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Shakespeare on Film



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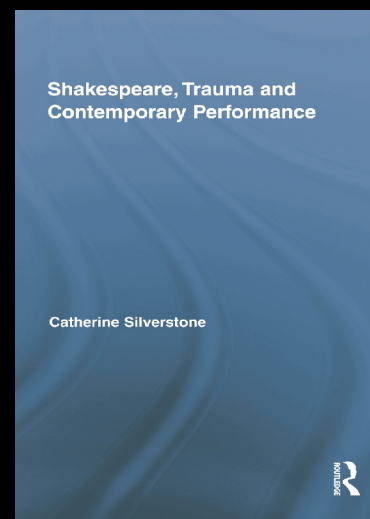
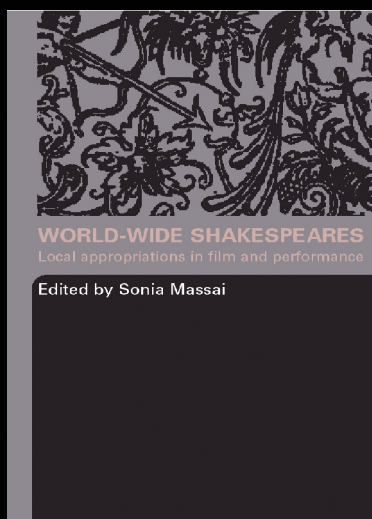
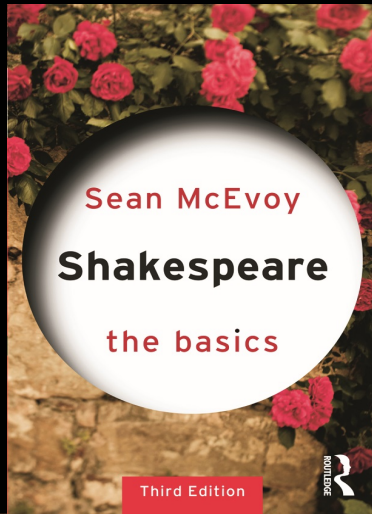
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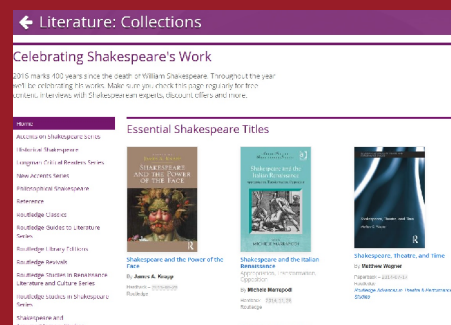
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Introduction

23rd April 2016 marks the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare. We will be marking this important anniversary throughout the year, showcasing the wealth of Shakespearean research we offer.

The chapters selected for this FreeBook represent some of our publishing in the field of Shakespeare and Film. Shakespeare on Film: How do you film Shakespeare is taken from Sean McEvoy's bestselling introduction *Shakespeare: The Basics, 3rd Edition*. This chapter looks at how the challenge of turning the play text into a successful film can reveal much about the nature of both Shakespeare's theatre, and about the nature of that most apparently 'modern' medium, film.

Chapter 2, Adapting Media: Shakespeare Re-Told by the BBC, explores how innovations in the medium of television and film shape perceptions of the Shakespearean work. Taken from *World-Wide Shakespeares* by Sonia Massai, chapter 3 examines *Friedrich Harris: Shooting the Hero*, a first-person fictional tale about the making of Laurence Olivier's 1944 film epic.

Finally, The Legacy of Colonisation: Don C. Selwyn's *The Maori Merchant of Venice* and Aotearoa New Zealand seeks to stress how performance is engaged in processes of cultural exchange and to explore the material conditions that have shaped this performance and on which the performance acts.

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Note to readers: References from the original chapters have not been included in this text. For a fully-referenced version of each chapter, including footnotes, bibliographies, references and endnotes, please see the published title. Links to purchase each specific title can be found on the first page of each chapter.

As you read through this FreeBook, you will notice that some excerpts reference previous chapters – please note that these are references to the original text and not the Freebook.

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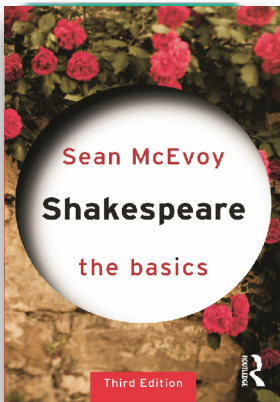
CHAPTER

1

Shakespeare on Film: How do you film Shakespeare

Sean McEvoy

01:: Shakespeare on Film: How do you film Shakespeare?



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The rest of this book discusses the plays as they are read or seen in the theatre. But many more people encounter Shakespeare's plays in the cinema or on television, or on DVDs or downloads of Shakespeare films. Yet film represents the world in a totally different way from theatrical representation in 1600. Film is an art form whose very nature requires words to be subordinate to the visual image; in Shakespeare's theatre, words rule. This chapter looks at how the challenge of turning the play text into a successful film can reveal much about the nature of both Shakespeare's theatre, and about the nature of that most apparently 'modern' medium, film. I will look at a couple of different approaches to screen adaptation in the case of *The Tempest*, but also at how Shakespeare has become a brand in the globalized culture of the moving image in the twenty-first century.

HOW DO YOU FILM SHAKESPEARE?

One important function of film (and, in the past, video) for Shakespeare studies is that such technologies have been able to act as a permanent record, of a kind, of notable stage productions. The simplest answer to the question 'how do you film Shakespeare?', then, might be simply to film a play in the theatre. However, if you have ever sat through a recording of an uninterrupted live stage production, even one edited from the footage of three or four different cameras, you will know how dull and unaffecting the whole experience usually is. The inappropriateness of this method of turning a play into a film is even more notable in the case of Shakespeare (or early modern theatre in general).

There are several important reasons for this. Firstly, location is absolutely crucial in film; the actors and their actions are secondary to the way the medium works. The critic Anthony Davies quotes the French theorist André Bazin in pointing out that 'in the theatre ... the drama proceeds from the actor; in the cinema it goes from the décor to the man. This reversal of flow is of decisive importance'. In the cinema we believe that there is a world continuing beyond the edge of the screen which gives meaning and function to the characters whom we see inside the frame. In the theatre, as Davies points out, we know that beyond the margins of the acting space is only the theatre building. On Shakespeare's stage, the drama is located in the interactions of people; the representational realisation of those people's imaginary location is of very little importance to the success of the play. This is clearly the opposite with cinema.

Secondly, a member of a theatre audience remains in control of what they choose to look at on stage. They can focus on one actor, or on the reactions of all the actors on stage at once (something which film finds very difficult to achieve). Their




spatial position in relation to the actors on stage remains constant (unless they are witnessing a promenade performance, or standing in a 'pit' area such as at the Globe replica in London). In the cinema that spatial relationship is dynamic, and is always manipulated by the director as the camera zooms, tracks or offers low or high-angle views, or magically shifts ground as the editing cuts between different shots and locations. The rhythm, pace and emotional temperature of the scene on stage are created by the relationship between the actors and the audience, but in the cinema it is usually the rhythm of the cutting, and, very often, the accompanying music which dictate rhythm, pace and emotion. With film 'the normal frontiers between the spectator and the work of art are broken down', writes Davies: 'the spectator is invaded by, and participates in the laws of the existing structure.'

Thirdly, it follows from this that if early modern theatre, even in modern stagings, is a public event – a live communion of minds and feelings in a common space – cinema is an art form which takes place inside the heads of individual spectators as they sit in the dark. The American critic Jack A. Jorgens quotes the psychologist Hugo Munsterberg to point out that film tells a story 'by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely space, time, and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely attention, memory, imagination and emotion'. To this extent film closes down the plurality of meaning and response in a public context which the Shakespeare play had in its original performance conditions and which it can still achieve today. Film, like traditional pre-theory literary criticism writes Catherine Belsey, tends to see the individual's own 'subjectivity as the origin of thought and action, dwelling on the personal and experiential at the expense of the public, abstract and political issues also raised in the play'. The term subjectivity in critical theory means an apparently single, unified conscious self which is in charge of its own decisions, but which is in fact constructed by language ('subject' in the grammatical sense) and by social and political forces (so also 'subject' in the political sense).

Finally, the onstage actor in Shakespeare acknowledges the presence of the audience, not only directly in soliloquies and asides (a perennial problem for film directors), but also in the general interactions with the audience which are required by many parts. On the other hand, mainstream film convention requires a closed, psychologically consistent, 'realistic' characterization: people with whom the audience can sympathise as if they were real. In film, typically, 'attractive, interesting people will encounter difficulties and overcome them ... and take something less than two hours to do so'. Shakespearean characters on stage do not offer such an easy division between art and life, nor such a reductively simplistic view of human personality in its necessarily social context. Bridget Escolme puts it this way:

a good reason for continuing to produce four-hundred-year-old plays is their



potential for permitting us, albeit in a fleeting and fragmentary way ... to stand outside our own ways of being, embodying, performing the human, brought up sharp by other efforts at performance, performance from the past.


(Escolme 2005: 17).

There are, then, fundamental differences between the early modern theatre and the modern cinema which make it very difficult indeed simply to film a stage performance and expect it to work. There are some exceptions: the 1969 film of *Hamlet* directed by Tony Richardson uses the cavernous darkneses, on and off-stage, of its original setting, London's Round House (an ex-engine turntable shed) to great effect. Trevor Nunn's video version of his 1990 RSC *Othello* works well because it focuses tightly on the performers' faces, a requirement of productions made for the small screen. But successful films of Shakespeare must generally be *films* first, and Shakespeare texts some way second.

Such films, however, often do find effective cinematic means for expressing the original script. It is almost always necessary to make a major reduction to the number of lines spoken. Most films use between 25 and 30 per cent of the original text. It will also be necessary to cut up and re-order both speeches and whole scenes in order to produce a narrative which will work according to the rhythm of a medium where it is rare to find extended scenes in one location, let alone individual speeches of more than a few lines.

Whether it is achieved naturalistically or symbolically, the film's lighting, editing and music all work to express the mood and concerns of a particular scene (or a whole play). In the original these are expressed in the actors' words. Visual images used as a background, or even set in juxtaposition to the words can work powerfully in an analogous way to the functioning of imagery in stage poetry. Recurring symbols in the play can be literally and insistently presented on the screen. Changes of viewpoint and use of montage in the film can operate on a cinema audience in a manner similar to the way in which the plays' polyvocal language and often unstable characterization can unsettle in the theatre.

Though soliloquy cannot function as genuine communication with the audience, if it is spoken as voiceover in a specific public or private context the speech can be illustrated, commented on or rendered ironic by the visual setting used. Much in cinema is conveyed by the close-up of the human face, especially through the use of reaction shots. These can stand in for much stage dialogue. On film, the use of foreground and background can express relationships between characters, and between characters and their setting. The camera can also reduce a human figure to an insignificant size on the screen or it can make them dominate the audience's view.



Visual images can efficiently show those elements of the narrative which need to be told on stage. By all these means verbally-dense poetic theatre can be successfully transformed into a film which is an authentic presentation of the original play.

What can happen when different film makers address the issue of how to transform poetic theatre into moving pictures is evident in two contrasting films of *The Tempest* which I discuss next. A significant difference between watching one of the plays live in the theatre and watching an old film version is that the film will carry with it the signs of the historical moment of its making in an obvious way merely by virtue of hindsight. In both cases I look at the vision of the film maker in the context of the moment in which the film was produced. Subsequently, I consider three reworkings of Shakespeare not by film makers who see cinema as a serious art form, but by entertainment corporations primarily seeking to be profitable in the modern global marketplace.

TWO TEMPESTS: DEREK JARMAN (1979) AND PETER GREENAWAY (1991)

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest* might seem to be the most amenable to cinematic transformation. The action takes place on a magical island of uncertain geography. Its cast of exotic characters and the text's demand for visual effects and spectacle would seem to make it much more suitable for screen adaptation than many other plays. In fact, apart from a few television versions, there were no films made of *The Tempest* between the days of silent cinema and Derek Jarman's 1979 production.


Equally curiously, even though critical attention of the play in the late-twentieth century has often focused on the play's exploration of colonialism, none of the films which have stuck closely to Shakespeare's text have taken much interest in the idea that the play is about a powerful European aristocrat who takes over an island and enslaves its inhabitants: Caliban, the 'savage and deformed slave', Ariel, an 'airy spirit' and various other mysterious spirits of the isle. Instead, in at least the two versions discussed here, the film makers have taken the obvious opportunity to be the dictator-magician themselves, and to summon into being their own personal vision of being a creator through adapting Shakespeare's text into film. In both films the historical and political moment powerfully contextualizes. For Jarman, the moment when homosexuality began to fight successfully for full public respect occurs just when wider radical politics seemed on the verge of defeat. For Greenaway, working at the end of the 1980s, the self-regarding *fin de siècle* inertia that accompanied the collapse of communism – a time notoriously misidentified as 'the end of history' – pervades the film, for all its beauty.

DEREK JARMAN, *THE TEMPEST* (1979)

When Derek Jarman was diagnosed as HIV positive in 1986 he deliberately broke the property magician's wand which had been used by Heathcote Williams as Prospero in his film of *The Tempest* seven years before. In doing this Jarman – who knew that he was not likely to live very many years longer – was consciously echoing Prospero's action at the end of Shakespeare's play (V 1 54). Jarman himself seemed to believe in the reality of magic. More significantly, he was a gay artist and film maker whose work played an important role in a significant cultural change which took place in Britain at the end of the twentieth century. Unlike many artists in previous generations, Jarman never attempted to conceal his homosexuality and the central and unashamed presence of gay sub-culture in his work was an overt public statement at a time when homosexuals were winning many battles against the prejudice and hatred which had been widely prevalent in society for a long time.

Yet Jarman did not seem to be a revolutionary who thought that the world could be made anew, and *The Tempest*, as elsewhere in his work, shows the dead weight of history entrapping its main character. In his immediately previous film, *Jubilee* (1978), Queen Elizabeth I is brought forward in time by the magician John Dee to the 1970s to discover a London whose society is falling apart, beset by violence, alienation and a loss of faith in all values. But Jarman's contrast between a supposed 'golden age' of national confidence and great artistic achievement with the era of 'punk' was not a reactionary condemnation of the present day. Rather it asked whether our glorious past might be the reason for the problems we face today. Punk was a fashion in clothes and music in the late 1970s which set out to shock, but it possessed no kind of political programme at all; it was exciting, but nihilist, and turned out, in fact, to be ripe for commercial exploitation. Yet it served a valuable purpose in shaking up complacencies at a moment of great social and political unrest.

Jarman's film made a great impact at the time because of its fresh irreverence towards the institution of the Shakespeare film (although, of course, similar things had been happening to Shakespeare on stage for many years). Film had previously, for the most part, treated Shakespeare with great respect. When it was attempted at all it tended to be done with high production values and stellar casts (a good example would be Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*). Jarman brought a punk sensibility to Shakespeare, which shocked some and delighted others. His *Tempest* was obviously a low-budget film. It cast the twenty-year-old punk singer Toyah Willcox as Prospero's Miranda, and the dancer and mime artist Jack Birkett as Caliban. Both had been in *Jubilee*. There were plenty of references to youth culture in the costume design. Miranda's dreadlock-like hair and stiff, almost jagged dress seemed right for a fantasy punk princess. Prospero's appearance as an eighteenth-century thinker gave him the




'New Romantic' look just coming into fashion. Ariel's white, deadpan face and boiler suit recalled one of the singer David Bowie's stage incarnations.

In keeping with this approach were some features of the performance which did not please contemporary reviewers. Images are more important than words when considering the impact of all Shakespeare films, but here the text is very often spoken in a flat, inexpressive manner. Willcox later admitted she didn't understand much of what she was saying, but with the exception of Heathcote Williams' Prospero it seems at times as if the words are almost spoken in quotation marks and not as part of the dramatic action. Some speeches, such as the old councillor Gonzalo's account of an imagined utopia (II 1 158–73) are more or less thrown away in one of the blue-lit scenes set outside Prospero's house, where it is hard to make out which characters are on screen anyway. Not all of the acting convinces, either, and the dancing of the sailors who suddenly appear at the end of the play to mark Miranda's betrothal to Ferdinand is decidedly shaky in places. The film feels one-paced, both in the delivery of its language and in its editing. But the overall impact is not one of ineptitude. Neither Shakespeare's text nor the high-cultural tradition it represents are particularly respected, but it is clear that *The Tempest* remains a play which still retained significance in the 1970s, and which must be re-explored and given regard. Prospero's house is a dark, decaying Georgian mansion, which maintains some beauty and hope despite its gloom and the presence of a harsh and troubled ruler. The film seems prophetic of what Britain was about to go through.

But rather than make a clear statement in the film, Jarman's intent seems to be an exploration of the decayed ancient mansion that is both Shakespeare and contemporary Britain. Jarman said of Shakespeare's play that 'no-one can actually pinpoint the meaning – it floats, is it about forgiveness, is it about coming of age, is it about magic?'. All three meanings are present in his film, but critics have found many other strands. William Pencak sees it as an insight into how what was once the servant of humanity – the intellect - has become in Prospero's case, and ours, no more than the 'slave of those who would subvert it for their own ends'; Kate Chedgzoy sees the film's refusal to acknowledge *The Tempest's* colonial subtext as a replication of the 'misogyny and racism' of the original; Rowland Wymer finds the film to be 'centrally about ... the loss of childhood, the loss of imagination and the approach of death'.

There remains however, a subversive glee which runs through the whole film, alongside a sense of doom for Prospero, whose consciousness is the most powerful presence in the film. The presence of a camp sexuality and a delight in the homoerotic is ever present. The handsome Ferdinand has lost all his clothes when he emerges from the sea, and the drunken butler Trinculo spends the last part of the film naked apart from a basque and a frame-like underskirt. At one point Ariel appears naked with




a collar and chain. The masque of dancing sailors, as Chedgzoy po-facedly puts it, ‘fully live up to their reputations as homoerotic icons, [which] does nothing to enhance the appeal of institutional heterosexuality’. There is some female nudity, too, but it is less campily eroticized. The witch Sycorax is a grotesque figure breast-feeding the fully grown Caliban, and a topless Miranda is shown washing her feet and laughing, shooing away a leering Caliban. The heterosexual union of Miranda and Ferdinand is not shown as a perfect conclusion; the text’s wedding masque is replaced by the surprising performance of the ominous but delightful blues number ‘Stormy Weather’, sung by Elisabeth Welch.

The bathing scene shows that Miranda does not regard Caliban as a threat. When he recalls how he wished he had fathered children on her in an earlier scene, she sticks her tongue out in a childish fashion. She shows a childish delight throughout, practising her descent of the stairs in a stately way and playing on her rocking horse. Caliban sings while he works and spends much of his time laughing with Stephano and Trinculo, despite his clear hatred for his cruel master. At the end he seems contrite when forgiven by Prospero for his conspiracy.

Part of the film’s world is an evocation of a delight in play, and in a sexuality beyond the patriarchal concern for controlling female desire which is so significant in Shakespeare’s text. Jarman cuts Prospero’s repeated warnings to Ferdinand not to sleep with Miranda before they are married (IV 1 14–23, 51–4). The critic Colin MacCabe wrote that ‘the complete containment of sexuality within sanctified heterosexual marriages’ is ‘fundamental’ to Shakespeare’s play and to Jarman’s film, but I am sure he is wrong about the latter. History is what completely contains in the film. The real past constrains Prospero’s consciousness and cannot be ignored by him.

Jarman said that his film is set on an ‘island of the mind’, and the dream-like qualities of the whole encourage the viewer to consider that the action of the film may be in Prospero’s imagination, in some sense. The film begins with a sleeping Prospero, and his snores seem to be the storm-wind afflicting the Italians’ ship. The snores, and a heartbeat, punctuate other scenes, and the film ends with Prospero once more asleep.

As in a dream, the house is maze-like and shadowy for most of the film. The exceptions are the exterior scenes featuring the shipwrecked Italians making their way to the house, which are shot uniformly in a blue wash, and are played very low key, almost as if extraneous to the rest of the action. They are outside Prospero’s domain, and at the centre of that domain are Prospero’s magic books and charts, his walls covered with authentic Egyptian hieroglyphics and cabbalistic symbols, and, towering above all, a large bust. This statue represents Mausolus, the fourth-century BC Asiatic king who, like Prospero, built a small empire at the expense of the powers around him, in his case Athens and Sparta. Now he is only famous for his great tomb, the




Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Several shots place the head of Prospero, the mini-empire builder, exactly congruent with this bust. All of Prospero's amazing knowledge and power are preparing him for the tomb.

Heathcote Williams' Prospero has a seriousness and weight unique in the film. Jarman intended to costume him like the cruel, ultra-rationalist French Revolutionary leader Robespierre. Unlike the other characters in the film with their eclectic costumes (Miranda, Ariel) or pantomime dress (Stephano, Alonso), Prospero is dressed appropriately for the Georgian house, and wields historically specific implements (such as the replica of John Dee's wand and even Jarman's own copy of the magician Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*). The records and words of the past surround him; his mastery depends upon them. When he forgives his brother and Alonso for deposing him from being Duke of Milan and exiling him to the island a fantasy ending ensues. There is a bright light, dancing (modern) sailors, and a blues songstress. But he is left alone in historical reality at the conclusion once Ariel, dour and thoughtful as ever, leaves. The punkish delights of youth, of sex, of camp playfulness can divert, but the responsible artist must acknowledge the weight of history, which determines the way the world is now and must be dealt with. Prospero does forgive, and offers some fleeting joy, but it is not in circumstances of his own choosing, and the future looks stormy. Sexual liberation is only part of what it is to be free.

PETER GREENAWAY, *PROSPERO'S BOOKS* (1991)

Greenaway's film of *The Tempest* also locates the play in Prospero's imagination, but otherwise it could not be more different. In this adaptation Prospero has used the magic books which Gonzalo gave him when he went into exile (I 2 166–9) to build a vast palace for himself and Miranda, which he has peopled with the innumerable spirits which he has brought under command by his skill as a sorcerer. We see Prospero write the text of Shakespeare's play to tell the story of his exile, in order, as he intends, to wreak revenge upon his enemies. As Prospero writes, the characters come into existence in the film, but he speaks all of their words for them until the point when Ariel (who is played simultaneously by three different cherub-like actors) takes the pen. The Ariels write that now Prospero has his enemies under his control he should take pity on them. Ariel himself would do so, 'were I human' (V 1 20). Prospero agrees, and from then on the characters whom he has created speak in their own voices. Finally Prospero and Ariel 'drown' (V 1 57) all of the books except two: the text of the play, *The Tempest*, which Prospero has written, and a copy of the 1623 First Folio with some blank pages in the front where *The Tempest* will be inserted. Both books are cast in the water, but saved by Caliban, so that, presumably, they could come down to us and to



Greenaway and he could make this film.


The critic Judith Buchanan wisely remarked that this film might 'as aptly (if not as elegantly) been called *The Books' Prospero*'. Greenaway told an interviewer 'on a slightly facetious note' that '*Prospero's Books* is a film about "you are what you read". We're all products of our education, our cultural background, which very largely is perceived through text'. The twenty-four volumes which Prospero took with him to the island appear on screen to punctuate the action as animated, high-definition images, and from these imagined books comes much of what we see on screen:

books for an elderly scholar to learn how to rear and educate a young daughter, how to colonise an island, farm it, subjugate its inhabitants, identify its plants and husband its wild beasts. There would need to be books to offer solace and advise patience and ... to encourage revenge ... a book of languages, a book of utopias, a book of travellers' tales, a book of games ... volumes [which] made Prospero so powerful he could command the dead and make Neptune his servant [V 1 42–4; 48–50]. Against such magic, mortal enemies like the King of Naples could be considered small irritants.

(Greenaway 1991: 9–12)


'In this post-modern sense', writes the critic Amy Lawrence, 'the author himself may be nothing more than the fragments of texts from which he is made'. But Lawrence is referring not only to Prospero, but to Greenaway himself, who self-consciously and meticulously quotes from the art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to produce the key images of his film, even though the film is supposedly set in 1611: 'being a magician', writes Greenaway, Prospero can 'borrow and quote from the future'. The opening image of the naked Prospero comes from De La Tour's picture of St Jerome; the Ariels are based on an allegorical portrait by Bronzino; Prospero's library is a copy of one of Michelangelo's buildings in Florence; Miranda's appearance explicitly recalls Botticelli's depiction of Spring and she meets Ferdinand (who appears as a courtier from Rembrandt) in a Breughel cornfield. 'Like Greenaway or the postmodern/reader viewer, Prospero is both producer and product of a world made up of texts, not only a writer but a reader'. 'Post-modern' here refers to a contemporary cultural movement which, among other ideas, would deny original creativity in as much as all writers and creators are themselves the products of the language and cultures into which they are born. All cultural products consist of a series of recombinations of quoted fragments from pre-existing texts; these products present a series of competing narratives none of which has any more claim to our attention, nor to the truth, than any other.

Greenaway explicitly draws on the classical tradition of Shakespearean



production in casting the 87-year-old Sir John Gielgud as Prospero. Gielgud was one of the great Shakespearean actors of the twentieth century and had played the role many times before. Like Shakespeare when he wrote *The Tempest*, like the century itself, Gielgud was coming to the end of his career (he died in 2000). When Gielgud speaks the lines in *Prospero's Books* from Act IV of *The Tempest* which have sometimes been taken as Shakespeare's own farewell to the stage ('Our revels now are ended ...' [IV 1 148 ff.]) he walks between two facing rows of mirrors reflecting back on each other. This image sums up the whole film well: an ever receding set of cultural references which place the meaning of Shakespeare's play in a series of never-ending intertexts which never quite touch base with the world beyond. In one of the first post-modern takes on Shakespeare, Tom Stoppard's 1967 *Hamlet* comedy *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the Player, after his flamboyant entrance, remarks 'don't clap too loudly – it's a very old world'. After so many centuries of performance and criticism, not only is it nearly impossible, according to this view, to do anything new with Shakespeare, but, in fact, our whole culture, and, ultimately, our sense of ourselves (as consumers of culture) is now formed out of an inescapable web of allusions and cross-references to myriads of texts of many kinds. The honest thing to do is to admit this, and this is exactly what *Prospero's Books* does.

Shakespeare's script becomes a pretext for the film in two senses: it's the text on which the film is based, but it also seems to be a kind of excuse for making a very different kind of art work. All the drama is bleached out of the delivery of the lines, and Shakespeare's words become a kind of bare frame for the visual excess of the film. Any sense of tension, conflict, even characterization is pared away so that the film's riot of colour, effects and display can overwhelm the viewer as a complex network of allusion and allegory passes rapidly across the screen. When Miranda and Ferdinand declare their love for each other (Act III Scene 1) they are in the background of the shot framed by huge architectural structures. White horses mysteriously appear around them and move into the foreground. Symbolism is more significant than narrative. The hymns of Iris, Ceres and Juno at the masque to mark their wedding (IV 1 60–117), which are often cut in modern performance, are drawn out to full length, with the screen showing a rapid succession of half-lit baskets of gifts, each allegorical but not clearly visible for very long as they are rapidly presented by Prospero's army of naked dancing spirits. The excess of images and movement constantly de-theatricalizes. Even the play's great rhetorical climax, the marvellous speech in which Prospero renounces his magic powers (V 1 33–57) is upstaged by the half-naked young women dancing robotically around the sorcerer as he advances through a crowd towards the camera. Stephano and Trinculo, the comic characters, are deliberately rendered humourless. The very funny slapstick scene where Trinculo hides under Caliban's coat to escape the storm is shot in a gilt frame held between the camera and the action by Prospero's spirits. At its



conclusion a plush curtain falls across this fake proscenium arch. Greenaway seems to be mocking comedy like this as mere theatre.

If there is a melancholy which pervades Jarman's *Tempest*, drawn from a late twentieth-century awareness of human cruelty and power-worship, Greenaway's version shows a typically post-modern playfulness. History for Greenaway isn't a nightmare we can't escape, but a library, a museum and a gallery in which we play to produce striking, enchanting, self-referential images for our further recreation. For postmodernism, all is surface, there is no depth. At the end of Shakespeare's play the actor playing Prospero steps to the front of the stage to ask the real, live audience for the applause which will set him free from the role. In Greenaway's film we get, for the only time, Gielgud in close-up talking straight to camera when he speaks this Epilogue. But as he talks his image slowly fades to a white dot on a black screen. Canned applause follows as the newly freed Ariels leap apparently over the camera towards us. But of course they never arrive. Nothing real has happened here.

GLOBALIZED SHAKESPEARE: *ROMEO + JULIET* (1996), *TEN THINGS I HATE ABOUT YOU* (1999) AND *O* (2001)

The British academic Tony Howard writes that "Shakespeare" permeates our culture iconographically ... so in mainstream film culture the plays have functioned as myths and sources; they materialise repeatedly and often unnoticed on cinema screens through allusions and variations, remakes, adaptations and parodies'. He means that the idea of 'Shakespeare' as a marker of cultural worth and traditional values is very powerful in English-speaking cultures (and beyond), and this makes him surprisingly central to mainstream popular culture.

Such centrality seemed to be especially evident in the last decade of the twentieth century, when Hollywood was responsible for a number of Shakespeare films of one sort or another, including Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) and the money-spinning pseudobiographical *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). *The Lion King* (1994) and *Last Action Hero* (1991) were both reworkings of *Hamlet*. *Men of Respect* (1990) turned *Macbeth* into an American Mafia hitman who kills his way to the top of the organisation. *O* (made in 1999) was a modern *Othello* with a high school setting. Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) was a version of *The Taming of the Shrew* also set in an American school. Most financially successful of all at this time was Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). I now go to discuss these last three.

Perhaps, as Howard considers, this plethora of Shakespeare films reflected 'Hollywood's globalisation of film culture – the recycling of certain internationally

recognisable cultural icons – and the targeting of high school and college audiences familiar with canonical great books.’ Indeed, the final decade of the last century, following the fall of the communist regimes from 1989 onwards, was a time when American power, cultural and otherwise, seemed more than ever a truly global force. The American cultural critic Denise Albanese has argued that Hollywood’s embrace of Shakespeare at this time was an attempt to appropriate him for triumphant US capitalism, seeing ‘literature as a regressive formation exempt from direct market instrumentality’. It was finally time to rescue Shakespeare from those who would see him as immune from market values.

The ongoing globalization of world culture has typically seen certain kinds of (almost always Western) products penetrate every part of the world. The dominant products adapt themselves to some extent to local conditions, but they maintain and enforce their view of the world through repetition of the same values, narratives and character types. In the manner of the unchanging basic menu of the fast-food corporation, Hollywood now produces the same product over and over again, in the form of ‘blockbuster, sequel, prequel, trilogy and remake’. As Carolyn Jess-Cooke puts it, contemporary Hollywood subscribes to ‘those franchising, commercialising and



Figure 4.1 Leonardo Di Caprio (Romeo) and Claire Danes (Juliet) in Baz Luhrmann’s film *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996) © The Kobal Collection




health-crushing activities of the king of conglomerates, McDonald's'

Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) was a huge box office success all over the world, taking \$147M in ticket sales. It also became for many years the main experience of Shakespeare for very many teenage schoolchildren in the UK. The film is set in 'Verona Beach', a city that might be Mexico City (where it was actually shot) or Miami or Los Angeles. The film features the explosions, gunfights and car chases which are the expected conventions of the action-romance. It is fast-paced, garishly colourful, noisy and frenetic: Shakespeare as MTV video. The party at which the lovers meet is a crazily excessive fancy-dress party. Juliet's tomb is a dramatic riot of candlelight. Its décor is extravagant to the point of kitsch. Albanese observes that the film employs Catholic devotional objects and symbols (Madonnas, crucifixes, angels, candles, bleeding heart tattoos), but not to show that the Catholic faith is important in the world of the film. Rather, they are used in a knowing, 'ironic' way, merely as a style: a culture and a faith is turned into a fashionable look, a commodity to be bought and discarded. In fact, she continues, this is also how the film treats its Shakespearean source. Shakespeare's words – which are not always easily heard in the film – become a kind of soundtrack to the visual images, an aspect of the film's style: US corporate entertainment has turned Shakespeare into a consumable fashion item whose meaning and value amount to no more than its market price.

The Montagues and Capulets are clearly super-rich and engaged in some kind of business. Unlike in Bernstein's *West Side Story* (1961), however, the feud is not between different ethnic groups, since both families contain a mixture of races. But this is not merely 'colour-blind' casting. Race, like everything else in the film becomes a product to be consumed in a nowhere-world where local identity floats free of real place and time. There is a soundtrack of African-American music, but this has no more relevance to the action than the multi-racial casting; it is simply the music which its audience enjoys. That audience are the consumers of a world where identity and location are products to be bought and consumed. But at the centre of the action, significantly, are the 'inexplicably white' Romeo (Leonardo Di Caprio) and Juliet (Claire Danes).

Shakespeare's text provides the words for all the characters, but it also appears on signs, billboards and on product labels. The guns used in the opening brawl between the Montagues and Capulets are focused upon lovingly as desirable lifestyle accessories rather than killing machines, and an advert for Benvolio's weapon, the 'Sword 9mm Series 5' appears on posters in the background throughout the film, accompanied by a line from *Henry IV Part 2*, 'I am thy Pistol and thy Friend' (V 3 94). Shakespeare's language has become advertising slogans, rhetorical flourishes aimed at making a sale; as in the rest of the film, style replaces meaning. As the American




theatre scholar Bill Worthen writes, 'absorbing Shakespeare into the market-driven rhetoric of the producers – McDonald's, Disney – of the globalized economy, the film allegorizes the work of Shakespearean drama as an intercultural globalized commodity'. Shakespeare's 'universal' quality used to be described as his common 'humanity'; but in the globalized world 'local cultures and identities are uprooted and replaced with symbols from the publicity and image departments of multinational corporations'. Shakespeare's worldwide iconic status has been taken over to become just such a stylish but rootless and empty symbol. Ultimately, 'Shakespearean discourse blends into advertising and fashion, and into the slippery transformations of race and place characteristic of the privileged world of the transnational elite, who are at once the film's protagonists (both characters and actors) and also its target audience'.

Gil Junger's *Ten Things I Hate About You* is less of a globalizing product and more obviously an American High School Rom-Com than a 'Shakespeare Film' (if there is such a genre). *The Taming of the Shrew* might not be the most obvious candidate to turn into a film of this nature, but in fact the wise-cracking dialogue of the script lends itself well to the satirical tone of Shakespeare's comedy. In *The Taming of the Shrew* all the more or less foolish principal figures are held up for the audience's amused scrutiny. At 'Padua High' to be spectacularly sarcastic, rude and offensive is the normal mode of conversation for both students and staff. Much of the film's humour resides in this. All the high school students are very wealthy and privileged, just like Shakespeare's aristocrats and merchants.

Junger stays ingeniously faithful to Shakespeare's plot in the first part of the film. The beautiful Bianca Stratford (Larisa Oleynik) is sought both by the vain and predatory male model Joey (Andrew Keegan) and by a new boy from a military family, Cameron (Joseph Gordon-Levitt). Cameron and Joey correspond to Lucentio and Hortensio respectively. Bianca's father is a paranoid obstetrician (Larry Miller) who will not allow Bianca to go out with boys until her elder sister Kat (Julia Stiles) does, echoing Baptista's actions in the play. Kat, however, shows only sarcastic and savage contempt for all male attempts to win her favours, and indeed for her fellow students and their social habits. Prompted by Cameron's friend Michael (David Krumholtz), Joey pays a mysterious newcomer with a wild reputation, Patrick Verona (Heath Ledger), to win Kat over so that both Bianca's suitors have a chance to ask her out. Just like Petruchio and Katherina, Patrick is motivated to woo Kat for the sake of money (I 2 75–6). Cameron, just like Lucentio, becomes Bianca's tutor in an attempt to get closer to her (III 1), but not in disguise. Early in the film he even uses one of Lucentio's lines to express his feelings about Bianca ('I burn, I pine, I perish' [I 1 155]).

But the similarities are not enlighteningly sustained. In *The Taming of the Shrew* Katherina's bad behaviour seems to be a general fault in her personality, perhaps



inspired by jealousy of her younger sister (II 1 31–6). Modern critics have read her hostility as an unconscious reaction to the injustice of her social position as a mere male possession. In Junger's film Kat's contempt for those around her does seem to have some validity. In an amusingly satirical opening sequence, Michael shows Cameron the different and mutually hostile student groups with their different 'lifestyles': white Rastafarians, cowboys, 'future MBAs' and so on. Bianca tells her friend that she knows the difference between love and lust because she 'likes her Skechers [shoes], but loves her Prada Backpack'. There is comic exaggeration happening here, but the bookish and politically engaged Kat has a point when she points out the shallowness of their 'meaningless, consumer-driven lives'. But Kat's political views are themselves revealed to be skin-deep: after her ideas are mocked sarcastically by Bianca and her friend Chastity (Gabrielle Union), she starts to satirize herself. It then turns out that her bitterness towards others has psychological, not political origins: her guilt at having under-age sex with the unworthy Joey years earlier, and her resentment for the mother who abandoned her family. The absent mother turns out to be the real villain of the film. No feminist reading can be sustained of this *Shrew*.

Katherina's behaviour gets better as Petruchio 'tames' her. As Kat grows to love Patrick she demonstrates her abandonment of her 'shrewishness' by drunkenly dancing on a table at a party, and by exposing her breasts to her football coach in order to distract his attention during a detention session. Petruchio achieves Katherina's submission by humiliating her. Patrick wins Kat, and grows to love her himself, by taking an interest in her favourite things and looking after her kindly when she is drunk. Romantic love triumphs over everything in this film. In Junger's climax Kat's love for Patrick even makes her forget that he originally only sought to date her for financial advantage, as she tearfully confesses in a maudlin poem she recites to her English class: the ten things she hates about him, a recital which acts as an equivalent to Katherina's submission speech (V 2 136–79). Patrick seals their reconciliation by using the money he was given to take her to the prom to buy her an explicitly featured Fender Stratocaster electric guitar so that she can start a rock band. Some might see this as a kind of continued rebellion, but there is no doubt that Kat has joined the consumerist society.

Kat's poem was written in response to her teacher's request to write a version of Shakespeare's sonnet 141 ('In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,/ For they in thee a thousand errors note'). Michael wins the love of Kat's Shakespeare-mad friend by dressing up in a distant approximation of early modern dress and using lots of 'thees' and 'thous' to her. Thus the film wears its Shakespearean origins knowingly, but subsumes them in its energy, wit and romantic sentiment. To be in love and to have fun, to enjoy yourself now is all that matters. This is the truth which Kat needs to discover. In the film's final shot we see a triumphant rock band playing, perhaps appropriately, a


song called 'Cruel to be Kind' high up on the school roof over a sunlit Seattle. There is no challenging moral or social conclusion as in Shakespeare's play: *The Taming of the Shrew's* 'regressive' literary qualities have again been appropriated, this time into a 'feel-good' product.

Another product of this period, Tim Blake Nelson's *O* (2001) is an adaptation of *Othello* set in a private high school in America's Deep South. Odin James (Mekhi Phifer) is the one black student, but his prowess on the basketball court makes him universally admired. In particular, the coach of the basketball team (played by Martin Sheen) publicly dotes on him so much that his son Hugo (Josh Hartnett), who is the team's 'utility man', is determined to avenge himself upon this rival for his father's attention. Hugo/Iago successfully hatches a plan to make Odin (or 'O' to everyone in the school) believe that his girlfriend Desi (the Dean's daughter, played by Julia Stiles) is sleeping with Michael Cassio (Andrew Keegan). The conclusion is as bloody as Shakespeare's original.

O follows the plot, structure and even some of the dialogue of *Othello* with some degree of faithfulness, but all the language is contemporary US teen-speak. In this it can be seen to be half-way between Luhrmann's and Junger's use of Shakespeare's original play. The film's relative faithfulness to the narrative of *Othello*



Figure 4.2 Mekhi Phifer (O) and Julia Stiles (Desi) in Tim Blake Nelson's film based on *Othello, O* (2001). © The Kobal Collection




seems to be part of its desire to be seen as much more than a teen-movie. Its makers originally wanted to time its release to have the best chance of being considered for the Oscars in 2000. Julia Stiles was not only fresh from *Ten Things I Hate About You*, but in 2000 appeared in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*, an artistically successful production of the text set in a contemporary New York. Her presence was therefore a marker of the film's desire to identify with the more accomplished end of the Hollywood Shakespeare product fashionable at this time. The film attempts a use of symbolism: there is a recurring image of innocent white doves at the school, whilst Hugo fondles a black hawk. As much is made as possible of the idea of the letter 'O', whether it be the evocative use of a circular stairwell, a basketball hoop, or even circular camera movements.

Yet whatever its ambitions, the film never becomes genuinely tragic. Its characterization remains two dimensional, verging on the stereotypical. O's conduct is neither noble nor particular worthy of pity. O beats up and threatens a defenceless Roger/Roderigo in retaliation for telling the Dean of his relationship with Desi. In the film's most affecting scene O's tender lovemaking with Desi turns into a brutal rape-like sex, despite her pained demands for him to stop. O becomes inhuman when he catches a glance of himself in a mirror and imagines Michael in his place. In an earlier love scene O had joked about his sexual prowess, and as his jealousy develops he becomes, in an unsubtle way, the monstrous negro of the white racist imagination. He starts to take drugs, and powerfully destroys the basketball hoop and board in front of the whole school during a competition. Unlike much else in the film, there is no parallel for any of these actions in *Othello*. Unlike with Iago on stage, there is nothing mysterious or magnetic about the whiny Hugo, whose motivation is transparent and plays out the most overworked cliché in American drama, tension between father and son. The intelligent, middle-class Desi, unlike Desdemona, threatens to break off the relationship if O does not end his jealousy, and rebukes Emilia's warnings about O by asking whether she would make the same remarks if he had been white.

Noting that a sense of anti-climax is 'the almost inevitable result of rethinking the tragedies in a contemporary setting' Judith Buchanan suggests that modernizations such as this allow 'the psychology of the relationships' to be 'examined as they play out in a more localised, and often more accessible milieu'. But the adaptation of tragedy into teen-movie genre renders the psychology shallow and predictable at the cost of 'accessibility'.

As Buchanan notes, in fact the film goes out of its way to stress that it is not *Othello*. When challenged in an English lesson on *Macbeth* to name one of Shakespeare's poems, the inattentive Hugo cynically quips 'I thought he wrote movies?'. We would expect Hugo to get the answer wrong. When Desi asks how O came by a scar



on his back, he initially teases her with a story of how he was mutilated at birth by a back-street obstetrician. But he soon reveals that he doesn't come from desperate poverty on the wrong side of the tracks: the scar was a result of a skateboard accident. Thus the moment which should echo the story of how Othello won Desdemona through the tale of his sufferings and journeys (I 3 142–182) becomes deliberately downplayed, to the point of mockery of the original.

Carolyn Jess-Cooke writes that 'Shakespeare is not the concern of the film but, rather, is pushed to the film's outer layer' since Shakespeare is the brand name to be exploited in Hollywood's drive for universal appeal. What is local in America – in this case killings in schools – is made part of a global entertainment product, a Shakespeare film. *O* was scheduled for release in 1999 but delayed for two years following an outbreak of shootings in US schools, beginning with the deaths of twelve students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Colorado in April 1999. Buchanan writes that the use of Shakespeare's narrative and the larger concerns of the original play all owes the film to 'transcend' its locality and become a 'safe' place where such a troubling matter as heavily armed teenagers massacring their classmates could be considered less emotionally.

Both these justifications for the film make Shakespeare either a universal or global cultural presence but ignore the question of the ownership which authorizes use. For the argument can work the other way: globalized Shakespeare becomes annexed by US corporate power, in the form of Hollywood, in order to make specific social problems in America appear to be global or universal, part of a world system or, indeed 'the human condition'. Globalization is actually Americanization.

It may once have been the case that the big entertainment corporations regarded making Shakespeare films as a means of getting 'high-culture' status at the cost of poor box office returns. In the 1990s an attempt was made to turn Shakespeare into a consumer product on corporate terms. How successful the process was remains to be seen. It is interesting how few Hollywood Shakespeare films have been made in the years since the turn of the century, in the years when the global ambitions of the United States have had to be curtailed somewhat by intransigent circumstances, both military and economic and, consequently, cultural.

**Adapting Media: Shakespeare
Re-Told by the BBC**
Margaret Jane Kidnie

02:: Adapting Media: Shakespeare Re-Told by the BBC




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As was seen in the context of stagings of *Hamlet* presented by Lepage and Warchus, means and styles of production that challenge one's assumptions about the medium of transmission can provoke a crisis of work recognition. If one's idea of Shakespearean theatre is technologically minimalist, essentially defined by 'two planks and a passion', then a staging such as Lepage's that relies heavily on 'computerised sets and electronic wonders' will seem, at best, far from the heart of what one considers the authentic work. One might even choose to insist that a category shift has been effected, and that this is not an instance of the work at all, but something new, perhaps an adaptation. Alternatively, and especially as distinctions among performance media continue to blur, such features of production might come to seem, or might already seem to others, unremarkable, this adjustment of expectations permitting innovation to be folded into an evolving consensus about the supposed essence of the work. Parallel technological developments have likewise confronted production of the work in the textual instance, especially with regard to the continued expansion of electronic editing and the internet. Curiously, however, far from generating controversy and anxiety about what should count as a genuine textual instance of the work, humanities computing has more often been embraced as providing *improved* access to the work. While my larger argument is that there is no fixed work to which one can gain access, what seems certain is that as capabilities such as full-text searching and on-screen facsimile reproduction become increasingly ordinary (to note just two of the more common applications of electronic text), the potential for such technology to influence a pragmatic conception of the work is enhanced.

In terms of performance, probably the most significant (because most prevalent) technological development to trouble recognition of the work in the instance is the advent of film and television. It is not unusual to see filmed Shakespeare – even 'full-text' productions – automatically categorized as adaptation; even Branagh's *Hamlet*, advertised as the 'writer's cut', was nominated at the 1997 Academy Awards for 'Best Adapted Script'. The implicit assumption here is that Shakespeare's work is only legitimately produced as literary text (and perhaps also live theatre), while all other forms of production are inherently adaptation. However, as electronic editions become more prevalent, and the boundaries dividing live theatre and film in multi-media stage productions become increasingly porous, this division into 'original' and 'secondary' media comes to seem tenuous, even unsustainable.

This chapter explores how innovations in the medium shape perceptions of the Shakespearean work. My focus will be on *Shakespeare Re-Told*, a four part television series mounted in 2005 by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). I have taken broadcast television as my example partly because of its ready accessibility to potential




consumers: it seems likely that the Reduced Shakespeare Company's ten-second performances of the works on *Jeopardy!* in 2005 were seen by more viewers than any live production of Shakespeare staged in the same year. Television might further seem an apt site for analysis since it represents in Shakespeare studies a relatively neglected medium of production. By looking beyond live theatre and film to focus on television, this chapter seeks to isolate how a recognition of Shakespeare's work – both what one thinks it is and how one comes to know it – is caught up in, and shaped by, technologies of production. I begin by analysing how the works were updated and reinterpreted for a twenty-first century British audience. The next two sections address in turn scriptwriting and camerawork in order to investigate how the BBC uses such elements of production to reinvent for television not Shakespeare's words, but something like a convincing 'Shakespeare effect' that is available to be read by viewers as consistent with the work. Finally, I consider the impact of interactive digital technology specifically in terms of the way this 'add-on' educational component, while ostensibly enabling a recovery of the original words in their historical moment, foregrounds the producerly contributions of an active viewer to the ongoing construction of Shakespeare's works. This last section of the chapter is particularly attentive to broadcast television as a technology that is itself undergoing rapid change.

Strategies of appropriation: Shakespeare's 'divorce comedies'

The BBC launched *Shakespeare Re-Told* as part of a New Shakespeare Season aired in the autumn of 2005. Each Monday at 8:30 p.m. throughout the month of November a ninety-minute production of one of Shakespeare's plays was broadcast on BBC1. This BBC Drama initiative, modelled after the award-winning *Canterbury Tales* series televised two years earlier, included three comedies and a tragedy: the series began with *Much Ado About Nothing*, continued with *Macbeth* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, and concluded with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As with the *Canterbury Tales*, the goal was to produce four distinctive retellings of selected works of a classic author for modern television audiences. To this end Executive Producers Laura Mackie (BBC Head of Drama Series and Serials) and Patrick Spence assembled for each drama an almost entirely independent creative team, each with its own writer, director, director of photography, music composer, and cast.

All of the dramas are relocated to modern-day Britain, the scriptwriters finding for Shakespeare's settings local and familiar analogues. *Much Ado* is set in a Wessex television studio, with Benedick and Beatrice portrayed as antagonistic news anchors; *Macbeth* unfolds in the kitchens of a three-star Michelin restaurant in Manchester; *Taming's* Katherine, who comes from a wealthy London socialite family, is a volatile parliamentary figure seeking election; and the confusions of *Dream* are played out during a two-day engagement party hosted by 'Theo Moon', Hermia's father, at a




wooded holiday resort park in northern England. The emphasis is on rendering Shakespeare's plays contemporary in terms of situation and social attitudes by incorporating into the action physical surroundings, material objects, and behaviours that might be presumed to be well known to the BBC's projected audience. Characters send video messages by mobile phone, they get married in churches and pampered in spas, they travel by plane, bicycle, and taxicab, they put out the garbage and they feed the children.

Apart from a scattering of Shakespearean lines, the plays are fully rescripted. Short and easily recognized phrases are fitted into the modern dialogue (Macbeth, his wife tells him, is 'too full of the milk of human kindness'), while a few longer speeches, such as the soliloquy in which Benedick persuades himself that the 'world must be peopled', are loose paraphrases of a well-known passage. In some instances the appropriations are more deliberately underscored. 'I would lead you up and down', Puck explains, grinning at the camera, 'it's my theme tune'. A sense of collusion in Puck's pranks encouraged by his frequent direct address to camera is heightened here for those viewers who recognize his 'theme tune' without prompting. In *Taming*, by contrast, the distance one occasionally registers between the modern script and Shakespeare's language is usually a function of the Petruchio character's eccentric, larger-than-life personality – 'I've come to wive it wealthily in Padua', he declares inexplicably to 'Harry' (Hortensio), as he slumps into a chair in the middle of a comfortable living room in what looks like Battersea, London.

Such practices of modernization are by now not unfamiliar strategies of production, with the works interpreted – some might say 'adapted', a distinction to which I will return later in the chapter – in order to make them feel contemporary. The challenges that attend on efforts to update Shakespeare's action and characterization are perhaps especially visible and acute in the case of *The Taming of the Shrew*, a play that has long been at the heart of ongoing debates about gender politics and the canon. Famously attacked as a brutal and objectionable portrait of male–female relations by commentators as varied as Charles Marowitz, Michael Billington, and Shirley Nelson Garner, this early comedy has come to seem something of a modern 'problem play'. Its very notoriety, however, is probably precisely why the comedy was chosen ahead of popular mainstream works such as *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet* for inclusion in a modernized television drama series. It remains one of the most topical of Shakespeare's plays not despite, but because of, what George Bernard Shaw derided as its 'lord-of-creation moral'.


The show's scriptwriter, Sally Wainwright, had met with success two years earlier on the *Canterbury Tales* project with the proto-feminist classic *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Perhaps surprisingly, Wainwright chose not to use this next commission to make a



similarly strong feminist intervention, but to develop instead strong motivation for Katherine's decision to marry – and stay married – to a feckless Petruchio. This production thus deflects rather than confronts the work's critical legacy by reconfiguring marriage as an issue less of female exploitation than of male vulnerability. Katherine is presented as a physically and verbally abusive Member of Parliament who is prone to making a public spectacle of herself. She follows up an assault on a subordinate whose inadequate briefing made her seem a 'political pigmy' on *Newsnight* by throwing over a table in a high-class restaurant while lunching with her mother and supermodel sister, later storming out of a party after reportedly breaking a guitar over the head of another guest. Albeit not a realistic portrayal of a modern, image-savvy politician, this level of farce quickly establishes Katherine as recognizably Shakespeare's comic heroine. In keeping with a range of critical and theatrical interpretations, this production variously implies as the source of her anger sibling rivalry, parental neglect, personal eccentricity, a lack of sexual interest in men (her mother warily asks if she 'shop[s] around the corner'), and pent-up sexual frustration, with quite a lot made of the fact that she has never had an offer of marriage, has never been in a relationship of any account, and at thirty-eight is still a virgin. By multiplying possible causes for her anti-social behaviour, Wainwright makes Katherine's violent proclivities legible through the ready caricature of the career woman driven by a competitive edge that, in its single-minded ruthlessness, comes to seem grotesque.

It would be reductive, however, to argue that the film in any simple way stigmatizes career women to celebrate an ideology of domesticity. All of the Minola women – mother and daughters – are independently wealthy, and Bianca is no less successful in her career than Katherine in hers. The spectator first sees Bianca surrounded by paparazzi at an Italian airport, the use of a medium-range slow-motion tracking shot reinforcing her status as a supermodel by picking up on the familiar signs of beauty and glamour visually encoded, for instance, in television commercials. She regularly gets, and rejects, offers of marriage, choosing for herself an Italian 'boy' out of a crowd of people checking their bags onto a flight. Lucentio, travelling to England as a tourist, is subsequently invited to her London flat to tutor her in Italian. It is at this moment that she dismisses her besotted personal manager, Harry, announcing that she will get married 'when Katherine does'. Bianca is thus presented as an empowered woman in command of her money and sexuality, while it is the relatively silent Lucentio, without a command of the English language, who is objectified as the subplot's sexually desirable, silent marriage partner.


Marriage comes to seem one option among many, rather than a state to which a woman necessarily or even ideally aspires. Since there is no parent in Wainwright's modernized setting with the absolute authority to negotiate an arranged marriage,



motivation has to be found for Katherine to choose a husband for herself, a decision that is ultimately driven by political expediency. Her parliamentary mentor, John, is crucial to this plot development. With Baptista reinvented in the sphere of the family as a mother and former supermodel (the part is played by Twiggy Lawson), John takes on an unofficial function as the primary role model in Katherine's public life, advising her to marry by obliquely referring to her status as a single woman in terms of 'certain [pause] lifestyle issues' that might impede election. He later assures her that her hasty choice of partner is a 'stroke of genius'. Leadership of the party and a residence at Downing Street constitute the bait that makes the idea of a husband for Katherine – 'to anyone', as John puts it – seem feasible.

The marriage plot is thus recast in terms of Katherine's explicit consent and approval. Although she first meets her future husband while trapped in a lift, and so has no means of escape from their first encounter, she *chooses* to meet him for lunch the next day, and *agrees* to accompany him over the weekend to see his family estate. His eligibility is settled during that visit when she learns that although he is penniless, he is the 16th Earl of Charlbury. This matter of the title is used by Wainwright to lever an unexpected gap between production and work, this central character gaining a title but losing a name. When first questioned in the elevator, he names himself through a projected relation to Katherine: 'I'm – going to marry you.' The next day, when he calls to confirm a non-existent lunch date, Tim, her assistant, passes on the message that a 'bloke rang to say you're having lunch with him'. When Katherine asks for his name, the answer is simply: 'Didn't say. Said you met him at Bianca's party.' A few scenes later, a reporter tells Bianca that Katherine is marrying the '16th Earl of Charlbury' on Saturday; this is likewise how Tim identifies him to John at Westminster. The name Petruchio is entirely, and it would seem deliberately, erased from the television drama.


And yet clues that link this modern shrew-taming earl to Shakespeare's Petruchio allow the loss of his name to pass almost unnoticed. The first explicit mention of taming occurs after the marriage. Having just been threatened with divorce at the airport by his wife of one hour, the Petruchio character telephones Harry to tell him to join them on honeymoon in Italy. 'She wants a bad marriage, I'll give her one!' he drunkenly threatens, adding ominously: 'And then I'm going to tame the bitch.' The violence of his language later translates into physical abuse when an argument at the villa escalates into what looks set to be a rape, Petruchio throwing a protesting Katherine on the bed and claiming sexual relations with her as a husband's right. When he suddenly steps away from the bed to announce, to Katherine's clear disappointment, that he will have sex with her only if she starts being nice to him, the spectre of a Marowitz-like brutality is replaced with the troubling yet no less familiar spectacle of the unruly woman who secretly desires of a husband social and sexual mastery. Finally, however, almost despite itself, the programme's portrayal of the shrew-tamer is



undercut by an utter lack of motivation: Petruchio, seduced from the first by Katherine's outspoken belligerence, is given no reason to wish her 'conformable as other household Kates'. His impulsive decision to leave them stranded at their secluded Italian villa is driven by need not power, as he seeks ways to put off their return to England and so the divorce that seems the inevitable consequence of his decision to turn up late to the church, drunk and dressed like a woman.

A major consequence of the work's reinvention as a twenty-first century television drama is thus the intrusion of divorce as the circumstance able to redirect entirely the portrayal of husband–wife relations. Why, having married a man she now regards as 'a moron', 'a freak', and a political liability, would Katherine choose to *stay* married to him? Somehow Katherine has to have motivation to choose a husband not only before, but after the wedding. Wainwright, in keeping with a familiar strand of theatrical interpretation, develops audience sympathy for Petruchio by presenting him as psychologically fragile. His offer early on to show Katherine the derelict estate he cannot bring himself to sell but equally cannot afford to keep comes to represent more than eccentricity or a misguided sense of aristocratic privilege when he reveals it was there he was raised by his father when his mother 'cleared off' when he was six. Anxiety about a man's ability to be lord and master in his own home is reworked in this film as a male fear of female abandonment, with family and divorce providing the coordinates around which a peculiarly modern idea of marriage is constructed. The turning-point in their relationship occurs through Harry's intervention – not on the road to Padua, but one evening at the honeymoon villa, where he explains to Katherine that: 'Basically, he's just a mixed-up, emotionally needy exhibitionist who needs someone to think the world of him.' In an off-hand comment that in its specificity recalls the divorce of Petruchio's parents, Harry explains that he will never be 'one of the adults ... he is no more than about six, probably'. At this, Petruchio walks past them, carrying Katherine's supposedly lost luggage. Threatening to throw her case in the pool unless she promises 'unreservedly and without sarcasm' to be nice to him, Petruchio starts a count-down from ten. The stand-off is resolved without a concession on either side: Petruchio ruins her clothes, and Katherine gives him his kiss.


Male insecurity likewise provides the context and motivation for Katherine's final speech of wifely duty. Asked for her opinion during the family row occasioned by her sister's demand for a pre-nuptial agreement, and noticing her husband flinch when her mother insists that 'We live in an age of divorce', Katherine announces to Bianca that she should be grateful to have a husband to take care of her. Her depiction of a marriage in which the husband works to support a wife who stays at home watching television notably bears little relation to the show's narrative circumstances or conceptual framework, given that Harry is the only man in the room (apart from Lucentio's translator) who works for a living. Both Lucentio and Petruchio are supported



financially by their high-flying career wives, with Petruchio, as becomes clearer in the programme's 'after-story', staying at home to raise their children while Katherine goes on to become Prime Minister. This speech on female duty thus seems as meaningless as the pre-nuptial agreement that Katherine moments later tells her husband never holds up in court. But like the legal document, it functions as an important symbolic promise of intent. The fact that Katherine delivers a speech of marital obedience explicitly obviates any need for divorce – and so for even the possible security of a legal safety net – since it offers an unconditional affirmation of the institution of marriage.

The BBC's productions of *Much Ado* and *Dream* likewise struggle with Shakespeare's comic marriages. In *Much Ado*, for example, Hero and Claude (Claudio) are never reconciled after his humiliation of her at the altar, the film playing with viewer expectations of the work to challenge the politics of romantic desire. The action shifts from the abandoned wedding reception to a hospital ward when Hero hits her head and falls into a coma. What follows that night when her friends and family leave the hospital is a version of the display of penance performed by the mourning groom outside of the tomb, here played as a bedside monologue between Claude and the unconscious Hero that is as familiar a trope of television hospital drama as is the nurse who finally enters to usher him firmly into the hall. As the camera tracks Claude leaving the ward, the soundtrack takes an ominous turn, lights start flashing at the nurses' station, and hospital staff rush past him towards the room he has just left; forcing his way back into the room, Claude discovers – at the same time as the viewer – Hero sitting up in bed, the filmic clues at first interpreted as evidence of death in fact marking her unexpected recovery.


Whereas spectators and readers are usually privy to the plot to fake Hero's death, this production situates the spectator with the groom, using the generic conventions of television drama to persuade the viewer that Hero might indeed be dead. This trick ending that is in fact consistent with the shape of the work (the slandered woman must 'die to live') prepares one later on to interpret as yet more false clues Hero's new-found determination to seek a life independent of the jealous control of either husband or father. As this penultimate scene closes with Hero looking silently at Claude as he pleads with her to give him reason to hope they might yet marry 'sometime in the future', the camera cuts to a signboard reading 'sometime in the future', and from there to Benedick dragging a pacing Claude into a registry office where the guests have already gathered. This second wedding seems a lower-key repetition of the first, the implicit answer in the affirmative to Claude's appeal for forgiveness, until Claude suddenly notices that Benedick is standing on the wrong side of his best man. As the two of them switch positions and Beatrice enters with Hero in attendance, the programme concludes with the prospect of a single, rather than double, wedding.



This second trick ending is part of the production's complicated interrogation of Shakespeare's treatment of affective relations, a focus enabled by reconceiving Don John's resentment of the honours heaped in war on Claudio as a melancholic obsession with – or rather, in this character's mind, 'love for' – Hero. The expression of a man's love for a woman through a jealous control of her sexuality, an aspect of the work that is already problematic for many twenty-first century readers and spectators, is made more troubling in this production by finding in 'Don' a near criminal counterpart to Claude. Reservations about Hero's possible motivations for going ahead with the marriage are overlaid with questions about whether, and how, Don's and Claude's possessive attitudes towards Hero might differ. A peculiarly Shakespearean take on the nature of love is explored at length the night before Hero's and Claude's ill-fated wedding day, Beatrice and Benedick parsing the poem he plans to read the next day in place of the best man's speech – Shakespeare's sonnet 116 ('Let me not to the marriage of true minds'). 'Original', Beatrice dryly comments. This familiar sonnet with its injunction against alteration functions as an affirmation of love and marriage, the poem serving as the seemingly prescient expression of Beatrice's and Benedick's feelings for each other. As they reach the final line, the would-be lovers simultaneously conclude that since the poet *did* write, and men *have* loved, 'therefore Shakespeare must be right'.

Beatrice and Benedick make a claim for Shakespeare's supposed power to speak across the ages to the essential truths that lie at the core of human relations. However, the revised ending which takes a stand on abusive, even potentially murderous, marriages and the problem of loving 'not wisely, but too well', is worked through to a very different conclusion. This production in effect builds into its interpretation of the work a self-aware critical apprehension of *Much Ado's* gender politics. *Why would Hero marry Claude? Should one 'admit impediments' to forms of jealous love so readily susceptible to corruption?* The interpretative attitude embedded in the decision to summon up, only to deny, the possibility of Claude's and Hero's marriage is the prospect that Shakespeare's works are never just 'told' – and that at least in this particular instance, for this particular audience, he did not get it right.

Early in *Taming*, Harry describes Katherine to Petruchio as 'a dyke, or mad, or Hitler – or something', telling him that her sister claims she is still a virgin. 'It's not what you want, is it?', he comments, 'Not in this day and age.' In each of these instances, what exactly one wants 'in this day and age' – of marriage, of Shakespearean romantic comedy – presses awkwardly to the fore. Even Helena in this series' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at first rejects 'James' Demetrius after their night in the woods, refusing to be his 'consolation prize'. These uneasy comic resolutions speak to the insistence with which the works are interpreted as domestic tales about marriage and the family, especially as these institutions have been complicated by women's professional careers: Shakespeare's works as (re)told by the BBC become readily legible




to modern day viewers in terms of the challenges posed by a liberal heterosexual feminist politics. While this bias is in part a consequence of the series' orientation towards comedy, the exclusion of cross-dressed comedies such as *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* (or even *The Merchant of Venice*) narrows the opportunities to stage sexual diversity that have become commonplace in theatrical production. Same-sex orientation, when it is not ignored altogether, is either demonized or tightly inscribed within male heterosexual fantasy. Thus Petruchio, future father and house-husband, is quick to make clear as he walks up the aisle in make-up and women's clothes that he is a transvestite, not 'a poof', while Bottom's pornographically coded 'dream' includes the promise of lesbian desire staged for male sexual pleasure as two women dressed in classical Greek attire embrace in Titania's bower. Katherine, by contrast, stigmatized as a 'dyke' and portrayed (along with Beatrice) as a woman nearly past her marital prime, is saved in the end through the love of a good man, a clichéd character arc that once again privileges traditional – albeit in this particular programme gender-inverted – family values.

Even *Macbeth*, not self-evidently one of Shakespeare's most domestic of plays, becomes principally a story of complex family relations, the impetus for 'Ella' Macbeth's murderous ambition linked firmly to a mother's emotionally troubled response to the death of a child. The solution to the literary riddle 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' turns out to be 'one' – a premature child who lived for three days. For Peter Moffat, the show's scriptwriter, the opportunity to cut through speculation about Lady Macbeth's cryptic reference to nursing a baby is one of the pleasures of this sort of project: 'you get to make a choice. I thought it would help our understanding of the character if we just said it – that she had a baby who lived for [a] while and then died'. According to Keeley Hawes (Ella), this information 'gives an insight into why she acts as she does. It doesn't excuse it, or make her a more sympathetic character exactly, but it makes her more accessible to a contemporary audience.' Not prompted by any indication of wavering resolve on the part of her husband, Ella's mention of breast-feeding a baby becomes a narrative end in itself, the couple living the pain of her memory of giving birth to, then grieving after the death of, a child. This disclosure functions to project an image of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth as both wife and mother *manqué*, a woman suffering the mental after-effects of a very precisely located loss.

Writing Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for television


By reconceiving setting, language, and action, these programmes seek to make Shakespeare more accessible to twenty-first century British television audiences. But can one still claim them as genuine instances of Shakespeare's works? Or have the works been so altered in production that one must regard the programmes as adaptations – as not 'fully' Shakespeare's works – or else as *new* works authored by



someone or something else, perhaps modern scriptwriters or the BBC Drama department? In a way, the ambiguous identity of the transvestite, Shakespeare-quoting 16th Earl of Charlbury speaks to the problem of discerning work from adaptation. He is, and he is not, Petruchio. He is the 16th Earl of Charlbury, but viewers are free to bridge the identity gap potentially occasioned by the BBC's production choices to find in this titled but nameless character, Petruchio. The need to supply the elided name emphasizes the extent to which recognition is always a contested, evaluative process – this character *achieves* the name 'Petruchio' only to the extent that he conforms sufficiently to one's expectations of Shakespeare's shrew-tamer. This pragmatic process of gauging when something is 'like enough' likewise guides work recognition, continually fashioning and redefining its accepted limits. This section will explore further issues of work recognition and the attendant problem of adaptation as they bear on television drama, focusing in particular on Shakespeare's language.

The scriptwriters were acknowledged as important creative contributors to the series, but, importantly, they were not presented as the 'authors' of the shows they scripted. On the contrary, each programme was identified through interviews, publicity, website material, and, eventually, DVD extras with a wide range of artistic personnel. In addition to the four scriptwriters (David Nicholls, Peter Moffat, Sally Wainwright, and Peter Bowker), the series was chiefly aligned with the names of two Executive Producers – one of whom (Laura Mackie) was joint Executive Producer with Franc Roddam on the *Canterbury Tales* project, and so particularly closely associated with the modernized format. There were also four directors (Brian Percival, Mark Brozel, David Richards, and Ed Fraiman), and a team of well-respected and celebrity British actors including Shirley Henderson, James McAvoy, Bill Paterson, Billie Piper, Rufus Sewell, Imelda Staunton, and Johnny Vegas, all of whom were well known to British audiences for their work on television, stage, and film. Curiously, though, instead of marking a dispersal of authority, the perhaps counterintuitive effect of this proliferation of names is finally to cause one to fall back on 'Shakespeare' (and perhaps by extension 'BBC Shakespeare') as the name able to encompass and give purpose to all the others.


Unlike *10 Things I Hate About You* or *She's the Man*, Hollywood films that elide more or less entirely their respective indebtedness to *Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*, this series explicitly defines itself as 'Four modern interpretations of Shakespeare plays'. *ShakespeaRe-Told* thus positions itself within a long and continuing history of Shakespearean performance: this 'new' drama, the marketing implies, is at the same time 'classic' drama. Such genre identification guides producers' scheduling and advertising decisions, while for viewers it firmly situates the series within a certain horizon of expectations (in turn reinforced by scheduling and advertising decisions). The cultural coordinates that perhaps most readily give meaning to the series are educational value (the vague perception that the shows will be somehow improving),



the English-language canon, and the BBC's own traditions of production of great classic literature, especially but not exclusively in relation to Shakespeare (one thinks, for instance, of the much earlier BBC–Time/Life Complete Works series, but also of series such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bleak House*). Since many viewers will come to the drama with prior knowledge of the plays – if only a hazy classroom memory of plot and character – the way the series simultaneously enacts and disrupts expectations of 'Shakespeare' as a generic category becomes a significant, and not necessarily alienating, part of the viewing experience.

So while the producers are frank about a level of interpretation that might lead some viewers to describe the project as adaptation, *ShakespeaRe-Told* is nonetheless positioned as instances of the works, able to 'bring Shakespeare' (as one publicity blurb puts it) to a twenty-first century audience. To take up again from the first chapter Grigely's insight into the historical situatedness and constant reinvention of text – into the inevitable failure, as it were, of textual reproduction – it seems not inconceivable to identify as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* a BBC production with clear generic links to Shakespeare that is entitled *Macbeth*. But despite the BBC's efforts to shape audience expectations in such a way as to permit an at least provisional identification of the series with Shakespeare, the loss of Shakespeare's language proved for some viewers an unqualified and insurmountable barrier to recognition. Sir Trevor Nunn, former Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and Royal National Theatre, was one who spoke out against the decision to rescript the plays, insisting that fidelity to language is the touchstone of the work: 'I'm concerned that none of Shakespeare's language is to be involved in these films. Ultimately for me, it's the language that matters – no language, no Shakespeare ... What we find in his language defines how close we are getting to Shakespeare.'


Nunn is not alone in laying a priority on language, playwright and director Stephen Poliakoff and RSC Voice Director Cicely Berry, for instance, arguing seven years earlier at a roundtable discussion hosted by the RSC that 'the magic of Shakespeare's writing' lies in the language: 'When we start to lose the language, that's the end.' Significantly, however, Poliakoff's and Berry's attacks on efforts to 'simplify Shakespeare or dumb him down', like Nunn's after them, are fuelled by productions that they perceive to have made unacceptable textual alterations. Despite the authoritative positions from which all three speak, they are entering into a public debate, seeking to persuade others of the validity of their opinion about what should count as Shakespeare. The very fact that they feel motivated to stake a claim in this debate at all suggests the extent to which the artistic and political boundaries defining the plays and 'the end' of Shakespeare are drawn precisely in response to such exchanges. The occasion for the RSC roundtable, as discussed in Chapter 2, was Matthew Warchus's *Hamlet* and the director's widely publicized call for a ten-year moratorium on productions of



Shakespeare. Arguing that '[p]arts of *Hamlet* are actually rather badly written, and we shouldn't be afraid to say so', Warchus clearly struck a chord with at least some members of the audience at the roundtable discussion who offered a series of comments to the effect that theatre companies should experiment even more freely with the plays. Their views understood in context, it becomes plain that Poliakoff and Berry are defending a particular – not necessarily self-evident – position. Revealingly, their uncompromising stance on the need not to be complacent about the importance of language was prompted by the opinion, voiced from the floor, that Shakespeare's works and texts are not self-identical: 'The stories are good, universal themes and that's what we are interested in, so why not tamper with them?'

The issues here concern the point at which interpretation ('tamper[ing]') disables recognition of the work in the instance, and the degree to which Shakespeare's works, as distinct from either text or performance, are indeed defined by language. I want to pursue this particular problem of adaptation specifically in relation to the demands of writing *Macbeth* for television. As already explained, the death of a child provides the primary narrative context for Ella Macbeth's madness and death. After 'Joe' Macbeth plans the attack on Macduff's home, the camera cuts to a close-up of Ella in profile narrating a gruelling labour, a Caesarean birth, and the baby's eventual death. The sound of murmuring voices and cutlery suggests, however improbably, that she is at her usual place, greeting guests at the front of the restaurant. Growing curiosity about her unseen listener(s) is answered at best uncertainly when the camera at length cuts away to reveal the indistinct outline of two customers who are calmly shown to their tables, the camera then quickly cutting again to a slightly elevated distance shot of the restaurant floor in which Ella is captured staring impassively into the middle distance. The poise and clarity with which the history of the baby's life is recounted are thus opposed to an opaque and disorienting visual narration of the actual moment of telling, the camera's disruption of viewer legibility (should the speech be read as a monologue? as an internalized soliloquy?) marking the character's deteriorating mental stability. The action shortly after cuts to the rooftop of the restaurant from which Ella, her washed hands raw and bloody, falls to her death, the camera pausing over the sight of her lifeless body on a garbage skip below.


The report that she is dead is thus heavily augmented for television with the dramatization of what is transparently a suicide. Questions one might have about the circumstances surrounding Lady Macbeth's untimely death are dispelled, and as with other trajectories in the series, whether comic or tragic, Ella's tale is brought to an unambiguous end. These 'new interpretations' are often directed towards enhanced character motivation and clarification of Shakespeare's action. *Much Ado* sketches in the history behind the long-standing animosity between Beatrice and Benedick with an extended pre-show sequence, and locates the cause for Don (John)'s ill-defined



misanthropy in feelings of emotional abandonment and sexual obsession; *Taming* not only makes explicit Petruchio's straitened financial circumstances (he owes £54,000 to the Inland Revenue), but cites identity politics as the reason behind his unconventional wedding garb, rounding off the comedy with a series of picture album snapshots that reveal the birth of triplets and Katherine's rise to parliamentary power. Such moments explain events that might otherwise seem perplexing (Petruchio's costume at the church), expand on hints only lightly touched upon (Beatrice's casual reference to a prior emotional attachment to Benedick), or else provide a firm sense of closure (Katherine and Petruchio went on to raise a family and run the country, whereas Macbeth's wife killed herself by jumping from a roof).

Moffat explains this pattern of story-telling in terms of the conventions of writing for television: 'You have to fill in the gaps for a 21st-century television audience ... Shakespeare very often leaves things unresolved, whereas the rules of television say you have to finish what you've begun.' Writers for *ShakespeaRe-Told* thus shape Shakespeare's works for the television-literate viewer who has certain narrative expectations of how a story will be told, but who no longer relies on expository dialogue to grasp even complex plotting. Telling a story for television is in large part a visual exercise, and *Macbeth*, like the other programmes in the series, relies at key moments on contrived filmic techniques to encode villainy, to signal hallucination, and to express the intrusion into everyday life of the surreal world of the weird sisters (imagined here as three binmen). Given the dominance of non-verbal narration, it seems especially curious then that the language of *Macbeth* should be no less stylized than its camerawork, the show's heightened and even poetic dialogue drawing attention not just to what characters say, but also to how they say it. The opening dialogue, for example, is given over to the binmen as they eat lunch in the cab of their truck, perched in isolation in the middle of an immense wasteland of garbage. The challenge of making sense of their allusive and heavily accented language as they discuss meat sandwiches, restaurant slop, and *Macbeth*, especially as the scene's visuals are already slightly distorted through almost impossibly tight camera angles, creates the disorienting sensation of not being able fully to get one's bearings on a nearly but not quite ordinary scene. The programme then moves into what feels like a second introductory sequence with a scored filmic montage developing a set of interwoven storylines that converge on the restaurant. Sustained dialogue resumes when Macbeth, heaving a raw pig's head onto the preparation counter, calls over his apprentices to give them a master class in knife skills.


Like the binmen, Macbeth is immediately set apart from other characters by his distinctive language patterns. As he slices and tears the pig's flesh from its head, he instils in the would-be chefs gathered around him the rules of butchery – 'respect' and 'no waste' – that double as life lessons. In another long monologue, Macbeth



remembers the complex sensory experience of eating roast sparrow, describing the sound and feel of crunching down on the bones as a sort of childhood epiphany. The deliberate artistry of this narrated memory implicitly links the sensuality of meat and the sensuality of words, food preparation and poetry emerging as analogous aesthetic forms. The only character to rival Macbeth's wordcraft is Duncan, who recounts as defining the childhood memory of his mother waking him before dawn to watch his father slip into the shed to butcher a sleeping Tamworth pig. When asked if his father killed the animal in its sleep out of kindness, his mother 'gave [him] the truth' rather than the answer she knew he wanted to hear: "The meat," she said, "tastes better." Sounding like each other, and nobody else, Duncan and Macbeth are verbally positioned as potential rivals.

This aural patterning, however, shifts with the plan to knife Duncan in his sleep, the crime seeming in this particular setting a monstrous travesty of the art of butchery since it produces meat that can only be wasted, not consumed. The kitchen, a space previously filled with shouting and music, falls increasingly silent. Days and nights within the windowless walls of the restaurant become indistinguishable, the viewer caught up, like the Macbeths, in the disorienting experience of insomnia. The temporal and linguistic strangeness of this new world is captured in a short scene that takes place shortly after the murder of Duncan is discovered. Summoned by an out-of-hours knocking at the door – whether it is late afternoon or the early hours of the morning is impossible to tell from lighting and costuming cues – Macbeth admits into the kitchen a well-dressed stranger who starts rummaging through cupboards and pulling knives from the wall, demanding to be told the secret he knows 'Michelin man' wants to confess, promising leniency if he is not made to work for his 'pound of flesh'. This tense episode is played as one long monologue, Macbeth, as uncertain as the viewer about the visitor's identity, standing to the side, silent. Concluding that the problem is always vermin in the sewer, this garrulous porter-cum-health-inspector offers an uncanny inversion of the life, meat, and art speeches previously heard from Macbeth and Duncan, describing as 'tragic' the remorseless certainty with which the exterminator is able to kill fecund, but behaviourally predictable, rats. Telling Macbeth that he sees what he is, 'a man who is committed to running a clean kitchen', this comically disturbing figure disappears as suddenly and inexplicably as he arrived.

This new image of a wordless Macbeth increasingly dominates the film as his distinctive, heightened register is taken up by other characters. A version of the 'signifying nothing' monologue, for example, is here delivered by the binmen. Warning Macbeth to beware Macduff as they throw bags of waste into the back of their truck in the alley by the restaurant, the enigmatic binmen explain that they have access to the 'whole story':



MACBETH: How – how do you know these things?

BINMAN 1: The whole story is here. From flaunted sperm in banana flavoured rubber, right through to the yellow hacked-out gob of ancient drunks. All of life.

BINMAN 2: And the Special Brew.

BINMAN 3: Dipping needles.

BINMAN 1: All the great excitements that get us from cradle to the grave. The sound and the fury.

BINMAN 2: It all ends with us.

BINMAN 3: Incinerated.

BINMAN 2: Obliterated.

BINMAN 1: No more.

BINMAN 2: Yesterday's breakfast, yesterday's meat, yesterday's men.


BINMAN 3: All our yesterdays.

BINMAN 2: All our tomorrows.

ALL: [*driving away*] Bye bye, bye bye, bye bye ...

This rich passage of dialogue, with its repetitions, oppositional phrases, and stichomythic rhythm, reduces to detritus 'all of life', with the bleak expanse between birth and old age, yesterday and tomorrow collapsed into a vision of bodily emissions – the 'flaunted' sperm and the 'hacked-out' expectorate – as discarded urban waste. Everything ends with the collection and disposal of meat and men, the repeated shot of the garbage truck at the dump coming to seem in this light an emblem of despair. In terms of the production's manipulation of linguistic registers as the sign of power, the reassignment of this monologue further marks the alienation of Macbeth from himself, his once accustomed creativity and authority appropriated after the murder of Duncan by characters as various as the binmen, the porter-cum-health-inspector, and Billie, his second-in-command in the kitchen, all of whom come to seem threats to his authority.

This treatment of a script for television is conspicuously wrought, the characters' verbal artistry drawing attention to the scriptwriter's craft as art. This encourages in turn a curious bifold perspective on the category of authorship (a faultline already implicit in a series that is simultaneously 'new' and 'classic' drama), with the modern author 'writing' the canonical author. Moffat, accommodating what he calls the rules of television, modernizes Shakespeare's words, introduces visual sequences in place of expository dialogue, develops psychological motivation, and brings narrative trajectories to firm closure. However, he also *disrupts* viewer




expectations of television dialogue to make the language sound in places self-consciously elevated. In a film preoccupied with the production and corruption of art, the craft of the scriptwriter lies in the way that his (re)telling for television reproduces not Shakespeare's poetry, nor even a modernized paraphrase designed to approximate for a later age what might be supposed to be the effect of the language of *Macbeth* in the period of its earliest theatrical production, but a treatment of language that in its patterning and stylization seems overtly literary – or, more specifically, 'Shakespearean'.

Moffat writes what at times registers as strange television dialogue. This is different, however, from Shakespeare's language sounding strange on television, which was often the effect generated by the BBC–Time/Life films. It is precisely because Moffat's language can be accepted first as authentic television that there emerges the potential for it to be recognized subsequently as authentic Shakespeare. Moffat, in short, authors Shakespeare for a new medium and a new millennium by projecting a distinctive authorial *effect* that is consistent with modern perceptions of the canon as high art. Paradoxically, it is this slanting proximity to the work, one's ability to hear the 'Shakespeare' in Moffat's *Macbeth*, that makes an interpretation 'based on the play by William Shakespeare', as the title credits put it, less self-evidently adaptation. The more closely *Macbeth* approaches a poetic style that might be (mis)recognized as Shakespeare – or rather, as it approaches what sounds within the specific context of the broadcast medium 'Shakespearean' – the more the art of the television scriptwriter challenges implicitly the boundaries of what can be recognized as an instance of the authentic work. They are not Shakespeare's words, but this programme might yet be Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Mediated proximities, or much ado about 'noting'

The previous section questioned how conventions of television might contribute to evolving conceptions of Shakespeare's works, particularly in relation to the intersection in production of language and medium. Of course, when the BBC last attempted to mount full-scale productions of the works, critics tended to stress the impossibility of playing Shakespeare on television. A recurrent observation at the time of the monumental BBC–Time/Life series which began in 1978 its marathon broadcast of thirty-seven productions was that although television with its small screen and poor quality image is necessarily a dialogue-intensive medium, Shakespeare's convention-heavy stage language is ill suited to the typical three-camera studio format. Arrangements of actors within the small frame became a predictable range of head-and-shoulders shots, and the complaint was that experimentations with language and mise-en-scène were frequently insufficient to prevent distractions in the home intruding on the viewing experience. As Michèle Willems concludes her analysis of the




distinct styles that characterized directors' work for the series: 'Producing Shakespeare with the resources normally expected on the small screen has too often resulted in attracting attention to the fact that Shakespeare did *not* write for television.'

Since the conclusion of the Complete Works series in 1985, the BBC has explored ways of broadcasting Shakespeare on television as varied as the documentary format of BBC2's *Bard on the Box* series in 1994, the *Animated Tales* on BBC2 (1992–4), and productions of live theatre transmitted on BBC4 (Peter Brook's *Hamlet* in 2002, and *Richard II* and *Measure for Measure* from Shakespeare's Globe in 2003 and 2005, respectively). Each of these types of production presents distinctive answers to the problems and opportunities posed by the medium, with 'Shakespeare on television' emerging over the past thirty years as a catholic house embracing a wide and overlapping range of possible formats. In yet another configuration of 'Shakespeare' and 'television', *ShakespeaRe-Told* elides through wholesale updating of language and situation the lack of fit between theatrical and televisual media so apparent, in different ways, in the BBC–Time/Life series or the broadcasts from Shakespeare's Globe, in effect producing these works as drama made for, not translated to, television. This section shifts from a focus on the interplay between language and work production to consider how strategies of visual narration peculiar to the televisual medium might further contribute to an effect of work recognition.

ShakespeaRe-Told draws for the most part on a familiar range of filming techniques that through repeated use have become naturalized as television's supposedly transparent window onto a fictional world. Scenes are usually filmed from possible, but not actual, human perspectives, the shot-reverse-shot sequence is commonly used to listen in on a conversation between two characters, and editing practices create what seems an 'invisible' cut from one frame to another by showing first a character's glance and then the object of the glance, the sequence of shots seeming 'naturally' to follow the look. These sorts of shooting and editing practices construct what Tony Wilson calls television's 'regime of vision', a highly conventionalized, and yet precisely because of that believably realist, visual narration. Registering such filming techniques – when they are working most effectively, subliminally – as everyday and unexceptional allows one to accept the viewing experience as uncontrived.


However, and fittingly for a series that flirts with issues of production and adaptation, *ShakespeaRe-Told* also marks the extent to which assumptions about 'everyday' television are themselves being reconceived. Low lighting, tracking shots, extreme close ups, camera positions strikingly above or below eye height, digitally enhanced images, and point of view shots – devices which at one time seemed more cinematic than televisual – create idiosyncratic effects that overtly require decoding



and interpretation. One is sometimes aware, in other words, not just of the story unfolding, but of how it is being told visually, the aesthetics of the programme foregrounding as artfully constructed (and so as less unproblematically 'real') both the image and one's perspective on it. Such compositional complexity is consistent with what John T. Caldwell identified in 1995 as a shift towards 'televisuality'. Technological improvements such as new film stocks and more mobile cameras in the production industry, and a prevalence of bigger screens, sharper digital images, and surround sound systems in consumers' homes, have led to greater experimentation since the late 1980s in mainstream television. As television has increasingly invested in 'visual style' (to use Caldwell's phrase) in terms of its manipulation of image and sound, and become proportionately less dependent on wordy expository dialogue, traditional conceptions and expectations of the medium as being 'more like' radio or 'more like' film have been challenged.

Viewers, according to Caldwell, are not only gaining greater sophistication in terms of their ability to decipher increasingly complex *mise-en-scène*, but have become fluent readers of presentational style. Television programmes can juxtapose competing generic styles reminiscent, for instance, of newscasts, soap opera, commercials, or documentary, they can borrow visual effects suggestive of film, and they can even cultivate a deliberately 'retro' look from earlier generations of television programming without being in danger of alienating their projected audiences. This is not to imply that every programme will draw on such 'semiotic abundance', or that viewers necessarily seek or accept this kind of display as typical of the medium, but simply to highlight the availability of an emergent, peculiarly televisual, aesthetic. The at times self-conscious camerawork and editing of a series such as *Shakespeare Re-Told* implicitly construct the viewer as a media-literate 'reader', one who is engaged with the BBC's handling of the conventions of mainstream television as another property of the work in this particular production instance.


In *Macbeth*, for example, the attack on Billie (Banquo) is filmed in a wooded park, Billie and his son 'Freddie' biking quickly along the trails. A juddery hand-held camera takes either Freddie's view on his father ahead in the distance or assumes an undetermined but clearly motivated perspective, racing at the cyclists and (impossibly) cutting without collision across their paths into the bushes. This artful and fragmented filming style raises as an unanswered question the identity of the third presence in the park, implying solely through camerawork the presence of supernatural forces. *Much Ado*, however, is perhaps the film which integrates this self-conscious visual play most fully into its methods of story-telling: *Much Ado* is not only on television, but *about* television and its production in, and for, an increasingly mediatized culture. The programme's self-reflexive attitude is captured in the many scenes set in an imagined Wessex television studio. The action of the drama takes the viewer behind the camera,



as it were, to watch the roles played by producer, director, editors, make-up artists, and newscasters in the production and broadcast of local regional news. Cameras and teleprompters, frequently featured in the television frame, become ordinary parts of the programme's *mise-en-scène*, technical jargon used in the production gallery while the show is live on air cues opening credits, commercial breaks, and movement between cameras, and one watches the constant interaction between gallery and studio floor that happens by means of headset, earphone, and two-way intercom. Occasionally human error intrudes to disrupt the show's smooth broadcast: Don, the newscast's first director, is late on his cues, there is momentary confusion about which camera the meteorological reporter, Hero, is supposed to address, the live broadcast suddenly cuts to an embarrassed Benedick caught checking for food between his teeth.

The overall effect of these meta-televisual scenes is complicated. In part they reinforce as an important aspect of the aesthetics of broadcast television the effect of 'liveness', the sense that this action is transmitted (as though) live directly into one's living room. At the same time, however, a constant engagement with the production of television images disturbs an illusion of camera transparency, serving instead as a constant reminder that this 'liveness' effect is itself fabricated. The exchange of wit on set between Beatrice and Benedick as they prepare for their first co-hosted show is watched through a studio camera that happens to zoom in and out on their exchange, a device used again after Benedick has fallen in love, the repetition visibly marking the transition in their relationship. At other times one watches nested images – a television visible in the frame relaying the action on set (either on or off air) – or else the screen image as a whole is deliberately degraded, in effect transforming one's television at home into a studio monitor. This insistent use of technology exposes, rather than reinforces, the reality effect typically associated with television, with the camera lens, the screened image, and the embedded monitors working in different ways to impose a distance from the action, making of the passive viewer a self-aware watcher.


This attention to the production of images trains viewers in a knowledge of their situated vantage point, encouraging one to be suspicious of even seemingly unmediated narration. The ability of the camera to mislead or even to trick the unwary viewer into making false assumptions that must be subsequently corrected is flaunted in the show's opening moments as one watches characters who will eventually be identified as Beatrice and Benedick separately getting ready to leave their respective flats. Watching the cuts between the two spaces, the viewer infers they are preparing for a date with each other, a reading that is finally contradicted only when Benedick directs his taxi to the airport. As Benedick sends a text on his mobile phone, the storyline darkens: the upbeat, slightly tongue-in-cheek soundtrack (Tom Jones's 'Help Yourself') dies away, and Beatrice, already seated at an expensive restaurant, picks up the text message. One's revised understanding of this mostly dialogue-free sequence is



confirmed when a waiter appears at the table with a bottle of champagne to tell her that 'The gentleman said to say, "No hard feelings"'. The camera quickly cuts to a storyboard that reads 'Three years later', and from there to Beatrice in the news studio, startled out of her reverie by an insistent voice calling her name on the intercom. Beatrice's gesture as she is brought back to the present-day world of the studio re-contextualizes this moment of rejection as her (impossibly omniscient) *memory* of it, throwing into question the assumption that one watched the action unfold, as it were, 'live'. This preshow sequence explains the animosity between Beatrice and Benedick, and provides for Beatrice, in particular, strong character motivation; beyond this, the way it wrong-foots viewers' expectations and so draws attention to one's lack of direct access to events raises as an interpretative issue the formal story-telling conventions of television.

Viewers are caught out again while watching a private conversation between Beatrice and Leonard (Hero's father and the show's producer) that takes place after hours on the newsroom set. After he persuades a reluctant Beatrice to work again with Benedick, Leonard reveals that he has also decided to fire the director, confiding to Beatrice (and so to the viewer) that Don is alcoholic, incompetent, and not well liked by his co-workers. The intimacy of their exchange coincides with the intimacy of the televisual medium to situate the viewer within the scene as an unacknowledged and privileged auditor to a confidential exchange. Suddenly, however, one's viewing position shifts to the darkened gallery overlooking the set where the scene one had been watching from the studio floor continues, now captured on a small monitor. Only when Don leans into the television frame to ask Leonard through a microphone if he would like to speak with him does one realize that this character, like us, has been silently listening in on their dialogue. His unexpected interjection exposes the viewer no less than Leonard and abruptly reconstructs as eavesdropping what had previously seemed a conventionalized, and so unproblematic, spectatorial presence.

The camera's visual preoccupation with what and how one sees further triggers an awareness of how often one watches and is watched in the course of everyday life. Characters are constantly being televised, whether as part of the mass circulation of news and entertainment, or just as a result of the commonplace surveillance of public spaces by means of closed circuit television (CCTV). *Much Ado*, of course, is a play alert to encounters either accidentally overheard or else purposely staged for the benefit of a hidden listener/auditor. Borachio overhears the plan for Don Pedro to woo Hero on Claudio's behalf, and is in turn overhead by the Watch explaining how Claudio was gulled to believe as true the counterfeit spectacle of Hero courted by a lover at her bedroom window; Benedick and Beatrice, like Claudio, but to less potentially tragic ends, are separately tricked when they are framed as supposedly unseen witnesses to false and deliberately planted information. Hearing is figured as eavesdropping;




watching as spying – with both activities demanding careful interpretation in order to discern false performance from true intelligence. *Shakespeare-Told* takes this ‘noting’ motif and extends it to the now familiar conditions of a mediatised information culture dominated by mobile phones, text messaging, and television cameras.

This is particularly evident in the way Benedick is tricked into believing Beatrice loves him through the simple device of making him believe that audio technology affords him a neutrally positioned peripheral stance on a scene taking place in the gallery. A conversation involving Leonard, Hero, Claude, and ‘Peter’ (Don Pedro), the director who returned with Benedick to work on the show after Don’s demotion, first comes to his attention when it is piped, seemingly in error, into his dressing-room; when the sound suddenly cuts out, he sneaks into the studio to continue listening furtively through a headset. By such means, the eavesdropping Benedick is himself transformed into a spectacle surreptitiously watched from above by the conspirators. Much like those viewers previously ‘caught’ watching Leonard and Beatrice, Benedick wrongly assumes that his adoption of a fly-on-the-wall stance guarantees him a privileged and unproblematically mediated perspective on the scene being relayed to him through audio. The comedy, both for the characters-turned-actors in the gallery and the viewer at home, rests in their perception of a larger contextual frame and of Benedick’s manipulated and unwitting position within it.

This training in the potential duplicity of media technology – a suspicion of television, and of telecommunications more generally – is reinforced by the way Claude is persuaded of Hero’s infidelity. Working on his jealous and violent temperament the night before his wedding, Don ‘confesses’ to Claude in the hotel library that he and Hero are lovers, producing as confirmation of their affair signed photographs and text messages sent from her mobile phone. The scene, played as a two-hander in which one character, Iago-like, plants doubts in another’s mind which lead him to mistrust the woman he loves, causes this plot line to shade into the much later *Othello* in terms of its treatment of marriage, male friendship, and betrayed faith. These resonances between the plays are further heightened when Don, without recourse to accessories, gives Claude the ‘ocular’ proof he demands. Watching Hero from his hidden vantage point out of earshot down the hall talk to Don at the door of her room, then using his mobile phone to hear Hero, now inside her room, deny Don’s presence with the words he cannot see him suggest to her, Claude misinterprets this fragmented evidence, believing he sees and hears what Don directs him to see and hear.


Don’s deceptions are only unravelled after the wedding, when the security guard, ‘Mr Berry’ (Dogberry), and his assistant, ‘Vincent’ (Verges), piece together for Benedick the evidence gleaned from what had previously seemed their comically vigilant security checks. Mr Berry saw Don steal the photographs during the fancy dress



party, and Don was caught on CCTV taking Hero's phone from her bag at the office; at the end of the library scene, the camera cuts to a vantage point in the hall where one becomes suddenly aware of Vincent watching unseen, with us, the conversation between Don and Claude. Benedick's 'challenge' back at the hotel after Claude humiliates Hero at the altar consists in showing him how he has been tricked, making explicit precisely the same lessons in uncertain perspective and biased information transmission the viewer has been implicitly trained by the camera to attend to over the course of the programme. What follows is a public confrontation in which Hero demands a reason for Don's malice, a motive for his actions. This scene, without an equivalent in the work familiar to spectators and readers, blurs once again the boundaries separating *Much Ado* from *Othello* as the bewildered victims of slander try to understand not 'what' but 'why'. Unlike Don John, who runs away, or Iago, whose refusal to speak makes him seem a cipher of evil, this Don cites as his inspiration unrequited love.

The directness of this face-to-face exchange and its ability finally to expose Don's deceit and obsession might seem to confirm a profound suspicion of telecommunication, especially the way confusions can proliferate as one consequence of an increasingly mediatized and mediated world. But the ease with which Claude(/io) is persuaded of Hero's dishonesty is not peculiar to *ShakespeaRe-Told*. On the contrary, a recurrent motif of this work in its various instances is the manipulation of evidence enabled by a jealous mistrust of female sexuality; all that changes in this instance of production are the resources available to the slanderer. Television cameras and mobile phones are thus not in themselves the problem – indeed, if one considers Mr Berry's timely intervention, they could just as easily be understood as contributing to the solution. However, the ability accurately to interpret the evidence presented to one's eyes is shown to depend on an increasingly sophisticated knowledge of the potential of electronic media and the conventions within which they operate.

This programme meta-televisually foregrounds the realization that personal communications devices and technologies of remote observation and surveillance (either selectively mediated by a camera operator or, as in the case of CCTV, impassively and endlessly recording information) have become a condition of modern existence, altering assumptions of what constitutes the 'normal' operation of perception in twenty-first century Britain. This in turn has consequences for one's assumptions about, and so knowledge of, Shakespeare's works, especially a work such as *Much Ado* that is preoccupied above all with the manipulation of perception. The work cannot remain exactly what it was four hundred years ago, or even twenty years ago, in part because the audiences who must discursively apprehend it by means of its instances have been conditioned to 'see' differently. For this reason, it is not self-evidently the case that *ShakespeaRe-Told* 'translates' the works to television (a choice of words that




presupposes an innately adaptive and alien medium). On the contrary, the series integrates into its formal strategies of story-telling modern communication technologies that – to the extent one has come to take them for granted as ordinary parts of daily existence – already inform in fundamental ways one’s perception of the legitimate boundaries of Shakespeare’s works.

(Re)Telling *Dream*, building digital Britain

Where *Much Ado* plays with and critiques perception, particularly in relation to the way evidence can be mediated and potentially compromised by modern communications technologies, the final programme in the series, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, addresses the manipulation of sight itself. *Dream* exhibits many of the same formal and thematic characteristics of the earlier films, particularly in terms of its narrative interventions, stylized camerawork, and preoccupation with marriage and female agency. Theseus and Egeus are conflated in the figure of Theo Moon, Hermia’s irascible father, with the Duke’s marriage to Hippolyta reconceived in the film’s closing scenes as a renewal of vows between Theo and ‘Polly’, his wife of twenty-four years. Theo and his guests think they are at the holiday park to celebrate the engagement of Hermia to James Demetrius, but Puck informs the viewer that they have been brought there by the fairies in order to give supernatural forces the opportunity to help Theo and Polly resolve an impending separation. Thus the crisis at the outset of the programme from a fairy perspective involves not unmarried, but married, lovers, the conflict between Oberon and Titania doubling the escalating tensions between Theo and Polly.


A metaphorical connection between sight and (sometimes false) understanding is made readily legible through stylized camerawork signalling the transformative effect of the ‘love juice’ dropped into the eyes of Lysander, Demetrius, and Titania. Extreme close-up shots of a sleeper’s eye held open and a drop of liquid falling in slow motion through the air are followed by a low rumbling sound and a high-contrast, rapidly accelerated pastiche of associatively linked faces and situations. Such effects suggest the television viewer is given privileged access to dreams, specifically to the sleeper’s mind’s eye at the moment his or her mental visions are redirected by the power of the drug. The suggestion that the viewer’s own sense of sight is no less vulnerable to manipulation is introduced in the opening scene. The programme begins in an empty forest clearing: one hears the sound of a man and a woman arguing but can see nothing other than little sunbeams flitting through the air. The shot then cuts to Puck sitting up in the trees who, in a direct address to camera, offers to better our eyesight through the application of an eyewash. As with the drugged lovers later, one watches the drop fall in slow motion, the picture swims as the liquid hits the camera lens with a low rumble, one glimpses flashes of what can be identified on a second viewing as moments in the film yet to ensue, and then, as the camera turns back to the



forest ground, one suddenly sees what had previously been imperceptible: Oberon and Titania standing in the clearing, playing out again the scene of their argument. As Puck notes, 'Things aren't always what they appear to be'. This idea that there exist alternative realities if only one could see them thus extends beyond the fictional world of the film to include the viewers watching the programme. Within the narrative space of *Dream*, love juice functions to distort visual and mental sight; when considered from the point of view of the television audience, Puck's eyewash provides viewers with a fuller and more accurate perspective on the unfolding action.

The difference between the visually innovative *Much Ado* and *Dream* in terms of their treatment of perception and sight rests in the disparity between electronic devices such as newsroom cameras and mobile phones, and fairy magic. This distinction, however, is ultimately not as important as it might at first seem since the effect of a self-consciously privileged access to a supernatural world can only be created in *Dream* by means of the technological resources of television, thus generating for the viewer, as with *Much Ado*, an acute attention to medium. When the series was first broadcast in Britain, this effect was further reinforced by a continuity announcement at the end of each of the four shows which instructed viewers to 'press red now' to go interactive with the programme they had just watched. For those with analogue television, the invitation to press a non-existent red button on their remote controls seemed to summon up the promise of another world as inaccessible to their eyes as the fairy world of *Dream* is to the eyes of the young lovers. But for those others – the Bottoms of Britain? – who found themselves in November 2005 in a position to abandon a technologically imposed and culturally learned relationship of passive consumption to enter an interactive 'red button' environment, *ShakespeaRe-Told* provided an encounter with a largely novel and still evolving conception of television as transformed and redefined through digital transmission. In this section I will investigate the way *ShakespeaRe-Told* invests in contradictory discourses of authoritative production depending on whether one considers the programmes, or the programmes in relation to their interactive supplements. This uneasy tension is a feature of the series' political and ideological implication in issues relating especially to digital literacy and the BBC's unique mandate among British broadcasters as a 'trusted guide' to change.

The interactive component received no mention in reviews of the series, which were on the whole mixed, many reviewers clearly bemused by these so-called interpretations. Robert McCrum, for example, unable to locate in the changed storylines and modernized language the 'literary inheritance we call "William Shakespeare"', recommends sending the BBC drama department 'back to the Arden and the Oxford texts to discover that you don't need to "reinterpret" Shakespeare', claiming the season 'is inventive, often wildly so, brave, and occasionally interesting. It is also a tragic failure



and a dreadful waste of money.' Thomas Sutcliffe acknowledges midway through the month-long season that the series should be commended for offering modern writers a commission for a one-off television play and the opportunity to stretch beyond the limits typical of more conventional television programming. 'On the other hand,' he continues, citing the previous night's airing of *Taming* as a good case in point, 'we are entitled to consider these plays as if they were just one-offs, and when you do that, it can be quite hard to credit that anyone would broadcast something so silly and implausible if Shakespeare weren't standing surety for the whole affair.'


Sutcliffe's assumption is that the BBC was persuaded to undertake the series not because it necessarily makes for outstanding television drama, but because the BBC (or its anticipated audience) considers Shakespeare's plays worth broadcasting in any format. The political and educational agendas underpinning this series, however, are perhaps more complicated than Sutcliffe's analysis suggests. The idea for the *Canterbury Tales* series, the model for *ShakespeaRe-Told*, grew out of a desire back in 2001 for 'a piece that reflected life in the new century'. The stories were pitched as 'enduring' tales that 'embody the timeless themes of love, lust, greed, power, anger and bigotry – human emotions that are as relevant today as they were six hundred years ago'. Similarly universalizing assertions about Shakespeare's drama have long been commonplace, so it seems not entirely surprising that the BBC might follow up its success with a sequel based on a few of the plays. The format, however, is not exactly reproduced. Specifically, the *Canterbury Tales* series lacked the interactive supplement accessed through one's television immediately following the broadcast of *ShakespeaRe-Told* by means of 'red button' technology. Pressing the red button took one to the actor David Oyelowo, who, pictured outside of a weathered stage door, introduces the viewer to the interactive format. A short clip is then shown of actors dressed in black and playing in a white box who perform a scene or speech from the work just broadcast. In each case the actors work from an unmodernized script. When the clip ends, Oyelowo invites each viewer to use his or her remote control to choose among four options (see Figure 3). The selections include interviews with actors, writers, and directors on the making of the series ('Performers'), and listening to Oyelowo offer a voiced-over commentary on the structure of the language and choice of vocabulary while watching the actors repeat their performance ('Glossary'). Another set of interviews with British scholars and media figures such as Sir Peter Hall, Kathleen McLuskie, and Michael Wood provides biographical details about the author and information about the earliest socio-historical conditions of theatrical production ('Context'), while the fourth option offers a thematic approach to the works, relating them to modern points of reference as varied as music festivals and drug culture, *EastEnders*, and protests against the war in Iraq ('Theme'). Viewer interaction is limited to arranging and choosing among these four pre-filmed, programme-specific clips, a

level of involvement presented by Oyelowo as an opportunity to ‘follow your own path to create your own story’.

Digital interactivity thus links education, Shakespeare, and the BBC in what has become a familiar nexus of authority, and one notes without surprise that the New Shakespeare Season was timed to coincide with the release of the BBC–Time/Life Complete Works as an anniversary box-set DVD collection. It seems doubtful, however, that *ShakespeaRe-Told* will enjoy the same shelf-life as the earlier series, which, despite widespread reservations about the critical merits of many of its productions, has served as a pedagogical tool in classrooms around the world for the better part of three decades. The decision, in particular, to rescript the language undoubtedly compromises the usefulness of the programmes as a certain type of illustrative performance resource for teachers of English literature. Moreover, topical jokes such as Snug’s tentative guess that Bottom with his ass’s head is trying to impersonate the footballer Ruud van Nistelrooy, or Malcolm’s blundering reference to Gordon Ramsay (‘we don’t use that name in this kitchen,’ Billie tells him, ‘it’s bad luck – we just call him the Scottish chef’), will not only inevitably and quickly date but are so culturally specific as to have currency only with an audience keenly attuned to trends in British popular culture.




Figure 3 Interactive menu, *ShakespeaRe-Told*, British Broadcasting Corporation. Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/interactive.shtml>; site accessed 12 August 2008.



However *ShakespeaRe-Told*, unlike the earlier series, is not dependent on selling itself as providing either enduring or universal readings of Shakespeare's works. Its educational impact rests instead in an irreproducible broadcast moment when viewers were invited to press the red button, and what was 'performed' in homes across Britain was television itself, as reinvented through digital technology. When one looks beyond the Shakespeare content to examine the medium of performance, the purpose of commissioning, filming, and broadcasting modern versions of the works comes better into focus. To return to Sutcliffe's observation, Shakespeare does indeed stand 'surety' for the series, but not quite in the manner he suggests; rather than serving as a specious guarantor of quality, Shakespeare's works provide a familiar entertainment vehicle for a certain form of mass education in new technologies. The BBC is reaching out by means of an already tested narrative formula to a self-selecting audience base whose interest in Shakespeare might well predispose them to take advantage of, or *wish* to take advantage of, the opportunity to go interactive. Although the interactive component of the programme was made simultaneously available on the BBC-hosted *ShakespeaRe-Told* website, the point, at least at the moment of broadcast, was not to redirect viewers from television to the internet but to get them to use their television in an unaccustomed way, gaining a greater comprehension of what digital offers and how to use it, and so prompting among analogue and digital viewers alike a reconception of the medium of television.


The motivation for this initiative reflects the complex relationship to market forces and centralized government that has characterized the BBC since its inception in its current form in 1927. While it is in the Corporation's own commercial interests to train up users in new technologies, the government equally demands of the BBC this critical educational role, an expectation enshrined in the White Paper that was prepared throughout 2005 and released in the spring of 2006, which sets for the BBC in its next charter period the responsibility of 'Building Digital Britain'. In the government's eyes, technological developments are proceeding 'at an unprecedented, often bewildering, rate', and the BBC, perceived by the public as 'a "trusted guide" to new technology and the new experiences that come with it', is ideally positioned to draw British viewers into this new world. The branding of the series as 'BBC' and 'Shakespeare' discussed above thus speaks to the BBC's unique mandate among broadcasters to provide the 'practical help and advice' to make possible a nationwide switch to digital by 2012.

The decision to transmit the series on BBC1, a channel that can be received by both analogue and digital televisions, is therefore a significant broadcasting choice. Instead of catering to an audience that has already converted to digital with a distinctive genre of 'Shakespeare' programming – as with the decision to broadcast on a digital channel (BBC4) Peter Brook's *Hamlet* and live productions of *Richard II* and



Measure for Measure from Shakespeare's Globe – the BBC made the changing shape of television felt by every viewer who tuned into *ShakespeaRe-Told*. Analogue viewers, denied access to the interactive site, were enticed to make the switch to digital, while recently converted digital viewers were introduced to the benefits and capabilities of digital technology and to a greater understanding of how to use it. The educational impact of *ShakespeaRe-Told* is precisely not tied to series longevity, and not just because this particular technology will probably be obsolete within five years. The potential of the series as a learning tool for new technologies was almost entirely fulfilled at the moment of transmission because of the irreproducible nature of the red button experience: there is no way to access the interactive environment when watching the films by means of recorded playback devices. Even as broadcast four months later on BBC Canada, the programmes, stripped of their interactive technology, assumed a very different – more backward-looking – cultural and educational significance. As audiences become more sophisticated digital users, their relationship to the red button, an object which functions at the moment as a metonym of television as a transforming and so newly unfamiliar medium, will itself inevitably alter. *ShakespeaRe-Told*, a broadcast event directed at a local audience at a particular moment in the continuing evolution of British communications technology, thus intervenes simultaneously in popular conceptions of the works of Shakespeare and the media by which they are currently told.

With the conclusion of the British broadcasts at the end of November, the educational potential of *ShakespeaRe-Told* shifted from television to the internet, with ancillary material facilitating a 'do it yourself' attitude to production in terms both of Shakespearean interpretation and film. The adjustment of priorities in the two years between 2003 and 2005 can be gauged through a comparison of the BBC-hosted websites for the *Canterbury Tales* and *ShakespeaRe-Told* projects. The Chaucer site, illustrated with stills from the six programmes, has clickables leading to a photo gallery, video clips, a prize quiz, a downloadable screensaver, supporting material about the programmes in the forms of a 'Producer's Intro' and 'Episode Guides', and educational information about how to write for television ('Get Writing'). The *ShakespeaRe-Told* site supplements these pages with an online murder mystery game ('The Seven Noble Kinsmen'), an invitation to 'Explore Shakespeare Interactive' which streams to one's computer via broadband the material that was first made accessible through digital television, and '60 Second Shakespeare'. This last option, aimed explicitly at schools, opens into nested information pages and video tutorials designed to communicate and inspire, training students in the digital media skills they require to create their own one-minute film or audio interpretation of Shakespeare in performance. Schools were invited to submit their productions to the BBC through the six months to May 2006 for posting on the *ShakespeaRe-Told* site and review by their




peers. By constructing them as producers, the BBC makes of students knowledgeable consumers of digital media.

The BBC thus foregrounds in a variety of ways an awareness of television as a medium itself undergoing major changes. Television no longer looks or performs entirely according to conventional expectations, and the shift for viewers from an attitude of mass passive consumption to one of personalized interactivity enabled by digital technology radically blurs the boundaries separating television from, say, the internet or even computer games. Functionality is expanding to the point where existing conceptions of television no longer seem adequate or appropriate. This is a lesson that the BBC embeds in *ShakespeaRe-Told* precisely by making the medium visible as medium through devices such as stylized camerawork and language, situated perspectives, and the development of interactive environments.

Given what might be perceived by some viewers as unwelcome change to a medium long taken for granted, it is then perhaps no surprise that the BBC returns to the works of Shakespeare, grounding technological innovation in stories likely to register with a British audience as both comfortably familiar and, especially as televised by the BBC, quintessentially British. The potential for viewer alienation was likewise assuaged by building into the series allusions to popular British television culture. To return briefly to *Dream*, Bill Paterson and Imelda Staunton, much-loved stalwarts of British television, are cast in the roles of Theo and Polly, while in Titania's bower the offer made to Johnny Vegas (Bottom) of a familiar pyramid of wrapped chocolates provides a camp visual citation of the long-running Ferrero Rocher television advertisements ('You are spoiling us, monsieur'). Vegas himself, a household name in British television comedy, famously starred three years earlier with a knitted monkey – in what seems an apt intertextual link – in advertisements launching the erstwhile ITV Digital channel. These sorts of common points of reference (among them the works of Shakespeare) help to ease the transition from analogue to digital transmission, encouraging viewers to continue to recognize in this transformed medium, television.


The BBC promises its viewers 'television Shakespeare', but *ShakespeaRe-Told* makes apparent how both of those terms – along with viewer expectations of them – have undergone revision in the twenty years since the completion of the BBC–Time/Life Complete Works broadcasts. The differences between the two series are more deep-seated than the matter of modernized language and settings, choices McCrum attacks as a failure to safeguard Britain's 'literary inheritance'. Television is not what it was. As a broadcast event *ShakespeaRe-Told* spoke to a moment when innovations in technology made expectations of television briefly visible as conventionalized, rather than as innate to the medium, before a new model of television–viewer interaction could itself be learned and in turn taken for granted.



Viewer familiarity with Shakespeare was used to introduce ‘television’ as an altered discursive structure, so driving up, in the words of the 2006 White Paper, ‘media literacy amongst all social and age groups’. But alterations to the means of production cannot be introduced without implications for the work; such innovation sets in motion a feedback loop which influences conceptions of Shakespeare’s work and so in turn assumptions about its legitimate reproduction.

Whether *ShakespeaRe-Told* should be categorized as ‘interpretation’ or ‘adaptation’ is a question that cannot finally be resolved since the authority of the work, itself under constant negotiation, is conferred on, rather than found in, the production instance. To put this another way, to seek to determine in any absolute sense the series’ status as either interpretation or adaptation is to ask the wrong question of production since there is no fixed original the essence of which can be repeated or captured through performance. The point is rather to look *beyond* the instance at hand to the surrounding contextual circumstances to determine how, at this moment and for a particular community of users, the work is being defined (and redefined) as a conceptual tool. On this basis one can then determine whether a particular instance of production is likely to count – and for whom – as a ‘genuine’ repetition of the work.

ShakespeaRe-Told offers a fascinating example of this authorizing process in action since the series constructs for different communities of users contradictory notions of the work, the divide, tellingly, falling along the line that separates analogue from digital viewers. On the cover of Bowker’s script of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, pictured on the website as one of two quiz prizes, one can read that it is subtitled ‘An Adaptation’. However, with just one notable exception that I will return to consider below, the only other place this term appears either on the website or in advertising and other BBC-supported material is behind a clickable offering a brief description of historical stage traditions found deep within the ‘Seven Noble Kinsmen’ computer game. The terms preferred by the BBC are ‘updating’ or ‘interpretation’, both of which foreground continuities with, over departures from, the works. There is no suggestion that these films are not adaptations, but one notes that the BBC itself seems satisfied to perpetuate fuzzy boundaries. These programmes based on television scripts that carry the same titles as plays written by Shakespeare are – as the graphically hybrid title of the series implies – simultaneously Shakespeare ‘Told’ and Shakespeare ‘Re-Told’. This slippage around a (possible) prefix speaks both to the complexities of ‘Shakespeare’ as origin and a reluctance to declare whether these are genuine or adapted instances of the works, the producers leaving it finally to the consumers to recognize in the programmes both/either television and/or Shakespeare. These boundaries shift, however, as soon as one goes ‘interactive’ to explore the material broadcast as an exclusively digital supplement to the series. It is as though *ShakespeaRe-Told* itself exists in two versions. The first version, directed at users




without digital capability, strongly implies that these broadcasts, like any instance of production, are 'interpretations'. The other version of the series – the one that comes with an interactive supplement – freely situates the four broadcasts as 'adaptations' of original works. The interactive environments share a common introductory sequence in which Oyelowo, about to enter a theatre by its stage door, pauses to invite the viewer to join him in what amounts to a special 'behind-the-scenes' tour of Shakespeare's works:

You are about to embark on a fascinating interactive journey that will take you right to the heart of Shakespeare's plays, and I will be your guide along the way. You've just seen the BBC's modern adaptation of [fill in title]. Now we're going to use modern technology to explore a scene from this play in its original language. For each week that BBC1 brings you a contemporary reworking of one of Shakespeare's stories we will allow you to explore that particular play in greater depth. We're going to show you a defining moment from the play. We've staged the scene in a simple theatrical space to allow you to concentrate on Shakespeare's words, as the drama of Shakespeare's stories was created by words alone. With the scene as your starting point you'll have the chance to discover more about Shakespeare's players, history, themes, and language. You'll be the one to follow your own path to create your own story. Come with me and let's see if we can find a new way to interact with Shakespeare.

These prefatory remarks present what follows as a return to an authorial original. To take up Oyelowo's invitation is to make the 'journey' from the margins of the work 'right to the heart of Shakespeare's plays'. The viewer's remote starting point (figuratively outside of the stage door which comes to stand as the material sign of privileged access) is defined by the programme one has just watched on television – now no longer figured as an interpretation but as a 'contemporary reworking' and 'modern adaptation'.


Although one is eventually asked to select among four options ('Performers', 'Glossary', 'Context', and 'Theme'), one can only reach those options by first passing through a staged episode that has been identified by the producers as 'defining'. The way these embedded performances are situated in relation to the full-length television productions is instrumental to a perception that one is now gaining privileged access to the real thing. Oyelowo introduces the excerpt shown to *Much Ado* viewers, for example, by explaining that the interactive site's performance of the Watch overhearing Borachio bragging to Conrad follows 'the original play' in showing the deception of Claudio 'carried out with the aid of Don John's vile henchman Borachio'. Once past this scene, Oyelowo summarizes what viewers will encounter if they choose the 'Performers' option by explaining that: 'Our modern adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* is set in a world renowned for its shallowness and deceit – TV. To hear how and why this world



was picked, select our second option and listen to the insight of our writer, David Nicholls, talk about bringing the play to the small screen.' The implicit suggestion is that, unlike an adaptation for television set in a newsroom, the BBC's unelaborated and unmodernized staging of Act 3.3 for the interactive environment offers a suitable launching-off point for an in-depth exploration of the 'drama of Shakespeare's stories', created in his own time 'by words alone'. This returns the viewer to the belief, explored earlier in relation to objections to some modern productions set out by Berry, Poliakoff, and Nunn, that Shakespeare's works survive in the words. These short excerpts – the others include Katherine's final-scene monologue (delivered by a male actor), Macbeth's dagger soliloquy, and Titania awakening to Bottom's song – are presented as the 'unadapted' instances of production by means of which one gains greater insight into Shakespeare's works, a process which in turn allows one to formulate an informed assessment of the 'adaptations' one has already watched on television.

The sleight of hand achieved by this interplay between original broadcast and red-button supplement is to persuade the viewer that the performances encountered in the interactive environment are 'neutral' instances of the works. And of course they are not. To continue for the moment with the *Much Ado* example, even this 'simple theatrical space' assumes a modern period setting when the actors playing Borachio and Conrad, looking somewhat like film mobsters, enter the white box set wearing black suits, ties, and hats, with Borachio sporting a heavy gold necklace; the Watch is likewise dressed in a black shirt and trousers, but his lower status is signalled through the lack of a tie, jacket, and hat, and his regional difference is marked with a Welsh accent. Playing the Watch not as a group but as a single actor perched above the other two on top of an up-ended white block is a good example of theatrical economy, but it has important interpretative consequences: the Watch's end-of-scene dialogue is transformed into a short monologue, the pronouns used by this character are altered from 'we' to 'I', and his interjections, scattered throughout Borachio's tale, are delivered as asides to the audience. Curiously, this latter production choice (presumably introduced because there is nobody onstage to whom this character might direct his lines) is subsequently presented as an essential part of the work. Viewers who select the 'Glossary' option learn from Oyelowo that 'Shakespeare puts the audience in a privileged position – possessors of knowledge of which the characters in the play remain unaware – and he reinforces the importance of this position by having the watchmen *talk directly to the audience* in asides' (my emphasis). A few other lines and words are likewise reassigned or in some cases cut, and this stand-alone scene is given a firm sense of comic closure when Borachio's and Conrad's willingness to obey is punctuated by the Watch collapsing in surprise in a faint.


This example in fact nicely demonstrates the extent to which 'the drama of Shakespeare's stories' is *never* created in performance 'by words alone'. It also points up



the complexity of the process by which one recognizes the work in production once interpretation is admitted as a component part of what constitutes a 'genuine' instance. Without the benefit of fixed criteria (such as Goodman, for example, devises), an assessment of the in/authentic repetition can only rely on judgement and context. One is perhaps disposed to regard this staging of a scene from *Much Ado* as a genuine repetition of the work, despite its modernizations, interpretations, and language adjustments, precisely to the extent that one is directed to find and evaluate interpretative distance between two production instances, one categorized as staged performance, the other as televisual adaptation. My point here is not to argue that textual revisions somehow invalidate production, but to foreground the way this production – inset within and contextualized by an interactive educational site, which is in turn inset within and contextualized by the *ShakespeareRe-Told* series – generates, rather than discovers, an authentic Shakespearean work to which it then claims fidelity.

What seems most surprising, even paradoxical, about the BBC's treatment of the scenes embedded in the interactive site is precisely that they are 'staged' in a 'simple theatrical space'. Another part of what evidently makes these performances recognizable as authentic instances of the works is the way they are coded as specifically *theatrical* instances of production. This effect extends well beyond Oyelowo's verbal introduction to the interactive environment: the viewer is invited to walk through a stage door rather than into a television studio, the white box set and black costuming reproduces a familiar and peculiarly theatrical minimalist aesthetic, the sound of the light breaker being thrown at the beginning and end of each of the sequences creates the effect of live, instead of filmed, performance. Even the direction to camera of the Watch's asides in a stage whisper is a device borrowed from theatre that draws the television audience into the enactment by seeming to break the fictional illusion. The implicit suggestion is that genuine as opposed to adapted production of Shakespeare's works is theatrical rather than televisual – even when transmitted on digital television. Technology is ostensibly set aside as a hindrance rather than an aid to production, with performance seeming more closely to approach the work the more completely it is stripped bare to reveal in a 'pure' form Shakespeare's words. In effect the BBC marks these productions as authentic by seeming to embrace the 'two planks and a passion' school of thought mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Particularly interesting then is to mark the way advanced communications technology contributes to this illusion of 'liveness'. In the enactment from *Dream*, for example, the aesthetic of the spare theatrical set and minimalist casting is maintained by means of computer graphics, animation bringing to life a vibrant fantasy world in which Bottom is transformed and Titania attended in her bower by an entourage of fairies. An ass's head which seems to move with Bottom is sketched as a black and white line drawing over the actor's head, and the same technique is used quickly and



lightly to introduce and erase flora and fauna from the frame; the three fairies, by contrast, are represented as small animated splodges in primary colours that when summoned fly out of Titania's mouth to float in the air, attending on Bottom. Computer animation is thus superimposed on the BBC's 'simple theatrical space' in order to invent the fairy world as a dynamic space that is perceptibly distinct from the mortal world, and digital technology is folded into the 'theatrical' production with minimal disruption since it specifically functions to reinforce a sense of the fairies' otherness.

These embedded performances of scenes from the works are thus presented as though they were live theatre, but without the 'once-removed' effect of an actual live performance filmed for television broadcast. By such means, the viewer seems to gain privileged access not just to an interpretation but also to the real thing, Shakespeare's work itself. Crucially, the most important factor contributing to this effect of authenticity is not Oyelowo's commentary, nor even the carefully managed illusion of a neutral and theatrical staging, but the way the viewer is situated within this interactive environment as a producer – less a passive consumer than a participant integral to the decision-making activities on which production depends. Those who follow Oyelowo through the stage door implicitly agree to collaborate with him on a pioneering, technology-aided encounter with Shakespeare's words to 'see if we can find a new way to interact with Shakespeare'. The effect of choosing among the options thereafter is to generate the sense that one is actually making real-time decisions that shape real-time interactions with the works in production. Theatrical 'liveness' is reinvented as an effect of digital interactivity, the viewer's own 'performance' seeming to discover, while actually participating in the ongoing construction of, Shakespeare's work. As with the films from which this supplement takes meaning and purpose, the works of Shakespeare are generated in the space *between* production and reception. This realization of the work as an event, as a process of dynamic interplay between an instance of production and its user, is captured in the medium of digital television by an invitation to play and to learn, or, as the BBC puts it, to 'press the red button now'.

*Shooting the Hero: The Cinematic
Career of Henry V* from Laurence
Olivier to Philip Purser

Ton Hoenselaars

03: *Shooting the Hero*: The cinematic career of *Henry V* from Laurence Olivier to Philip Purser




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Critical investigations of Shakespeare's *Henry V* have increasingly come to recognize the importance of theatrical and cinematic appropriations, native as well as foreign, but they still tend to ignore off-shoots generated by these appropriations in other genres and in the broader field of popular culture. It nearly goes without saying that such spin-offs are neglected at the critic's own peril; often they may generate valuable new insights into the more familiar Shakespearean material, and give rise to fresh investigation and debate. One such unfortunate oversight is Philip Purser's 1990 novel entitled *Friedrich Harris: Shooting the Hero*, a first-person fictional tale about the making of Laurence Olivier's 1944 film epic. This novel places the film and its crew in the context of wartime propaganda, and, by establishing a direct connection between the German film industry run by Joseph Goebbels and the charismatic acting skills of Laurence Olivier, it ultimately invites a reconsideration of the political significance of the most problematic of Shakespeare's history plays and one of its most popular cinematic reincarnations. Purser's largely unexperimental novel represents a useful case study because it problematizes the phenomenon of hero worship which has deeply affected the reception of Shakespeare's play throughout the twentieth century, and which even iconoclastic approaches like John Sutherland and Cedric Watts' *Henry V, War Criminal?* Have been unable to challenge.

Shooting the Hero is a Second World War spy novel like Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Male* (1939), presenting a clash between British and German interests during the Nazi years. This conflict of interests is effectively suggested by the novel's main character, Friedrich Harris, who is half German and half Irish. Clearly, the German part of his name is meant to recall his distinguished royal German forebear whom Thomas Carlyle celebrated as Frederick the Great ('my illustrious namesake', as the narrator in the novel puts it), just as the British part of his name is a reminder of 'Bomber Harris', who coordinated the allied bombing campaign against Germany ('Official propaganda against the air-raids reducing our cities to ruins had lately begun to name the English air marshal Harris as the arch-villain').

Shooting the Hero recounts Harris's memories of the shooting of *Henry V* ('the Olivier movie above all Olivier movies'), at which he was present as Joseph Goebbels's film-adjutant preparing *Kolberg*, the most expensive German propaganda film of the Second World War, a venture comparable, perhaps, only to Olivier's *Henry V*. The novel's plot begins in 1943, in Goebbels' film viewing room in Berlin. The occasion is the Reichsminister's announcement that they are planning the greatest film ever made, a film that will even eclipse *Gone with the Wind*. He shows the spectators present, including Veit Harlan, the film *Lady Hamilton* (dir. Alexander Korda, 1941) starring Laurence Olivier. Goebbels wants to find out why Germany has 'no actors of such heroic



magnetism', and announces the plan to give Olivier a central part in *Kolberg*, to be directed by Veit Harlan. Goebbels believes that Olivier 'would certainly be the most valuable player in any film designed to popularize new world-political situations that might arise, for example England and America supporting [Germany's] crusade against the Bolsheviks'. For this purpose Olivier must be made to come to Germany from neutral Ireland where he is shooting the battle scenes for *Henry V*. Friedrich Harris is entrusted with the task, and sent to Ireland after a period of training in medieval warfare:

Your foremost objective is to persuade Mr Olivier to come to us voluntarily. Failing that, you will bring him against his will. Failing this, you will endeavour to prevent his film of *Henry V* from being completed. In the last resort you will at least deny his further services to Churchill and the warmongers.


One of the novel's main strategies is to exploit the detailed accounts of the making of *Henry V* by Olivier and his biographers. In the process, it manipulates precisely those instances where Olivier and his biographers express their apprehensions about the past they are trying to recreate, or where they confess their inability fully to understand and explain strange incidents – 'the usual number of cock-ups', as Olivier calls them. Moreover, the novel is quick to exploit those moments in the memoirs and biographies where Olivier would seem to quote speakers or introduce agents into the narrative who ultimately remain unidentified or anonymous.

One case in point is the instance in Olivier's *Confessions* where he speaks of his strategy vis-à-vis a daunting film crew of seven hundred. In order to impress and ultimately to control these men from the outset, Olivier climbed onto a beer-crate, and made an impressive and brave announcement to the effect that he would never ask them to do anything hazardous that he would not do himself. Cottrell calls it '[s]tirring stuff', and notices a special case of identification between Olivier and Shakespeare's king. As Anthony Holden has it, this was 'a rousing inaugural address worthy of Henry himself'. Olivier, however, not without self-irony, comments on his own grandiloquence as follows: 'The warmth and strength of the applause that greeted this mighty line should have been a warning to me. I was taken literally'. He then proceeds to tell the related incident where he asked one of the actors to jump from a tree onto a passing horse and rider:

My gallant rider looked at me pleasantly but steadily, and as usual it came: 'We'd like to see you do it first, Mr Oliver?' – all the peasants pronounced the name thus.

(1982: 101)

In the event, Olivier jumped from the tree, sprained his right ankle, and told the



bystanders: 'There, you see? Easy, really'. In an attempt to explain the event, John Cottrell is tempted to commit a generalizing act of national prejudice:

there were obvious hazards in committing oneself publicly to promises like that, especially before so many men with the mischievous, sometimes perverse, Irish sense of humor.

(1975: 193)

In the Philip Purser novel, however, the incident involving an unnamed and presumably Irish film crew member is deftly presented as Friedrich Harris's Germano-Irish attempt to sabotage the shooting of *Henry V*: 'From the back of the group of us, in my best Irish brogue, I called out: "Would you mind showing us exactly how you mean, Mr Oliver?"'. Although the wording is slightly different, the effect is the same, as becomes clear also from the response of the fictional Olivier, in severe pain: "There you are", he cried rather desperately. "Nothing to it.".


Another instance in the novel where Purser capitalizes on the anonymity and confusion of the biographical material is Olivier's account of the accident that occurred when, during the shooting of the scene with a French horseman setting light to the English camp, one rider had to charge in the direction of the camera:

I told the young rider to come as close to the camera as he could; again through the finder I could tell it wasn't very exciting. This time I said, 'Look, boy, aim to hit the camera this time, will you? Your horse will manage to miss it at the last moment.' I watched again through the finder; the horse was looming beautifully large and frighteningly close – and smack! – right into the camera.

(Olivier 1986: 102)

The impact of the camera left a large scar on Olivier's upper lip (often covered by a moustache). In Purser's novel, the description of what Holden has called 'one of the worst incidents' of Olivier's career, is presented as the result of a clash between the German protagonist Friedrich Harris, whose mission it is subtly to persuade Olivier to transfer his talents from the British to the German propaganda war, and Dominic, Harris's Irish contact on the set, who labours under the conviction that it is 'about time somebody did something towards this stupid operation'. In Purser's fiction, it is Dominic who rides the horse, and tries to hurt Olivier on purpose.


Shooting the Hero closely follows Olivier's autobiographical and biographical writings. However, the novel also challenges the various accounts by Olivier and his biographers in at least two significant ways, thus bringing into focus some of the political complexities that Olivier ignores or unconsciously represses, matters involving Anglo-Irish and Anglo-German relations.



As the son of an Irish patriot who fought England during the First World War by enlisting in the Army of the Rhine in Solingen, the son also of a father who ended his life in an English prison, Friedrich Harris is consumed by a deep hatred for England. This explains his long residence in Berlin, where, thanks to his uncle's connections, he has worked in the film industry, getting involved in the making of anti-English and pro-Irish films like *The Fox of Glenarvon* (*Der Fuchs von Glenarvon*, dir. Max W. Kimmich, 1940) and *My Life for Ireland* (*Mein Leben für Irland*, dir. Max W. Kimmich, 1941). Harris's dual nationality introduces a sensitive political issue which is activated further on his arrival in Ireland. As Harris tries to persuade Laurence Olivier politely to come to Berlin, his Irish contact named Dominic (a moderate Republican whose father fought in the Spanish Civil War), finds his strategy too slow to be convincing, and independently tries to attack the actor on horseback. Nor is this the only reference to the Irish question. The IRA, too, are on Olivier's tail, and stage a hijack that is surprisingly unsuccessful. It would be wrong to argue that *Shooting the Hero* provides subtle political analysis of any intrinsic value or relevance; however, it does highlight the political irony implicit in Olivier's making of *Henry V* on Irish soil. Shakespeare's play, of course, makes explicit reference to the Irish rebellion across the narrow seas which the Earl of Essex, on behalf of an expansionist Elizabethan government, was meant to crush, and as Andrew Hadfield has therefore put it, the Shakespearean play 'appears to be at least as much concerned with Ireland as with France'. It is against this background that Olivier's utterances must be classified as complacent, certainly when, speaking about shooting Shakespeare's political play in Ireland, he alleges that those working on it 'were inspired by the warmth, humanity, wisdom and Britishness just beneath the surface of Shakespeare's brilliant jingoism'.

Admittedly, Olivier carefully represents the scene from *Henry V* where the three British nationals – the Welshman Fluellen, the Scot Jamie and the Irishman Macmorris – engage in a debate about nationhood. Olivier's reading, however, stresses the way in which, via their discord, these three came to represent a united nation behind the warrior king. This is confirmed by Olivier's comments at the time he made the film. Asked how, in wartime, it was possible to make a propaganda film in which the English king invaded and conquered the land of his Second World War ally, France, Olivier said that the film was in the interest of 'Anglo-British relations'.

If Olivier's interest was mainly to suggest the way in which Henry V managed to busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels, Philip Purser deftly uses the discussion among the three Britons as a guide to the narrative's conflict. In particular, Purser playfully translates Macmorris's famous words – 'What ish my nation?' – into the dual nationality of the main character of Friedrich Harris. This accounts for Harris's involvement in the Germano-Irish plot against Olivier, but it also explains his sexual involvement with the Irish wife of an English army commander preparing the Normandy invasion,



appropriately named Mrs Macmorris. Even if the novel fails to explore the inherent political issues in any serious detail, it does invite the reader to look again at Olivier's wartime rhetoric on matters Anglo-Irish.

In addition to matters Anglo-Irish, the novel also alerts us to the overlap of matters Anglo-German. In 1937, Charles Laughton had commented on Olivier's stage performance of *Henry V* with the words: 'Do you know why you're so good in the part? Because you are England'. Purser's novel subverts this Anglocentric statement (which Olivier liked to quote) by suggesting that the same charismatic actor might have also graced the propaganda of Britain's enemy. At first, the situation suggested in the novel seems utterly fictitious, but a closer look at the available information indicates a number of intriguing points of contact that may have inspired Purser.

In film history, and even more so in Shakespearean reception history, there are striking instances of overlap between the English and German traditions. As Anthony Holden, for example, remarks in his biography of Olivier:

It is an intriguing footnote to the history of the Second World War that while *Lady Hamilton* became one of Churchill's favourite diversions, Hitler would apparently order screening after screening of *Fire over England*.

(1988: 169)

This hints at a German interest in the products of the English film industry – imitated and mirrored at the beginning of the novel where it is Goebbels who uses *Lady Hamilton* to explain his views about the future of the German film industry – does not stand by itself. When we take another look at the mythmaking accounts of Laurence Olivier's career, and concentrate on the embellishment of the narrative where it concerns the actor's skills at playing *Henry V*, a richer discourse opens up.

In his biography, for example, Anthony Holden discusses in some detail Olivier's habit of making patriotic speeches on behalf of the English government. These 'rabbleroising duties' would culminate in the Harfleur speech from *Henry V*: 'A stirringly sub-Shakespearean address would invariably be followed, in grandiloquent Churchillian vein, by "Once more unto the breach"'. Olivier himself also mentions these one-man stunts in his book *On Acting*. He describes how, following the reading of some now lesser known verse, he would slip into the Feast of Crispian speech. The actor's craft of illusion – or was it the rhetorician's art? – was consciously aimed at a clearly identified audience:

I knew how to pace it all perfectly and was able slowly to whip up my wartime audience, urging them forward with me:

And hold their manhoods cheap, while any speaks,



That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

During the applause I would hold my gesture and remain still. Then, when I felt the applause reach its peak and begin to wane, I would launch into 'Once more unto the breach ...'. By the time I got to 'God for Harry ...' I think they would have followed me anywhere. Looking back, I don't think we could have won the war without 'Once more unto the breach ...' somewhere in our soldiers' hearts.

(1986: 65–6)

On the basis of utterances such as these, where the histrionic impersonator is transfigured into the politician leading his troops into an ongoing war, Holden reminds us of the following:


A clip which survives of one such performance at a Royal Albert Hall rally organized by Basil Dean in 1943 – to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Red Army, then holding off the Germans – shows the uniformed Olivier in frenzied histrionic form, looking for all the world as if he were intent on out-ranting the enemy leader.

(1988: 172)

Olivier and his patriotic circus based, among other things, on Shakespeare's *Henry V*, in an apparent act of imitation and emulation, begins to assume not just the monarchic or 'imperial' traits that all of his biographers recognize, but those of the nation's common enemy. The words that Shakespeare penned for *Henry V* ('This day is call'd the feast of Crispian', 4.3.40), together with the voice of England's Prime Minister (producing the 'grandiloquent Churchillian vein') and combined with the striking gestures of Olivier (who was 'in frenzied histrionic form'), evoke, excel and outclass Adolf Hitler himself.


This instance of narrative identification of the actor, his part, and two contemporary political figures who were also one another's enemies, should not be read as a veiled indictment of Olivier's political loyalties. Rather, it ought, perhaps, to be interpreted as a complex image that captures *Henry V*'s profoundly problematic status in the Shakespearean canon, which remains underexposed in Sutherland and Watts' exploration of Henry V as a potential 'war criminal', as they consider the ethical and political implications of 'the most contentious element in the play for British audiences, namely Henry's apparently criminal massacre of his helpless French prisoners in what seems suspiciously like an attack of pique, or at best cold-blooded strategic calculation'.

The problematic status of *Henry V* was first established by William Hazlitt who, two years after the Battle of Waterloo, called Henry not only 'very amiable' but also a 'monster', and it was more fully recognized after the First World War, when memories of the play were evoked on either side of no-man's land – in the English trenches, where



Edwardian schoolboys-turned-soldiers would repeat King Henry's invocation of St. George, but also in Germany, from where the Chancellor 'quoted *Henry V* when his troops stood before Calais'. However, the Second World War activated traditional uses of the play's political and militaristic interests anew. There were, of course, G. Wilson Knight and Laurence Olivier who exploited its rhetoric in their public addresses, but also Winston Churchill who manipulated Henry's victory against all odds into a model for wartime Britain when he alleged that 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few'. Olivier in turn exploited Churchill's propagandist use of the play in the making of his film, thus turning his most popular of Shakespearean adaptations into his own belligerent contribution to the conflict. Paradoxically, Sutherland and Watts do not seem to regard this highly idiosyncratic and localized use of *Henry V* as one of 'the most contentious elements in the play for British audiences'.

More alert in its response to *Henry V* in the context of the Second World War was Peter Zadek's analysis of heroes and of hero worship in his 1964 production of *Henry V*, entitled *Held Henry* ('Henry, the Hero'). Zadek – who had grown up in England after his parents fled the Nazis in 1933, returned to Germany in 1958 to make a name for himself as a controversial avant-garde director – presented *Henry V* as 'a pacifist collage, an ahistorical multimedia show against heroism and militarism' complete with portraits of fifty rulers, including Elizabeth I, as well as images of ancient and modern heroes. These images included Elvis Presley, Billy Graham, soccer star Uwe Seeler, Wernher von Braun, Frederick the Great, Atilla the Hun and Churchill. Moreover, the production featured 'a screen at the back showing Hitler's troops marching into Paris, and "Harry" taking the salute'. This production conflated Shakespeare's medieval monarch and the dreaded leader of Nazi Germany by means of overlapping images drawn from both the German motion picture propaganda machine and from traditional Shakespearean (hence canonized) battle rhetoric, thus making it difficult if not impossible to establish which leader served to level criticism at the other. It is true that Zadek, as Loehlin puts it, 'made *Henry V* into a part of Germany's confrontation with its own past and present', but it seems inappropriate to overlook the provocative comparison between the German and British war efforts which Zadek clearly brings to his audience's attention. As much as *Shooting the Hero* and Olivier's biographical and autobiographical materials suggest, this German instance of 'foreign Shakespeare' invited contemporary, politico-cultural questions of a more serious nature than those that elevate Henry's historical massacre to 'the most contentious element in the play for British audiences'. Instead of challenging the play and its impact on contemporary English culture, Sutherland and Watts's question represents a neatly sanitized, but still largely acritical, desire for hero worship in keeping with a nineteenth-century tradition which elected as its target objects the charismatic medieval English king and the nation's canonized playwright. Purser's novel helps us realize how Olivier's wartime



performances, on and off screen, revitalized this tradition. However, and most interestingly, it is on this very point that Philip Purser's novel betrays its origins, and more or less explicitly subscribes to the tenacious English devotion to its cultural heroes.

In *Shooting the Hero*, Friedrich Harris never kills Laurence Olivier. Given a final opportunity to do so – during the decisive blows exchanged between Olivier-as-Henry and Friedrich Harris-as-Constable of France at the end of the Battle of Agincourt sequence – Harris unexpectedly refrains from killing the actor: 'I could see each fine black corn of hair in the shaven skin of his neck, the tiny crater left by a spot. And my arm would not move'. The motivation for his apathy is precisely the hero worship syndrome that Zadek's production of *Henry V* exposed as affecting all levels of society, from the world of politics to the soccer field:

It was the certainty that we must all have heroes, for without heroes there is no hope. So who would choose to slay the King; who would dare to shoot the hero, on whosoever side he be?

(244)


Despite its useful emphasis on ideological fault lines, telling omissions and overt propagandistic gestures in Olivier's film, Purser's novel shows that the ubiquitous need for heroes more or less subliminally links state and military hierarchies with the cinematic star system.

However, the novel is not a generic tribute to one of the greatest English actors of the twentieth century; it is a tribute to this same actor playing the part of Henry V. While it praises Olivier's wartime role, it is also extremely critical of the actor's postwar achievements. The opening of the novel anticipates the debunking representation of the actor in the classroom scene of *Last Action Hero*:

When I watched him in one or other of those stupid roles of his old age; when for example he played the Jewish poppa in a vile remake of *The Jazz Singer*, or on television a Roman elder in some laughable epic continuing over two or four evenings; when he was inveigled on to one of those ceremonies at which today's film makers 'salute' each other, and he would address them in the quavering voice he affected on such occasions; when I saw these things and remembered how once he could strike fire, summon music and bring down thunder with one cry, then I would groan aloud that I had not killed Laurence Olivier when I had the chance.

(1)

Friedrich Harris: Shooting the Hero ultimately represents an attempt to fictionally



preserve the image of Laurence Olivier at his 'finest hour', as Winston Churchill would have said. However, it also represents an attempt to criticize the post-war years, including peacetime Hollywood stardom. Perhaps nothing better illustrates Harris's attempt to do so than his attitude to Kenneth Branagh's remake of *Henry V* of 1989. Harris refuses to name the Belfast-born actor-director when he states that 'some young English [sic] smart-arse was remaking the English title. Jesus, is nothing sacred? I shall take care not to see it'. As Donald Hedrick has noticed, Branagh's film reveals 'tactical indecision', which is possibly due to Branagh's failure to confront the very issues and concerns which Purser's novel effectively foregrounds.


It may well be that the need for heroes accounts for the tenacious position of Shakespeare in the literary canon, in general, and of his controversial war play, in particular. As Thomas Healy remarks in his discussion of the fortunes of *Henry V*:

While Shakespeare allows us to re-examine our differing pasts in important ways, a sense can also develop of the inescapability of these pasts and the ideological structures the plays articulate, no matter how adapted for new productions. Is Shakespeare the ally we seem to want to make him? Perhaps the time has come, not to dispense with Shakespeare, but to disestablish him, whether as the voice of order or of dissidence?

(1994: 193)

Rather than disestablishing Shakespeare, recent appropriations from Olivier's to Purser's show that important cultural and political positions are still being advanced through plays like *Henry V*. It is indeed a measure of the continued vitality and centrality of Shakespeare that not only offshoots (like the cinematic adaptation of *Henry V* by Laurence Olivier), but also offshoots of these offshoots (like Philip Purser's *Shooting the Hero*) can be effectively used to gauge the extent to which a stable sense of national identity is threatened at times of intense crisis or change.

In recent years, Shakespearean drama has been increasingly used to explore the fascist element in European politics. In 1992, Terence Hawkes discreetly but effectively read *Coriolanus* within the context of the ominous developments in the 1920s. Julie Taymor's *Titus* explores the history of fascism from the Roman period, via Mussolini, to the present day. And, from a slightly different perspective, Loncraine's interpretation of *Richard III* suggested what might have become of Britain if Oswald Mosley had been as successful as Shakespeare's hunch-backed king. In a similar way, *Shooting the Hero*, along with the biographical and autobiographical materials upon which it draws, may alert one to a discourse that also links *Henry V* to a range of Second World War notions of charismatic authority, hero worship and movie stardom, and not always unproblematically so. Perhaps it is due to the play's special place in the definition of

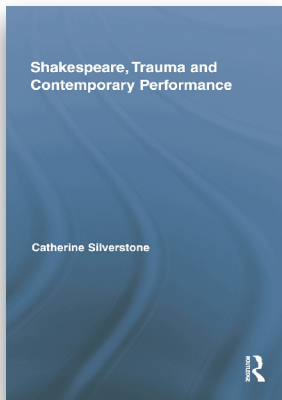


British nationhood, supported by a brand of bardolatry akin to the hero worship at work in various guises in the afterlife of Henry V, that such insights have not been able as yet to emerge in current critical discourse.

The Legacy of Colonisation: Don
C. Selwyn's *The Maori Merchant
of Venice* and Aotearoa New
Zealand

Catherine Silverstone

04:: The Legacy of Colonisation: Don C. Selwyn's *The Maori Merchant of Venice* and Aotearoa New Zealand




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“After the horrors of the twentieth century, there can be no imaginative realization of Shakespeare’s play that is not shaped by the Holocaust. Like the commemorations dedicated to the liberation of Auschwitz, [Michael Radford’s] *The Merchant of Venice* functions as a memorial: its construction of a Shakespearean past is tunnelled through a more immediate legacy, with the inevitable result that its pre-images are also after-images”, writes Mark Thornton Burnett in his analysis of Radford’s 2004 film, *The Merchant of Venice*. Burnett neatly identifies how the film embodies a contradictory logic whereby it at once works to institute memories and images of the Holocaust within the field of the film’s production and works to distance itself from this material. This contradictory logic can be extended more widely to identify how productions of *The Merchant of Venice* after the Holocaust are, to some extent, haunted by this traumatic legacy, such that this event is variously avoided, embraced, memorialised and returned to the field of performance. Thus the Holocaust “returns” in direct references and images, such as the red hat Shylock is forced to wear outside the confines of the ghetto in Radford’s film, which as Burnett argues “resonates less with an audience’s awareness of sixteenth-century practice as with a knowledge of the insignia thrust on Jews during the Third Reich”, namely white armbands and blue Jewish stars.


The play’s performance history is enfolded in a history of anti-Semitism marked most strikingly by its popularity in Nazi Germany and also in Austria where it was used as anti-Semitic propaganda. For example, in Lothar Müthel’s 1943 production of the play at the Burgtheater in Vienna, Werner Krauss played Shylock by drawing on an extensive range of anti-Semitic images and stereotypes. Conversely, the play has also been used to critique anti-Semitism and Jewish stereotypes, such as Arnold Wesker’s adaptation *Shylock* (1989)—formerly *The Merchant* (1976)—in which a benevolent Shylock and Antonio “are old friends”. In this play Shylock does not want to make a contract with Antonio, preferring instead for him to “[t]ake the ducats”. Forced by the law to make a bond, they make what Shylock refers to as a “lovely, loving nonsense bond” so that they might “mock the law”. When the bond is proved unenforceable, Shylock is delighted and embraces Antonio. However, the Doge confiscates Shylock’s books and possessions and he “moves away, a bitter man”. Even as Wesker’s play offers a more benevolent interpretation of Shylock, this does not excise the cruelty of the punishment or the anti-Semitism that is directed toward him. Recalling the uses of the play in Nazi Germany, Hanan Snir’s 1995 production of the play at the Deutsches Nationaltheater in Weimar, Germany—50 years after the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp—is framed by a narrative where Jewish prisoners are brought onstage and forced to perform *The Merchant of Venice* for the entertainment of the SS officers. These instances of the play’s relationship with the Holocaust and



anti-Semitism are far from isolated and their multiple instantiations are the subject of a wide-ranging reception study at the Freie Universität Berlin, which argues that “[t]he changes in the perception of the Jewish money-lender Shylock since 1945 are understood as conflict-ridden attempts at coming to terms with the German past: the Shoah, guilt and remembrance and German anti-Semitism”.

As well as performances’ direct negotiations with the Holocaust and histories of anti-Semitism, these references also occur indirectly where that which is not offered space in a performance’s diegesis nevertheless shadows performance as a kind of supplement, working to return that which is refused or elided to the frame of performance. Gregory Doran’s comment on his 1997 production of the play for the RSC exemplifies this dynamic: “[t]he play has been hijacked by history. We are putting it back in to the world of renaissance trade. We’ve started with the title: Shylock was a merchant of Venice. I wanted to take the swastikas and stars of David out of the play”. Notwithstanding the fact that the merchant of the play’s title is usually understood as referring to Antonio, Doran’s intentions for his production at once cast history as that which has usurped a properly historical reading of the play and rehabilitate history as that which will ground his interpretation in relation to Renaissance mercantilism. While images of the star of David and swastikas might have been excised from the visual field of his production, the excision is not total as the signifiers work their way in to Doran’s language, demanding to be acknowledged; his refusal thus bears the trace of that which he seeks to banish. Similarly, Michael Billington, in his response to Loveday Ingram’s 2001 RSC production, notes: “one hoped for slightly more [. . .] than a romantic reading that treats the play as a fairytale in Edwardian dress: in a post-Holocaust world, let alone one where differing concepts of global justice confront us daily, it is difficult to return to such blithe innocence”. Here Billington returns the Holocaust to the frame of Ingram’s performance, even as its visual images and documentation, like Doran’s production, worked to elide such associations. Here, then, I am suggesting, as Burnett and others have done, that performances of *The Merchant* are unable to escape the accretions of history, where the anti-Semitic discourse of the type the play offers (even as it works, on occasions, to complicate it) invokes a relation with the historical consequences of this discourse.

I begin with these relationships between *The Merchant of Venice*, the Holocaust and histories of anti-Semitism in order to acknowledge how performances of *The Merchant of Venice* after 1945, perhaps inevitably given the cataclysmic nature of the Holocaust, fold the trauma of this event into their frame of reference, regardless of the political and cultural imperatives of the production. In so doing I seek to draw attention to an aspect of the territory covered by this chapter, which focuses on Don C. Selwyn’s 2001 film, *The Maori Merchant of Venice*, produced in Aotearoa New Zealand and released in February 2002. I also want to mark a difference to criticism concerned with



The Merchant and discourses of trauma, which tend to coalesce around anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, as Burnett's work does, and also a difference to work which examines the play's refusal to endorse homoerotic desire in its resolution, especially with respect to the treatment of the eponymous Merchant (I will return to the trauma of homophobia in the next chapter). In contrast, I am concerned to consider Selwyn's film in relation to the trauma of colonisation, identifying how this traumatic working through also folds the trauma of the Holocaust into its iterations. Like Radford's film, Selwyn's tracks a series of what Burnett describes as pre- and afterimages which here work to memorialise Aotearoa New Zealand's history of colonisation and which also offer possibilities for a future-to-come, even as this future is traced by past trauma, of which the Holocaust is deployed as a central marker.

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND TRADITIONS OF PERFORMANCE


Settled by the Māori from their ancestral homeland in the Pacific approximately 1,000 years ago, New Zealand was first discovered by Europeans as part of Abel Tasman's 1642 voyage to the southern hemisphere. But it was not until after James Cook's landfall in 1769 that the European presence in Aotearoa New Zealand increased with the arrival of sealers, whalers, traders and missionaries and in 1840 a treaty was signed between the British Crown and the Māori. Although promised the benefits and rights of British citizenship and, hence, equality, in the 170 years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori have been affected, often adversely, by the European settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand. These effects—which have been present to a greater or lesser extent over the last century and a half—include the dispossession of land, a lower life expectancy and poorer health record than *Pākehā* (white New Zealanders of predominantly British and Irish origin), lower educational achievement and a higher rate of offending and imprisonment. Since the 1970s there have been significant efforts by both Māori and the Government to redress some of the systematic inequities that have been perpetuated since the signing of the Treaty/Tiriti, particularly with respect to the Crown's promise that Māori would maintain possession and authority over their *taonga* (treasures), such as lands, fisheries and, also, *te reo* (Māori language). While recent census results and the 2001 *Survey of the Health of the Māori Language* suggest that the situation is, in some respects, improving for Māori, Aotearoa New Zealand still bears the difficult legacy of its colonial history, especially with respect to land, language and cultural dispossession of the Māori people.

As with this book's other chapters, I am interested here in how performances of Shakespeare can be analysed in terms of how they “work through” traumatic cultural histories and events. In identifying colonisation as one such traumatic history, my intention is not to posit a simplistic one-way process whereby indigenous peoples have been uniformly and unequivocally wounded and oppressed by colonising nations and




settler cultures. Indeed, as critics such as Homi K. Bhabha have shown, encounters between colonisers and colonised peoples are significantly more complex and multifarious than such an analysis would allow, and Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis make a case, with specific reference to settler cultures such as Australia, Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand, for considering “the histories of indigenous and migrant peoples as interdependent”. Rather, in denoting colonisation as traumatic I seek to acknowledge how histories of colonisation are often marked by violence, both physical and cultural, as well as how the ongoing legacy of the ensuing trauma can be measured in the specific material effects on indigenous peoples. I am thinking in particular of how indigenous peoples have been socially and economically disadvantaged and disenfranchised from their culture and language (and often that of the colonising culture), while recognising that intercultural encounters can also produce nonviolent possibilities for ethical exchange and the creation of new intercultural forms. My work here is informed by recent analyses of intercultural performances of Shakespeare, such as Ania Loomba and Phillip B. Zarrilli’s subtle reading of Kathakali productions of *Othello* and *King Lear*, respectively, and W. B. Worthen’s wide-ranging analysis of the phenomenon, which have sought to explore what Rustom Bharucha describes as the “ethics of representation underlying any cross-cultural exchange” and the “space in between” cultural polarities. My analysis of *The Maori Merchant* thus seeks to stress how performance is engaged in processes of cultural exchange and to explore the material conditions that have shaped this performance and on which the performance acts. I aim to show that the film both memorialises and witnesses the trauma of colonisation and also has the capacity to create affirmative and productive community responses to this trauma.

At first glance *The Maori Merchant* invites consumption as a celebratory exemplar of what Bharucha calls the “space in between”. The first feature film to be shot in Māori, the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the first feature-length film of a Shakespeare play to be made in Aotearoa New Zealand, it might thus be termed an intercultural hybrid which works to locate Shakespeare’s narrative in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, meshing Western and Māori performance traditions into a singular cultural product. Drawing on the production strategies of Western cinema, the lush *mise-en-scène* oscillates between Venice/Weniti, shot at various Italian-inflected locations throughout Auckland, and Belmont/Peremona. The scenes in Venice/Weniti, where the actors wear ruffs and britches, stand as homage to the play’s early modern origins. Simultaneously, the images of bustling traders and visiting ships allude to Aotearoa New Zealand’s colonial period and work to draw attention to the country’s landscape; these scenes also reference Māori culture in the inclusion of poi dancers and flax artefacts. Peremona extends Venice/Weniti’s range of references to Māori culture in the inclusion of the



tūrehu (mist children) who are seen flying in the bush, the *tukutuku* panels (flax lattice) and *taiaha* (spears) that adorn the walls, the carving of Portia/Pohia's *tipuna* (ancestors), *moko* (facial tattoos), feather cloaks and *koru* (spirals). Peremona is also home to Māori performance traditions, most clearly seen in the *karanga* (call of welcome) and *wero* (challenge) that are issued to the Prince of Morocco. In its visual signifiers which allude to a specifically New Zealand landscape, the film offers a neat counterpoint to the way in which the landscape has been used by internationally funded film and television projects, encouraged by Aotearoa New Zealand's relatively low production costs, to stand variously for J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003) and Japan in Tom Cruise's epic *The Last Samurai* (2003), not to mention the faux-ancient worlds depicted in the television series *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) and *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995–1999). As an aural accompaniment to the visual, the soundtrack merges Clive Cockburn's soaring orchestral compositions, performed by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, with Hirini Melbourne's compositions for traditional Māori instruments, which he and other musicians perform within the diegesis.


The film employs a range of cultural signifiers to produce a world that combines Māori cultural artefacts, clothing and performance with Shakespeare, opera and Renaissance costumes. Filmed in *te reo* (Māori language) with an (almost entirely) Māori cast and director and a multicultural crew, *The Maori Merchant* seems to exemplify Māori self-determination and the resulting film offers a challenge to some of the dominant stereotypes by which Māori tend to be identified, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally. A media release notes that “[c]ontrary to what some expect, there are no *piupius* [traditional clothing] and no *mokos* [facial tattoos] in this vision of cross-cultural fertilisation”. Producer Ruth Kaupua Panapa also notes that “[i]n this movie there are no tattoos, no leather jackets and no men in blue uniforms”; in other words, there are no references to gang culture or the police. Instead *The Maori Merchant*, with its representation of Māori actors in Renaissance costumes, counterpoised against more familiar signifiers of Māori culture, seems to play with or parody the notion of cultural authenticity and “exoticism”. Although, as Emma Cox notes, the film’s “unashamedly exoticised and fantastical representation of Peremona might be criticised for promulgating particular mythologies and stereotypes of Maori culture”, such as the Victorian conception of “Maoriland”, this kind of critique “may ultimately end up circumscribing Maori creative expression” by insisting on particular modes of originality and authenticity. Instead, through its recycling and mixing of images of Māori and *Pākehā* cultures and histories, the film offers an alternative to representations of colonial-era Māori culture, exemplified in films such as Jane Campion's representation of traditional Māori tribal life which functions as a backdrop to a Western narrative of colonial romance in *The Piano* (1993). The film also stands as



an alternative to films such as Niki Caro's *Whale Rider* (2002) which, as Claire Murdoch argues, is "fostered from an indigenous myth, washed (intentionally or not) in the gloss of its national and international arts-export ideology" in which cultural authenticity becomes "one, totemic and inherently 'meaningful' part of an appealing package". *The Maori Merchant* also offers a challenge to the pervasive association between Māori and violence propagated by Lee Tamahori's internationally successful *Once Were Warriors* (1994). As Kaupua Panapa comments, "[w]e were sick and tired of seeing so much [Māori] violence in films. There is conflict in this film but it is not highlighted in a violent way". The film also offers an additional challenge to the representational practices of Hollywood where Māori actors have variously played Iraqis, Colombians, Easter Islanders, and the entire clone army in *Star Wars*, episodes two, *Attack of the Clones* (2002) and three, *Revenge of the Sith* (2005). In these films it is as if Māori are able to function in the global filmic marketplace as blank ethnic signifiers, able to be substituted for any non-European nationality, almost invariably playing roles with negative character trajectories. The phenomenon of "cross-ethnic" casting is not, of course, unique and Hollywood has a long history of this kind of casting practice where actors are asked to play roles at odds with their ethnic identifications, often without consideration to the ethical and cultural implications of these decisions.

Unlike many indigenous films, which are read as an analogue of the "real" (which may or may not be the intention of the filmmakers), *The Maori Merchant* refuses this collapse. As Valerie Wayne suggests, the film's "derivative narrative in a sense shields it from being taken as a direct representation of contemporary Māori experience". Instead it proposes an alternative vision that celebrates images of Māori in a fantastical filmic diegesis. The modes of presentation and reception of this *mise-en-scène* are certainly celebratory: a press release included in the Media Kit asserts that the "design, costumes and music interweave Shakespearean elements with Maori arts in a rich, textured and modern way", reviewer Sam Edwards praises the film for "knitting different and often conflicting cultures and histories into a remarkable whole" and Mark Houlahan describes the film as a "luminous example" of "New Zealand Shakespeare" in his article on the film for Sonia Massai's collection of essays, *World-Wide Shakespeares*.


Without wanting to deny the efficacy of this celebratory mode for participants and spectators of the film, in this chapter, as with this book as a whole, I am interested in an excavation of the film with respect to trauma. My work here is not to "diagnose" the film, its participants and spectators as "traumatised", but rather to consider how the film, produced at the turn of the millennium, is enmeshed in the traumatic effects of colonisation, especially in relation to *te reo* and Māori culture more broadly, even as aspects of this traumatic history also enable the creation and development of affective and effective communities and new cultural forms. Through a reading of the film, a



consideration of its representation in reviews, interviews and publicity materials and an analysis of its relationships to political and cultural discourses, I want to examine how *The Maori Merchant* remembers, responds to and, paradoxically, on occasions elides aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial history and ongoing effects. The film thus comes to stand as a monument to this history and traumatic aspects of its colonial legacy, operating alongside other Shakespeare productions in Aotearoa New Zealand in which the performance of Shakespeare creates a charged site for enabling an engagement with aspects of this history.


While one strain of Shakespeare performance in Aotearoa New Zealand does not seek to draw attention to its cultural contexts as a site of production or a potential source for adaptation, there is another strain, emergent primarily over the last 15 years, which has sought to perform Shakespeare's texts with particular reference to Aotearoa New Zealand's cultural politics, especially with respect to race relations. Theatre at Large's controversial production *Manawa Taua/Savage Hearts* (1994), which utilised a range of performance styles and texts including Shakespeare, music hall routines, melodrama, Māori performance arts and French-influenced improvisational theatre, is one such striking example. Set on the eve of the 1860s New Zealand land wars between Māori and British colonial settlers, *Manawa Taua* detailed the fictional story of Tupou, a Māori chief who journeys to London to meet Queen Victoria to gain her protection for his people. Victoria promises to help him, provided he agrees to play the part of *Othello* in a touring Shakespeare troupe that is about to embark on an expedition to the colonies. By charting the changes in Tupou as he rehearses *Othello*, falls in love with Lottie (the production's Desdemona) and returns to New Zealand, the performance used his body to register his colonisation and attendant alienation from his culture, a process in which Shakespeare played a central part. Thus Tupou's clothes changed from a traditional Māori cloak to European garb. More tellingly, he lost his capacity to speak Māori; instead all he could do was speak "Shakespeare". Despite the comic "happy" ending, in which a member of the theatre company was punished for appropriating Māori land, the performance dramatised issues concerning Māori cultural alienation as a result of the process of British colonisation of New Zealand through Tupou's corporeal transformations while playing Shakespeare. The discourse surrounding the production, which I have written about elsewhere, also identifies how this colonial fable is implicated in contemporary race relations and debates about how aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand's history might (or should) be represented.

Another apposite example of the way in which the performance of Shakespeare has been deployed in relation to contemporary race relations is evident in a plotline of the New Zealand soap opera *Shortland Street* (1997). Over several episodes, the rehearsal of *Othello* by a group of secondary school students engaged with questions of race, ethnicity and the ethics of affirmative action in a settler culture. This critique,



however, eventually gave way to a liberal humanist understanding of acting and casting and Bradleyan notions of character, where characters are treated as psychologically complex “real” people, which works to disregard cultural specificity under the rubric of “universal” emotional states. In contrast, the short film, *God and Shakespeare* (2001), which deploys the codes of the Western (pistols, Stetsons, cowboy boots and a shoot-out), depicts a sparring match between Shakespeare and God on one of Aotearoa New Zealand’s black sand beaches. Shakespeare, played by a young Māori man, and God, played by an older *Pākehā* man, duel both with “pistols” in the shape of hand-held power-tools, and words from their respective texts. Here the film pays homage to three colonial imports: Shakespeare, the Bible and firearms. In Shakespeare’s chunky red-heart ring and the ribbons that are used to symbolise the wounds inflicted by the power-tools, it also includes allusions to Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Peter Brook’s *Titus Andronicus* (1955), respectively. After a series of verbal and power-tool passes, God and Shakespeare eventually kill each other; a woman clad in a wetsuit, identified in the credits as Venus, subsequently discovers their bodies, which lie head to head on the beach. As the film closes, the camera pulls back to an aerial shot and pans over the bodies such that the closing shot consists of the black sand beach with Venus’s footprints emerging from the water, neatly erasing Shakespeare and God from the frame of the Aotearoa New Zealand’s beachscape.


These adaptations can be set alongside Cathy Downes’s *Othello* (2001), Toi Whakaari’s (New Zealand Drama School) *Troilus and Cressida* (2003), directed by Annie Ruth and Rangimoana Taylor, and Jonathon Hendry’s *Othello* (2007), all of which set the play in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand’s mid-nineteenth-century land wars as a means for exploring historical race relations. Other striking engagements with Shakespeare in relation to contemporary and historical contexts include Oscar Kightley and Erolia Ifopo’s production *Romeo and Tusi* (1997–2000) for Pacific Underground, which set a rehearsal of *Romeo and Juliet* in the context of conflict between Samoan and Māori families living in Auckland, and Samoan artist Lemi Ponifasio’s *Tempest: Without a Body* (2007), created with his Auckland-based company, Mau. Mau, named after a nonviolent Samoan independence movement of the early twentieth century that resisted German and New Zealand colonisation, makes work that engages specifically with Oceanic cultures. *Tempest: Without a Body*, employed dance, theatre, oratory and video images and utilised elements of Shakespeare’s play, Paul Klee’s “Angelus Novus”, and the philosophical work of Giorgio Agamben, in an exploration of an apocalyptic post-9/11 world. It also included an appearance by Māori activist Tame Iti, who was arrested in an anti-terrorist raid in New Zealand, along with 16 other activists, in 2007. As the media release for the 2009 Sydney Festival notes, the production offered “Iti a ceremonial platform to present his case for social change and his vision for his own people, the Tūhoe *iwi* [tribe]”. Such productions can, as Houlihan suggests in his



discussion of *Romeo and Tusi*, be seen as “driven by a desire to settle with Shakespeare on specific and highly localised terms”. These are terms that I would suggest lend themselves to consideration with respect to how these performances might negotiate difficult aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand’s past, present and future. In my work on *The Maori Merchant* my aim is to trace the various spectres of colonial violence which haunt the film and enable it to function, suggestively, as a repository of traumatic historical memories, contemporary cultural initiatives which work to redress past injustices and also, of imagined futures. In the present time of the film’s production and its imagined futures, the film models how trauma might, paradoxically, provide a means through which communities might mobilise themselves and others to redress acts of violence. I want, now, to begin my excavation of the film with respect to its hybrid conceit *par excellence*: the translation of *The Merchant of Venice* into *te reo*.

SPEAKING (MĀORI) SHAKESPEARE

The Maori Merchant is an adaptation of Pei Te Hurinui Jones’s 1946 translation of Shakespeare’s play into Māori, *Te Tangata Whai-Rawa O Weniti*. Jones has been widely acclaimed as a bicultural pioneer, who sought to foster closer relations between Māori and *Pākehā*. In particular, he recorded the history of the Tainui *iwi* (tribe), translated Māori *waiata* (songs) into English, contributed to a Māori translation of the Bible (1949), and translated Shakespeare into Māori (in addition to *The Merchant of Venice* he also translated *Othello* as *Owhiro: Te Mua o Weneti* [1944] and *Julius Caesar* as *Huria Hiha* [1959]).³³ After a gap of some 50 years, Jones’s mid-century translation projects have been joined by Merimeri Penfold’s translation of nine of Shakespeare’s sonnets into Māori, published in a limited edition of 200 copies on the occasion of the 6th Biennial Conference of the Australia and New Zealand Shakespeare Association in 2000.³⁴ Sonnet 147 is not included in Penfold’s collection but it was the subject of *Te Po Uriuri* (*The Enveloping Night*), a short film made in *te reo* in 2001 that set the sonnet in Aotearoa in 1592. The sonnet was used as the pretext to develop a story of obsessive desire and enforced marriage in context of a pre-European contact *iwi*, and it played also with contested and sensitive historical narratives about Māori cannibalism. Produced in the same year as *Te Po Uriuri*, the *Maori Merchant*’s dialogue is delivered in *te reo* and accompanied by English subtitles which mix elements of Shakespeare’s language with modern English, in sharp contrast to *Te Po Uriuri*’s reproduction of Shakespeare’s text in the film’s subtitles. With the action unfolding over 158 minutes, *The Maori Merchant* does, however, offer a “faithful” adaptation of Shakespeare’s narrative through its rendering of the plot and the characters. The translation might thus be posited as one, in Jacques Derrida’s words, “that performs its mission, honours its debt and does its job or its duty while inscribing in the receiving language the most *relevant* equivalent for an original, the language that is *the most* right, appropriate, pertinent, adequate, opportune, pointed, univocal, idiomatic, and so on”. In the film’s




Media Kit and reviews, the project is framed repeatedly as honouring a twin debt by marrying Selwyn's "passion for Shakespeare with his lifelong commitment to the revitalisation of the Maori language". Here the debt is to be paid not only to the "original" language of Shakespeare's English, but also (and primarily) to the "target" language of *te reo*. Indeed, the focus of Selwyn's long career was to promote *te reo* and to create training opportunities for Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand's film and theatre industries. As part of this programme he ran He Taonga I Tawhiti (Gifts from Afar) from 1984 until 1990, a film and television training course for Māori and Pacific Islanders; in 1992 Selwyn and Ruth Kaupua Panapa created He Taonga Films, *The Maori Merchant's* production company, which has provided a platform for creating Māori film and television dramas.

Given He Taonga Films's focus on training Māori with the skills to tell stories about themselves, Selwyn acknowledges the apparent difficulty that producing a Shakespeare play creates in relation to this remit and suggests that "Shakespeare in Maori is enough to turn most people off". However, the media discourse surrounding the production works to naturalise this choice and to package it as part of a programme of both cultural recovery and development in the face of dispossession. The focus of this discourse is Jones's translation, which uses a poetic, rhetorical style of Māori known as *te reo kohatu* where *kohatu* (stone) represents the language's ancient and enduring nature. This is in contrast to contemporary Māori language, which has undergone considerable change since the arrival of the British. Indeed, the language literally registers a history of colonisation through the number of slightly modified English words that have entered *te reo*, such as *tiriti* for treaty. As Scott Morrison, the film's Antonio/Anatonio, who also works as a Māori newsreader and part-time lecturer in Māori Education, elaborates, Jones's translation is:


a different kind of language. It's a language you don't hear that often. I believe our language initially belonged to the environment. It developed from the call of birds and the rustling of trees and so when our ancestors spoke they used imagery and metaphor and simile and other devices in conjunction with the environment to describe their feelings. That kind of expertise is lost in the language now, where a lot of Maori speakers are just using the language to translate their English thought processes and that metaphoric language is lost.

Morrison continues, "you can see by the way Shakespeare wrote and the way Pei Te Hurinui translated it, that the poetical element is back inside it, so I believe this film will really lift our language and people will get a lot out of it". Morrison also posits Jones's translation as a return to precolonial times, suggesting that the film "captures the essence of how Maori language would have been spoken before the arrival of Europeans".




In an ironic paradox, Shakespeare—the emblem of the language which has linguistically colonised aspects of *te reo*—is the vehicle by which Māori are able to reclaim and develop their language. In effect, Shakespeare becomes the means by which Māori are “given” back their language, enabling a return to a prelapsarian world before an encounter with European colonisation. In this process it is as if Shakespeare emerges somehow unscathed as the saviour of the Māori and *te reo*, sheered from associations with a well-documented history of colonisation. But, by the same token, it is asserted in the Media Kit that the film works by “enhancing” Shakespeare’s plot, characters and setting by, as Selwyn notes, “using Maori language and cultural elements as a vehicle to be able to express the dynamics that Shakespeare came up with”. Here, Māori is credited with improving Shakespeare and releasing “his” meanings. The film might thus be said to embody Walter Benjamin’s claim in “*The Task of the Translator*” (1923) that “[i]n translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air” even if “[i]t cannot live there permanently”; for Benjamin “[i]t is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work”. The discourse surrounding the film thus works to blend *te reo* and Shakespeare’s English into a seamless hybrid product which improves both languages, eliding any negative associations with a history of colonisation which Shakespeare might be seen to mark. Instead it seems to propose what Derrida, drawing on Benjamin, might describe as that “rare and notable event”, or a translation “that manages to promise reconciliation”, both of languages and, by association, cultures. Indeed Waihoroi Shortland, the film’s Shylock/Hairoka, seems to suggest a kind of cultural reconciliation in his claim that Shakespeare’s language is “actually quite synonymous with *whaikorero* [traditional Māori oratory]”. Furthermore, Selwyn reports Jones as saying that he only worked on his translations when he felt that he was “in tune with what Shakespeare was doing”. Here Jones is cast as a surrogate of sorts for Shakespeare and Shortland posits sameness between Shakespeare and *whaikorero*. In claims such as these the film participates in a discourse that works to elide cultural difference and any potentially negative effects produced through colonisation, especially with respect to language.

The Maori Merchant—through its title and subtitles—also works to undo this seamlessness, playing out a set of hierarchical power relationships between English and Māori, speech and writing, which hint at historical grievances stemming from translation between English and Māori and which simultaneously offer a response to this history. As Lawrence Venuti remarks, “asymmetries, inequities, relations of domination and dependence exist in every act of translating”. In Aotearoa New Zealand these issues can be traced to the inequities produced by the mismatch in meaning between the English and Māori versions of the Treaty/Tiriti; in particular, Māori understood that they ceded *kāwanatanga* (governance), rather than sovereignty, as the



English version demanded. *The Maori Merchant* might, then, be seen as an attempt to displace the historical dominance of English instated with the signing of the Treaty/Tiriti. A consideration of the various translations that have led to the finished film helps to clarify these issues. First, Shakespeare's play was translated into classical Māori by Jones; second, Jones's translation was adapted into the screenplay by Selwyn; and third, the Māori voice-track was then translated into "modern" English subtitles, also by Selwyn. The finished product thus privileges Māori over English, with Shakespeare's text positioned at several relations of difference to the text of *The Maori Merchant*. For Selwyn the "cryptic and very simple" subtitles were integral in ensuring that non-Māori speakers might "follow the story, get a feel for the *reo*, and a feel for the emotional element [...] they'll hear the beauty of the Maori language, and their understanding will be cryptically in their own particular language". Selwyn suggests that the cryptic subtitles, necessarily incomplete and brief, will have the effect of forcing a closer spectatorial and auditory engagement with Māori from non-native speakers. The subtitles thus work to pose Māori as the dominant language and to situate the language of translation as an inadequate supplement. Here the language of translation does not look capable of functioning as what Derrida would call a "dangerous supplement", or that which threatens to intervene in and replace the dominant discourse of Māori.

The title reinforces this effort to instate the primacy of Māori, especially in relation to Shakespeare's text. In the majority of the media discourse, including He Taonga Films's website, the film is known primarily as *The Maori Merchant of Venice* rather than its Māori title *Te Tangata Whai Rawa O Weniti*. The twin titles here flag the inability of translation to produce analogues, especially of names. Whereas the Māori title offers a translation of *The Merchant of Venice*, in the English title the word Maori is used to modify the title of Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*. If a title, as Derrida suggests, "names and guarantees the identity, the unity and the boundaries of the original work which it entitles", the reconfiguration of the title, both in Māori and as a modified English title, shifts the frame of reference for interpreting the film. The use of the word Māori, which refers both to the Māori people and to *te reo*, effectively displaces the "original" title of *The Merchant of Venice*. It also offers a succinct way of cannily differentiating the film from other *Merchants* in the Shakespeare on screen marketplace by signalling its ethnic origins. Whereas Baz Luhrmann sought to exploit Shakespeare's cultural authority by naming his film *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), the use of the word Māori to supplement the English title partially displaces the primacy of Shakespeare from the enterprise: the promise of the title is that Shakespeare's *Merchant* will be remade by Māori and in Māori. This process of displacement of English by Māori is further promised through the renaming of Shakespeare's characters with Māori names: Hairoka for Shylock, Pohia for Portia,

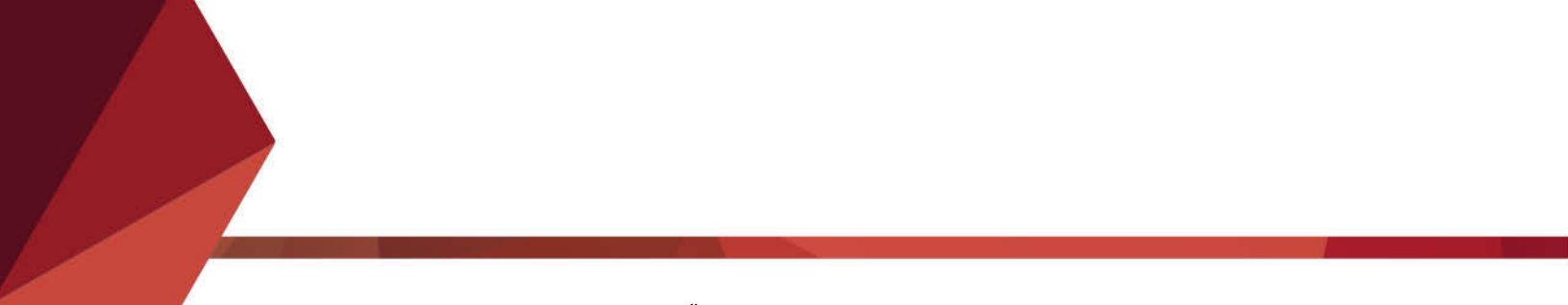


Anatonio for Antonio, and Patanio for Bassanio. This reassignment is fractured by the use of the more familiar (for me, at least) Shakespearean names in the subtitles, while the actors speak the Māori names.

This effect of fracture, or unravelling of the alleged seamlessness between spoken Māori and written English, occurs throughout the subtitles with respect to more than the title and the characters' names. Specifically, the brief prosaic, or "cryptic", as Selwyn puts it, nature of the subtitles, in contrast to the lengthy rhetorical speeches in Māori, exposes a series of differences between English and Māori. In this way the film, as the viewer might expect, privileges speakers of *te reo*, excluding nonspeakers from a "fuller" account of the play's narrative. Furthermore, the film contains moments where the camera tracks over the inscriptions of the caskets, the scrolls they contain and various written messages; these are expressed in Māori, denying comprehension to the nonspeaker, except in cases where the text is reproduced as part of the dialogue and, hence, "cryptically" in the subtitles. Here, the film works to counter language dispossession and to displace the primacy of English. The film, however, uses a canonical English text and provides English subtitles, which, as supplements to the alleged "fullness" of speech, always add to and threaten to exceed that to which they refer. In this respect the film cannot help but be traced, graphically, by the language of colonisation that litters the screen. The film is caught in a kind of traumatic feedback loop: it operates as a celebratory response to linguistic and cultural disenfranchisement but that response is enabled in part by elements of the colonial machinery (English, Shakespeare) which worked to produce the conditions of disenfranchisement and alienation in the first place.

TE REO AND THE FUTURE-TO-COME


Although Selwyn was aware of Jones's translation in the 1950s, it was not until 1990 that he staged the play as part of Auckland's Te Koanga Spring Festival of Maori Arts and it took another 10 years before funding was secured to produce it as a film. These temporal gaps sustain exploration as they offer a gloss on the history of language dispossession and cultural alienation, and also speak to a relative absence of "Māori Shakespeare" of the kind that Jones's and Selwyn's projects imagine. Following European contact the oral language of the Māori began to be expressed in written form and by 1820 the orthographic foundations of the language were articulated in Thomas Kendall's *A Grammar and Vocabulary of the Language of New Zealand*, produced by the Church Missionary Society. As Samuel Lee notes in the preface to Kendall's text, this work was carried out with the aim "of reducing the language itself of New Zealand to the rules of *Grammar*, with a view to the furtherance of the Mission sent out to that country", which facilitated "the double purpose of civilizing and evangelizing the



Natives". The word "reducing" identifies how *te reo* was to be articulated as a written sign system; as "reducing" also entails the possibility of "diminishing", Lee's preface hints at how this act of translation of committing an oral language to written form performs a violence on the language. Furthermore, the word "civilizing" embeds a value judgement that Māori are, conversely, not civilized, where "civilized" can be read as primarily symbolising Western values and behaviours. In the work of the Church Missionary Society *te reo* was codified partly for the purposes of religious conversion and "civilization", key apparatuses of colonisation, and also subjected to the rules of English grammar. Not only was *te reo* linguistically colonised as part of missionary work, it was further subjected through colonial systems of education. As has been carefully documented by Gauri Viswanathan with respect to the development of literary studies in India, education is one of the key means by which colonisation operates in the service of converting and containing indigenous cultures. This is strikingly evident in the 1835 Indian Education Act, which stated that Indians would be educated in English and in Western arts and sciences at the expense of classical Indian languages and subjects. Thomas Babington Macaulay makes the aims of this project clear in his 1835 minute on "Indian Education" where he proposed that an English education would produce "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". The effect of this education programme was to produce an educated Indian elite who would assist the British in governing the rest of the indigenous population.

Māori were not the subject of a Macaulay-style minute but they were identified as subjects for education in specifically British terms, which was partially responsible for large-scale language and cultural dispossession; as the British settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand expanded, *te reo* suffered a series of setbacks. Although the Native Schools Act 1867 enabled the establishment of primary schools in Māori communities, the language of instruction tended to be in English. This can be read as part of a process of cultural domination on behalf of the new settlers, whereby English was established as the primary mode of communication. This pattern was to continue; even under the more inclusive education policies of the 1930s Labour Government, the use of Māori continued to decline. This situation was compounded further by the "urban drift" of Māori into the cities during the 1950s and 1960s; consequently Māori were further alienated from their language and culture, as highlighted in the 1960 Hunn Report.


In considering the possibility of staging the play in Māori, Selwyn remembers Jones saying, "Kua tae mai te waa—the time will come". In a sense Jones proposed a "future-to-come", a future in which there would be sufficient numbers of Māori speakers to mount such a production. *The Maori Merchant*, spoken entirely in *te reo*, stands as testament to this future-present of cultural recovery. In part this future has been



produced as a response to Māori urban protest movements of the 1970s and what is commonly termed the Māori cultural Renaissance. This saw a renewed interest in traditional Māori arts such as weaving and carving and also the creation of works that employed Western cultural forms, such as Witi Ihimaera's short story collection *Pounamu Pounamu* (1972) and his novel *Tangi* (1973). Furthermore, the Government sought to address its responsibilities under the Treaty/Tiriti, especially its obligation to allow Māori to protect their *taonga* (treasures), of which *te reo* is one. As such, *kōhanga reo* (language nests) were established in 1982, offering Māori language immersion environments for preschool children, *kura kaupapa* (schools) were created in 1985 and Māori was designated an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand in 1987. As a *Pākehā*, or white New Zealander (and both are terms that I feel uncomfortable laying claim to as they speak to a history of colonisation and racial inequality), my own education in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s certainly benefitted from these developments in the 1970s. Compared to many children and teenagers educated before the 1980s I gained a comparatively increased awareness of Māori culture and language and also some understanding of the acts of violence—linguistic, cultural and physical—that led to the formation of Aotearoa New Zealand and continue to inform its history, even though that education felt partial and incomplete. As this chapter suggests, there is, however, still significant work to be done in increasing knowledge of Māori language and culture in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The actors' biographies included in the film's Media Kit stand as witness to past dispossession but also register the possibilities for a future where *te reo* has been encouraged to develop. Andy Sarich's (Tubal/Tupara) biography notes that he "grew up speaking the Maori language and was of the generation which was punished for speaking Maori at school and punished for speaking English at home, but he retained his Maori language". Charting a shift from Sarich's experience, several of the younger members of the cast noted that they grew up in families fluent in *te reo*, attended *kōhanga reo* and *kura kaupapa* or learned Māori at university. That said, some members of the cast noted that they were not fluent in *te reo* or that they did not grow up learning Māori, instead having to learn it as part of an intensive language-learning programme before the filming began. This suggests that the utopian future-to-come is, as the phrase suggests, yet to come. In this respect it is interesting to note that the Government's Māori Language Strategy consultation document, produced by Te Puni Kōkiri (Ministry of Māori Development), *He Reo E Kōrerotia Ana—He Reo Ka Ora [A Spoken Language Is a Living Language], A Shared Vision for the Future of Te Reo Māori*, proposes 2028 as a target date by which:

the Māori language will be widely spoken among Māori throughout New Zealand. In particular, the Māori language will be in common usage within Māori homes and communities. By 2028, non-Māori New Zealanders will have



opportunities to learn and use the Māori language if they choose to. New Zealanders will recognise and appreciate the value of the Māori language within New Zealand society.

The Maori Merchant, positioned halfway between the language initiatives that began in the 1970s and the future-to-come of 2028, can thus be read as a cultural project that indexes—and contributes to—the progress of the revival of *te reo* at the cusp of the millennium.


MEMORIALS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

But just as the proposed utopian future-to-come will be shadowed by the traces of colonisation, so too is the present. In this way *The Maori Merchant* stands as an emblem of the future/past, condensing both what has gone before and what might be into the event of performance. Writing of justice in relation to accretions of the past and the future, Derrida argues that:

no justice [. . .] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism.

He goes on to suggest that it is not possible to ask questions of the future-to-come “without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*”. Indeed Selwyn notes that “young people are the most important thing . . . In Maori we have a saying (that) we are but a moment between two eternities, the past and the future. Whatever time is occurring now, to help young people is what you are here for”. Here the time of the present is hinged to the past and is also marked as the site from which a responsibility to the future must issue; it is as if the events of the past, be those traumatic or pleasurable, are condensed into the now-time of the present where it is the responsibility of those living now to shape time-past and time-present for those who are to come. *The Maori Merchant* might be said to model such a sense of responsibility to what has gone before and what might come in the context of justice for violations of the Treaty/Tiriti. This is most obviously borne out by an allegorical reading of Shakespeare’s play in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand’s race relations.

If one strand of *The Merchant of Venice* concerns the violation of a written bond that is then debated in court, an analogy might be made with the interpretation of the Treaty/Tiriti, especially following the Government’s creation of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 to investigate and redress land claims. The Tribunal initially had the power to



consider breaches of the Treaty/Tiriti from 1975 but the Treaty Amendment Act 1985 gave it the power to consider all breaches of the Treaty/Tiriti since it was signed in 1840. This has led to a number of high-profile compensation claims that have resulted in reparations being made to various *iwi*. The film's website and Media Kit certainly work to locate *The Merchant of Venice* in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand's cultural politics. Shylock's quest for justice is expressed as a desire for *utu*, which is translated as both "revenge" and the less emotive "payment", which it also entails. As such, Shylock's efforts to gain redress for the violation of his bond through the courts might be read as neatly referring to the processes administered by the Tribunal. Shakespeare's plot resonates further in relation to Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana's successful spiritual and political mission, which was established in the 1920s. The Ratana movement located the Māori as God's "Chosen People" in place of the Jews and interpreted the Old Testament as a parable for the displacement and suffering of the Māori. Shortland makes this connection between Māori and Judaism explicit when he says:


playing Shylock from a Maori perspective is the easiest role because you know something of what it is to hang onto your identity and to deal with prejudice, some of it overt, some of it not so overt, in the New Zealand sense anyway [...]

I see him as acting on behalf of his people.

Selwyn makes the connection between the anti-Semitic prejudice examined in the play and race relations in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, claiming:

New Zealand is very conscious of its history, we're continually debating the misunderstandings and lack of a cohesive relationship. Prejudice is prejudice, and it's something that we have to address, and my feeling is that anything that is going to allow us to understand or face up to our own history is going to be for the better, because then we can get on with it.


Here the narrative work of the play is cited as a mechanism by which Aotearoa New Zealand might engage with or "face up to" its past, even as the historical specificities of prejudice are collapsed into the tautological "prejudice is prejudice". Again, a Shakespeare play, as with Sher and Doran's work with *Titus Andronicus* in South Africa, is deployed as a means through which to confront difficult aspects of cultural history. Furthermore, in the possibility of "get[ting] on with it", Selwyn seems to mark a moment whereby Aotearoa New Zealand might engage with the future more directly in relation to the difficulties wrought by the past. Aspects of the film certainly work to elide traumatic aspects of this colonial history, such as the part that the English language played in cultural dispossession, even as the use of Shakespeare has enabled, subsequently, a project of cultural reclamation. Other parts of the film are, however, more equivocal about the traumatic events of the past and the ongoing inequalities



produced through colonisation and its aftermath. Specifically, the analogy between Shakespeare's play and the history of the Māori warp under the weight of further analysis to reinforce the oppression of the Māori, coded in specifically Shakespearean terms. Indeed, the film's "one-liner" tag, "Revenge is not so sweet", coupled with Shylock's failure to attain *utu* in the court, might be read symbolically as a bleak view of the possibility of honouring the "bond" of the Treaty/Tiriti through the processes of the legal system. The film's courtroom scene resonates in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand in the ways I have suggested. It is, though, through extra-textual referents that the film most clearly references a sense of responsibility to the traumatic violence of the past and the future-to-come. This is most sharply articulated in the film's representation of 1.3, where Antonio/Anatolio makes his bond with Shylock/Hairoka.

As Bassanio/Patanio and Shylock/Hairoka begin their negotiations, the camera tracks their journey through a Venetian marketplace before Bassanio/Patanio introduces Antonio/Anatolio to Shylock/Hairoka in an artist's studio. As the scene progresses, through a sequence of slow-moving shots, which highlight the division between the Christians and the Jew, the camera also captures scenes from the paintings that hug the perimeter of the studio. These images, painted by Māori artist and the film's co-producer Selwyn Muru, who is present as a painter in the diegesis, offer yet another instance of intercultural production. Here Muru uses the medium of painting to depict Māori history, which traditionally was recorded orally and through carving. More tellingly, the paintings offer a visual record of conflict over land between Māori and *Pākehā* at Parihaka in the 1880s; coincidentally in 2000–2001 Wellington's City Gallery/Te Whare Toi housed an exhibition entitled "Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance", which explored the legacy of Parihaka in New Zealand art. While the Treaty/Tiriti gave the Crown first option of buying land, the history of land purchase in Aotearoa New Zealand is enmeshed in narratives of land confiscation. The *pa* (village) at Parihaka, situated near Mount Taranaki, whose imposing shape is registered in Muru's paintings, attracted Māori who were drawn to the teachings of the prophets Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Toho Kakahi. These prophets are remembered primarily for their campaigns of pacifism and passive resistance against *Pākehā* attempts to survey land. These programmes met, however, with an invasion of 644 troops and 1,000 settler volunteers on 5 November 1881, which resulted in the destruction of the *pa* and the arrest of the prophets. In the inclusion of paintings that depict this event, *The Maori Merchant* reiterates the memory of this traumatic event, emblematic of more widespread land dispossession and violence. It is, though, in the closing moments of this scene that the film works, most pointedly, to stand as witness to past events.

As Antonio/Anatolio and Bassanio/Patanio leave the studio, the paintings, which have occupied a peripheral position throughout most of the foregoing scene, are brought to the centre of the filmic gaze. Focussing on one painting the camera pans up.

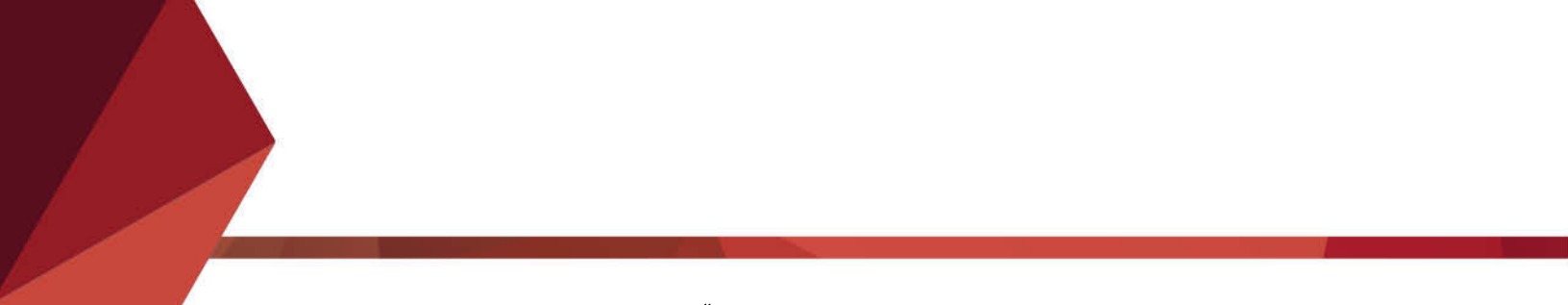


At the bottom of the painting the spectator sees the word “holocaust” broken up along the painting’s vertical and horizontal axes to read “HO/LO/CA/UST”. As the camera reaches the top of the painting, the phonemes are again shown, rearranged horizontally to spell “HOLOCAUST”. In this double iteration, the word “holocaust” registers multiple meanings that the spectator is invited to witness, their responses shaped by the particular circumstances of their cultural backgrounds. The dominant meaning that “holocaust” carries is, of course, the genocide of six million Jews under the instruction of Hitler’s Nazi Germany. The insertion of the word thus provides a reminder of the way in which productions of *The Merchant of Venice* after the Holocaust are, perhaps inevitably, traced by this traumatic history, exemplified by the productions with which I opened this chapter. In a film which has resolutely insisted on the primacy of te reo, the insertion of an English word into the diegesis provides a sharp reminder of the linguistic colonisation which has created the need for the film in the first instance: literally, a linguistic holocaust is referenced. The dual iteration also signifies at the level of contemporary national politics.

In 1996 the Waitangi Tribunal released a report on land claims in the Taranaki region. Buried near the end of the lengthy report Chapter 12.3.3 states:

[a]s to quantum, the gravamen of our report has been to say that the Taranaki claims are likely to be the largest in the country. The graphic muru [confiscation] of most of Taranaki and the raupatu [conquest and marginalisation] without ending describe the holocaust of Taranaki history and the denigration of the founding peoples in a continuum from 1840 to the present.


The report thus makes a connection between the effects of colonisation on the Māori and the term’s more common association with Hitler’s programme of genocide. The term “holocaust” was to resurface amid much public controversy in 2000. In an address to the New Zealand Psychological Society Conference, Tariana Turia, an Associate Minister of Te Puni Kōkiri, claimed that while Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was readily considered in relation to Holocaust survivors and Vietnam veterans “[w]hat seems to not have received similar attention is the holocaust suffered by indigenous people including Maori as a result of colonial contact and behaviour”. Turia’s comments here, alongside her assertion that Māori child abuse and domestic violence could be linked to the effects of colonisation, were attacked. The New Zealand First leader Winston Peters dismissed Turia’s claims as “psychobabble” and National MP Roger Sowry asserted that it was “the most off-the-planet speech by a politician in living memory”. Following the outcry, Turia made a speech in Parliament; while she apologised for any offence caused, she did not offer an official retraction of the term holocaust. In response to Turia’s speech, Helen Clark, the Labour Prime Minister at the time, issued



the following edict: “I know the [Waitangi] tribunal used it [holocaust] with respect to Taranaki. I do not agree with that and I do not want to see ministers using the term and causing offence again”. She went on to say: “I don’t accept that the word holocaust can be validly used about the New Zealand experience [. . .] I would not use that particular term, which has a specific and very tragic meaning”. Furthermore, Wendy Ross, a member of the Auckland Jewish Council, commented that it was “a pity” that Turia “reinforced the Waitangi Tribunal’s use of the word”.


The scene in the artist’s studio was shot after Turia had been castigated and Selwyn says that “[t]hey couldn’t resist” referring to it in the film. The inclusion of this textual referent, coupled with the images of Parihaka, offers a graphic (in a literal sense) representation of the dispossession of the Māori in the context of other histories of dispossession; indeed the term has been used in relation to other indigenous peoples, such as David E. Stannard’s analysis of the effects of colonisation on indigenous cultures in the Americas. In attempting to ban the word (for Government ministers at least), Clark limited the vocabulary available to account for Aotearoa New Zealand’s cultural history, highlighting how language can be used both to articulate and limit self-representation. In referencing the word “holocaust”, *The Maori Merchant* unshackled the term from its “ban” and makes a case for the right to self-representation through denoting aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand’s colonial history as violent and painful for Māori.

As the scene in the artist’s studio works to acknowledge traumatic historical events and their figuration in contemporary politics, the film’s distribution process, alongside the way in which it fostered Māori language, actors and filmmakers, also works to redress some of the damage created by colonisation. The film, like the production of *This Island’s Mine* which I will explore in the next chapter, thus identifies how traumatic events and histories can also offer acts of resistance and the capacity to produce and sustain communities, even as these communities, as Miranda Joseph notes, are still yet caught in (and maintain) capitalist systems of production and consumption, here denoted through the operation and labour of the film industry. *The Maori Merchant* was made primarily for an audience fluent in *te reo*, with the aim of recovering lost aspects of the Māori language, encouraging Māori to learn *te reo* and, in the longer term, to become an educational resource. The film, a 2004 Ministry of Education resource kit, which included a video of the film, a book and a teachers’ guide, and the 2008 Ministry of Education reprint of Jones’s 1946 text, thus offer an early twenty-first-century reprise of Jones’s mid-century efforts to create Māori Shakespeare and Selwyn’s 1990 staging of the translation. As Selwyn notes, “[i]t’s a long-term educational resource and an opportunity to celebrate the artists and people who are learning the language. But it’s also a catalyst for the broader community thing—such a wide range of artists are employed on it”. Here Selwyn imagines how the film will



galvanise communities of Māori speakers, now and in the future, but also the way in which the film is seen as a means of creating a community based on affiliations in addition to speaking Māori. The film's participation in narratives of community creation also recurs in the release strategy. Using a slow-release strategy, the film toured around Aotearoa New Zealand and was screened at a series of charity premieres to benefit the Pei Te Hurinui Jones Trust, formed to fund creative writing in *te reo*. In this way He Taonga Films located *The Maori Merchant* as a performance event, designed to showcase it to maximum cultural effect and to raise money to benefit Māori education. The film also screened on the then newly launched Māori Television channel in 2004. This channel is the latest addition to Māori broadcasting which, like the cast biographies in the Media Kit note, has included *Te Karere*, the Māori language news programme, *Ruia Mai*, a Māori language radio production company and *Marae*, a Māori magazine programme. The biographies and network screening stand as testament to the development of Māori (language) broadcasting, which has benefited from Government support as it has worked to meet its obligations, set out by the Waitangi Tribunal, to support Māori language. Indeed the film was primarily funded (NZ\$2.4 million) by Te Māngai Pāho, the Crown entity, established in 1993 “to make funding available to the national network of Māori radio stations and for the production of Māori language television programmes, radio programmes and music CDs”. The film also screened as part of the inaugural Wairoa Maori Film Festival (2005). It can thus be seen as an integral part of the development of Māori filmmaking that this festival marked, and continues to mark, as the 2010 festival screened several new short films by Māori filmmakers.


Māori filmmaking still makes up a relatively small percentage of Aotearoa New Zealand's film industry and no other feature film in *te reo* has yet, at the time of writing, been produced. A consideration of the New Zealand Film Commission/Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga's list of 294 feature films made since 1939 and catalogue of short films in relation to Te Māngai Pāho's funding decisions suggests that significantly more work is made by Māori artists and in *te reo* for radio, music and television than for the cinema. Indeed, the production company Whenua Films was started by Cliff Curtis and Ainsley Gardiner in 2004, partly in response to Curtis's sense that the “Maori Film Industry” was not “flourishing with a diverse range of characters for him to play” on his return to Aotearoa New Zealand from Hollywood; “[t]he reality inspired him to start a company devoted to creating a home for indigenous storytelling, that would in turn encourage an aspect of the industry informed by tikanga Maori”. Although Selwyn's project did not initiate a wave of feature films in Māori, its success in promoting Māori filmmaking and *te reo* is perhaps better measured in the proliferation of smaller scale projects, such as short films and documentaries of the kind that the Wairoa Festival showcases, and Māori involvement in Aotearoa New Zealand's film industry more



broadly. This work has largely been made possible by projects such as Selwyn's He Taonga I Tawhiti and He Taonga Films, representative bodies for Māori working in film, video and television such as Nga Aho Whakaari, and government funding for Māori broadcasting.

In addition to this local development agenda, Selwyn also sought to tap international markets to gain exposure for *te reo*. Indeed it was Selwyn's intention "to introduce the Maori language through Shakespeare to the world through this". Alongside positive reviews in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Award of Best Actor for Shortland at the 2003 New Zealand Film Awards, the film won the Blockbuster Audience Award for Best Feature Film at the 2002 Louis Vuitton Hawaii International Film Festival and screened at the second Denver Indigenous Film and Arts Festival in 2005. Outside the festival circuit, screenings of the film at the 2003 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in Victoria, British Columbia, and at a 2004 seminar on Māori Shakespeare at the International Center for Writing and Translation at the University of California, Irvine, proved popular; chapters on the film have also been included in Sonia Massai's collection *World-Wide Shakespeares*, Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray's collection *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-first Century* and in the postcolonial journal *Kunapipi*. As such it would seem that the film has, indeed, managed to acquire a place in the niche (film and academic) markets of metropolitan centres. However, given the niche nature of these markets, the film was positioned in such a way that its potential audience outside Aotearoa New Zealand was limited primarily to communities of spectators interested specifically in indigenous filmmaking and Shakespeare films. This prevented the development of broader audience demographics, of the kind that screenings at Sundance and Cannes and an international release would have enabled.


The film can be seen as contributing to various communities as I have suggested above but it also marks the work still to be done in developing and raising the profile of *te reo* Māori both inside and outside Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, given that *The Maori Merchant* has received only limited international festival play and the much awaited multi-language-subtitled DVD has yet to be released, Selwyn's dream of taking "Maori language to the world" has yet to come to pass outside the relatively small arenas of academic and independent film markets. Furthermore, in the wake of Selwyn's death on 13 April 2007, the obituaries and news reports of his death cited *The Maori Merchant of Venice* as an exemplar of the significant contribution he has made to regenerating *te reo* and developing opportunities in the film industry for Māori, even as several commentators acknowledged that the film has not been as commercially successful as it might have been. For example, in a series of memorials to Selwyn in *Onfilm* magazine, Judith McCann asserts that "Don's own acclaimed directorial achievement [was] with the stunning *Maori Merchant of Venice*. Sadly, his Merchant



stands as a magnificent inspiration to many, but remains under-exposed here and overseas as an audacious and culturally unique expression of Aotearoa New Zealand”. Similarly, speaking at Selwyn’s funeral, the high-profile Māori entertainer Howard Morrison was reported by Denise Irvine as saying said that “the movie [for Morrison] was Selwyn’s ‘greatest triumph’ and had not had the accolades it deserved”; for Morrison “[i]t should have had a premiere not only in Taumarunui, but also in London”. Although responses such as these acknowledge that the film’s impact might have been greater, several commentators, such as the Acting Minister for the Arts, Judith Tizard, and the co-leader of the Māori Party, Pita Sharples, identified *The Maori Merchant* as Selwyn’s “masterpiece”. In the reification of the film as Selwyn’s masterpiece, it comes to stand not only as a legacy to the traumatic effects of colonisation and the possibility for development in the face of cultural dispossession but also as a legacy to Selwyn and his extensive career in developing *te reo* and Māori participation in theatre, film and television industries, even though this work is not yet over. In a sense the film operates as a synecdoche for Selwyn’s career and works to memorialise his significant contribution to Māori cultural development.

SPEAKING MĀORI (SHAKESPEARE)

The Maori Merchant might thus be situated alongside productions of Shakespeare in Aotearoa New Zealand, such as those I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, which have drawn attention to the politics of their location, particularly with respect to race relations and the trauma of colonisation. Taken together, these productions make a mockery of New Zealand actor and director Ian Mune’s dismissal of the concept of “New Zealand Shakespeare” with “not yet” at a 2000 panel discussion on “Shakespeare in the Pacific”. In the scenes set in Belmont/Peremona and in the artist’s studio, coupled with a large cast of actors performing in the once profoundly endangered *te reo* and the celebratory mode in which the film was produced and received, *The Maori Merchant* offers a striking example of just such a New Zealand Shakespeare. In considering *The Maori Merchant* I have suggested that this Māori Shakespeare film from Aotearoa New Zealand, while promoting an apparently seamless relation between Shakespeare and Māori, is also traced by the effects of colonisation, which it works to redress. *The Maori Merchant* might, then, be seen as Janus-like, always already reaching back and looking forward. As such, it stands as a monument to the trauma and ongoing effects of what has gone before. It is subject to and materially affects the conditions of the present through the creation of a large-scale Māori language and staffed project; in its potential life as an educational resource and voice of *te reo* on national and global markets it also offers a glimpse of the future-to-come. In keeping with Selwyn’s goals to revitalise the Māori language, this might be a future in which *te reo* is secure and, perhaps, one in which Shakespeare is secondary, rather than positioned as pivotal, to that security. This chapter’s concerns with Shakespeare, trauma and the potential for



the creation of productive community relationships are developed further in the next chapter with respect to Philip Osment's appropriation of *The Tempest* for Gay Sweatshop theatre company.