power as Caesar and Cleopatra; Tybalt and his fellow Capulet boys are dressed as the devil and two death figures, paving the way for Tybalt's later murder of Mercutio; even Paris' astronaut suit can be seen as a symbol for the all-American-hero, for he is essentially a good guy, but too conform to the world she is trying to escape.

We find similar associations at the masked ball/ fancy dress party at Leonard's house in "Much Ado About Nothing". Claude and Benedick come dressed as knights in shining armour ("two [costumes] for the price of one"⁹¹) as indeed that is what they are for their ladies at least at some point in the movie (as Claude falls out of favour with Hero in this rendition and Benedick classically does not find approval with Beatrice until later); Hero pulls off a convincing Marilyn Monroe look-alike (a sex symbol, true, but a very naive one); Beatrice makes an entrance as Elisabeth I, the virgin Queen, seen as a cold-hearted woman because she abstained from men's company; we have another Caesar, Leonard's dress; Peter comes as John Lennon, all-time hippy and messenger of love and peace; and finally Don opts for a sad clown look to best portray his feelings.

I do not believe that some audience members may not otherwise figure out for themselves each character's true self, but there is no harm done by underlining this and it adds a comical layer of association, a nice little 'aha, I get it' effect.

⁹⁰ Tatspaugh, Patricia. "The Tragedies of Love on Film". Ed. Russel Jackson. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007. 141-164. P. 148.

⁹¹ *Much Ado About Nothing: ShakespeaRe-Told*. Dir. Brian Percival. Writ. David Nicholls. BBC, 2005. 19:38.

12.3 Transparent Tempers

These are extremely easy methods for getting the message across and certainly none of them original, but they are no less effective for all that. And when, in those cases where the adaptations use the original Elizabethan language, the audience is already confronted with so much novelty, that such simple lifelines can go a long way toward ensuring its ability to stay with it and not get lost in the complexity which is Shakespeare.

A character's moods or personality can effortlessly be conveyed to today's audience by putting them in the right setting. With a glimpse we know all we need to know, or at least the back-story, of that character. Tybalt's initial appearance in "Romeo + Juliet" is very telling of the kind of person he is. Of course first the scene has to be set right for his entrance and that is done in the petrol station scene at the beginning of the movie. This entire scene indulges in mimicry of an Italian Western and therefore, how else could it be, Tybalt first enters the story à la the baddy from just such a film. This puts his character into an unmistakable context for us.

But first let me rewind just a minute or two as the petrol station scene actually starts with the Montague boys on their way there. We have just seen the crazy collage that is the prologue and the full title of the film ("William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet") plastered across the screen. This gives way to some hip, gangster rap music with a lot of drums and a close up of three of the Montagues seen from behind riding in an open Cadillac. In the play Gregory and Sampson are of the Capulet family, Luhrmann however put them in the house of Montague to give Romeo a few more mates to hang out with. One of them (Gregory Montague) has the name 'Montague' and their family's emblem tattooed on the back of his bald head. All of them are sporting fancy Hawaiian t-shirts and sunglasses: these guys are obviously 'cool' and they know it. Gregory turns around and calls after a passing car: "A dog of the house of Capulet moves me" (I.i.7). He and his mates find this exclamation hilarious and they 'high five' each other. This line was originally intended to be spoken by a Capulet; here the two households' names were simply exchanged for one another. What follows is a potpourri of Shakespeare lines, not all of them in fact taken from "Romeo and Juliet". Encouraged by Gregory's behaviour, Sampson now stands up in the driving car and shouts out (to no one in particular): "Pedlar's excrement!" ("The Winter's Tale" [IV.iv.713,714]). Gregory follows this up with: "King Urinal! Go rot!" ("The Merry Wives of Windsor" [II.iii.31]). The scene freezes briefly and these characters are also introduced by name as "The Montague boys" and at the same moment the song we're hearing played on their radio sings:

“the boys, the boys”. The scene unfreezes and with a screech the car pulls up at the petrol station, almost running over one of the attendants. The camera zooms onto their number plate which reads: “MON 005, Verona Beach”. Benvolio gets out of the car, leaving the other two alone to fill the tank. In that moment another car pulls up in one of the slots. Its number plate reads: “Cap 005, Verona Beach”. Someone gets out of that car (we only see his feet), wearing metal-heeled cowboy boots with engravings of a cat on the heel. As soon as these feet (we do not yet know whom they belong to, but the cats are a hint) exit the car the chord of a country-style electric guitar strikes, followed by the mysterious sound of the pan flute, typical of a Spaghetti Western soundtrack reminiscent of the theme from “The Good the Bad and the Ugly”(1966). A cigarillo falls to the ground in slow motion and is crushed by the heel of one of the boots. The picture freezes and the credits announce that these are “The Capulet boys”. The boots then go into the shop. When a large van pulls away, which had been blocking their view from one another, the members of the enemy houses confront each other. Weapons are revealed (revolvers with the family crest and name of each house pictured on the hilt) and after sufficient provocation (Sampson bites his thumb at the Capulets), they are eventually drawn. Benvolio’s (“Benvolio Montague, Romeo’s cousin”) return from the men’s room (“Part, fools! You know not what you do.”) shows us a close up of his weapon. It has the brand name ‘Sword’ written across it and it is of the model 9mm series S, paving the way for his next line: “Put up your swords” which now makes sense. The music has stopped; glances are exchanged, but nothing happens as yet. In the calm before the storm you can hear the squeaky station sign blow in the wind (the sign reads: “Add more fuel to your fire” [V.iv.70], a line taken from “King Henry VI: Part 3”, a warning of what is to come). Into the silence the striking of a match is heard, and now we fully see Tybalt for the first time (“Tybalt Capulet, Prince of cats, Juliet’s cousin”). In the background the haunting Western music has started again and you can read the fear in the eyes of the Montagues. After some brief dialogue, which is loaded with aggressive and hateful tension, the shoot-out begins. The very different fighting-styles of the two houses are shown. The Montagues are more rough and clumsy, whereas the Capulets fight with grace and style. Tybalt practically performs a dance while he wheels a gun in each hand. Bullets fly, men jump and roll, civilians take cover. The music reaches its climax (a choral element is added) when Gregory and Sampson start the car to get the hell out of there. The gas pump, however, is still in the tank inlet of the car and when they drive off it falls out, spilling petrol all over the ground and onto Benvolio who is still lying there. As they make their get-away Tybalt dramatically pulls a third gun, larger and with a telescopic sight, he ceremoniously kisses its side, aims and shoots Gregory in the shoulder as

the car drives off. Victoriously he drops his cigarillo which falls into the pool of petrol; Benvolio has just enough time to jump to his feet and escape before the entire station goes up in flames. It is exciting stuff, no doubt about it!

This was rather an extensive diversion on Tybalt's first appearance to the movie. I guess I got slightly carried away, but it helps to look at such a fast paced scene blow by blow; otherwise so much of the information (and there really is a lot of information) is overseen.

A contrasting example is that of Romeo's entrance, I have already written about it in the chapter "Space", but I will repeat myself here for better clarification and now also from a different viewpoint. When we first come across our love-sick hero, he is sitting in the middle of the stage of the ruined theatre Luhrmann had built on the beach front. We have just witnessed the explosive petrol station scene and our minds are abuzz with loud, violent and fast-cut impressions from it. So when we see Romeo, peacefully sitting there, his feet dangling down off the stage, pensively looking into the distance before jotting down another line of the sonnet he is composing for his heartthrob while the sunset throws him into a soft, warm light, we immediately get, without having to be told, that this boy is more the quiet, romantic type. This is obviously a person who is not afraid of his feelings and is willing to express them, fight for them and, as it turns out, in the end die for them.

12.4 Links and Likes

Staying with "Romeo + Juliet" a bit longer, there are numerous other instances in which brief images suffice for telling part of the story or creating links. Benvolio approaches Romeo, still close to the beginning of the film, after having promised his parents he would talk to their son in the hope of finding the cause for his melancholy. They speak of Rosaline, with whom Romeo has fallen out of favour, and who is indeed the reason for his glum mood, when he exclaims: "O me! What fray was here?" (I.i.171). Romeo says this after a short pause in which he glances into a TV screen standing by, to see the result of that morning's shoot-out between his cousin and the Capulet boys. This three second cut to the news on TV is all it takes to make perfect sense of the Romeo's line, even though the cousins had just been talking about something completely different.

We are introduced to Paris through a picture in the literal sense, via the printed media. We see a newspaper stand featuring row upon row of Verona Beach's very own "Time" magazine,

named “Timely”. On the front cover, a picture of Paris bearing the headline: “Dave Paris, bachelor of the year”. That says it all and again no more spoken words are needed as explanation.

Titus is also so full of meaning, but as I have already elaborated on several of the more poignant scenes in other chapters (“Space” and “Soliloquies”) and because I have also already repeated myself quite a lot in this chapter I will refrain from doing so once more and point you towards those chapters for further referencing.

These pictorial representations of the written word may well be taken for granted in the film industry, but that does not lessen the amount of thought that is put into them. Like in a play or book where every sentence is carefully thought through, every word placed just right, in a movie this is done with pictures. It is well-known that usually half of the film footage shot for a movie ends up on the cutting room floor. Like words, pictures are created and then discarded for better material.

13 Conclusion

Now it is time to wrap it all up. In the last ninety pages or so I have tried to honour this broad topic to the best of my abilities, and with the help of many source books and papers, to comprise a collection of methods used by the makers of the films I worked with, for promoting Shakespeare's plays amongst the young generation of the 21st century; I have tried to recognise strategies applied for ensuring a young person or Shakespeare newcomer be able to follow the film's language and plot (and furthermore enjoy it), and strategies for making sure these persons do not feel alienated by the film's setting and by the modes of speech used therein.

In Sheila Cavanagh's essay "'Crushing on Capulet': Culture, Cognition, and Simplification in 'Romeo and Juliet' for Young People", she notes the tendency which exists within literature focused on Shakespeare pedagogy, to make Shakespeare 'fun'. "The concern with making the teaching and learning of Shakespeare 'fun' apparently results from a widespread belief that both instructors and pupils fear Shakespeare because his works are too hard, too boring, or too irrelevant to generate much interest in today's classrooms"⁹². If making Shakespeare fun is indeed the path to tread, then I furthermore hope the collection of films dealt with here may function as a guideline for this purpose.

Ian McKellen had something interesting to say when faced with the problem of marketing his adaptation of "Richard III" set in the 1930s. I have already stated my reasons for not including his masterpiece in these pages, but his opinion on putting Shakespeare on film is nonetheless valuable:

Yes, I'm very excited by the idea that people may be discovering Shakespeare for the first time; but it's my duty to make sure that what they [spectators] are excited by is not just another action movie, not just another political intrigue thriller, not just another play about sex and family betrayals and a cruel tyrant with a lot of blood spattered on the screen – but to point out that theses were inventions, not of the cinema, but of Shakespeare. Cinema has adopted so much of the melodrama, the excitement and the thrills which Shakespeare first brought to life 400 years ago and the vital link is Shakespeare's words. So I will not betray Shakespeare and I don't have to betray Shakespeare because one could say he invented many of the clichés of the cinema and many of the things that people find exciting in the cinema.⁹³

⁹² Cavanagh, Sheila. "'Crushing on Capulet': Culture, Cognition, and Simplification in 'Romeo and Juliet' for Young People". Ed. Christy Desmet, Sujata Iyengar. *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*. Vol. 2, no. 1, 2006. (5 May 2011).
<http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/cocoon/borrowers/issue?id=7149>. P. 2.

⁹³ Sir McKellen, Ian. "Interview". *Richard III Society*. (2 Feb. 2013).
<http://www.r3.org/onstage/mckellen/mckel1.html>.

So it seems the combination of Shakespearean language with all that cinema has to offer is a winning formula every time. Sadly this is not quite true; but McKellen is right in pointing out that the two do go very well together, as the one (cinema magic) is in fact derived from the other (Shakespeare plays).

During the time I have spent writing this thesis (it has been several of years by now) a couple of new and piping hot Shakespeare adaptations have been released. I however made the decision not to include them as my work had already progressed too far, and I figured that in the time it would take me properly to incorporate these films, three still newer ones would have popped up again and the entire process would never reach an end. The adaptations in question are “The Tempest” (2010) and “Coriolanus” (2011). I will however briefly touch upon “The Tempest” now as a sort of representative outlook into the future.

I awaited the release of Julie Taymor’s “The Tempest” (2010) with baited breath. There was considerable hype surrounding it prior to its release as the leading role of Prospero was given to Helen Mirren, thus changing the character to Prospera. Gender changes most always make for interesting story-telling: a brilliant cast and the fact that Julie Taymor was back in the director’s seat of a Shakespeare adaptation steering this vessel through the rough seas, I felt not much could go wrong with this one. And yet it did. I did not like it personally, but this is not the place to complain about that; I do feel, however, that I can offer some criticism in respect to the points I made throughout my thesis. Visually the movie is stunning, hands down. The story is set on an island and an island is what you get in this adaptation. It was filmed on the Island of Hawai’i which offers breathtaking film footage and certainly gives you the feeling that “all the world’s a stage”⁹⁴. But the filming of so much of the movie on location strongly affects, negatively affects, the audio quality. Due to the amount of on-location background noises (breaking waves, harrowing winds, etc.) one would, even at the best of times, have a hard time understanding what is being said; and then to have to decipher Elizabethan English through all the wind and weather is really a bit much to ask for. Djimon Hounsou gives a remarkable performance as Caliban, very physical and full of strong emotion, but unfortunately his heritage gets in the way a little (Hounsou is from the Republic of Benin) and his Shakespearean English is really a challenge to understand. The spectacular effects become tedious as they too hinder our understanding of anything Ariel is trying to say. The entire production is visually exciting, but frustrating to follow.

⁹⁴ Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. (II.vii.139).

No doubt my lack of enthusiasm for this adaptation also influenced my decision to steer clear of it in my thesis. But I do not want to end my thesis with a list of personal impressions. I merely wanted to mention this film as proof that Shakespeare adaptations are forever an ongoing project, capturing the imagination of ever new movie-makers.

I hope my cousins in Australia will one day still have the opportunity properly to be introduced to Shakespeare even if this means me trekking out there with a collection of my favourite film adaptations. For all of those youngsters to whom I cannot pay a personal visit with my collection of DVDs, I remain hopeful that someone else will do this for me, or ideally that they may come across captivating Shakespeare adaptations either of their own accord or at school. The importance is the willingness to 'like'. That is why a positive introduction to the bard, any kind of positive introduction, is the key to further interaction with him. There remain many plays by Shakespeare that I have not yet had the pleasure of reading or seeing, but because I genuinely like most of what I have encountered so far, I look forward to continuing and broadening this relationship.

Various elements in this paper can also be seen as such 'positive introductions' to Shakespeare: for example a modern-day setting may be enough to plant the seed of thought that Shakespeare is 'kinda cool'; the use of so much modern technology in conjunction with Elizabethan English might tickle your fancy; hearing your favourite music artist's score underlie the film or seeing your favourite actor take on the lead role could well lead you to want to see more; or realising that a few cunning shifts of words suffice to make the playwright you always thought to be a tiresome bore, in fact quite hilarious, thrilling, captivating and really not that hard to understand after all.

As a final note I will leave you with the reassurance that throughout my work on this thesis, Shakespeare's plays have been my constant companions, keeping me on track. I wanted to make sure I did not get too caught up in the filmic process' web and therefore continuously returned to the plays for referencing.

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15 Abstracts

Deutsch

Das Thema meiner Diplomarbeit dreht sich um Verfilmungen der Werke von William Shakespeare. Konkret behandle ich darin Methoden, die von FilmemacherInnen angewandt wurden, um den veralteten Stoff für die heutige Generation aufzuarbeiten, sodass sie ihn gut verstehen und ansprechend finden. Ich habe zu diesem Zweck einige Kernthemen identifiziert: der Raum, in dem die Adaptionen stattfinden und die Implikationen, die dieser mit sich bringt; Formen innerer Monologe und das Nachspionieren anderer im Film darzustellen; Marketing Möglichkeiten; Casting; Unterrichtsmethoden; die Sprache; und die visuelle Unterstützung für das bessere Verständnis der Handlung. Zur Veranschaulichung dieser Methoden habe ich sechs unterschiedliche Verfilmungen analysiert: Baz Luhrmanns "William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet"; Julie Taymors "Titus"; die RSC Produktion von "Hamlet", mit David Tennant in der Hauptrolle; Michael Almereydas "Hamlet" (2000); die Channel 4 Produktion von "Twelfth Night"; und "Much Ado About Nothing" von der vierteiligen Serie, ShakespeaRe-Told.

English

The subject matter of my thesis is film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays; but more precisely: methods chosen by filmmakers to present this aged material in a fashion which would awaken the interest of today's younger generation and help them to better understand it. For this purpose I looked at a selection of key topics, these being: the space (i.e. the location) in which the adaptations are placed and the implications this bears with it; forms, introduced by the medium of film, of reciting soliloquies and spying on others; marketing possibilities; casting; teaching methods; the language; and step by step visual aid for the comprehension of the story. To illustrate these methods I examined six very different adaptations: Baz Luhrmann's "William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet"; Julie Taymor's "Titus"; the RSC production of "Hamlet"; starring David Tennant; Almereyda's "Hamlet" (2000); Channel 4's production of "Twelfth Night"; and "Much Ado About Nothing" from the four part mini-series ShakespeaRe-Told.

16 Vita

Madeleine Seaman was born in Hallein near Salzburg to an Australian/Maltese mother and an American father. She attended first and secondary school in Salzburg and started her degree in Theatre, Film, and Media Studies in Vienna in 2005. Before and during her time as a student, she gathered extensive work-experience in the field of theatre and opera: in 2003 she worked as the stage-director's assistant for a production of Monteverdi's "L'incoronazione di Poppea" at the opera in Basel, Switzerland; in 2005 and 2006 she worked as the general assistant for the opera-workshops in Lofer, near Salzburg, and in 2011 she did similar work for a production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Salzburg summer festival. She found inspiration for her thesis topic throughout her life and in particular during her exchange semester at the University of Sydney.