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A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Cinema: Shakespeare's Comedies in Film and Television

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A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Cinema
Shakespeare's Comedies in Film and Television

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

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in

English

by

Wendy Nicole Lamb

December 2010

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This project examines Shakespeare’s comedy plays and the ways they have been used as source material for twentieth and twenty-first century films. Three main questions guide the project: What was comedy in Shakespeare’s time? How do modern and postmodern film adaptations of Shakespeare’s comedies draw upon and transform early modern comic forms and conventions? What do these films—along with their marketing and reception—reveal about today’s cultural values and identities such as gender, race, religion, and status? Genre theory and cultural studies form the theoretical foundation for the answers to these questions as each chapter examines one or more sets of films based on the comedies.
The BBC Shakespeare Television series views the plays as early modern artifacts and makes traditional, but not entirely successful, versions of them. *The Taming of the Shrew* has found its way onto film multiple times. Usually the farce is turned into a “battle-of-the-sexes” style romantic comedy as the filmmakers attempt to bring to Katherine some sort of subjectivity. The supernatural elements of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* take over on film as filmmakers show off their technology by creating fantasy pieces. *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, while comedies in early modern categorization, become more serious. In a post-Holocaust world, the character of Shylock becomes problematic and *The Merchant of Venice* becomes his tragedy. *The Tempest*, on the other hand, seems to be a treat for film directors as they concentrate on a solemn Prospero and the way he directs the action of the film. Finally, what was originally tragic can be fodder for comedy as adaptations and appropriations of *Hamlet* demonstrate. Whether it is a lion, a female brewery owner, or an action star, the audience recognizes the character and laughs at the incongruity of the comedy. All of these films negotiate how to present early modern concepts and characters in a way that will be palatable to a contemporary audience, and sometimes the ones that free themselves from the restrictions of their source best honor the spirit of the Bard.
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Introduction

In my dissertation, I examine Shakespeare’s comedies and the ways they have been used as source material for twentieth and twenty-first century films. Three main questions guide my work: 1) What was comedy in Shakespeare’s time? 2) How do modern and postmodern film adaptations of Shakespeare’s comedies draw upon and transform early modern comic forms and conventions? 3) What do these films—along with their marketing and reception—reveal about today’s cultural values and identities such as gender, race, religion, and cultural status. For the first question I examine early modern comic conventions, elements the comedies have in common, plots that lend themselves to comedy, and how characters and situations might have been played for laughs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As I move into the world of film and television in my second question, I am very interested in seeing which comic elements retain their essence in contemporary society and what filmmakers change to appeal to a world 400 years later. One of the keys to this query is to ascertain which plays are even made into film. Why do we have multiple versions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Tempest* but almost none of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* or *Measure for Measure*? How do the films negotiate the space between Shakespeare and the 20th/21st centuries? This leads to the question of values and identities. How do contemporary versions of *The Taming of the Shrew* deal with feminism? Do films of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* include the class strata inherent in the original? How do filmmakers and actors choose to portray characters such as *The Merchant of Venice*’s Shylock or *The Tempest*’s Caliban in a world that cannot accept them as merely comic
types? Filmmakers seem to prefer Shakespeare’s tragedies as source material; however, there are a number of comedies they turn to repeatedly. I examine why these particular comedies are prominent in our culture of film and television and what they reveal about this culture.

I begin by examining the plays as artifacts of early modern drama, juxtaposing them with one approach to adaptation that attempts to work closely with the plays’ early modern origins—i.e. the BBC Shakespeare TV series. From these foundations I examine film treatments of two plays that have garnered more attention from filmmakers than other comedies: *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Finally, I explore the way films have shifted Shakespearean genres. Hollywood has made comedies into dramas and turned tragedies into comedies. In the first case, I specifically contend with versions of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, two plays that seem to have completely shifted genres and are no longer accepted as comedies. I would like to understand what, generically, these plays have become, why the shift happened, what this says about modern and postmodern culture, and how well they work as dramatic films. In the latter instance, I am interested in how the great tragedy, *Hamlet*, becomes funny, what kind of comedy it is, and what purpose that comedy serves.

In exploring the evolution of Shakespeare’s comedies on film, I look at how they use their Shakespearean source material, but also attempt to understand how they fit into the genres of twentieth and twenty-first century comic films and what they say about contemporary culture. Each set of films seems to fit within a film genre: romantic comedy, fantasy, or heritage drama. Much of my discussion centers on how
contemporary filmmakers work with the material to fulfill generic expectations. In addition, I ask, to what extent are they “successful” films? One obvious measure of success in today’s culture is money made. I note how popular these films have been at the box office and in DVD sales and rentals. Whether they made enough money to satisfy the studios and allow similar films to be made is a measure of their achievement. Another test of success is popular criticism. In some instances, the popular versus academic criticism is quite divided. Finally, there is academic criticism. Whether scholars of Shakespeare and film find these films worthy of their attention shows how significant the academy believes them to be. When scholars do write about them, what aspects do they find appealing? When they have not written volumes on the films, I wonder what they are leaving out. I am interested in how the films add to our understanding of Shakespeare’s texts while also making them cinematic. I will also try to determine who the audience is for a film and whether the film works better as an educational explication of Shakespeare’s play, an intriguing film in its own right, or possibly both.

My theoretical approach is guided by genre theory and cultural studies. Because Shakespeare’s plays have been broken into genres since their earliest publication and films are also broken into genres, genre theory allows me to examine the plays and films as comedies and as particular kinds of comedies and use notions of genre as a means of understanding what the filmmakers are doing with the plays. Because I am also using various ideas of what makes a successful film and am examining what the films reveal about contemporary culture, I delve into cultural studies ideas as I look at the films within
their cultural contexts and use popular opinion in the form of audience and criticism as one determination of success.

Critical Background

In the following section, I discuss some of the major critical works that provide a foundation for my project. I begin by examining scholarship that explores ideas of comedy in the early modern era and how Shakespeare’s comedies correspond with these ideas. I then focus on critical works that show how modern and postmodern film adaptations transform Shakespeare’s texts. Finally, I discuss key texts showing what the film adaptations reveal about today’s cultural values and identities.

A beginning place for examining comedy as a genre is Northrop Frye’s mythic criticism. In his “Theory of Myths,” he sets out workable definitions of comedy, tragedy, romance, and irony, all of which form the basis for Shakespeare’s comedy plays and lead into the film genres they have inspired. Frye includes all of Shakespeare’s comedies, even the ones we often call romances, within his description of the comic myth of spring; however, the other categories help make distinctions among the plays and provide a basis for examining the fluidity of genre forms as directors transform early modern plays into modern and postmodern films. While Frye’s work is certainly dated and may not ultimately provide the most useful categorizations, it is foundational and is at least acknowledged in later criticism. Because I hope to show that the “problem plays” and “romances” contain basic comic elements, Frye’s categorizing of the plays together and discussion of comic myths and characters are helpful in showing similarities in the disparate plays.
In another scheme for generic comedy, C. L. Barber works in much the same vein as Frye in *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*. Like Frye, Barber suggests a Greek foundation for Shakespeare’s comedies, commenting on the “Saturnalian pattern” they contain; however, rather than going back to the Greek myths, he places Shakespeare’s Old Comedy notions directly into the festival world of England. In doing so, he discusses medieval and Renaissance English festivals and shows the general influence of the May Game and the Lord of Misrule on Shakespeare’s comedies. This certainly helps explain the entertainments and pageants found within the plays, and Barber mentions them, but his focus is on how entire plays are also festival pageants. He specifically explores his concept of the festival in *Love’s Labours Lost*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. Even more than Frye’s seasons, Barber’s festive categories help contextualize the comedies in the early modern period. He sets *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the scope of the May Games, times of madness in the woods with the lovers swept away in the impersonal love games of Puck (123). He sheds light on *The Merchant of Venice*, a play with which the contemporary world struggles. Shylock is no longer a comedic character in contemporary versions of the *The Merchant of Venice*; however, Barber’s comparisons between Shylock and the killjoy figure of festive comedy show how he can work in opposition to the communal world of the other characters to bring them to festivity. Barber does not claim that *The Merchant of Venice* is specifically tied to a festival, but he works in symbols and analogies to show how it aligns with concepts of festival comedy. *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* helps tie Shakespeare’s plays very specifically to Early Modern England. Along
with other generic ideas, it begins to paint a picture of what formed the basis of comedy in that world. It seems to be a fairly narrow reading of the plays—a helpful reading of one aspect of Shakespeare’s comedies, but not the sum total of the corpus. I hope to use these ideas in conjunction with other understandings to try to contextualize the plays in their own world in order to show what filmmakers have and have not brought into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The specific notions of festival Barber discusses may be one aspect of the comedies the contemporary versions have lost; however, part of what I want to explore is how some of the more symbolic aspects of the festival comedies may be retained in films of the plays.

In *Carnival and Theater* Michael Bristol challenges the notions of C.L. Barber and others that carnival is, by nature, conservative. He suggests instead that carnival and by virtue of its connection to carnival, the theater, actually provided moments of transgressing the social order, of community power, of true misrule. While Bristol’s logical leaps may not always be solid, he does provide an application of Bakhtin’s ideas to Elizabethan theater including Shakespeare’s plays, investigating its use of various carnivalesque themes. For this, it is a useful foundation for examining questions of misrule, disguise, transgression, disruption of power, mocking of tradition, the grotesque, and so on in Shakespeare’s comedies. In *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* Chris Humphrey much more thoroughly than Bristol takes up the question of whether carnival really is social protest or if it is merely a conservative “safety-valve.” His possibly more objective view of the context of carnival in medieval England complements Bristol’s specific assertions about plays and allows me to make
further suggestions about the use of festival and carnival in the texts and how some of the comedies continue to push against social customs while others have lost any transgressive force and become quite conservative, working to maintain the status quo.

Beginning with the view that Shakespeare’s comedies are less attractive to filmmakers than tragedies, Russell Jackson in the article, “Shakespeare’s Comedies on Film,” discusses some of the issues of making films from Shakespeare’s comedies including fidelity to the original through cinematic expression, theater versus the cinema, how to use filmic space, and questions of language and adaptation. He then looks at some versions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest* and places them in the genre of fantasy film. He uses the Sam Taylor and Franco Zeffirelli versions of *The Taming of the Shrew* as examples of “battle of the sexes” comedies. He finishes by commenting briefly and positively about Branagh’s *Much Ado About Nothing*. By touching on film issues from 1935’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to 1993’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (with which he was involved in an advisory capacity), Jackson illuminates some issues of making Shakespeare’s comedies in Hollywood. It is the beginnings of a discussion, but only just. There is much more to be said both about the films he places into nice generic boxes and the films he chooses not to consider—those that do not somehow fulfill his test of fidelity to Shakespeare.

Michael Hattaway in his article, “The Comedies on Film,” gives a broader overview of the comedies that have been filmed, giving less space to each one. He concentrates on the cinematic gestures the comedies make. He discusses the difficulty of finding cinematic equivalents to the theatrical space needed for comedies and notes what
various directors have done, particularly in setting and narrative mode. His notion of faithful adaptation is more expansive than Jackson’s and he allows directors to make the texts their own. He does suggest that this makes it almost impossible to really compare films of Shakespeare’s work to “Shakespeare,” but does not seem bothered by this shift. He remains, however, dissatisfied with any single vision of a comedy on film and appeals for a not yet achieved truly cinematic version of one of Shakespeare’s comedies. This broad but brief overview gives useful discussion points on a wide array of films and supports my somewhat liberal view of what makes a Shakespearean film. I do think some films may have more successfully adapted Shakespeare’s comedies into truly cinematic pieces than he does, but it is a point to consider.

In a book that looks at all filmed Shakespeare rather than just comedies, Michael Anderegg attempts to identify just what Cinematic Shakespeare is. Coming from a film studies perspective, he includes strong discussion of genre, language, and adaptation. His introduction explores the notion that a play is a different entity in adaptation than a novel or other source, making Shakespearean adaptation a different entity than Dickensian or Austenian. He scans the actors and issues of language, dealing with what happens when actors speak iambic pentameter as conversational prose—more and less successfully. Much of the book is helpful by analogy as Anderegg—like many critics—focuses on the many filmed tragedies and significant histories, but downplays the comedies. For instance, in his discussion of “Studio Shakespeare,” he gives a paragraph to A Midsummer Night’s Dream before moving on to a more thorough exploration of Julius Caesar and then the films of Laurence Olivier and Orson Welles. His chapter on Branagh
focuses on the accessibility of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love’s Labours Lost*. While he almost completely dismisses *Love’s Labours Lost*—suggesting that by cutting it so much to try to make it accessible, Branagh actually made it difficult to follow—he damns *Much Ado About Nothing* with faint praise when he asserts that the moments that work best are the most dramatic moments. He believes Branagh misjudges the comedy—especially the Dogberry scenes—but makes the dramatic tension—particularly between his Benedick and Emma Thompson’s Beatrice—work well. In the same chapter, he has similar points to make about Nunn’s *Twelfth Night* and Hoffman’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. His points seem sensible and help to show why it is difficult to film Shakespeare’s comedies; however, I think each of the films may be more comedically successfully than he believes.

While up to this point the criticism I have discussed has attempted to deal with a breadth of Shakespeare’s plays, there are several books that give an in-depth focus on the making and understanding of particular film adaptations. In *Shakespeare Films in the Making*, Russell Jackson traces the production of Reinhardt’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He investigates Reinhardt as director, the vision for the film, the casting, the origins at the Hollywood Bowl, the script, visual effects, music, the mechanicals and fairies, and promotion and reception. This chapter provides a detailed view of what happens when someone wants to adapt a play by Shakespeare into a film. It is particularly helpful in understanding some of the early adaptations and provides a list of the elements that go into making a Hollywood version of a Shakespearean comedy.
In *The BBC Shakespeare*, Susan Willis provides a thorough overview of the project. She discusses its origins, its goals and the (monetary) reasons for them, the three groups of programs under three producers, and some of the specific programs. After discussing Cedric Messina’s problematical start to the series, she spends much time in the middle years with Jonathan Miller as producer and Miller, Jane Howell, and Elijah Moshinsky directing many of the individual programs in that group. While Howell’s only comedy was *The Winter’s Tale* and her histories and *Titus Andronicus* tend to stand out more, the discussion of Moshinsky’s comedies and Miller’s plays—particularly *The Taming of the Shrew*—is valuable. The BBC *Taming of the Shrew* is often criticized for not being very funny. Willis explains Miller’s philosophy for the play, making the interpretation more explicable. It does not make it funny, but evidently that was not the purpose. While I am among those who wish the BBC comedies had been faster moving and funnier—according to Willis, this is evidently a primarily American attitude—understanding the economic and philosophical motivations as well as the various personalities behind the series is useful for this group of comedies.

The final question I ask in my project is what the film adaptations reveal about today’s cultural values and identities. There are several texts that look to these issues regarding films of plays. I discuss these more explicitly in the appropriate chapters; however, a brief synopsis suggests the kinds of questions critics are asking. In *Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace*, Mark Thornton Burnett considers Shakespeare as cultural capital at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries and examines the values and identities many of the recent films suggest. He discusses the
social and political issues with which filmed Shakespeare must grapple, examining global
Shakespeare, spirituality in Shakespearean films, and the work recent Shakespeare
parodies are doing. There are a number of valuable sections in Mark Thornton Burnett
and Ramona Wray’s *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-first Century*. One of the most
noteworthy for this project is Carolyn Jess-Cooke’s “Screening the McShakespeare in
Post-Millenial Shakespeare Cinema.” In this chapter, Jess-Cooke begins with *Scotland, PA*
and scrutinizes the way Shakespeare has been reworked in fast food fashion for
popular consumption. She believes the aspects of McShakespeare include tension
between the local and global, issues of racial identity and politics, multiple cultural
affiliations, and reterritorialisation. Diana E. Henderson examines the issues of the *The
Taming of the Shrew* in two pieces, “A Shrew for the Times, Revisited,” and “The Return
of the Shrew: New Media, Old Stories, and Shakespearean Comedy.” In the former she
concentrates on what she considers conservative renderings of *The Taming of the Shrew*
on film. In the later, she nuances her reading and adds a Freudian reading to the texts.
Each of these critics examines certain aspects of the work the films are doing in the
twenty-first century. My readings incorporate some of these ideas from Shakespeare as
cultural capital to acknowledging the conservative nature of many versions of *The
Taming of the Shrew*. My readings extend some of the generic ideas these authors invoke,
investigating the tension between comedy and serious film genres and between academic
drama categories and popular film categories.
Chapter One: Shakespeare by the Book: The BBC Adaptations

In chapter one, an introduction of sorts to my project, I begin by working through ideas of early modern play genre and modern and postmodern film genre and developing some schemes for where and how the two meet. Because most of my project will encompass films that transform Shakespeare quite a lot, I begin with a more conservative set. To begin analyzing the juxtaposition between Shakespeare and film, I discuss the BBC Shakespeare Project. Between 1978 and 1985 the BBC filmed for television all thirty-seven canonical Shakespeare plays. This is the only filmed version of some of the comedies. The directors, many of them primarily theater directors, were restricted by a conservative philosophy of using Shakespeare’s words, abridging as little as possible (while making a film that was less than two and a half hours long) and using costumes that were either Elizabethan or appropriate to Shakespeare’s setting. While this philosophy remained in the basic understanding of the project, the three producers (Cedric Messina, Jonathan Miller, and Shaun Sutton) allowed more and less innovation from their directors. Of the comedies, *As You Like It* was filmed on location outdoors, the rest on sound stages. This project shows the best and worst of attempting to make definitive Shakespeare pieces that will appeal to a mass television audience and presumably become classroom staples.

Specifically, I work with four comedies that cover the life of the project, Shakespeare’s varied comedy genres, and the two most lauded directors from the series. *As You Like It* (Coleman 1978) is one of Shakespeare’s middle comedies, but was the first the series presented, produced naturalistically under the auspices of Cedric Messina.
Critics call *All’s Well that Ends Well* a problem comedy and director Elijah Moshinsky films it pictorially, concentrating on a scenic mise en scène. Jane Howell presents a highly stylized version of the romance, *The Winter’s Tale*. Finally, *The Comedy of Errors*, one of Shakespeare’s early farces, receives a full comic treatment by director James Cellan-Jones late in the series. Each of these directors chooses a different way of representing Shakespeare’s plays while keeping mostly with the guidelines of the series, and this section shows what happens with “traditional” Shakespearean films—what works and what does not.

Chapter Two: Shakespeare and The Battle of the Sexes: The Taming of the Shrew

Chapter two examines the most-often and probably most straightforwardly filmed comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*. This is the only one of Shakespeare’s earliest comedies that receives much film attention. I find it intriguing that the “shrew” continues to be tamed in big Hollywood productions as well as smaller television versions. Shylock can no longer be played for laughs in *The Merchant of Venice* and Caliban becomes a misunderstood, even noble character in versions of *The Tempest*, but Katherine is still a shrew. Of course this sort of thinking leads to a feminist take on the films, and, while it would be nearly impossible to omit it entirely, and I will address it, that is not my primary concern. Diana E. Henderson has thoroughly covered that in her articles. My interest is in what makes these films some of the purest Shakespearean popular Hollywood comedies. If the play itself is a farce (Nevo 17), does it say anything that the twentieth century has made it a romantic comedy? What happens when two of Hollywood’s most famous couples play Petruchio and Katherine? Do their public
celebrity lives somehow change or enhance the production? While *Shrew* continues to be remade, why in the last twenty years has it attracted only modern language adaptations? What does it say that this story continues to be a source for Hollywood films? Critics ask, what do we do with the shrew? I wonder, why do we love the *Shrew*? I use the following films in this chapter: *The Taming of the Shrew* (Sam Taylor 1929), *Kiss Me Kate* (George Sidney 1953), *The Taming of the Shrew* (Franco Zeffirelli 1967), *The Taming of the Shrew* (Jonathan Miller 1980 TV), *10 Things I Hate About You* (Gil Junger 1999), and *ShakespeaRe-told* “The Taming of the Shrew” (David Richards 2005 TV).

**Chapter Three: Fantasy Shakespeare: The Filmmaker’s Dream**

Chapter three explores the slightly less generically clear-cut, but also often filmed, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Ruth Nevo suggests that the ideas Shakespeare works out in the first four comedies “culminate in the brilliant achievement of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (17). In the world of film, the great strength of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* seems to be its fantasy. The films make the most of cinema special effects by showcasing the fantasy of the film. For Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle in 1935, this means making a full-blown epic fantasy that brings Hollywood into the realm of high art. Peter Hall, in his 1968 Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) film, tries to play against this grain and enhance the comedy of the film to the delight of Shakespeareans and condemnation of the public. Elijah Moshinsky’s 1981 BBC film showcases the darker aspects of fantasy with a punk Puck. Adrian Noble’s 1996 RSC film presents a surreal dream of a fantasy framed by a young boy’s search for home. The 1999 Hollywood version directed by Michael Hoffman shows how civilization slowly
overtakes the supernatural world in a film set after the industrial revolution. Finally, the BBC takes another look at *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as a delightful fantastic romantic comedy in its *Shakespeare Retold* series. Each film plays with different aspects of the text while glorying in the supernatural world.

**Chapter Four: One Century’s Comedy is Another Century’s Drama: The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest on film**

The last two chapters concern the fluidity of genre and media. Chapter four examines how filmmakers have made dramas out of two of Shakespeare’s comedies. *The Merchant of Venice* has received very little film attention, but what has been made is very much drama rather than comedy. It may even be considered Shylock’s tragedy, as he, rather than Antonio, seems to have emerged in the twentieth century as the “Merchant of Venice.” It seems to be pretty well acknowledged that Shylock long ago ceased being a comic character and since the Holocaust he has become quite a sympathetic character, changing entirely one of Shakespeare’s main comic plots. There is also racism inherent in Portia’s suitors choosing the caskets. This has become more difficult to portray as such. The two twenty-first century film versions are Trevor Nunn’s 2001 version set in a pre-World War II German cabaret and Michael Radford’s (2004) starring Al Pacino as Shylock set in the Venice of 1596, but with an anachronistically sympathetic Shylock. I wonder if it is even possible to make *Merchant* a comedy? Does it work to tackle it as a drama? What happens to Antonio when Shylock becomes more sympathetic? What about Jessica? Is there enough humor that does not involve Shylock to carry off a comedy or is drama its true place?
While few filmmakers seem willing to touch *The Merchant of Venice*, there seems to be a bit of a love affair between filmmakers and *The Tempest*. Even more than a stand-in for the playwright, Prospero may have become a stand-in for the film director. There are almost as many versions of this play as *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They range from science fiction to contemporary America and Greece. The one thing connecting them is that they are more drama than comedy. I would like to understand why this transition has been made—if it even is a transition. *The Tempest* is certainly a comedy as opposed to a tragedy, but Shakespeareans have put it into the subcategory of romances. I think *The Tempest* contains many pure comic elements including the marriage at the end and the subplot with Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban; however, Derek Jarman is quoted on a DVD special feature of his version (*The Tempest* Derek Jarman 1980) claiming that the play is a drama rather than a comedy and his version certainly is. *Prospero’s Books* (Greenaway 1991) takes apart *The Tempest* and privileges the idea of Prospero as author. *The Forbidden Planet* (Fred M. Wilcox 1956), Shakespeare in outer space during the Science Fiction golden age, is a cultural gem. There is also Paul Mazursky’s 1982 modern language adaptation that sets the play on a not-entirely-deserted Greek island. The presence of Caliban may be one of the reasons that *The Tempest* has become a drama rather than a comedy. In some ways like the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*, a native figure can no longer be written off as an amusing monster. Beyond that, it seems that the directors become so enraptured with Prospero and his story that they earnestly tell it through the perspective of the author mage. Their films become their messages to the world, as *The Tempest* may have been Shakespeare’s.
There also may just be something inherent about the text that lends itself better to drama than comedy in the modern/postmodern world.

Chapter Five: *Hamlet, the Comedy*

As Shakespeare himself shows with the “Pyramus and Thisbe” play in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, it is quite possible to take very serious matter and make it funny. In chapter five I examine how twentieth and twenty-first century film and television make comedy out of Shakespeare’s great tragedy, *Hamlet*. The Reduced Shakespeare Company briefly covers every one of Shakespeare’s plays in its *Complete Works of Shakespeare, Abridged*, but *Hamlet* gets the longest treatment as the actors thoroughly deconstruct and reconstruct the play. *The Lion King* and *The Adventures of Bob and Doug McKenzie: Strange Brew* both take the plot and characters of *Hamlet* and use them as the basis for their films. *The Lion King* brings the noble ideas of *Hamlet* to Disney’s animated world. *Strange Brew* is a silly film set in Elsinore Brewery that follows the comedic duo of Bob and Doug as they stumble into and through the *Hamlet*-esque plot.

There are a number of films and television episodes and series that cite Shakespeare’s tragedies through a kind of “play within a film” mode that, to some degree, work with the tragedies thematically while remaining very much comedies. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (Tom Stoppard 1991) adapts Tom Stoppard’s play that tells the story of the minor characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern against a background of *Hamlet*. In an ideal blending of pop and high culture, *Gilligan’s Island* does *Hamlet* to the music of *Carmen*. In the third season episode, “The Producer”
(George Cahan, Ida Lupino 1966), in yet another wacky rescue attempt, the cast of *Gilligan’s Island* stages *Hamlet: The Musical* for a producer who has come to the island. This is a fairly short bit that can be interrogated for the way Shakespeare works into popular culture. An even briefer parody of *Hamlet* is found in *The Last Action Hero*, an Arnold Schwarzenegger film that includes a trailer for an action version of *Hamlet* in which Hamlet blows up Elsinore and moves on. *Slings & Arrows* (Peter Wellington 2003-2006) is a Canadian television series about the “New Burbage Shakespeare Festival,” loosely based on the very successful Stratford Shakespeare festival in Stratford, Ontario, Canada to which many of the participants have connections. The first series showcases *Hamlet* and elements of the tragedy become part of the themes, backgrounds, and plots for the characters in the show itself, a comedy. This is an adept series that understands its Shakespeare and blends drama and comedy through its characters and plots, but always comes out on the side of comedy, even if that means careening through the theater in the middle of the play carrying a real skull to the actor playing *Hamlet*. Each of these versions of *Hamlet* takes what makes the tragedy resonate with audiences and turns it on its head to parody it and satirize Hollywood, enhance their own work, or pay tribute to the incomparable Shakespeare.
Chapter 1
Shakespeare by the Book

The BBC Adaptations

Between 1978 and 1985, in a massively ambitious project, the BBC filmed all 37 canonical Shakespeare plays for *The Complete Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare*. This includes the 16 comedies and is the only filmed version of several of them. At a time when many theatrical productions took liberties with settings and costumes, the BBC project maintained a conservative stance in which costumes had to be either Elizabethan or match the play’s setting and Shakespeare’s dialogue had to be maintained and abridged as little as possible while attempting to keep to a 2 and 1/2 hour time frame (Willems 72). As the series progressed, the later producers allowed their directors more latitude; however, the no one ever rescinded the basic concept of the project. The prevailing comment from directors of Shakespeare's comedies within the BBC project seems to be that the comedies are not necessarily supposed to be overtly funny (Willems 76). While some of the individual films are appealing, the basic conservative philosophy of the project together with this notion that the comedies are not funny, allows it to showcase what makes Shakespeare’s comedies difficult to sustain for a twentieth century audience.

One of the decisions for the directors of these films was how to use the television medium to fit their purposes. Susan Willis discusses this stylistic debate as a choice between a cinematic approach that places realism foremost and attempts to replicate settings as authentically as possible or a theatrical approach that stylistically provides
symbolic sets that suggest a place (87). Michèle Willems puts the modes of filming into three categories: “naturalistic, pictorial, and stylized” (74). The first of these seems to coincide largely with Willis' cinematic approach and the latter two with the theatrical mode. Willems discusses the difference between film and television by describing television as “naturalistic and even domestic” (71), a sort of window into a world rather than a representation of the world itself as one sees in the cinema. Willis also emphasizes the difference between film and television by showing the prevalence of the visual in film while owning that television, while it may seem visual, is actually an oral medium with a rhetorical mode (81). They acknowledge the difference between film and television, but do not suggest that the makers of the BBC television films were able to make use of this difference. Instead, the directors attempted to emulate either film or play.

As You Like It was the first comedy presented in the BBC project and closely fits the realistic or naturalistic approach used in many of the early films. It was filmed under the auspices of original series' producer Cedric Messina and director Basil Coleman. All's Well that Ends Well, a pictorial or cinematic film directed by Elijah Moshinsky, and The Winter's Tale, a stylized or theatrical production directed by Jane Howell, were both produced in the fourth series with Jonathan Miller serving as producer. The Comedy of Errors, one of Shakespeare's early plays, was filmed late in the project by television director James Cellan-Jones under producer Shaun Sutton. These four films provide a variety of Shakespeare's comic styles—a farce, a festive comedy, a problem comedy, and a romance—and explore the wide range of the BBC project with examples filmed under
each producer in four distinct styles including one film each by Elijah Moshinsky and Jane Howell, the two most often acclaimed directors of the series.

As You Like It and the Problem of Realism

As You Like It was probably Shakespeare's ninth comedy, but became the BBC project's first. Cedric Messina, an originator of the project and the producer of the first two series of plays, particularly gravitated to the realistic mode of filming, thus the first comedy, As You Like It, was filmed on location at Glamis Castle, Scotland, in a real forest. That unreal place, the pastoral paradise of Arden becomes a real English forest with real bleating sheep for the real shepherds to maintain. This plays into the philosophy of the project, setting the play someplace Shakespeare would have recognized, but it is not Shakespeare's Arden. C.L. Barber with his festive interpretation of As You Like It, suggests that the forest of Arden is an ideal world, hence this is not a play based on realism. Marjorie Garber notes that its very title implies a fantasy world, a world that is not real, but is “as you like it” (Shakespeare After All 453). She notes the literary basis of the pastoral world Shakespeare evokes in the forest. In Renaissance literature all shepherds were poets just as all the characters in the play seem to be poets—even if bad poets (Shakespeare After All 442). She recalls that the pastoral from its origins “was profoundly 'literary,' rather than descriptive or mimetic” (Shakespeare After All 438) and that Shakespeare's particular pastoral setting is “not so much a real 'English' forest...but rather a place of imagination and possibility” presenting a contrast between the “working-day” world of the court and the “holiday” world of the forest (Shakespeare After All 443). Harold Bloom calls the forest of Arden “the best place to live anywhere in
Shakespeare” (205). This is the place that Rosalind and Celia go “in content/To liberty,
and not to banishment” (Shakespeare As You Like It I.iii.131-2). Duke Senior calls the
woods “More free from peril than the envious court” (II.i.4) and claims, “Here feel we
not the penalty of Adam” (II.i.5). It is here that when Orlando breaks into the circle of the
Duke's men, brandishing a sword and demanding food, he is given a lesson in civility and
invited to “Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table” (II.vii.104). The forest of
Arden is an ideal place—it is never supposed to be real—yet the BBC project loses the
“otherness” of the place by filming on location in a real forest in a filmic pursuit of
verisimilitude. It is merely an English Forest of Arden without its exotic or paradisiacal
connotations. The unreality of the actions and words creates a dissonance with the
attempted reality of the setting.

Act two scene seven, Orlando's introduction to the Duke and his company,
highlights some of the problems of the realistic setting. Day suddenly gives way to night
as the Duke and his men are shown sitting around a fire. The darkness and fire do a
disservice to this scene of the Duke, Jaques, and the others. The darkness makes the scene
difficult to follow. The viewer never gets a good look at the Duke's men. Jaques' long
monologues, witty as they may be, grow tedious as he stands in the dark with only his
face lit and an occasional cut to Duke Senior for reaction. The first part of the scene is
mainly filmed in close-up shots of Jaques and the Duke with the speaker's face lit. This is
interspersed with infrequent medium shots of the speaking characters that show one or
two of the entourage in dim light. Television may be an oral medium,³ but if there is not
something on the screen to hold the viewer's attention or the back-and-forth dialogue is
not quick enough to keep their focus, most viewers of Shakespeare will get lost in the midst of the long speeches. The darkness does allow Orlando to surprise the group, but he hardly “Enter[s]...with sword drawn” (II.vi). He instead lurks in the shadows with sword drawn. The remainder of the scene plays out murkily in the dark and seems quite serious. Jaques “seven ages of man” comes across earnestly in the firelight not giving it the ridiculousness Barber would like, but that is not unusual in a twentieth century interpretation. The end of the scene with Orlando’s return with Adam is quite touching with the supposed ruffians gently feeding Adam in visual contrast to the words of Amiens “winter wind” song. Jaques is a bit of an ominous character in this scene after his final monologue. As Amiens and his men sing and play and others feed Adam, a close-up of Jaques shows a scowling face drinking his own drink and menacingly watching the others. At the very end of the scene the Duke kneels before Orlando in the foreground speaking to him of his father while Jaques is lit in the background sitting watching the interplay and then rising, stepping drunkenly forward, sneeringly half-toasting the two, chuckling, and walking away. This melancholy Jaques, rather than making him the “amateur fool” (Barber 229), seems almost as sinister as the truly sinister Malvolio in Twelfth Night and the “merry men” living “like the old Robin Hood of England...fleet[ing] the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world” (I.i.100-3) have become a rather somber lot.

Another scene that displays the unreality of the real forest is act three scene two when Rosalind speaks with Corin and Touchstone in the pasture and then all three move into the forest and hide behind trees at the edge of the forest to eavesdrop on Celia
reading a love poem. While the theatrical convention of the eavesdroppers is completely legitimate, there is an unreality to the story created by the reality of the setting—Celia is too far away in too open a space for the others to hear her. This should be a non-issue and it is a minor point to bring up, but it suggests some of the problems of the production. The realism—the attempt to make the world of the play the real world—emphasizes minor points that should simply be accepted in the world of a play. This is also the scene in which Rosalind brings out a verse she “found on a palm tree” (III.ii.161), a line that makes no sense in this forest where palm trees do not exist yet Rosalind gives the line a straight reading without suggesting she is saying something ludicrous or alluding to something different.

Along with the setting, Helen Mirren's portrayal of Rosalind herself is another point of realism that demonstrates the naturalistic tendency of the production. In the play, Rosalind and Celia decide to disguise themselves and leave the court for the forest and Rosalind's father. This is how Rosalind imagines herself.

Rosalind: Were it not better, 
because that I am more than common tall, 
That I did suit me all points like a man? 
A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh, 
A boar-spear in my hand; and—in my heart 
Lie there what hidden woman's fears there will--
We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other mannish cowards have
That do outface it with their semblances.
Celia: What shall I call thee when thou art a man?
Rosalind: I'll have no worse name than Jove's own page,
And therefore look you call me Ganymede. (I.iii.109-19)

Of course, on the early modern stage, a young man would already have been playing Rosalind; therefore, dressing up as a young man would hardly have been a stretch. For
the actor, the “semblance” becomes less of a disguise than the original character was. In twentieth century film, such is not the case. A woman, in this case Helen Mirren, plays Rosalind and must choose how to play a woman dressed as a young man. The quoted text suggests that the disguise will be thoroughly masculine. Rosalind is “uncommon tall” and thus manly to begin with—that is her reason for dressing as a man rather than simply a woman in “poor and mean attire” (I.iii.105) as Celia originally suggests. Then, the attire—especially the two phallic weapons, the “curtle-axe” and “boar-spear”—add to Rosalind's height a “swashing and martial outside.” Rosalind is planning to be a masculine figure using her manly exterior to hide her womanly interior. While this may be the character's plan, it is not what Mirren's Rosalind actualizes. To begin, at five feet four inches, Mirren is not “more than common tall.” Her disguise of jerkin, doublet, hose, and cloak match the men's except her doublet and jerkin are looser fitting and longer skirted, presumably to hide her breasts and lack of male genitalia. While she is not wearing a cod piece and does not carry a “curtle-axe” nor “boar-spear” the first time she appears in the film as Ganymede a sword hangs from her belt between her legs and she tends to fondle its hilt, as if making up for her lack. This Ganymede is a feminized version of the character, a woman playing “dress-up” as a man.

While Rosalind's “design” suggests a masculine Ganymede, a feminine character such as Mirren's is not necessarily a suspect interpretation. The name Rosalind chooses for herself, Ganymede, has ambiguous connotations. In mythology, Ganymede was not only “Jove's page,” but also his lover. As lover and cupbearer to Jove, this is not a burly, fighting masculine figure, but an erotic servant to the gods. Through the play, Ganymede
then teaches Orlando how to be suitor to Rosalind by playing the “character” of Rosalind, again a feminine role for the disguised woman. Further, in act four scene three, Ganymede faints when Oliver shows him the bloody napkin Orlando used when bitten by a lioness. When he comes to, he claims the faint was a “counterfeit, I assure you” (IV.iii.170). Rosalind's original description of herself and her plan for Ganymede may well be banter from a woman considering what it is to be a man. In this comic play, the part seems ripe for a large part of the comedy; however, the characters could play this in several ways. A very masculine Ganymede—when the audience knows differently—would make the courtship scenes and fainting scene amusing. The feminine Ganymede—attempting to act manly, but not quite succeeding—brings a subtler sort of humor to the role and this seems to be the direction Mirren as actor and Coleman as director choose.

Helen Mirren does, in fact, play her Ganymede for comic effect. In this film that occasionally seems to forget it is a comedy with its realistic forest and sinister Jaques, Mirren's Ganymede is consistently amusing with his blustery but unsuccessful masculinity. Mirren carefully frames this from the beginning, making dressing up seem like a game. The two women, arrayed in elaborately feminine costumes complete with headdresses, giggle as Rosalind decides to dress as a man. Rosalind titters after slapping her thigh while imagining the curtle-axe she will wear there and stands and swishes her skirts imagining her “swashing and martial outside” (I.iii.114). Both Rosalind and Celia laugh again as Rosalind decides she will be called Ganymede. The rest of the scene—planning to woo Touchstone to accompany them and gather their jewels and
wealth as they go “to liberty and not to banishment” (I.iii.132)—the actors play seriously. It is only the discussion of Rosalind's disguise that amuses them.

As the film continues, Rosalind dresses in her masculine disguise, but plays herself as long as she is alone with Touchstone and Celia. It is her interactions with Orlando that show her comedic portrayal of the man. When she wants to get Orlando's attention, she tries to whistle at him, but is unsuccessful. After this first amusing moment, the scene between the ignorant Orlando and knowing Rosalind/Ganymede is subtler. Rosalind does not disguise her voice as the two trade quips and Rosalind has to think on her feet as she explains why she “thank[s] God [she] is not a woman” (III.ii.116); however, it is not until she begins to set forth her plan to have Orlando woo Ganymede in the name of Rosalind that she employs the physical comedy of the woman pretending to be a man. While Orlando gazes on her, Rosalind swaggers forward describing her plan. The idea is that because Ganymede is a youth, he can seem effeminate and take the place of Rosalind to “cure” Orlando's love. Once Ganymede is playing “Rosalind,” he/she no longer attempts to act manly and the humor comes from the irony of the situation rather than any kind of physical or homoerotic comedy.

This interpretation of Rosalind/Ganymede is safe and traditional in keeping with the philosophy of the Messina produced BBC Shakespeare films. Even though Rosalind seems to be the active member in the relationship with Orlando, persuading him to woo Ganymede, Orlando is active and Ganymede passive in the actual suit. Therefore, Rosalind remains the feminine figure to be objectified as she persuades Orlando to actively objectify her by wooing Ganymede as “Rosalind.” This induces the audience to
join Orlando in his gaze. While Marjorie Garber assumes that a “male/male' homoeroticism animate[s] Orlando's conversation with Ganymede” (Vested Interests 76), this does not seem to be the case in this production because Mirren's Ganymede is never truly masculine. This is a traditional heterosexual love story in spite of Rosalind's disguise.

Meanwhile Celia and Audrey, two of the other three women in the play, are completely traditional in their roles as objects for the men. Celia plays foil to Rosalind and tries to temper her cousin's passion toward Orlando in their familial relationship of sisterly cousins. Audrey is part of the comedy as the bawdy wench who eventually marries Touchstone because that seems to be the thing to do. Even Phebe, the only woman in the film who might complicate the heteronormative pairings because she is in love with Ganymede who is really Rosalind, does not do so. Phebe falls for Ganymede and seems to actively pursue him, suggesting that it is the woman objectifying the man. This is neutralized, however, because Ganymede is not a man, thus the woman is both pursuer and pursued. Additionally, most of Phebe's scenes are not with her pursued, Ganymede, but with her pursuer, Silvius. She is his love object and the audience knows that this is the suitable match that must eventually be made.

The true traditional nature of all the love stories is brought together and emphasized at the culmination of the film. When the four members of the love quadrangle meet together and declare their various loves, Rosalind promises everyone that their true desires will be fulfilled and Rosalind/Ganymede and Celia leave the group “To make these doubts all even” (V.iv.25). In the film, the two return, transformed from
their disguises into white dresses and garlands and escorted by Hymen, the god of marriage. Looking and sounding like a Star Trek alien in the forest, Hymen presents Rosalind to her father and she gives herself to both her father and lover. Hymen then makes each of the four matches, Duke Senior receives back his dukedom, and the group joins together in a circle and dances for the marriages.

Rosalind ends the film by breaking from the dancing group and addressing the camera directly in the epilogue. The epilogue seems almost as alien in the realistic setting of the film as the god Hymen does. She entreats the people to like the play as they will and offers “If [she] were a woman” to kiss the men who pleased her (Epilogue 14-15). Originally, this would have been a way for the male actor, now back in a feminine costume, to acknowledge his masculine identity and, Garber suggests, “open[] up the possibility of a male/male homoeroticism between male audience member and male actor” (Vested Interests 76). This now seems a little incongruous in the film, as Rosalind is very much a woman in her womanly garb played by a woman actor giving an epilogue that is metatheatrical for a play, but somewhat nonsensical in this film. However, it is Shakespeare's text as we have it and if this film does nothing else, it honors the words on the page—if not the subtextual notions—even when they do not make sense in the film. This is a traditional, realistic take on As You Like It. The reality of the forest setting takes away from the holiday, festive, even magic nature of the play, but it does provide a glimpse of life in an English forest. The characters are appealing if unadventurous and humor is present if subtle. It is not be any means terrible, but it does not make any leaps
forward in portraying one of Shakespeare's more potential-laden women or playing with
the liminal space of the Forest of Arden.

*All's Well that Ends Well—An Aptly Called “Problem Comedy”*

In the nineteenth century critics dubbed several of Shakespeare's later
plays—*Measure for Measure, All's Well that Ends Well,* and sometimes *Troilus and
Cressida*—“Problem Comedies.” The term refers to the idea that in these quite dramatic
plays the endings do not ring true and the social problems are not entirely solved. While
the plays do have ostensibly happy endings, the endings do not have the pure joy and
festivity of the earlier plays. All's Well that Ends Well does “end well,” but everything
that comes before makes it a difficult ending to accept. These plays continue to be
problematic, not only because they do not fit the general idea of comedy, but also
because the characters are not pleasing to twentieth/twenty-first century sensibilities.
Helena may be strong, but she is hopelessly and utterly devoted to Bertram, a man so
much her inferior in quality that we do not comprehend her motivation. Because the other
characters love Helena and give her their approbation, Bertram seems like the biggest
problem in this play since he is assertive and scornful in his rejection. William Babula,
defending Bertram, suggests that the play is really about his growing from boy to man,
immaturity to maturity, innocence to experience (94). Marjorie Garber points out that
Bertram is no more of a cad than *Much Ado About Nothing's* Claudio. She suggests that
the real problem may be Bertram's mother (*Shakespeare After All* 618). At least part of
Bertram's rejection of Helena stems from his rejection of his mother's authority and that
single mothers fare much worse in Shakespeare's plays than single fathers. Regardless of
the reasons for Bertram's lack of appeal and in spite of having “brilliant, complicated, strong women” (Garber, *Shakespeare After All* 618), this is not a play often revived in contemporary theater or film.

Given the difficulties inherent in filming this play for a twentieth century audience, Elijah Moshinsky provides a dramatic pictorial version for the BBC Shakespeare project that, through camera shots and unique lighting, emphasizes the characters’ psychology and sympathizes with Helena while downplaying any possible comedic bits. Moshinsky, directing for the series under the auspices of second series' producer Jonathan Miller, had much more freedom in interpretation than earlier directors. *All's Well that Ends Well* was theater and opera director Moshinsky's first film for the series and first foray into television. He chooses a pictorial style for his films, setting them against backgrounds reminiscent of Vermeer paintings. In that mode, Moshinsky sets this film entirely inside, emphasizing, it seems, the interiority of his characters. To accentuate this, he also films, at times, from Helena's perspective, showing the audience what Helena sees, and, at other times, by reflection, giving the audience a glimpse, not of reality, but of a mirror world. Additionally, the actors' interpretations of characters as well as Moshinsky's direction underscores a strong sexual element in the play, not only between lovers, but also between the king and Helena. All of this comes together to portray a Renaissance story through the lens of twentieth century psychological interiority.

Helena is the guiding force in this play, and Moshinsky works to maintain her prominence in the film. As played by Angela Down, Helena is a somewhat contradictory
character. She seems unassuming and reserved, yet she also shows strength and cunning. Her blond hair and pale face seem absolutely washed out with the dark colors she wears and the way Moshinsky films her in shadows and often in profile. She seems to be a meek woman, and this is further suggested through her first soliloquy in which she declares how much lower in status she is than Bertram, the man she loves. She suggests that she must bask in his reflected light, and compares the two of them to a hind and a lion (I.i.86). This is the Helena who it is difficult to accept in the twenty-first century world, though by casting her in shadow as she speaks the line, Moshinsky's directing works to emphasize what she is saying. She is in the shadow because she is merely the physician's daughter. Bertram, the son of the countess, is the light. She knows that she is unworthy of the count, and the filming reflects her unworthiness, but it is still difficult to comprehend with contemporary sensibilities that see her as being far more worthy than the count. While Helena may portray herself as unworthy, the audience sees the contradiction to this in her actions. She not only heals the dying king, but she also extracts from him a promise to give her what she desires. She forces Bertram's hand even though he is unwilling, and later tricks him into consummating their marriage. She is skillful, effective, and cunning, though this is belied by her passive stance in the reflection of those ranked above her.

Helena begins the film in the background as Bertram takes his leave warmly from his mother and then impersonally from Helena. While the play simply exits the men and allows Helena to speak her soliloquy, Moshinsky begins a new scene by moving her into the next room where she once again has her back to the camera as she plays mournfully
on a piano type instrument. In the shadow of the light from the window, she begins her soliloquy as the camera slowly moves forward and left to end in a shadowed medium-shot profile of Helena and the instrument against the light of the window. It is in this stance that she compares herself to the “bright radiance” that is Bertram. Moshinsky draws out this soliloquy by having Helena stop speaking in the middle to play again for a moment while the camera moves into a close-up of her shadowed face before she finally finishes the speech. After she has finished the soliloquy, Parolles enters and he and Helena spar while he leans against the piano and watches her. Finally, at the end of this scene, Helena declares her intention to heal the king. The audience sees her for a moment in a direct close-up, fully lit by the light coming through the window, as she declares her intention to see to the king's disease just before the scene fades slowly into an almost still painting-style scene of the king in bed surrounded by his councilors.

This short scene is indicative of Moshinsky's style and his intentions with the play. It gives Helena center-stage, yet keeps her—until the last moment—in the shadows. Since she believes herself to be in the dark without Bertram's light, that is a faithful visual representation of her soliloquy. Further, slowing down the scene and allowing some moments of pure synchronous music emphasizes the idea that this is Helena's state of mind, her interiority. While she may seem weak through parts of this scene, and a contemporary audience may wonder about her praise of Bertram, the sparring with Parolles shows a different side of her. The positioning of the preening Parolles between double images of Helena shows her domination even as he is larger and better lit. The scene ends by emphasizing Helena's strength as she finally moves into the light and
shows that she is more than just pining for Bertram, that she is, in fact, intentional and skillful.

The scene between the king and Helena that follows seems to be an actual courting scene, though a triangular one with the third party, Bertram, in the forefront of Helena's mind if not actually present in the scene. The scene begins with the king in bed and Helena standing near the door. As they talk, she moves to the bed beside him, caressing him while he strokes her face and chest. The scene ends with the king taking Helena's face in both of his hands and slowly moving her toward him into an extended, sensual kiss that does not end, but fades into the next scene. This quietly powerful scene shows Helena's strength, skill, and cunning, but it also reveals her vulnerability. By comparing her to Cressida, Lafeu highlights her vulnerability in the set-up of the scene. Cressida is an object her government used as a bargaining tool. Helena might have been the same in the king's hands, and he certainly exerts power over her as he chooses whether to let her heal him and as he draws her toward him and kisses her. The suggestion, as Susan Willis points out, is that the healing is a return from impotency to potency for the king, and the moaning, the sure stroking of the hands, and finally, the kiss, show this passage (149). This could threaten Helena's position as a maid seeking a husband, but it does not because she parries the king's desire—for her or merely for healing—with her own desire for Bertram. In the midst of this sensual scene, she is the one who exerts her will by gaining from the king the promise that he will force Bertram to take her as his wife. Through the power of the king and the art her father has given her, she will marry Bertram. While Helena is vulnerable simply because the man she would
help is the king, it is her strength that is revealed as she uses her power to heal him, and uses her cunning to gain that which she most desires. Moshinsky highlights this by having her always above the king, standing at the beginning of the scene and sitting over him while he continues to lie down. Even when he kisses her, he must bring her face downward to join his.

The contrast to Helena is Bertram. This is the man she loves, the man she pushes the king into securing for her, and the man who wants nothing to do with her. Both she and he believe that he is enough above her in status that it is onerous for him to stoop to marry her. This seems to be where a contemporary audience balks at All's Well that Ends Well. Helena is admirable, but it is difficult to understand her pursuit of Bertram, though, as John N. King reminds us, this may be a realistic aspect of the love story—“women like Helena do fall in love with men like Bertram, though why I don't know” (43-44). Even so, Bertram is not a sympathetic character, and unless an actor can find some sympathy within him and show that he really does believe he is correct to disdain Helena, both characters lose the audience's favor—Bertram for being an ass and Helena for being enamored of an ass. Under Moshinsky's direction, actor Ian Charleson works on this, but Bertram mostly sneers and pouts. In a poignant moment, after Bertram has coldly agreed to “take her hand,” the camera leaves him and moves between Helena and the king. Without a word, Angela Down shows such anguish on Helena's face that the audience can understand that, while this is what she wants, it is not the way she wants it. She would rather not force Bertram to marry her if he is going to be this cold about it;
however, the king has now spoken and there is no going back. It does not make Bertram likable, but the audience is able to stay sympathetic to Helena.

The ending of the play does not make Bertram any more sympathetic. He laughs off Helena's death, takes Diana's virginity with concern only that he might be responsible to her later, and denies all knowledge of her when she goes to the king. Yet, it is this man who somehow becomes transformed when he learns that Helena is not dead and that she has fulfilled his impossible demands of acquiring his ring and being by him with child. One moment he is denying knowledge of Diana and the next he is asking pardon of Helena and promising to love her truly. It is a difficult transformation to achieve.

Moshinsky again works by downplaying Bertram altogether. As the supposed dead Helena enters the scene, the camera shows close-up reactions of each character in turn: Diana, Lafeu, the king, the countess, and finally, Bertram. By the time she comes to him, he has been transformed and claims her as his wife and asks her pardon. It is not a realistic transformation, but it is at least well played. Showing each character's reaction to Helena gives the audience a chance to prepare for Bertram's. This scene accents why this is a “problem comedy” and difficult for a contemporary audience to accept. The ending is difficult to believe and is usually seen as cynical with a character who is not really reformed, conventional with attention to the conventions of the fairy tale that is playing out, or spiritual as grace descends on Bertram and forgiveness comes from the other characters (Babula 99-100), but none of these options makes for a realistically comprehensible ending to the contemporary psyche. Moshinsky's stylized vision helps to counter this somewhat—when every scene is a painting, we are reminded that we are
watching art rather than any sort of realism. In contrast to the realism of an unrealistic Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, this play never suggests it is natural. It is a series of paintings, an in-depth look into the interiority of the character of Helena, and a narrative of sexual desire. This last is emphasized once again at the end of the play as the king, in an echo of his earlier moment with Helena, moves from the now happy couple to the maid Diana, takes her face in his hands, and promises to find her a husband as well.

Two subtle moments at the very end of the film keep it, in Moshinsky's vision, from having an entirely fairy tale ending. While in the play the king's speech is entirely directed to Diana, in this film he makes his promise to her and then walks away alone before finishing the speech as a soliloquy. The camera follows him, moving past a tight circle of Lafeu, Bertram, the countess, and Helena respectively. The newfound couple is not standing together, but with the older generation between them. Their reunion may not be as true as it seemed a moment before. The king then intimates this when he moves beyond the group, behind a pillar, leans down as if he needs support, and addresses the film's last line directly to the camera. “All yet *seems* well,” he begins, “and if it end so meet, / The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet” (V.iii.329-30). This plays as the epilogue in the film, but leaves out the actual epilogue of the play. The stress of the word “seems” and the “if it end so sweet” belies the *All's Well that Ends Well* of the title. The director has chosen to embrace the problem of this problem comedy and leave the audience questioning whether all really is well.

Elijah Moshinsky has claimed that the BBC Shakespeare series “was artistically in disrepute” and that it was Jonathan Miller's appointment as producer that allowed it to
become “permanently accessible” and “offer[] good performances” (Willis 164). This
seems to be true of Moshinsky's *All's Well that Ends Well*. He has produced a
psychologically complex film that tries to work toward an acceptable twentieth century
ending. He leaves out much of the humor and it is still difficult to accept the character of
Bertram, but Helena, as the pivotal character, and the king, as the symbol of what is
happening with his subjects, bring a richness to this pictorial stylized film. Unfortunately,
it is still long and slow. It has a sexual energy, but is lacking energy otherwise, and it is
dark and complex. It is a more than worthy adaptation for someone who is already
interested in the play. It is accessible, but it might not be interesting to someone who
happens across it by chance.

*The Winter's Tale— A Stylistic Seasonal Romance*

Elijah Moshinsky and Jane Howell are widely considered the most successful of
the BBC Shakespeare Directors, yet their approaches could not be more disparate, at least
in visual effect. Where Moshinsky is lavish with his painterly scenes, Howell chooses a
stylistic approach with minimal, symbolic scenery rather than elaborate, pictorial
backgrounds. Every bit of the mise-en-scène enhances the themes of the play and helps
focus the dialogue of the characters. *The Winter's Tale* uses two sets. The main one is a
single outdoor set, a tree with branches and large wedges for structure. This set shifts
with the seasons and mood of the play. It begins stark white and snowy for this Sicilian
“winter's tale.” A red and gold canopy and carpet are added for Hermione's trial scene. A
grey, rocky floor represents the beach when the play turns to Bohemia and Antigonus
brings the infant Perdita to safety. The scene comes alive with green and gold, leaves on
the tree and grass on the ground, when time moves forward and the place becomes the shepherd's country in Bohemia. The final set, back in Sicilia, is reminiscent of the original winter scene except that an overlay of green on the wedges and leaves on the tree suggest a new beginning as the film ends. There are also a few scenes that take place indoors—the jail where Hermione is kept, the king's court, and Paulina's house. These are dark scenes with minimal furniture that suggest the darkness of Leontes behind the play. If the indoor settings of Moshinsky's *All's Well that Ends Well* emphasize the character psychology he is presenting, then the mainly outdoor settings of *The Winter's Tale* suggest the story aspect of this romance.

While *The Winter's Tale* is grouped with the comedies in the first folio, it is considered by contemporary critics to be a romance and might be called a tragicomedy—not quite a comedy nor quite a tragedy, but containing elements of both. The play begins like a tragedy with mistaken jealousy on par with Othello's; the death of Mamillius, the innocent young prince and heir to throne of Sicilia;\(^2\) the death of Antigonus, the man who takes Perdita into exile for the king, famously killed offstage, “Exit, pursued by a bear” (III.iii.stage direction); and sixteen years lost in the lives of the characters. The play ends as a comedy with comical characters and scenes, reconciliations all around, the believed dead Hermione brought back to life, and two marriages to come.\(^3\) Along with the tragicomedy of the plot of *The Winter's Tale*, there are elements of romance in the play. It can be heard as a story to be told on a winter's night. It takes place over a long period of time and involves more than one place. It includes a shipwreck, disguises, lost children, and final reconciliations. The dead even
come back to life. These are elements that Shakespeare includes in straight comedies as well, but coupled with the fairy tale elements and tragic moments of this play, they work here to form a kind of romance. Howell's direction focuses on the fairy tale/romance nature of the play. Her characters are strong types, the settings underscore the symbolic rather than realistic nature of the play, and she brings both levity and gravity to the production.

This play centers—not around a woman as *As You Like It* and *All’s Well that Ends Well* did—but around a man, Leontes, King of Sicilia, a man in the early parts of the play “associated with wrath, jealousy, and punitive justice” who must learn to find life instead of death (Garber, *Shakespeare After All* 836). As played by Jeremy Kemp, he is a leonine man with a reddish mane and beard who wears a black fur cloak and hat. The complications of the play ensue when he suddenly believes his wife is having an affair with his boyhood friend. One of the difficulties in this play is understanding how Leontes suddenly changes his opinion of his wife and childhood friend. Garber suggests that this rapid change is stylized, but emotionally intense (*Shakespeare After All* 833). Through her direction, Howell shows how this change can come about as a lighthearted scene becomes suddenly somber, and a non-threatening play becomes threatening.

The scene begins in the courtyard on the outside set of the wintry Sicilia. The characters all wear warm clothing, but Leontes and Hermione stand out regally in black and white fur respectively. The characters are all on stage, but grouped into small clusters, providing an appreciative audience for the beginning banter of the scene as Leontes—and then Hermione at Leontes' request—cajole Leontes' friend Polixenes into
extending the visit he has made. The scene grows sober as Hermione moves from Leontes' embrace to quietly implore Polixenes to stay while Leontes moves in the background caring for his duties and watching his wife and friend. A long shot of Leontes in the background, moving jovially toward the almost embracing Polixenes and Hermione becomes a close-up of Leontes who turns toward the camera and mutters in an aside, “At my request he would not” (I.ii.89). As Polixenes moves off hand in hand with Hermione, a gesture supported by the text (I.ii.117), Leontes stares after them and then turns to the camera where his face is once again in a close-up while they stand in the background and says, “too hot, too hot” and explains his sudden understanding that they are too close.

The stark setting makes the eventual tone of this scene seem possible. The staging provides an audience for the original conversation as everybody listens to the three friends speak and laughs at their teasing. It is, however, a combination of Kemp's acting and Howell's direction that makes Leontes—at least at this point—still a sympathetic character. In the bare text, his sudden jealousy is difficult to comprehend. In this scene, it is not. What begins as a joke suddenly becomes very serious to him. By showing him watching the other two characters and their sheer playfulness—innocent though it may be—one can understand how the seed of doubt is sewn in him. The close-ups of Leontes' face, the pain he shows, and the doubts he addresses directly to the camera show that this sudden belief is, at the very least, quite real to him. Even if it is unfair, the audience sees it wash over him. As the scene continues, the camera follows him and continues to let the audience see him grapple with his feelings. As he moves between trying to joke and
trying to grasp this horrifying notion he is coming to, he gives an intimation of how he has come to so wrongly accuse his wife and his friend. This does not make him reasonable or right, but it does make him at least somewhat sympathetic. As Hermione stood one moment in his sheltering embrace, she has now moved to that of his friend. He misreads their actions, but this production provides the actions for him to misread, a misreading that provides a tragic first half of the play and leads to sixteen years of grief as young Mamillius dies, Leontes puts Hermione on trial and she seems to die, and Leontes sends Hermione's infant child Perdita—a child he wrongly believes to be Polixenes'—to die as well.

The play moves from tragedy to comedy as act three ends with its final scene in Bohemia where Antigonus brings the infant Perdita to safety and is famously killed by a bear—clearly a man in a bear costume in the film—and a shepherd and his son find the baby. Act four begins with a green and golden growing overlay of the set that welcomes the sheep shearing festival, one scene in *The Winter's Tale* that suggests a traditional pastoral—even festive—comedy. In this scene, act four scene four, the action continues in Bohemia sixteen years after the earlier events. It is here that the audience meets the now-grown up Perdita and Florizel, son of King Polixenes. This is a bit of an interminable scene and Howell includes all of it in this nearly three hour film, but it does serve almost as a pastoral play within the play. It sets up the plot for the final act and reconciliations of the comedy. In another comedy, acts one through three might have been mere narrative exposition and the events of this scene spread throughout the whole first four acts of the play. In this romance that tells the story of two generations, the
younger generation has this one scene to build their story, the comic story that contrasts
the tragic nature of their parents' story from the beginning of the play.

In a festival atmosphere, Prince Florizel as country man Doricles, overturns
hierarchies by wooing and winning Perdita, the shepherd's daughter. Camillo and
Florizel's father, King Polixenes, have disguised themselves as commoners to spy on
Florizel. Meanwhile, Perdita, the lowly Shepherd's daughter, reigns as queen of the
festival surrounded by a court of clowns, servants, rogues, shepherds, and shepherdesses.
In the BBC Shakespeare production, the actors carry off this comic scene well. It begins
particularly nicely with an earnest and sincere Perdita basking in her flowers and showing
concern about Florizel's disguise. The hyperbolic Florizel basks in his flower goddess and
the mythologies he invokes as he justifies his lowborn love. Young actors Robin
Kermode and Debbie Farrington bring a fresh innocence to these roles. Kermode's lanky
form, long face, and curly hair suggest that of Robert Stephens' Polixenes, but where
Polixenes is somber and internal, Florizel is ebullient and external. Farrington does not
particularly resemble either of the actors playing her parents—textually she should
resemble Leontes; however, she shows a similar manner and humor to Hermione when
she bids welcome to the strangers at the feast.

The fun scene continues as Perdita anoints her shepherd father and the strangers
with flower petals and passes the basket of flowers to the country wenches who choose
their own victims as the crowd laughs, plays merry music, and dances. A brief highlight
of this scene is the clown, the shepherd's son and Perdita’s foster brother, and, even more,
his servant, played by Peter Benson. Benson, tall already, climbs onto a prop that puts
him head and shoulders above the crowd. He calls out to the crowd that Autolycus, the
peddler, is coming, and explains in innocence that the peddler has ballads that are not
bawdy at all, but merely contain such things as “dildos and fadings, 'jump her, and thump
her’” (IV.iv.192-94). It is small touches like this, Benson's servant playing to the crowd
without fully understanding what he is doing, that make such a delightful scene. This is
a tiny role that stands out as the servant raises himself up and commands everyone's
attention for a brief moment of performance and laughter. Then Autolycus enters and
performs his ballads to much applause and more laughter. The literal festival nature of
this scene brings a spirit of life to the film that has been lacking heretofore. The younger
generation is fully alive in a way their parents never were even before the disruption in
their lives. The grass is green and the world is alive in this country life in Bohemia.

This scene does inevitably begin to drag as it goes on. At the beginning it moves
quickly, but eventually the sheer length of the scene works against the film format. There
is simply too much that needs to be accomplished in a single scene that contains a whole
play's worth of material. It is actually when the crowd disperses and only the young
lovers, the shepherd, Camillo, and the king are left that the energy also disperses and the
scene becomes tedious. The audience synergy keeps the scene moving. One of the
difficulties of the television experience, particularly for actors and directors coming from
the theater, is the lack of audience. This becomes problematic in The Winter's Tale as
this scene moves from a festive romp with an audience to a quieter scene without one.
This does work in the way that the end of this scene brings the festive comedy of the
disguises and inverted hierarchy to a close when Polixenes reveals himself to Florizel and
forbids his marriage. The film moves once again from comedy to tragedy as the king flares in anger at the shepherd, Florizel, and Perdita, and the shepherd leaves angry with Perdita and Florizel. The final discussion in this scene between Camillo and Florizel and Perdita contains much exposition. It is necessary for setting up the final act, but a little difficult to sit through as the three actors huddle close together and move only to shift positions among themselves.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, a woman is not the pivotal figure of this play. Leontes is primarily the controlling figure, even if the double nature of the play removes him from the fourth act. Regardless, there is one female character who directs much of the internal action of the play and who deserves attention. This is Paulina, friend and counselor to Hermione, the queen. Garber calls her the “final artist and wonder-worker of the play” (*Shakespeare After All* 849). It is Paulina who proposes the plan of faking Hermione's death and who hides the queen for sixteen years. It is Paulina who plays the part of confessor to Leontes and who gives him his penance to do, daily praying at Hermione's grave, when she knows Hermione is alive and well. Paulina is a strong character who works behind the scenes to manipulate the plot of the play, yet also has her own grief, as it is her husband, Antigonus, who dies after taking the infant Perdita to Bohemia. As portrayed by Margaret Tyzack, she is a stern, formidable woman whom not even the king wants to defy. The final revelation scene of this romance is the one Paulina most openly directs. The king has brought his company through her house in order to see the statue of Hermione, but cannot find the statue. Paulina, “the presiding
genius of this scene” (Garber, *Shakespeare After All* 849), must guide them through this discovery.

This final scene set in Paulina's house is one of the indoor scenes in Howell's version of *The Winter's Tale*. The king and his company stand in the dark, holding candles for light. Paulina comes in from behind as the king is attempting to find the statue himself. Paulina leads the way to the curtained podium and has it opened to the group. She manipulates the resurrection as the camera switches between close-ups of the king and his wondrous reactions and distance shots of Paulina and the “statue” of Hermione. It is she who forces the king into a final confession and who allows Hermione to return to life only when the king “awake[s] [his] faith” (V.iii.95). Although Paulina controls this scene, she is not entirely in control. Now that all has been restored in the kingdom, she moves away from the group and laments her late husband and solitary state. Leontes, however, does not allow her this luxury. He provides one more revival of sorts in this romance—he commands that Camillo, newly returned with Florizel from Polixenes' court, will marry Paulina. In the nature of romance, the two tragically dead characters, Mamillius and Antigonus, are replaced by their equivalents, Florizel and Camillo. It is a somber ending as the lines on Hermione's face remind the audience that sixteen lost years cannot be replaced and Paulina's final grief reminds us that there has been tragic death, but it is a happy ending as one marriage is restored and two, one from each generation of characters, are imminent. The production underscores this with this dark interior scene that gives way only in the final few seconds as Leontes leads the newly reconciled group to a bright, new, green world outside.
Jane Howell's use of minimal sets that change with the mood of the play allows an understanding of the symbolic nature of this romance. Her ability to switch between tragedy and comedy and reconcile the two at the end complements her source material. It is an unwieldy play that has a rich story to tell, and while it may be a little tedious at times, this production tells its Winter's Tale.

**The Comedy of Errors: Real Television**

One director for the BBC comedy project actually came from television rather than the theater and understood television as a medium. James Cellan-Jones, brought in by Shaun Sutton in the sixth series to direct The Comedy of Errors, had directed such BBC television dramas as The Forsyte Saga. While his forte may be drama, and he really brings to life the dramatic moments of the play, through his casting choices, sets, and physical direction, Cellan-Jones makes an admirable television comedy of The Comedy of Errors.

While it was filmed late in the progress of the BBC series, The Comedy of Errors was one of Shakespeare's early comedies. In some ways it shows the promise of many of his later plays, having similar themes and character types, without quite achieving greatness itself; however, it is a farce and thus should have blatantly comic elements without having the depth of some of the mature plays. It is based on Plautus' Menaechmi with the double-twin plot added in from his Amphitruo. It is a play of mistaken identity and physical comedy that may seem to be "'a barren and tedious farce' and a 'Shakespearean flop'" (qtd. in Willis 260). These issues have given directors the liberty to change the play as much as they wish, particularly through the later nineteenth and well
into the twentieth century (Ford 12). Following the BBC policy, Cellan-Jones does not make substantial changes to the play. He notes the problematic aspects of the play, but he also believes it to be more than just a farce—“Plautus' characters are flat, Shakespeare's full” and “Aegeon is 'a genuine tragic figure' who has lost his family and now is about to lose his life” (qtd. in Willis 260). By noting the depth in the story and characters, Cellan-Jones gives his actors more to work with than a simple farce might; however, he still acknowledges the humorous aspects of the play and works toward making the film comic as well as dramatic.

One of the first casting choices in the Comedy of Errors is how to double the two sets of twins. While on stage similar actors might be found to play the roles and then their likeness emphasized through costuming and gestures and so on, television audiences are not as forgiving of such efforts and television offers technology that makes it unnecessary. In television, one actor can play both roles, and this is the method Cellan-Jones uses in this production with Michael Kitchen as the two Antipholi and Roger Daltry as both Dromios. As Willis points out, this allows the director and actors to play up the characters' differences rather than trying to emphasize their similarities (267). Conversely, Ford dismisses Cellan-Jones' production because of this particular choice, claiming it “diminish[es] some of the wonder of the play” (14). This seems an odd critique. The doubling of characters is natural in television and it allows the mistaken identity to play out realistically as well as humorously.

Cellan-Jones also uses the soundstage to great effect in this television production. On the floor is a map of the eastern Mediterranean that symbolizes the voyages of Egeon
and the boys and the background of the narrative. The buildings of the set—the Phoenix, the Temple, the Porpentine, and the Centaur Inn—stand in a 360-degree circle surrounding the map. The map serves as a visual reminder of the background of the story and works as a public town square for most of the action.

The first scene sets the tone of the play, expresses ideas that would have been understood by an early modern audience, and cunningly provides the exposition needed to understand the plot enhanced by a delightful performance from a troupe of mimes. The first shot is a traditional map of the Mediterranean. This fades to a shot from above, clearly showing the map painted on the floor with people dancing and waving colorful capes and merry music playing in the background. The comic tone is set immediately and the importance of place brought into focus. The camera then enters the town square and shows a circus-like atmosphere with dancers, jugglers, a fortune teller, a man on stilts, and women watching from a balcony that help suggest for a contemporary audience the exotic, mystical nature the early modern audience would have projected onto the city of Ephesus based on St. Paul's visit to Ephesus as detailed in chapter nineteen of the Acts of the Apostles. This city is a place where the unexpected can be expected.

This leads to the entrance of the Duke of Ephesus and Egeon, a merchant of Syracuse, who is his prisoner simply because there is a law in Ephesus against visitors from Syracuse. As Egeon tells the sad story of his life that has led to this moment, musicians play and the circus performers mime the story. This is a necessary bit of exposition that makes for a long speech barely broken up by comments from the duke. By adding the amusing action, the speech becomes interesting and the necessary exposition
is expressed both verbally and visually, making it appealing and easy to understand. While he is visibly moved, the duke still passes a sentence of death or a penalty of 1000 marks, though he gives Egeon until the end of the day to find a way to pay the fine, a moment of mercy that is made ominous by the presence of a large clock ticking away the time. Egeon, as played by septuagenarian Cyril Cusack, takes the form of a sort of senex, or old man, from the Roman plays that form the comedy's source material. The father, in this play, could be somewhat younger, but the elderly version utilizes the Roman character and emphasizes the care-worn life Egeon has lived and the idea that he may be flirting with death, as he sees no further reason to live. Since Cellan-Jones saw Egeon as “a genuine tragic figure” (Willis 260), this is not the doddering fool of a comedy or the wise old man of a romance or drama, but is instead the sad father around whom the rest of the film will be built even when no one knows who he is or that he is in Ephesus and he fades into the background for the majority of the play. Part of his prominence is the story he told that the audience will see come to life in the next three acts as the twin sons he has lost discover one another and show the fulfillment of his sad tale. Cellan-Jones pulls all of this together in this first scene through his narrative moves and focus on the importance of the character of Egeon.

The visual cues working in conjunction with the language in the BBC production of *The Comedy of Errors* use the television medium to good effect. The transition between scenes one and two contains detailed visual cues that set-up the second scene and much of the remainder of the play. Scene one closes with a red-cloaked performer twirling around the center of the mapped stage, slowly fading to invisibility while a wind
howls in the background. This cuts to a close-up of the fortune-teller's table with four tarot cards displayed, each representing the notion of transition or new beginning, important themes in the play. The sun card also shows what looks to be a set of twins, reminding the viewer of the twins of whom Egeon spoke and who will be the film's protagonists. The camera then moves up from the tarot cards to the fortuneteller waving her hands over her crystal ball, once again reminding the audience that Ephesus is a town of sorcery. The tone of the scene then shifts back and forth from comedy to drama as Antipholus describes his search for his mother while Dromio leaves to find secure lodgings and returns improbably soon to bring his master home for dinner. This is the first of the mistaken identities with the two sets of twins, the beginning of all the confusion, and the moment Antipholus begins to wonder about this city of Ephesus. As Dromio of Ephesus attempts to convince Antipholus of Syracuse that he has a mistress and the mistress is awaiting him, Antipholus becomes angrier and angrier while Dromio remains hopeful if befuddled. The dialogue ends with Antipholus hitting Dromio over the head with a cloth while an indignant Dromio runs away. Antipholus' sputtering anger, Dromio's bewilderment, and the audience's understanding that this is all a mistake work together to make the mild beating funny. Antipholus is wondering what is happening and explains what “they say” about Ephesus:

They say this town is full of cozenage,
As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many suchlike libertines of sin. (I.ii.97-102)
As Antipholus speaks, the camera pans across the stage beginning with the fortuneteller and showing the members of the mime troupe. Antipholus puts into words what the early modern audience would have understood about Ephesus and Cellan-Jones reinforces the ideas with these ongoing visuals of the troupe. In Antipholus' mind, there must be something afoot and the ominous looks of the troupe suggest that such may be the case. There is this same mix between serious, ominous moments and light-hearted playfulness throughout the film, though Dromio brings much of the playfulness through his reactions to the ever more serious and suspicious Antipholus.

The next scene shows the contrast between the two major women in the play, Antipholus of Ephesus' wife Adriana and her unmarried sister Luciana. These two characters have something of the better known Katharina and Bianca or Beatrice and Hero about them, with Adriana impatient with her husband and asking for her own rights while Luciana attempts to persuade her that her husband has the right to do pretty much anything he wants without her knowledge or assent. In this film, these contrasts are quickly and somewhat stereotypically set in the first scene by physical characteristics of the women as well as the blocking and characterization. Adriana is tall and dark-haired and is wearing a rich brown and dark blue dress elaborately trimmed with gold, a tiara in her hair, and a chain with a heavy, jeweled pendant hanging from it. In all ways she is a conspicuous, aristocratic woman. She stands at the window and impatiently paces around the room while complaining about her husband. The blond Luciana, wearing a pale blue dress trimmed in white lace and a heavy cross around her neck sits serenely at the table working on a piece of handiwork, as she gently but capably parries with her sister and
takes the husband's part. She even genuflects as she reminds Adriana that man is “more divine” than the other beasts and are “masters to their females, and their lords” (II.i.20, 24). *The Comedy of Errors*, like *The Winter's Tale*, is a play that concentrates on the men; however, the women hold their own as they adhere to early modern types of women. Cellan-Jones' production emphasizes this characterization by the way it introduces the women, dresses them, and shows them in conversation with the gaudy shrew hovering over her submissive sister.

During this scene between the women, Dromio comes in with his story of the mad Antipholus who does not know his home and the basic premise of the play moves forward with its “comedy of errors” as servant is mistaken for servant and master for master and both are believed to be mad. While the film keeps the basic fun of the confusion of the twins, the playfulness is tempered by Egeon who is occasionally shown walking through the streets of the town, presumably trying to find 1000 marks before sundown,\(^\text{30}\) and by the occasional chiming of the clock. These are reminders by Cellan-Jones that this story, as farcical as it is, always has an ominous shadow in the background. The audience is never allowed to forget Egeon's plight, even in the light-hearted confusion of the double twins.

By the end of the play, the townspeople assume both Antipholi and Dromios are mad. The Syracusans have taken sanctuary in the Abbess' temple, and the Ephesians have run away from the crowd. The lengthy final scene includes many visual cues that continue to enhance the wordy stories that must be told to clear the confusion and end the play in happy reconciliation. The Duke enters with Egeon who is bound with a rope
around his wrists. The never forgotten juggler and others of the mime troupe dance ominously as the story begins to unfold. The Abbess holds her hands aloft, for attention, but also in a ceremonial manner as “Alleluias “ play in the background and Antipholus and Dromio emerge to meet Antipholus and Dromio. Using doubles in some shots and the often-used-in-television split screen effect in others, the sets of twins are able to meet and speak with one another. Emilia, the Abbess, moves to her husband and literally releases him from his penalty as she takes a pair of scissors and cuts the rope binding his hands. The other characters then exit the stage to join the Abbess in celebration, leaving the two Dromios to enjoy their newfound brotherhood. The camera cuts to a close-up of their hands as they shake on “let's go hand in hand / not one before the other” allowing them to touch without ruining the illusion of their twinning. The film then cuts to a final long shot of the town square with the Dromios entering the temple and the mime troupe left on the stage breathing fire and dancing as the camera switches to an overhead shot of the dancers moving into a circle and dancing around before being replaced with the traditional map which fades into the credits.

These visual cues and details that Cellan-Jones inserts into The Comedy of Errors lift this film above many of the others in the BBC project. It is definitely Cellan-Jones' vision, but that vision successfully uses television artistry to tell the story and keep the audience engaged. The mime troupe, not just presenting the beginning narrative, but also dancing its way through the entire production, keeps that important exposition in the forefront of the story. They serve as reminders that the play is a comedy as they perform their circus antics even while maintaining an ominous presence with their masks, capes,
and fire-breathing swirling on and off the stage. The positioning of characters and attention to costume and accessories also provides focus for the film. The two Antipholi wear their collars differently. Adriana and Luciana's costumes match their temperaments. Finally, moments such as the mimes' performance at the beginning and the Abbess cutting Egeon's ropes at the end add the visual to what might be merely verbal. They do not overshadow the verbal nature of the play, but they enhance what is being said and show how television, as a medium, can bring both discourses together. *The Comedy of Errors* is not a particularly convincing play in the contemporary world, but Cellan-Jones is a convincing director and this version grounds the story in the opening exposition and plays it through convincingly to the last moment as the dancers twirl across the world.

**Conclusion**

The BBC Shakespeare project is a worthwhile effort that showcases the difficulties of bringing Shakespeare’s plays to film. The traditional focus of the project stymied directors used to bringing innovative ideas to the Shakespearean stage. Most of the films are worthwhile, but few of them are engaging. This is the problem of attempting to adapt Shakespeare as the text appears on paper. Sixteenth and seventeenth century themes, characters, and sensibilities do not necessarily hold up in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These films do not account for shifts in audience. They do not try to. Their purpose is to recreate Shakespeare, not update him. They also struggle to utilize the strengths of their medium. Since most of the directors come from the stage, they tend to use theatrical modes rather than taking advantage of the intimacy of television. The problems of the project’s emphases become particularly clear in the comedies as the
directors choose to present them earnestly and seriously and do not make a particular attempt to invoke the humor they contain. Indeed, it would have been difficult to do so given their constraints. Thus, with a few exceptions, the comedies in the BBC Shakespeare Project seem like inferior versions of the tragedies and histories. They do not carry much substance, but do not provide laughter to compensate. This is the dilemma for Shakespearean filmmakers and this chapter suggests some of the issues of a too slavish adherence to Shakespeare’s texts as they have come down to the contemporary world. The following chapters examine film adaptations of five plays, The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Merchant of Venice, The Tempest, and Hamlet, that work to overcome this problem of re-creation. Filmmakers play with genre, setting, dialogue, and plot as they place the early modern text into apposition with contemporary sensibilities and remake Shakespeare’s comedies to resonate with a new world.
Chapter Two

Shakespeare and the Battle of the Sexes

*The Taming of the Shrew*

*The Taming of the Shrew* is one of Shakespeare’s earliest plays. Chronologically, it stands with *The Comedy of Errors* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*—neither of which has gained much attention in film. Unlike its two companion plays, however, *The Taming of the Shrew* continually garners attention from filmmakers and arguably has produced the most popularly successful of all Shakespearean film adaptations (Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past*; Henderson, "A Shrew for the Times, Revisited" 120). This is a phenomenon I will examine in this chapter as I discuss the comedy in Shakespeare's play and how these films adapt that to make comic films that are generically different than their source. Further, because of the misogyny inherent in *The Taming of the Shrew*, each of these films must find a way to make the “taming” palatable for a twentieth/twenty-first century audience. This chapter will explore how they attempt this and how successful they are in the undertaking. By and large, the twentieth and twenty-first century adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* replace the original farce with a romantic comedy that somewhat shifts the balance of power found in Shakespeare's original to become a reflection of male/female relationship issues in each society that produces such a film.

The adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* fit into two general categories. The first I will call “traditional” adaptations with Renaissance costumes and Shakespeare's words. This does not make them unabridged adaptations or filmed plays. Each of them
interprets the play for film; however, they imagine a Renaissance world and what dialogue there is comes from the play as we have it. These include the Sam Taylor directed version from 1929 starring Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, the Franco Zeffirelli directed version from 1967 starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, and the Jonathan Miller directed BBC Shakespeare Project adaptation from 1980. The second group consists of modern language adaptations that take the plot and move it into the twentieth century with contemporary language, settings, and costumes. These range from the musical within a musical *Kiss Me Kate* (George Sidney 1953) to the high school set teen flick *10 Things I Hate About You* (Gil Junger 1999) to the *Shakespeare Retold* version of *The Taming of the Shrew* (David Richards 2005) from the BBC's relatively recent project contemporizing four of Shakespeare's plays. Using these two groupings of films, I will concentrate on the set-up or frame each film utilizes, the genre the production fits, and three aspects of the plot: the subplot of Bianca and her suitors, the taming of Katherine by Petruchio, and Katherine's final soliloquy in order to show how the adaptations, the updating of the humor, and the way each film works with contemporary social issues all work to make the play less funny and somewhat conservative.

As I state above, I will discuss how these films tend to be conservative in their treatment of women and male/female relationships. “Conservative” is an encumbered term. I am suggesting that these films fall into certain traditional clichés based on both the source text, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the film genre, romantic comedy. These clichés include the idea that a woman needs a man to be whole, that women want to be
romanced, and that women cannot fit into general society unless they are part of a heterosexual couple. These are currently conservative ideas, even though in the sixteenth century, Kate may have been a progressive character because Shakespeare gave her a voice. A progressive version of Shrew would question some of these assumptions, and a liberal version might change them altogether, or at least provide alternate readings for them. The mainstream romantic comedy genre, by definition, will include these assumptions in some form as these films do. Some of the films, however, do include more of these traditional role ideals than others. For example, the first and last films, The Pickford/Fairbanks and the Shakespeare Retold versions, show more of a mutual taming between Katherine and Petruchio than some of the others do. This may make them more progressive than conservative. They are trying to push the ideas of traditional male/female roles forward as society has through the twentieth century. Shakespeare Retold even includes a reversal of roles as Kate is in politics and Petruchio becomes a stay-at-home dad that may edge it toward being liberal rather than conservative in some ways, but the crux of the film is still the pairing of the heterosexual couple, thus the traditional romance carries on.

Like its companion play, The Comedy of Errors, William Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew is a farce. It begins with an induction that establishes the whole play as a play within a play, setting it one remove from the audience. The induction, an elaborate practical joke played on a drunken tinker, Christopher Sly, is clearly farcical. The tinker is made to believe he is a lord and a boy “plays” his lady. They then watch the play within a play that makes up the main plot, the courtships and marriages of two
sisters, the so-called shrew, Katherine, and her sister, Bianca. This induction establishes the play as a farce. It is farcical itself and sets up themes of reality and appearances and class and courtship that will come to play in the drama to follow. It also reminds the audience of the basic fact that the “wives” in the early modern production are no more women than Bartholomew, the page who plays Sly's lady (Garber, *Shakespeare after All* 59). The portrayal of the female characters by boys is, of course, no different than any other early modern production and, in itself, would not keep the play from being a romantic comedy more along the lines of a *Much Ado About Nothing* (which also contains contrasting women and a sparring couple); however, the induction brings this casting issue to the forefront in a way other plays do not. As Marjorie Garber suggests, the audience, when introduced to Katherine, might think back to Bartholomew and that “manifestly 'false' image of femininity” (59). The induction, though it is not resolved or even returned to at the end, sets a farcical tone and themes for this play that acknowledges itself as a play.

Just as the induction indicates, the play continues as a farce. The titular plot, the taming of Katherine by Petruchio, is based on English folktales and contains verbal sparring and comic violence. The secondary story, that of Bianca and her suitors, based on Italian sources, is a masquerade of disguise and equivocation. The play ends with a reversal of roles when Katherine becomes the submissive wife and chastises Bianca and the widow who show themselves to be shrews. Katherine's final monologue, the last long speech of the play, closes the stories and gives Katherine and Petruchio the last laugh. While some of these elements also mark the festive comedies—particularly the disguises
and mixing of classes—they are not the prevailing elements or tones for *The Taming of the Shrew*. While the servant may play the master, the true class order is never really questioned, and the hierarchies are never really threatened. The disguises are bawdy fun as the suitors attempt to claim fair Bianca's hand while the taming is physical comedy as Petruchio claims his wife. Even Katherine's final speech—played seriously or slyly—is part of the farce as it ends with Petruchio's joyful proclamation of victory and insult of Lucentio and Hortensio (V.ii.189-92).

This farce seems to be the “go-to” comedy for makers of comic Shakespearean film adaptations. While the films may contain some farcical elements, particularly of slapstick in the taming scenes, not one of these films is the same kind of farce that Shakespeare's play is. With the possible exception of Jonathan Miller's psychology heavy BBC adaptation, each of the films is a comedy, but a romantic comedy rather than farce. These romantic comedies range from the “battle of the sexes” in the late 1920s to the modern “chick flicks” of the 1990s and 2000s. Each of the films uses the story of the taming as the central plot of the film and includes the secondary story as a contrast. Perhaps surprisingly, each adaptation, from 1929 to 2005 includes some version of Katherine's final submission monologue. While these films make these changes to attempt to update the story and make it more palatable to contemporary sensibilities, in some ways they have the opposite effect. As a farce, some of the misogynistic elements may be mitigated slightly because they are farcical comedy elements. In a romantic comedy or psychological study, they become more sinister as the twentieth century films seem to condone Petruchio's basic cruelty to Katherine.
Perhaps because this is something of a problematic play to make into a film, and perhaps because of its proliferation in film, critics have written extensively about *The Taming of the Shrew* films. Some of the most thorough criticism comes from Diana Henderson who returns to film of *The Taming of the Shrew* in several pieces. She notes how often filmmakers produce *The Taming of the Shrew* and asserts that the major film and television productions of the play come at times of conservative backlash toward feminist gains in society. In “A Shrew for the Times, Revisited,” Henderson points out some of the problematic issues with the last 70 years worth of filmed *The Taming of the Shrews*, showing each of them to be in some sense conservative as the Katherine characters somehow have the shorter whip and end up humbling themselves to satisfy their Petruchios. In “The Return of the Shrew: New Media, Old Stories, and Shakespearean Comedy,” Henderson repeats many of the points from her earlier article, but delves more deeply into the psychological doctor/patient relationship of Katherine and Petruchio in Miller's BBC version, which she suggests fits the neo-conservatism of the 1980s, and teen angst as a basis for the character of Kat in *10 Things I Hate About You*. In this article, Henderson also begins to examine the comedy of these filmed *The Taming of the Shrews*, asserting that it is a mirthless kind of comedy that shows a truth we may not wish to see about how this “so-dated text can still provide a strangely modern (not timeless) experience” (201). Henderson goes back and forth on how conservative she believes the films to be. She seems to appreciate some of them—particularly Zeffirelli’s—while still being frustrated that they fall into the pattern set by the play of a man taming a woman. While I find Henderson’s criticism quite appropriate, her assertion
that each film is a conservative backlash to a time of feminism may be somewhat of an overstatement. The films are more nuanced than that, a complication she acknowledges writing about some of the individual films, but not one that fits her overall argument. Also, the comedy of these films does elicit laughter. It might be questionable laughter from a contemporary stance that finds marital violence troubling, but it is not mirthless comedy. At least some of these films are physical, farcical romantic comedies.

Michael Hattaway dismisses most of the films of comedies by suggesting that “a truly great film of a comedy has yet to be made” (96). He sums up Zeffirelli's *The Taming of the Shrew* by calling Taylor's Katherine's behavior “pathologic” and noting she was “cured...by a little therapeutic housework” (87). Russell Jackson, on the other hand, finds much positive to say in his discussion of both of Hollywood's traditional versions of the film in his article, “Shakespeare's Comedies on Film.” He finds the Pickford/Fairbanks version to be summed up in Pickford's wink at the end of the submission speech. He suggests that Pickford as Katherine has “simulat[ed] submission,” “duped” Petruchio and placated the independent American woman (112). Russell then discusses the carnivalesque atmosphere of the Taylor/Burton version with the central couple as dynamic characters who grow wise through the course the film while Padua remains statically comic around them. He gives credit to Katherine's sexual awakening in this film as a kind of “Lawrentian” feminism of the 1960s that, he admits, may not be appreciated by “present-day feminists” (116). These films are neither as disdainable as Hattaway presents nor as surprisingly progressive as Russell would have them. They are popular Hollywood films that are trying to negotiate the audience expectations of both
Shakespeare and their leading couples. They both advance and falter as the try to match make between Shakespeare's most infamous couple and Hollywood's most famous couples.

Barbara Hodgdon in “Katherina Bound; or, Play(K)ating the Strictures of Everyday Life” shows how each filmed version of *The Taming of the Shrew* works to objectify and bind Katherine into a submissive role. She discusses the backstage background of the Fairbanks/Pickford version as well as the ending—not of Katherine's triumphal wink, but of an allaying of that triumph by Petruchio's kiss and Baptista leading the harmonious social group in song (544). Her problem with the Zeffirelli directed Burton/Taylor version is the use it makes of Taylor's body. According to Hodgdon, the film “appropriates Shakespeare to authenticate a beautiful woman's transgressive body as that of a faithful wife” (546). Hodgdon then brings her placating title pun to the fore with the notion that Lilli, the Katherine character in *Kiss Me Kate*, spends the entire film placating and eventually kow-towing to Fred (Petruchio) while Shakespeare becomes profane in the hands of two small time hoods (547-48). Hodgdon's absolute positions on these issues have been challenged and restated in subsequent issues of *PMLA*, where other critics accuse her of “overreading” the play and attempting to overlay twentieth century values on a sixteenth century text and oversimplifying the patriarchal tendencies found even in the original work (PMLA Forum 151, 152). All of these pieces show just how difficult it is to criticize or justify this particular play as it continues to be produced and as filmmakers try to find ways to serve it to their audiences. The films may not be as patriarchal and objectifying as Hodgdon considers them, but
they bear continued scrutiny for how they objectify Katherine as well as how they try to simultaneously give her a subject position.

Ann C. Christenson continues directly from Hodgdon's work by looking at the domestic space of filmed *The Taming of the Shrews* against the play text. She cites the play to suggest that the notion that Petruchio's house needs cleaning up is a modern invention, one that bolsters this idea that a woman can find a fulfilled identity in being a housewife (32). She claims that in the play Petruchio disempowers Katherine by taking control over the domestic duties himself and leaving her idle (28-29), but in the films the same power dynamic is presented through the woman coming in to Petruchio's house and making it a home. While Hodgdon paints a rather bleak picture of misogyny in her review of the films and Christenson presents an interesting contrast between Shakespeare's play and its contemporary adaptations, it is somewhat forced because *Kiss Me Kate* is not really domestic and the domesticity of the Zeffirelli version, coming as late as it does in the 1960s, reflects more the director and star's desires than some greater cult of domesticity. There are different ways to read the domesticity in each of these films than that which Christenson suggests.

*10 Things I Hate About You* has garnered considerable criticism as scholars attempt to figure out how much it is Shakespeare and how much it is John Hughes-inspired teen romance while also placing it into either feminist or conservative camps. Michael D. Friedman posits a feminist reading of the film. He equates Kat's “shrewish” period with second wave “feminazi” feminism and contends that she grows into third wave feminism that allows her to enjoy her heterosexual normativity while staying true to
her basic feminist principles. Friedman concludes that this is the message of the movie as a whole—third wave feminism can overcome the stereotype of second wave feminism and move the woman's movement forward (14). In “‘An Aweful Rule’: Safe Schools, Hard Canons, and Shakespeare's Loose Heirs,” Melissa Jones suggests a more conservative context for 10 Things I Hate About You. In her view, 10 Things I Hate About You is one of a group of teen Shakespearean films that bolsters a conservatism that tried to cope in the aftermath of the 1999 Columbine school shootings. She reads the film as an advancement of patriarchal conservatism from Kat's first angry outbursts that cast her as the social misfit to her final self-humiliating act of reading her poem and fleeing, sobbing, from the classroom and her final silencing with Patrick's kiss. Richard Burt is particularly harsh on 10 Things I Hate About You. He calls this genre “Shakesploitation” and considers 10 Things I Hate About You a version of “loser” or “bimbo” feminism and scorns “any attempt to redeem shakesploi flick from loserdom” (207). Ariane M. Balizet gives a different reading of Kat in “Teen Scenes: Recognizing Shakespeare in Teen Film,” an article in which she looks at intersections of teen films and their Shakespearean sources. She describes Kat as an “eccentric,” but the character in the film with whom the audience sympathizes and who has the most “substance” (128-29). It is through her growing relationship with Patrick that her “true self” can emerge and it is through Patrick's perspective that the audience sees this (130). Balizet finds parallels with The Taming of the Shrew’s Katherine, but implicitly suggests that the social conditions have been at least somewhat updated for this new shrew. Evidently 10 Things I Hate About You can be all things to all people. It is either the worst of Hollywood patriarchal
conservatism or a tale of new feminism or something in between. It may need to be read first as a teen romance flick. In that context, it surpasses many similar generic movies because its association with Shakespeare allows the characters to be a bit more articulate, a bit more socially conscious, and a bit more interesting than other such characters in such films. It does not so much attempt to rise above its genre, as to make the most of it, and it does this well, giving the audience a Kat who may fall in love with Patrick, but this Patrick is not merely a heartthrob, but a “new man” who will support rather than suppress Kat.

The final film, a BBC television film from 2005, has not yet garnered much critical work, but Ramona Wray does write about the series in “Shakespeare and the Singletons, or, Beatrice Meets Bridget Jones: Post-Feminism, Popular Culture and 'Shakespea(Re)-Told.'” Wray looks specifically at two of the four films made for the series, Much Ado About Nothing and The Taming of the Shrew as they fit into the mold of contemporary romantic comedy. As such, they value the female characters over the male and give the former a complexity they deny the latter, in a way, perhaps, “making up” for the opposing treatment the characters receive in their sources. Wray shows how the films use their contemporary understanding to push together “early modern constructions of 'woman' and twenty-first century reflections upon love, marriage, and heterosexual relations” (186). Wray's article is an excellent starting point for a discussion of this version of The Taming of the Shrew. Wray situates the film more within the genre of Bridget Jones style romantic comedies than earlier film versions of The Taming of the Shrew—in fact, Wray suggests that it is a “daring and distinctive choice” because it has
been “infrequently filmed or televised.” While I agree that this is a romantic comedy, I will be examining it against other versions of *The Taming of the Shrew*, a play I think has been filmed rather often and usually precisely as a romantic comedy whether it is screwball, musical, or teen romantic comedy.

**The “Traditional” Films**

The three *The Taming of the Shrew* adaptations I am calling traditional spread across 50 years of filmmaking. Two of them are “star vehicles, showcases for non-Shakespearean actor[s]” (Anderegg 14). These are Hollywood stars who bring their popularity to Shakespeare and perhaps hope his gravity will enhance their reputation. In 1929 Sam Taylor directed married couple Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks as Katherine and Petruchio in the first sound film adapted from one of Shakespeare's plays. Coming so early in the era of talkies, the film was also presented in theaters without sound and contains many silent film elements. In 1967, Franco Zeffirelli directed the new Hollywood couple, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, as Katharina and Petruchio in a lavish production. Finally, in 1980, Jonathan Miller, producer at the time of the BBC Shakespeare Project, chose to direct his own version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. This version is traditional in the manner of the BBC series' rules; however, because of Jonathan Miller's predilections and willingness to allow himself a non-traditional interpretation, it is not comedic.

In Shakespeare's play, the induction sets up the main plot as a play within a play, suggests that all may not be as it seems, and gives a farcical overtone to the production. Diana Henderson asserts that the induction does not make the play more palatable
because it shares the play's "ideological disposition" (Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past* 156); however, it does make the play a play-within-a-play and thus a fiction on the stage—something none of the film versions do. None of the traditional film productions use Shakespeare's induction, but each of them establishes the nature of their film within the first few minutes. The 1929 version includes a frame of sorts by using a Punch and Judy style puppet show to present a traditional comically violent taming scene that suggests this is not a naturalistic film, reminds the audience of the folk tale origins of the story, and provides the focus for its comic battle of the sexes to come. Zeffirelli's version—a lush setting with a hopeful and joyful Lucentio first catching a glimpse of a rainbow with its foot in Padua and then in the midst of the festival atmosphere of the city itself as he finds himself caught up in a carnivalesque parade and glimpses and begins to pursue the fair Bianca—sets up the grand romantic comedy, one that may even become a festive comedy with Katharina and Petruchio as the Lady and Lord of Misrule (Jackson, "Shakespeare's Comedies on Film" 112). Finally, Miller's adaptation is quieter. He uses a clean and orderly Serlio inspired set to establish his subtler vision of the story (Willis 111). The audience glimpses a dwarf and a couple of women in the uncluttered and pristine marketplace before seeing an uncrowded street with men speaking. Each of the other films presents some sort of crowded festivity, as if this were a festive comedy. Miller's film does not.

While each of these introductions establishes a tone and some themes for the films, none of them provides the play within a play/film notion that the original introduces. The plot the audience will see, the taming of Katherine by Petruchio, is the
reality of the film. Henderson suggests that the twentieth century audience sees the
treatment of women as portrayed in the *Taming of the Shrew* as a historical reality that, in
fact, it was not (Henderson, "A *Shrew* for the Times, Revisited" 122; Henderson,
*Collaborations with the Past* 158). In the films, it is not an elaborate staging of a joke, but
the very real subject matter that the audience will experience. Given that, the filmmakers
must then provide a mode of understanding for the violence and cruelty to follow that
Shakespeare never had to, not only because he wrote 500 years earlier, but because his
violence was a farce, a joke for a drunken tinker.

The films begin with the entrance of Lucentio to Padua, and—while focusing on
the Katherine and Petruchio plot—include the contrasting subplot of Bianca and her
suitors. In the play, this is the plot that looks toward the idea of a festive comedy. Three
different suitors don disguises to woo the fair Bianca who cannot marry any of them until
Katherine finds a husband.

The 1929 film, at a running length of only 66 minutes, does not have time to
develop the subplot. Bianca's story is condensed and used only to set up Katherine's. She
and Lucentio are already a couple with their only obstacle her father's ruling regarding
Katherine's status. This gives Lucentio the impetus to draft Petruchio to become
Katherine's suitor. Bianca shows up again only to be the recipient of Katherine's
submission speech and her wink. Dorothy Jordan as Bianca plays off of Pickford's cues,
first showing annoyance at the new, submissive Katherine, and then enlightenment when
Katherine winks it away. In this film, Bianca serves only to contrast and play off
Katherine while also showing a sisterly bond—a "conspiracy of 'unspoken thoughts'"
behind the “patriarchal ventriloquism” of the submission speech—that we will not see again until *10 Things I Hate about You* (Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past* 164).

She is barely in the film and has no real persona, though Dorothy Jordan makes the most of the miniscule part with strong body language and facial expressions as befit a silent film.

The 1967 film does considerably more with Bianca. The fair Natasha Pyne contrasts with Taylor's dark Katharina. Her light blue gown and veiled face suggest an innocence lacking in her sister. She spies on the festivities of the holiday and coyly runs through the streets as she is seen and chased by the equally blond-haired, blue-eyed Lucentio. Hortensio and Gremio are on hand as suitors to Bianca. Hortensio enlists the drunken Petruchio to woo Katharina in accordance with Mr. Minola's rule that Bianca cannot marry until Katharina does. A fair amount of time is then given over to setting up the suitor subplot with the establishing of the characters and planning of the disguises. Bianca herself becomes part of the action as Katharina chases her up in their rooms and down the stairs while the men look and listen from below until their father rescues Bianca and shows how much he favors her. Petruchio, amused, observes all this while the suitors enter in disguise and offer their services as Bianca's tutors. Later, as Petruchio begins his courtship with Katharina, the antics of the suitors physically fighting while Bianca obliviously reads from a book, provide a background for the chase. The film then cuts back and forth between the taming plot and the subplot to include the further antics of the Pedant disguised as Vincentio, Lucentio and Bianca's elopement, and the meeting of the two “fathers.” This subplot is played for fun in this film as the disguises cause
mischievous fun and the fighting among the suitors adds to the physical comedy of the film. It is also, as the film moves between the two stories, a contrasting piece for the taming plot. The supposed sweet yet deception nature of Bianca and her suitors contrasts with the honest physicality of Petruchio and Katharina. This comes from the play, but is emphasized in the film, even to the end as the overly sweet Lucentio and Bianca kiss at the table while Katharina and Petruchio still eye one another suspiciously, yet, in the final moment, it is Katharina who proves her loyalty and devotion to her husband.

The BBC version, following the play more exactly, sets up the subplot with the men before the women arrive. Bianca and Katherine then have a short scene in which Katherine torments Bianca before the men begin talking again, presenting themselves to Baptista. This production emphasizes the idea that the marriage deal was really between the father and the groom as the men continue to talk and talk and talk in close-ups and medium close-ups as Miller attempts to showcase real Renaissance attitudes (Willis 111). The tutoring scene between Bianca and Lucentio does provide a contrast for Petruchio's teaching of Katherine. Bianca and Lucentio sit at a table in the foreground and learn Latin and love while Hortensio attempts to teach with music in the background believing that Lucentio is forwarding his cause. This could be a funny scene, but it is played quietly and seriously. It does contrast the louder scenes with Petruchio and Katherine; however, it is obviously not as important as the many scenes among the men. Bianca continues in the background to the furious schemes and machinations of the men until she refuses her husband's bidding to come meet him. She then enters behind Katherine and listens sulkily to her chastisement.
The Bianca subplot serves to contrast the Katherine plot. In the earliest version it merely sets up and focuses the main plot. In Franco Zeffirelli's film, it adds to the liveliness of the film by presenting the disguised suitors vying for Bianca. In Jonathan Miller's BBC version, it does not liven the action, but it does show the politics of the time as the men meet and talk. In none of the films is the Bianca character particularly outstanding or memorable. She serves her purpose, but, while she might present a contrast to Kate, she is not a true foil to her. The closest she comes to that is in Zeffirelli's where they fight one another, but even so, the audience’s sympathy is always with Katherine. These films are Katherine's vehicle—or, in the case of Miller's—Petruchio's.

In the play, Bianca's subplot has all the elements of a festive comedy. The young triumph over the old; they don disguises, and love wins out. This is shown in two of the films, but it is not celebrated. Bianca merely becomes the shrew that was Katherine and must listen earnestly to her sister's speech.

While the films begin as the play proper does with the entrance of Lucentio to Padua, the main story of the films is that of Petruchio and Katherine. The two earlier films showcase their stars with these roles, using the real-life Hollywood couples' popularity to enhance the films' appeal. Because of this stunt casting, the audience comes to the films with certain expectations in mind, expectations the films do nothing to blunt. The stars are the focus, their personas become the center of the films, and their courtships provide the humor in the comedies.

The time period when each film was made has much to do with the generic concerns of the film and the way the actors portray the characters. The earliest film was
released in 1929 as both a sound and silent film. Appearing in this transitional time for film, Henderson calls it a “prototype for the great Hollywood comedies to come, in which equally important co-stars mix screwball antics with subtler repartée than this transitional film affords (“A Shrew for the Times, Revisited” 125). With Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford as its stars and a running length of only 66 minutes, this film focuses most of its attention on the taming scenario. The first third of the movie sets up the situation with Lucentio and Bianca and Petruchio and Katherine, spending a fair amount of time on the first meeting of Katherine and Petruchio and giving Katherine lines she does not have in Shakespeare's play\(^3\) and providing both characters with whips to use against one another in their wooing. It does give Katherine more airtime and lines than Shakespeare did, setting a precedent that other films will adapt of allowing the audience to see at least partly from Katherine's perspective (Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past* 161). In this adaptation, both Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford play versions of other characters they have played. Fairbanks' Petruchio is the swashbuckling Robin Hood or Zorro, while Pickford's Katherine—reportedly at the director's insistence and against her own wishes— is another version of America's Sweetheart (Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past* 160).

This is a light version of the taming. It begins with that notion of the traditional Punch and Judy puppet show and makes both characters actors in the sequence. They are tongue in cheek throughout, and Katherine gives as well as she gets. At first it seems as if Petruchio has the upper hand as he blusters about and deprives Katherine of food and sleep; however, she comes back by physically assailing him as they push back and forth
in a madcap romp around the bedroom, and she ends up clocking him with a stool. She then comforts him and throws his whip into the fire, showing her own initiative and effectively ending the taming sequence. Through the taming sequence each Fairbanks and Pickford grins or winks at the camera to underscore the game they are playing with one another and the audience. Jackson suggests that she is showing that she has learned to “simulate submission” (112). The end of the taming sequence cuts directly to the banquet table with the other characters present and—without any lead-up—Katherine giving her submission speech with a wink toward Bianca and the camera at the end of it. Coming between women's suffrage in the United States and the Post World War II cult of domesticity, this earliest film may have the most equal couple in it, a couple commensurate with early film couples to follow such as Tracy and Hepburn. While Petruchio always can overpower Katherine, she has power parallel to his and she can lash it out, taming him into leaving behind the roué and becoming the loving husband even as he tames her into becoming a socially acceptable devoted wife. This is also probably the most violent of the taming sequences in the films. It is the screwball, overdone, slapstick movie violence that forms this kind of comedy, but it is still violence. How funny is it really, especially in a time in which we are much more sensitive to domestic violence against both women and men? The final wink at the end of the submission speech does reinforce the notion that the characters are play-acting their new roles, but it does not mitigate what it has taken to tame one another.

The 1967 version shows how far women have not come since 1929 and reflects a regression to the fifties and early sixties American cult of domesticity. Gender roles
have once again begun to shift toward some sort of equality by the time this film was made in 1967 and the film recognizes this shift toward equality between men and women while still glorifying the woman's place of power in the domesticity of the home. As with Fairbanks and Pickford, the stars influence the roles. The leads are taken over by Hollywood's new darling couple, Shakespearean actor Richard Burton and Hollywood star Elizabeth Taylor. Reportedly, Taylor had much to prove in attempting Shakespeare while Burton could rely on his prior training, thus even the actors are not considered of equal status in the conception of this film. Due to this discrepancy, Zeffirelli claims that Taylor was willing to work with him trying new and interesting ideas while Burton simply assumed he was already prepared (Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past* 187).

Utilizing the Italian landscape, the wooing takes place through streets and across rooftops. The wedding is a bright, festive scene in keeping with the look of the film, and Petruchio's old and tattered wedding “costume” stands out with its array of bright colors. Through the wedding scene Katharina seems “tamed” already—as if all she lacked were a husband—until she happens to see Petruchio receive the dowry of gold coins her father promised him. This sudden knowledge that she is an object to be bought and Petruchio's interest in her may be monetary rather than personal causes her to revert to being the shrew who still must be tamed.

This Petruchio tames his Katharina by wearing her down. After the requisite horse ride in the rain, his servants scurry to do his bidding and Katharina hopes for her good meal until he bombastically throws the food down. When he carries her to her bridal chamber she looks wary. She is worn out and bewildered and wary of Petruchio's next
move. Every glance, every sigh, every move by Taylor shows this as the couple prepares for bed. She begins, however, to gain some control when Petruchio attempts to disrobe her and she moves from him to the bed and clocks him with a vessel as he tries to join her in bed. This leads to a tirade from Petruchio and tears from Katharina until an idea comes to her and her mouth forms a sly smile. While Petruchio has slept on the hard table he made his bed, Katharina has taken control of the situation by becoming a domestic goddess. She has won the servants to her side as she has enjoined them to clean house. Petruchio stumbles out to a merry scene of domestic energy and a wife who has formed her own position in the house who remains truculent toward him, but pleasant with everyone else. While it seems as if Katharina has gained some control of the situation, Petruchio shows that he maintains the power when he once again breaks her growing sense of herself by refusing the cap and gown created for her for Bianca's wedding. After this back and forth, Petruchio awakens Katharina in the middle of the night to take her to her sister's wedding. He insists that it is seven in the morning and she is suddenly tamed, showing her virtue by agreeing with all the nonsense he can spout when they meet Vincentio on the way. It is a back and forth kind of taming in which each half of the couple gains the upper hand at different times, Petruchio through macho bluster and Katharina through domestic energy.

Finally, without really showing why, the film jumps to a tamed Katharina. This Katharina is not only tamed, but she gives the final submission speech absolutely straight, a surprising interpretive choice since Pickford's wink had become the more common choice. Zeffirelli reports that this was Taylor's own choice. She wanted to be that devoted
wife to Burton and the speech was for him, straight and from the heart (Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past* 185). Through Katharina's speech the Hollywood star was showing her devotion to the serious actor who was her husband. Elizabeth Taylor, a working actor since she was a child, makes a feminine, domestic Katharina who just wants to be mistress of her own house. This is the ultimate domestic role—one prized in society a very few years earlier—that allows this couple to come together with distinct gender roles for wife and husband—both Katharina and Petruchio and Taylor and Burton.

After the boisterousness of the two previous Petruchios, John Cleese brings a very different tone to his wooer in 1981 in the BBC Complete Works project. Diana Henderson suggests that he is playing the doctor giving his student a psychologically based “cure” for her “diseased mind” (Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past* 173). It is an appropriate description. This Petruchio plays a serious and somewhat vicious psychological game to break Katherine so she can be controlled and welcomed back into society. He somberly explains to the audience just how he will woo her with psychological games and he proceeds to do so. Their first usually high-spirited dialogue full of back and forth word play is slow, deliberate, and serious and his threat to “cuff her” seems to be a real warning as the six foot five inch Cleese hovers over Katherine menacingly. In another physical move, as Katherine's father comes in, Petruchio grips her arm and tells her she will be his wife. She jerks away and turns her back to the men.

After their wedding—which is reported rather than seen as in the play text but not the other films—the couple adjourns to Petruchio's house, Katherine dirty and disheveled from the journey. Petruchio is loud and shrill in his berating of the servants as he begins
his work of deprivation on Katherine. Although nothing Cleese's Petruchio does is outside the play—as befits the philosophy of the Shakespeare project, this film follows the script much more exactly than the earlier two versions—it is carried out in such a serious manner that the film little resembles the farce it must have been in Shakespeare day or the overblown romantic comedy of earlier films. The torture of Katherine by Petruchio, when done in farce or in spirited romantic comedy, is problematic from a feminist standpoint, but cannot be taken entirely seriously, and thus is justifiable as comic fodder, particularly when Katherine finds a way to fight back. In this production the torture is just that—torture. It is a little unbearable to watch. There is no sense of fun and no sense of unreality. A realistic Taming of the Shrew is painful. Petruchio comes across uncaring, somewhat bored, and kind of awful. Hungry, sleep-deprived, and kept from acceptable dress, if Katherine wants to return to visit her father's house, she must give in to Petruchio's mind games and agree with his nonsensical claims about the state of nature. The final submission speech is as serious as the rest of the play. Katherine shows she has truly submitted and Petruchio rewards her by kissing her and offering to take her to bed. They seem suddenly a compatible couple, but the seriousness of the taming and the earnestness of the submission speech suggest that this is a Petruchio who can be generous in his complete victory and a broken Katherine who will ever after live in peace under Petruchio's thumb.

By making this farce into a serious film, producer and director Jonathan Miller does much to expose the basic problem of the play. In every version, Petruchio does torture Katherine. In every version, Katherine is her father's property to be transferred to
her husband. In every version, Katherine must give in to Petruchio. When these postulates are put into comedy form, they can be concealed through the laughter. It is funny to see what Petruchio will do next and how Katherine will respond. The form mitigates the truth. When it is serious, it becomes a little horrifying and the story cannot be hidden behind the laughter, but the truth must be acknowledged. Miller is not himself glorifying the patriarchy, but it working to expose it by taking off the screen of comedy and leaving the stark truth of a man torturing a woman into submission.

Each of the “traditional” shrews follows the play more or less. The two theatrical releases showcase a starring couple in the leading roles and emphasize their star power as they make the film. Mary Pickford is America's sweetheart, and her Katherine is played for laughs as she fights Fairbanks, even if he has the longer whip and she is easily cowed (Henderson, "A Shrew for the Times, Revisited" 125). Taylor earnestly wants to make her marriage work and make her Shakespeare work. She becomes the ultimate sixties' housewife as she domesticizes Petruchio's house and leads in its cleaning. Finally, the BBC version, by sticking closely to the script, shows the sexual politics of Shakespeare's day, but by playing loose with interpretation within the confines of the script, Jonathan Miller also shows the psychological reality of a man out to break a woman. Each of the films shows a different aspect of twentieth century relationships from mutual comic violence to traditional domestic roles to forcing the audience to realize that the play is problematic as they work through the issues of Shakespeare's misogynistic play.
The Modern Language Adaptations

The three traditional films of *The Taming of the Shrew* bring their stories into the contemporary world by the way they portray the characters and the taming; however, they are limited by the nature of a film that is attempting to make a traditional version of a sixteenth century piece. There are three additional adaptations that do not have this same limitation. They take the basic plot and characters from the play, but bring them very intentionally into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with modern language adaptations. In 1953 George Sidney directed a movie version of the Broadway play *Kiss Me Kate*, a play that includes a musical adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* as a play within a play. In 1999 *10 Things I Hate About You* adapted *The Taming of the Shrew* for a high school audience, giving us an angry-young-woman Katherine. In 2005 the BBC updated four of Shakespeare's plays including *Taming of the Shrew*, putting Katherine into politics and giving her a mother instead of a father. Each of these adaptations blends some of the traditional ideas of *The Taming of the Shrew* with contemporary issues. Each of the films tells the story of Katherine. While the play seems to focus on the men and gives as much time to Bianca's suitors as it does to Katherine and the traditional films tend to showcase Petruchio as well as Katherine, these films are all about their Katherine figure.

*Kiss Me Kate* is a fascinating conglomeration of genres. In a way the set-up is the closest to Shakespeare's induction as exists in a film version. It makes *The Taming of the Shrew* into a play within the film as it is a play within the play in Shakespeare's text, but it extends the frame story by overlapping it with the plot and performance of the play.
The film shows the production of a musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew* with song and dance numbers sprinkled throughout. While the play within the film is a version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, this is the version that follows the plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* least. The actors' lives and relationships comment on the characters and vice versa. The Katherine character, Lilli Vanessi (Kathryn Grayson), is divorced from the Petruchio character, Fred Graham (Howard Keel). Fred is seeing the Bianca character, Lois Lane (Ann Miller), who is really in love with the actor playing Lucentio, Bill Calhoun (Tommy Rall). The actors are not exact counterparts to the Shakespearean figures, but they have certain elements in common with them and their story is mixed with the play-within-a-film story of *The Taming of the Shrew* throughout the film.

*10 Things I Hate About You*, the high school *Taming of the Shrew*, sets up the story with a tour through Padua High School. The Lucentio character, Cameron (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), is new in school and school nerd Michael gives him a guided tour of the various groups on campus: the popular kids, the future MBAs, the white rastas, the cowboys, and Bianca. This gives the film a high-school vibe, echoing the ending of the John Hughes high school classic, *The Breakfast Club*, by defining the students by type, but it also sets up the Shakespearean motif since the play begins with student Lucentio's entrance into Padua.

The *Shakespeare Retold* “The Taming of the Shrew” begins with a shot of Kate's (Shirley Henderson) legs as she is storming to her office where she bawls out her assistant for not giving her the right information and thus making her look foolish. This Kate for the new millennium is a Member of Parliament (MP) who would like to be
leader of her party, but is considered too shrewish to be elected as such. The beginning scene establishes her position and her disposition.

Even though they focus on Katherine, each of these contemporary retellings of *The Taming of the Shrew* includes a fairly extensive version of the Bianca subplot as the Katherine characters tend to interact even more with their sisters than they do in the original. The oddest version of Bianca is in *Kiss Me Kate* simply because the Bianca character is not related to the Katherine character, the women do not have a father/authority figure, and Lois Lane seems to be Lilli's rival for Fred's affection. Fred is seeing the Bianca character, Lois Lane (Ann Miller), but she is really in love with the actor playing Lucentio, Bill Calhoun (Tommy Rall). Bill Calhoun does not precisely disguise himself to court Lois, but they do hide their courtship and he signs Fred's name to a gambling debt. Lois seems to be present to be a rival for Katherine, to flirt with Fred, to recognize Lilli's fiancé as someone she once entertained and thus show that he is not better than Fred, and to contrast with Lilli in the play. They have more scenes together at the beginning of the film when they both come to Fred's apartment to audition for the play and during early rehearsals when they are in full rivalry mode than they do later in the play. In the play within a film, Bianca has one song in which the suitors fight over her, “Tom, Dick or Harry,” that echoes Lois Lane's life, Fred, Bill, or Tex, but she is mostly relegated to the background and the frame story. The emphasis in the play is on Katherine and Petruchio.

*10 Things I Hate About You* uses Bianca to contrast with Kat, the Katherine character, but it also uses her to show Kat's softer side, the “real” person beneath the
tough exterior. Balizet suggests that Patrick brings out Kat's true self (130), and that may be true, but Bianca does as well. The audience learns that part of Kat's outward shrewishness comes from a very tender desire to protect her sister—even if her sister does not want that protection. In this version, Bianca is the popular younger sister of the self-exiled Kat. She wants to conform to society's expectations and wishes Kat would, too. Her father imposes the Bianca-cannot-date-until-Kat-does rule simply to keep Bianca from dating and not to try to rid himself of Kat. Bianca then has to do what she can to get Kat to date so that she, too, can date, and, in fact, go to the prom, the ultimate teenage rite of passage that is this film's equivalent to marriage. Bianca, for all that is made of her superficiality in this film, is a complex character. She is exasperated with her sister and their father's edict does not help. She does, however, also have a certain respect for Kat and listens to her. In the end, when she kicks a boy in the groin, she begins to take over where Kat seems to have left off.

In addition to the character of Bianca, the subplot of the suitors is realized in this version, perhaps even more than the main plot of the taming. Cameron and Joey both want to be with Bianca. Joey pays Patrick to date Kat and Cameron pretends to know French so he can tutor Bianca. They use one another to court Bianca and fight with one another over her. This helps set up the Patrick/Kat story, but it also gives one plot line that really follows the text. In a twentieth century teen version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, to follow the real plot between the leads would be too awkward. By following the subplot more closely—superficial dating hijinks are allowed in this society—the
filmmakers can give their nod to Shakespeare while veering from the more troubling aspects of the plot.

*Shakespeare Retold* makes one really interesting change to the Bianca subplot. In this version, Bianca, a supermodel, to put off a long-standing, long-suffering admirer, makes a joking claim that she will not marry until her sister—a politician who does not date—marries. This changes the dynamic of the sisters because it is not a resentful Bianca pitted against her sister by an authority figure, but a Bianca who is making choices for herself. Any resentment of Kate comes more from Kate's uncivilized treatment of everyone than it does from an outside force. Kate embarrasses Bianca with her anger and rages. Bianca does become enamored of Lucentio, an Italian model, and the film plays with that aspect of the subplot in their relationship as their courtship parallels Kate and Petruchio's and the audience sees the true love match of the interesting and intelligent—if eccentric main couple against a superficial romance between the beautiful people.

Another shift to the subplot is making the sisters' father into their mother. Mrs. Minola is portrayed by former model Twiggy Lawson as a society woman not unlike Bianca. The modern mother of grown, working daughters, she does not have the blustering authority of most Baptistas. She tries to control her daughters—especially Katherine—but she is also concerned with her own social life. In the end, she takes the part of the widow when she becomes engaged to the Hortensio character. Changing the gender of the parent figure does several things. It makes for an authority figure without much authority. It also allows for congeniality within the family, not just with the sisters,
but with the trio. They are all friends and they support as well as compete with one another. Finally, the casting of Twiggy, once a supermodel herself, allows the film to suggest that Bianca and her mother may have always had an understanding that leaves Kate out, but it also adds a layer of suggested superficiality for the two of them that contrasts with the intellectual Katherine.

These subplots are a major part of the modernization of these versions of *The Taming of the Shrew*, but they also showcase some of the continued problems of the ongoing popularity of this play. The Bianca characters tend to be stereotypically superficial women who are interested only in the men. In *Kiss Me Kate*, Lois Lane has had relationships with three of the men in the story, cannot decide between “Tom, Dick, or Harry,” works to make Lilli jealous, and is a bit of a ditz. In *10 Things I Hate About You* she is shown as materialistic, ditzy, and boy crazy until the end when she becomes “empowered” by kicking a boy in the groin, moving from passivity to violence with no middle ground. The *Shakespeare Retold* version probably has the least stereotypical, most interesting Bianca; however, choosing to make her a model means that the first impression of the viewer will be that she is the quintessential shallow feminine type. This impression does not change when the money-seeking Lucentio character takes her in. The Bianca subplots allow the modern films to follow part of Shakespeare's plot in a way that can fall apart with the main plot. They bring contemporary feminine stereotypes into play with these superficial, materialistic characters who contrast the more intellectual and angry Katherine characters, providing a foil for Katherine that shows how, by choosing not to give in to the feminine stereotype, she is the more interesting, superior character.
Especially in the two most recent films, they also provide a sororal space for the Katherine characters. In her interactions with her sister, she gives the audience an early glimpse of a gentler person behind her angry facade.

Because this is *The Taming of the Shrew*, each of the contemporary versions includes the actual taming and, surprisingly, a form of the submission speech at the end. *Kiss Me Kate* is intriguing in the way it juxtaposes the contemporary story with the play within the film. The taming begins before the wedding scene when Lilli has discovered backstage that flowers she thought Fred had given her had actually been meant for Lois. She screams from backstage and comes out on stage truly angry. She throws the bouquet at Petruchio and comes down screeching her lines. She does not change her lines, but adds physical violence to them, pushing and slapping Petruchio. In his turn, Fred as Petruchio holds his own against her and ends the scene by putting her over his knee and spanking her to the laughter of the audience and singing of the chorus. This is truly disturbing. It is done under the auspices of being in a sixteenth century play about a man taming a woman, but it is actually part of the frame story with Fred truly punishing Lilli. He is able to humiliate her as he attempts to teach the actress—not the character—how to behave. In the 1950s, this is a punishment suited for a child but humiliating for a woman, yet here Fred defends his actions as an actor and the audience finds it comical within the context of the play. Not only is it acceptable, but it is the iconic image from the film. A version of it appears on the DVD cover taken completely out of Shakespearean context, but glorying in its 1950s frame. The two characters are placed against the white background, dressed in their contemporary costumes, but with Lilli turned over Fred's
knee and Fred's hand raised to spank her. Meanwhile a very small Lois is shown beneath the other two in a skimpy red showgirl outfit, dancing with a fan. This film is not about Petruchio taming Katherine; it is about Fred controlling his too-modern ex-wife, Lilli. He can be the stern father to the wayward child and spank her as Fred masquerading as Petruchio.

After the spanking moment, the relationship between the actor characters deteriorates and Lilli plans to leave mid-play with her rich fiancé, Tex. Fred keeps Lilli in the play by using a threat on his life, forcing her to play through the taming scenes. Finally, that threat is pulled so Lilli can leave, but she discovers that Tex has had a dalliance with Lois. As the curtain opens for the end of the play within a play, Fred/Petruchio and the audience wait to see if Lilli/Katherine will come when he calls her. Fred expects the understudy and is surprised when Lilli returns as Katherine, kneels, and gives the submission speech. At this point, the characters of Lilli and Katherine have merged and not only is Katherine giving this speech to Petruchio in a sixteenth century context, but Lilli is also giving it to Fred in a 1950s context. The independent divorcée is giving herself once again into the rule of her former—and it can be inferred future—husband. The sixteenth century context is quite serious at this point—there is no mocking or farce about it. Katherine gives the speech quite somberly, holding herself out in supplication for Petruchio's approval. The same seriousness then covers the 1950s context as well, as Lilli seems to be asking Fred for forgiveness and approval. This woman shows herself to be entirely tamed and is waiting for her next move to come from this man's actions. This choice of Lilli's, however, is the more independent choice of the
two she has. If she had gone with Tex, she would have been entirely stifled by his power as the quintessential strong man, the Texas rancher. Even the neat little light pink suit she dons to leave with him shows just how much that choice would take from the vibrant, independent Lilli she has been. Lilli has also tamed Fred. He has given up his little black book and will, the viewer can assume, be a different kind of husband than he was before. In choosing Fred, Lilli may be putting herself under a man's control, but she is also choosing a life where she can continue to work, where she can play various characters, where she can be an equal of sorts. This is all implied, though it does not fully mitigate the fact that she gives the speech, and gives it as Lilli as well as Katherine.

The film ends with the ending of the play within. In a sort of reversal of the spanking scene that ended the first act, Petruchio now lifts Katherine in his arms and kisses her as the curtain closes, and the audience is given a final shot of the two together kissing moving toward the camera in a last bit of 3D magic (at least as originally shown). They break the kiss and smile directly at the camera and the scene fades to black.

Katherine and Petruchio are happy. Lilli and Fred are happy. The marriage is salvaged and the cult of the housewife is challenged by the romantic selection of the actor over the practical selection of the millionaire. Lilli will not be a housewife in any traditional sense of the term. She and Fred are coming together as equals; both seem to have learned through their year of estrangement how to be both more independent and more giving to one another.

It is with the taming of Kat by Patrick that the plot of 10 Things I Hate About You distances itself from The Taming of the Shrew, yet, bizarrely, the intent remains. Because
Patrick is a sensitive “new man” he is hardly going to deprive Kat of food or taunt her or beat her. Instead, he tames her by courting her. Kat is the new feminist who hates men, so he becomes the man to break her of that. He does this through scheming and kindness and the two share a mutual courtship. He watches her to find out what she likes, takes over the school sound system to serenade her, and pays the drum major to lead the school band to join in. Kat, in turn, sneaks Patrick out of detention by using the ultimate feminine wile—baring her chest at the male instructor. Having thus bonded, the two take a paddleboat ride in the lake, pedaling together, talking and laughing. While it seems that Patrick is doing this because he is being paid, the audience has already seen his reluctance to take the money. He may be an ambiguous character at this point, but given the high school romance genre, no one should think he is anything other than a good guy, especially when he is dancing on the bleachers making a fool of himself and serenading her. After the paddle boats, the two characters recreate the violent back and forth of most The Taming of the Shrews by playing paintball at a place called “Paint Balls.” They throw balloons of paint at one another, laughing, joking, and eventually rolling together in a hay bail. The sexual innuendoes starting with “paint balls” and ending with a literal “roll in the hay” are present and entirely innocent. This scene takes the place of the taming scene. Through kindness, fun, and not taking himself seriously, Patrick overcomes Kat's dislike of boys—namely one boy, Joey Donovan, the school heartthrob who thinks too highly of himself. It turns out that Kat was not angry at men on principle, but was actually angry at Joey because she gave in to pressure to have sex with him and then he reacted badly when she refused to continue the physical relationship. The film
gives her very specific motivation for her anger and allows a sensitive man to restore what an insensitive boy took from her.

If the *10 Things I Hate About You* taming scene is a feminine fantasy of what a romantic boy might do in a typical romanticized high school movie plot, then the submission speech is a fantastical apology by the girl for questioning the boy's motives. Kat—supposedly intelligent and academic—writes a terrible “sonnet,” makes herself vulnerable by reading it before the class, breaks down, and runs from the room. Patrick then meets her outside, gives her a guitar he bought with the money he won in the bet, they make up and he stops her mouth with a kiss as is fitting for this *Taming of the Shrew* couple. Kat's voice is, at least temporarily, stopped. She begins the film as an “angry young woman” with ideas and intelligence, but no social life. In the end, she realizes that someone might be willing to accept her ideas and intelligence and allow her to have a social life as well. Patrick allows her to show her true self (Balizet 131) and she is hurt only when she finds out it might not have been real. She then has to make herself “real” and vulnerable through the excruciating poem that makes her truly a typical high school girl. Finally, before she can sabotage her newfound understanding of herself, Patrick silences her by kissing her and she accepts the momentary muting. The closing scene moves from the kiss to a band playing on the rooftop, “I want you to want me/I need you to need me.” It is a high school romance flick and the final message is that the most important thing is to find that person who wants and needs you for who you really are.

This glorifying of the happy couple is the only possible ending to a romantic comedy such as this. Kat will still attend college and play music and maybe even attempt to
change the world, but she will do it more happily because she is part of a couple with someone who wants and needs her just as she is.

The BBC's *Shakespeare Retold* version of *The Taming of the Shrew* follows the original play structure and returns to a more traditional taming. After showing up at the wedding cross-dressed, Petruchio takes Katherine away from the reception, makes her carry her heavy bag, watches while she changes a tire on the car, loses her luggage and mobile phone, refuses to let her borrow clothes, and flattens all the tires on the car. All of these are part of his plan to “tame the bitch.” He continues with depriving her of food and sleep as is usual in the play. He makes his first inroad with her when he seems about to force her to consummate their relationship. She becomes aroused and seems to be willing when he immediately leaves her, telling her that he will not have sex with her until she starts being nice to him. This seems to be the most disturbing moment in this film. There is an undeniable suggestion that sexual violence will provoke a response of desire and is an acceptable method of courtship. It is a difficult moment to overlook in an otherwise light “rom com.”

The next morning, completely broken, Kate admits to Petruchio's friend that she married Petruchio because she loves him. She now has doubts about him, but the friend puts her at ease. She does not play by his rules, but she shows Petruchio that she does care for him and the shrew is no more. It takes the perspective of the friend to allow her to admit she wants to be with this “eccentric aristocrat.” The play then uses the sun/moon and old man/fair maiden speeches as bantering exchanges between Kate and Petruchio—giving a nod to Shakespeare and showing the characters' compatibility. The
film is also careful to show that Kate's political persona has not changed. The scene moves from a convivial discussion between the newlyweds in bed straight into a heated argument in Parliament featuring a hot-tempered Kate who is now leader of the opposition. This makes it clear that Petruchio has not tamed his Kate—that was not even his desire. She is the same bright, passionate, hot-tempered person she ever was, but by broadening her life from merely the work sphere into the domestic as well, the passion becomes positive rather than negative. The single-minded career woman is scary—the happily married career woman is not. This is what makes this version somewhat conservative. It challenges many notions of male/female relationships, allowing Kate to be the politician and certainly make her own choices in her life, but she still needs the humanizing that comes from having a romantic relationship to truly be successful.

The film ends with Bianca's wedding to Lucentio canceled because he would not sign a pre-nuptial agreement and Petruchio's friend engaged to “the widow,” Mrs. Minola. An argument about pre-nuptial agreements ensues and Katherine is asked her opinion. Her answer is her “submission speech.” Both her mother and Bianca claim that the pre-nuptial agreement is the reasonable thing to do in the twenty-first century. While Kate uses some of Shakespeare's language—including placing her hands beneath his feet—the speech becomes one of equality. She would do what he asked of her because she knows he would also do what she asked of him, and, if a pre-nuptial agreement is necessary, the marriage probably should not be. Kate sounds like she is submitting, but the audience is left with the idea that she and Petruchio are simply on a higher plane of compatibility and equality than the other couples. The film also flips traditional gender
roles in the last few minutes of the film by having Katherine reveal that she is pregnant and the couple agree that she will retain her political position while he looks after the children. It is kind of an obvious move to show the enlightened nature of this version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, but it is fun. A montage of photos of the pregnancy, Petruchio caring for triplets, and Katherine in the public sphere follow and fade into the credits.

**Conclusion**

*The Taming of the Shrew* is a farce that employs comic violence to show the seemingly ever funny subduing of a woman by society. *The Taming of the Shrew* on film feeds into the conservative project of continuing the subduing of women by society. Each film reacts to changes in society by re-envisioning this project to fit the relationship rules of its day. By replacing the fiction of Shakespeare's play introduced as a play-within-a-play by the induction with naturalistic set-ups, the films, in fact, make this an even more conservative project than it might have been in Shakespeare's time. The films become less farce and fantastic and more romance and realistic. Not one of the films of *The Taming of the Shrew* is traditionally feminist. While some of the Katherine characters have feminist characteristics, each one ends up needing to be part of a couple to find ultimate fulfillment. This is, of course, inherent in both the nature of the romantic comedy and in the original play. While ostensibly comedies and bearing some comic elements, each film is presented as a realistic version of a romantic comedy courtship. Each film makes the most of its comedy by matching and contrasting the shrew of the title with a sister character who embodies the opposite characteristics, presenting the two stereotypically comic women—the perhaps intelligent shrew and the shallow man-
pleaser. Each film includes a Bianca who is a stereotypical man-crazy, ditzy woman who has assimilated into society as a contrast with the shrew who is outside the group.

Finally, each film seems to give some power to their twentieth and twenty-first century shrews, only to yank it away and show that women continue to desire to fit in to society as part of a heterosexual couple. The humor in these films comes early, in the form of a feisty Katherine who seems to fight Bianca, her father, Petruchio, and society. As the films move to the end, the romantic takes over from the comedy and the conservatism of the films comes to the fore. Katherine no longer fights and the films become sentimental rather than funny. This is shown in each film as the taming sequences progress to a tamed Katherine giving her submission speech. The first film, the Fairbanks/Pickford version, seems like it might be progressive given Pickford's production credit and the idea that both characters mock and wink their way through the film, but, in the end, Katherine learns to act the part of the subdued wife and Mary Pickford learns that she can never be more than America's Sweetheart. In the 1950s version, *Kiss Me Kate*, the Katherine character seems to be a sophisticated woman who is making it on her own, but, in the end, this is not an acceptable choice. Instead, she must choose which man to let claim her—the uber-masculine Texas rancher or the actor ex-husband who is allowed to throw her over his knee and spank her. The conservatism of having to be part of a couple is mitigated by her choice of Fred, the actor, with whom she shares equal status as leading lady to his leading man. She will still be a working woman. The second star-vehicle version, that of Burton/Taylor, works in the tradition of the 1950s and 1960s cult of domesticity as Katharina dons a headscarf and cleans Petruchio's
castle to show that she can be the housewife that is the ultimate feminine role—a role the exotic Taylor seemed to revel in as she allows herself to be domesticated and gives the final speech in all seriousness. The 1980s television version takes the reactionary conservatism of the decade into the film and makes Katherine's independence an illness that needs to be cured by “doctor” Petruchio, though by making the film serious rather than comic, it also shows just how problematic this cure is. The teen version from the 1990s starts with an intelligent, feminist Kat who cannot be happy until she exchanges her anger for vulnerability and tears and allows herself to become a part of her society while maintaining her basic ideals. Finally, even in the twenty-first century, the Shakespeare Retold Katherine needs to be married to be acceptable as a powerful political woman. She has to be “softened” and being married and becoming a mother is what allows her to also aspire to being leader of the party. Her demeanor has not changed, but the way others view her has.

This story whose very title, The Taming of the Shrew, avers that women can be negatively categorized and subdued, that seems as if it would be untellable today because of its inherent violent misogyny is, in fact, told over and over in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While the films continue to show comic violence and somehow include the taming of Katherine and her final submission speech, they also work to mitigate some of the sixteenth century assumptions. Katherine takes a subject position in a way she does not in the original play and the films tell either her story or the story of her and Petruchio. Beginning in the traditional star-vehicle films and especially in the contemporized versions, she is always a twentieth/twenty-first century character—not a
sixteenth century one. However, the films are romantic comedies and they are based on a
sixteenth century play, therefore, they do continue to promote and embrace the social
conservatism that says women want and need to be accepted in society and that
acceptance comes through being part of a heterosexual couple and presenting that image
to the world.
Chapter 3

Fantasy Shakespeare

The Filmmaker’s Dream

It would be difficult to argue that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is anything but a comedy. It is in many ways the comic complement to *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare likely wrote the two plays at about the same time and both center around young, forbidden love; however, where *Romeo and Juliet* ends with a funeral, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ends with a marriage. Obviously, this is a simplification of the two plays.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the young lovers are only one element of a play layered with interweaving comic plots that also include Theseus and Hippolyta's impending nuptials, the rude mechanicals preparing their entertainment for the wedding feast, and Oberon and Titania's fight in the forest. This fairy world of the forest has its own set of rulers, subjects, and amusements, but it also touches the world of the Athenians through the supernatural. It is this supernatural aspect of the play with its fairy world that seems to have caught the attention of twentieth and twenty-first century filmmakers. Along with *The Taming of the Shrew*, it is the most often filmed Shakespearean comedy. The magic of movies meets the magic of Shakespeare, and a fantasy with comic elements is born in contemporary film versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is easy to understand why *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* continues to be made into film, both television and theatrical. As a festive comedy, it has elements—the young lovers' plight, the bumbling stooge-like antics of the mechanicals, the elaborate fantasy with comical in fighting of the fairy world—that appeal to a broad audience. As a fantasy, it must appeal to filmmakers
in a different way than it does to play directors because it provides the opportunity to bring in special effects and take advantage of what films can do that plays cannot. All of the films I will be discussing use the fantasy to showcase what the grandeur of film can do, but also to ground and enhance the themes of the play they choose to emphasize.

There are six major film and television productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Hollywood has made it twice, in the two periods that saw a trend of making Shakespeare's plays, the early days of Hollywood (Reinhardt/Dieterle 1935) and again in the 1990's (Hoffman 1999). The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) has twice filmed versions of their theatrical productions (Hall 1967 and Noble 1996). The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has also made the drama into a television film twice—first as part of the Complete Works project (Moshinsky 1981) and again as one of four films chosen for their *Shakespeare Retold* series (Fraiman 2005). Each of these projects is unique in its mode and style. The Hollywood versions are big, splashy film productions with well-known actors, which try to bring film into the high culture realm of Shakespeare while simultaneously working to make Shakespeare appealing to the masses. The RSC versions have more of a stage quality to them, employ Shakespearean actors, and tend to be high concept films. The BBC versions are television films that attempt to make Shakespeare work with the intimacy of the small screen. Each of these productions brings Shakespeare's fantasy play to life using the magic of film. This chapter will explore how each production uses film techniques to bring to life its vision of this fantasy and how that vision has evolved through seventy years of filmmaking.
Genre and Criticism

When theater companies first performed Shakespeare's plays, the performances took place in daylight with minimal staging and the magic came from the words the actors spoke. The mechanicals describing their Thisbe, wall, and moonshine gives a comic glimpse of what staging of plays was like in the early modern period (V.i.129-37). The fantasy did not need special effects to create it—the actors spoke the words and the world was created. C.L. Barber suggests that in the nineteenth century the fantasy becomes almost detrimental to the experience as theaters try to represent the supernatural in their elaborate staging of the plays. He discusses the way reality shifts in Shakespeare's play and asserts that the fairy world should not be an actual representation and that trying to make the supernatural real in Shakespeare's play leads to a misreading and a missing of the "most important humor" (141). I will argue that twentieth and twenty-first century filmmaking does something similar—it elevates the fantasy elements over the purely comic ones—but that this is not necessarily negative. Fantasy is a genre that works well on film and film is a place where the world of the fairies—the part of A Midsummer Night's Dream that makes it unique in the canon—can become most elaborate and most real. It is what makes the play work as more than just an old fashioned comedy whose humor we do not fully comprehend, and it is why it can be filmed six times and continue to find successful expression on screen. It is the filmmakers' dream Shakespearean comedy because film can make it a fantasy story that uses the supernatural to tie the layers of comedy together.
While *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is certainly a comedy of love, critics dispute the nature of the comedy and the various films do indicate some of these different interpretations. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's first comedies to move beyond farce. It certainly includes some elements of farce, particularly with the mechanicals and some of the love misunderstandings, but the exploration of the nature of power, the interference of the fairy world, and the three levels of the love story in the three plot strands move the play into a new category of comedy. Ruth Nevo suggests that the ideas Shakespeare works out in the first four comedies “culminate in the brilliant achievement of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (17). Harold Bloom considers it Shakespeare's “first undoubted masterwork, without flaw, and one of his dozen or so plays of overwhelming originality and power” (148). While he decries Jan Kott's notions of bestiality and sexual violence as the center of the drama, he does note, “all love is ironical in the *Dream*” (148-49, 153). The interchangeableness of the young lovers, the captive Amazon bride, and the fairies with their past sexual conquests and betrayals work to reveal the ironic elements of the love story. Marjorie Garber discusses this same love story as “a complicated tale about sexual desire” (228). She notes some of the same elements, but puts a darker spin. She observes that Hermia's very resistance to a sexual adventure in the woods is what instigates Puck's confusion, that Titania's attraction to Bottom as an ass should send out signals of danger as well as amusement, and, most importantly, that the reminders of Theseus' past dalliances as well as knowledge of the fate of his and Hippolyta's son puts the play in a “somber light” (228-29). These are issues that complicate, but do not negate, the comedy. While the above critics mention
the pageantry inherent in the play in its historical setting as it honors Queen Elizabeth, it is C.L. Barber who puts the play firmly into the pageant-filled world of the “festive comedies.” He places it in the scope of the May Games, times of madness in the woods, and relates the humor to “superstition, magic, and passionate delusion” (123). According to Barber, the play presents love as “an impersonal force” and the lovers have no will of their own, but are swept along in the games of Puck, the only one who knows “which way goes the game” (129-30). In an even darker vision of the love comedy, the vision Bloom rails against, Jan Kott points out the bestiality that brings together the parallel love stories. He suggests that the “dark sphere of animal love-making,” most literal with Titania and Bottom, also appears in the other plots, noting particularly the masochistic bent of Helena's “spaniel” (225). Kott paints a picture of a dark forest full of the things of witchcraft and sorcery, a forest that is often ignored in favor of a more Arcadian suggestion (226). *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is certainly a comedy with many funny moments from the antics of the lovers in the woods to the bumbling of the mechanicals, but it is hardly a simple comedy. Critics consider the comic love plot as anything from ironic to bestial. It is full of pageantry, but the pageantry must consider the nuances of the stories of infidelities, battles, and the machinations of the supernatural. The films use the fantasy of the play to show these variations of the love stories, though, with the exception of the 1981 BBC production, they tend to focus on the lighter side. They allow the supernatural elements to complicate the story, but remain well within the realm of comedy.
While critics agree that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* somehow fits into the category “comedy,” whether high or festive or even dark comedy, it is not quite as easy to place it into the category “fantasy,” a genre with roots in the past, but undefined until the last century. *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* defines fantasy very simply as “a general description of any literary work whose action takes place in an extravagantly imaginary world, partakes of the supernatural, or generally flouts expectations about what can and cannot happen” (107). While this very general definition covers *A Midsummer Night's Dream* merely by the inclusion of the supernatural world of fairies in the play, there are more nuanced definitions of fantasy as a literary genre that question the inclusion of Shakespeare's play. J.R.R. Tolkien, writer of what are arguably the seminal fantasies of the twentieth century, begins to formulate a definition of fantasy in his essay “On Fairie-stories.” He begins with a simple and general definition: “a ‘fairy-story’ is one that touches on or uses Faërie, whatever its main purpose may be...Faërie itself may perhaps be most nearly translated by Magic” (39). He proceeds to narrow down this broad definition quite a lot by excluding types of stories such as traveler's tales, beast fables, and stories with dream frames as well as any of the visual arts effectively excluding *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (40-44, 95-96). In his often-quoted definition, Tzvetan Todorov asserts that the fantastic is a kind of place of hesitation for the reader between the uncanny—seemingly supernatural events that have natural explanations—and the marvelous—truly supernatural events that ask for no other explanation (41). This is an extremely narrow definition, albeit one that may work for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; however, most of what contemporary critics term fantasy
probably falls into Todorov's idea of the “marvelous,” a more general genre that fits the *Columbia Dictionary* definition for fantasy. As Brian Attebery works toward a definition of fantasy in *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature* he remains close to the previous definitions with the simple statement, “any narrative which includes as a significant part of its make-up some violation of what the author clearly believes to be natural law—that is fantasy” (Attebery, *The Fantasy Tradition* 2). His definition of fantasy matches up with Todorov's definition of the marvelous, the idea that the author does not try to explain the supernatural—in a fantasy, the supernatural is natural (Attebery, *The Fantasy Tradition* 2). Attebery continues his quest for a definition of the fantastic in *Strategies of the Fantastic* in which he distinguishes the fantastic as a mode and fantasy as a genre that evokes “wonder” in its reader (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 16). Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston, on the other hand, assert that “wonder” is welcome but not essential in fantasy (168). They give these requirements: Fantasy must contain supernatural content that has its origins in myths and legends formerly but no longer believed to be true and it cannot be solely allegorical, parodic, absurd, or fright-inducing (167). This latter criterion matches up with Tolkien's; the former is another way of looking at what makes the supernatural, magic, or Faërie world.

By these general and simple definitions, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is clearly a fantasy because it contains the supernatural treated as natural, yet none of these writers includes it as such. Tolkien dismisses all of Shakespeare's texts because they are plays rather than stories and even if it were a story, Tolkien might categorize *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a dream and therefore not fantasy (71). Attebery posits that *A
Midsummer Night's Dream and other Renaissance and Medieval works are not fantasy because they come from a time that did not distinguish the real from the supernatural the same way the modern world does (Attebery, The Fantasy Tradition 14). This fits with the part of Laetz and Johnston's definition that says the audience cannot believe the supernatural in fantasy could actually be true (167). Attebery lumps A Midsummer Night's Dream in with other Medieval and Renaissance works including The Tempest as “romances” (Attebery, The Fantasy Tradition 14). While this may be true of the play written and viewed in the sixteenth century, it does not remain true for films made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These films can and do fulfill the requirements for fantasy as a genre. They include the supernatural and it is well distinguished from the rational world. How much they include the supernatural without questioning it, and so how much they are fantasy or marvelous rather than Todorov's fantastic or Tolkien's dream story or a sixteenth century comedy, depends on the individual film. The special effects of film allow the directors to give precedence to the fantasy aspects of the play—light or dark, dreamed or lived. When these possibilities are realized, the play becomes a different work. In this chapter, I show how becoming a fantasy contemporizes A Midsummer Night’s Dream, bringing Shakespeare into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries utilizing a popular genre to simultaneously give Shakespeare to the masses while adding prestige to the popular forms of film and television.

Film Criticism

Criticism of A Midsummer Night's Dream films tends to consider production factors, adaptation issues, and performances. They mention fantasy in passing, but it is
usually not the first consideration. Perhaps because it is one of the most prominent as well as earliest Shakespearean film adaptations, there is a fair amount written about Reinhardt's 1935 film. Hall and Hoffman also garner attention for their seventies and nineties versions respectively. Noble's film is occasionally discussed, perhaps because it is contemporaneous with Hoffman's. The two BBC versions have received less attention, in part due to their status as television rather than cinematic productions. Additionally, the earlier version is just one part of the whole Shakespeare project and the later one is a relatively recent addition to the collection.

Russell Jackson includes a chapter on the production of the Reinhardt film in his book, *Shakespeare Films in the Making*. Rather than specifically critiquing it in this chapter, Jackson attempts to present a thorough vision of the background, making, and follow-up of the film. He emphasizes the romantic and high culture aspects and refers to the shooting script including scenes missing from the final film, interviews with principals involved, and publicity for and criticism of the film. Jackson presents a more critical examination of the film in his chapter on the comedy films in *Shakespeare and the Moving Image*. In this chapter he asserts that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a natural play for film because it has no need for realism, but instead can walk Todorov's line between “assent and disbelief” (103). He contends that the best parts of the film are the purely fanciful scenes of the fairies and the completely earthy scenes of the mechanicals, and it is the lovers in the middle ground who are problematic (104). Anthony R. Gunaratne uses Jackson's discovery of the shooting script as a starting point to examine the politics of the studio system with the 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He suggests
that the studio probably tempered Reinhardt's darker vision of the film, but that the film
did bring the studio the prestige it desired (42-43). While many believed this would mean
more prestige films for the studio, it actually had the opposite effect. It did not make
money, but it did provide respectability for the medium, allowing the studio to note and
showcase it while moving back to producing solely popular films (44).

While he deals mostly with the 1935 version, Jackson briefly and negatively
contrasts Peter Hall's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the earlier film, assessing its
country house setting and translation from stage to screen as “rough” with a poorly used
location and the fairy world of the woods as “drab, cold, and far from magical” (106-07).
Though he acknowledges the same problems Jackson presents in his chapter, Michael
Mullin defends Peter Hall's interpretation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Mullin admits
that the mix of genres—beginning on stage and then playing in the cinema in Britain and
on television in the USA—makes the filming somewhat problematic, but contends that if
the viewer can move beyond those limitations, it is, in fact, an “extremely interesting
interpretation” (529). Mullin shows the strengths of the film in its emphasis of broad
comedy over romanticism and its careful and intentional characterization from strong
performers as well as the attention the direction gives to the relationships between and
among the characters (530-32). Harold Bloom also defends the production, calling it the
only recent one that is not a “brutal disaster” (148). He would likely not appreciate the
darkness of Elijah Moshinsky's BBC vision. Susan Willis writes briefly about
Moshinsky's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in her text on the Shakespeare project. She
notes that Moshinsky contrasts the staidness of civilization with the frenetic liberty of the
woods and describes the opposition between the beautiful Hermia and the unattractive Helena (152-53). She suggests that this *A Midsummer Night's Dream* belongs to the fairies in an “uncommon balance of the play's possibilities” (154).

Douglas Lanier points out the nostalgia and allusions to the cultural past in the Hoffman and Noble *A Midsummer Night's Dreams* of the 1990s. According to Lanier, the world of people in Hoffman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* clearly populate a heritage film and strictly follows the conventions of that genre while the world of the fairies pushes against those conventions. He suggests that most heritage films seem to be made for a feminine audience and privilege women and homosexual men as their primary viewers, but Hoffman's film aims to “recalibrate heritage film...to a more heteromasculine orientation” (158). In making his assumption, he seems to be privileging Kevin Klein's Bottom through whom this vision is mediated, but that is merely one aspect of the film. Casting openly gay actor Rupert Everett as the king of fairies and showing him lounging in the forest with Puck does not seem like it would appeal to a heteromasculine orientation. With Noble's version, Lanier emphasizes the theatricality of a production that began on the RSC stage. He then points to the problem of high-brow “director's Shakespeare” in the subsidized British companies and suggests that Noble attempts to counteract this by using the nostalgic frame of the child dreaming, a child, Lanier suggests, who stands in for Noble himself as the innocent and naïve director of this Shakespearean play.

All of these critiques engage in questions of producing Shakespeare in the twentieth century and examine aspects of adapting this comedy for stage. They describe
the director's ideas and critique how well each film negotiates the space between play and
film and high and popular culture. They also begin examining the fairy elements and
fantasy effects, the elements I will be examining more thoroughly as each production
uses its fantasy elements to focus the nature of its *Dream*.

The Fantasy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on Film

The six film versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can all be classified as
fantasies, but each one uses the fantasy elements to explore particular themes. The first
use of fantasy is to establish the nature of the film. The particular fantastic setting and the
way the film opens provide an entrée into the particular world of the film and its tone and
atmosphere--from the lightest of comic fantasies to a dark, nightmarish vision of a
supernatural "comedy." The way the films portray Oberon and Titania and their fairy
minions, especially Puck, showcases the light and dark and natural and supernatural
aspects of fantasy they are espousing. The fantastic in the films also has bearing on the
intertwining plots of the story as the films explore the nature of life and love and what
that means for the legends, the young lovers, the mechanicals, and the fairies themselves.
Finally, the play ends with Puck offering an out to the audience, "If we shadows have
offended,/Think but this, and all is mended,/That you have but slumb'red here/While
these visions did appear" (epilogue 1-4), suggesting that the supernatural events of the
play can be interpreted as being merely a dream. Each film picks up on this idea for the
supernatural in its own way, moving from capitalizing on the idea of the whole play as
one boy's dream to playing with the question of how much is real, to ignoring the dream
aspects altogether and firmly placing the action in a world where the fantasy is real. Each
of these aspects raises questions of fantasy and reality, of love and life, of comedy and solemnity that the films try to answer by making fantastic versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The first film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the 1935 Reinhardt and Dieterle Warner Brothers film, establishes an elaborate fantasy scheme that gives the film a legendary fantasy tone, launches a Hollywood prestige picture, and privileges the stories of love while slightly questioning the established power structure. Additionally, because it was first and is so very elaborate, it is the touchstone for later versions whose directors must decide not only how to negotiate Shakespeare's play, but also how to negotiate this original film with its full-scale fantasy. This film begins with classical music and shimmering credits setting the stage for a romantic fantasy film. The plot begins with the legend: Theseus returns triumphantly to Athens with his conquered bride. During this parade, Hippolyta sneers at Theseus while the four young lovers make their feelings known through comical looks and gestures. The film is set in legendary Athens with Theseus the clear ruler and conquering man-god of myth. If fantasy is grounded in mythology, as Laetz and Johnston suggest, then the emphasis on the court of Theseus sets the stage for a fantasy film while the by-play among the lovers shows it will be a comical fantasy. This set-up also provides exposition for the interpretation and themes Reinhardt and Dieterle emphasize. The lengthy classical music that begins the film shows that this film will emphasize the fantasy and romance of the play over the farcical comedy emphasized in the only other full-length film of a Shakespearean comedy at the time, *The Taming of the Shrew* (Taylor 1929). Further, while the fantasy that covers this whole film
from the legendary court to the forest with the fairies is intentional and elaborate, the set-up shows that the plot is basically one of a love story at multiple levels. The brief glimpse of Hippolyta's negative reaction to Theseus suggests that this love story is not a simple one. Even though she does not speak, her feelings come through loudly and clearly and she is not merely a docile vanquished woman who must follow her conqueror to the altar. The audience understands that she is a warrior in her own right and she is not going to just accept Theseus' overtures. The Theseus and Hippolyta love story is a more serious look at power relations in love that will be echoed in the fantasy story of love and power of Titania and Oberon. The lighter love story of the four young people brings in the comic aspects of young love, but it also complicates the notion of love. The amusing scene of the four lovers watching and gesturing to one another while the grand festivities commence shows the way each member works to connect with or antagonize each other member, each one making his or her own way in love, women and men both negotiating this love tangle. The grand legendary court setting also brings to light the power struggle in the young people's love story—not between men and women as with Theseus and Hippolyta and Titania and Oberon—but with the patriarchy in the form of Hermia's father who appeals to the impressive authority of Theseus, Duke of Athens and conquering man-god. The credits and opening scene of the Reinhardt and Dieterle *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, though they do not actually invoke the magic of the fairies, establish the grand fantasy nature of the film with the shimmering credits giving way to the elaborate staging of the legendary Duke of Athens' triumphal return home. They ground the film in myth and show the prestigious, classical story it will be telling, a story of negotiating love
and power with both high romance and lower comedy as the stories play off one another against the exalted setting.

After the Reinhardt and Dieterle 1935 film, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was not filmed again until 1968 when Peter Hall directed a version for British cinema and American television. Filmed on location at an English country estate, this production emphasizes civilized Englishness and comedy while its fantasy elements evoke the natural world and contrast with the civilized mortal realm. It begins with credits rolling over scenes of the misty forest, but quickly turns to the main conceit for the setting, an English country estate called Athens, a location selected specifically for the film. Theseus and Hippolyta are an English gentleman and his eager bride-to-be waiting for the next four days to pass quickly. The film has the feel of a weekend house party with the antics of the young lovers providing the entertainment. By beginning with the misty forest, the fantasy is acknowledged, but by removing the legendary aspects of the love story, the director has chosen to de-emphasize this fantasy and re-emphasize the comedy in the production. The atmosphere is light and the tone is comical, at least as the film opens in the mortal realm.

The darkest of the *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* films is the 1981 Elijah Moshinsky BBC television film. The film opens in a palatial library with the essence of a painting by Rembrandt. A long shot pits Hippolyta and Theseus against one another, standing apart and facing each other down. Theseus crosses the invisible line and tells an unyielding Hippolyta, “I wooed thee with my sword,/And won thy love doing thee injuries./But I will wed thee in another key” (I.1.16-18). This is the legend without the
pomp of the Hollywood spectacle. While the legendary nature of this couple is not specifically contextualized, the idea of a powerful and stately couple with a triumphant man and angry woman comes through clearly. This brief opening, following the play text exactly, sets the tone for a darker vision of this comedy. Hippolyta will not be easily appeased and Theseus will have to labor to truly change the tune from a battle cry to a love song. The stateliness and the simplicity of this opening scene along with the challenge Theseus gives to himself emphasize the larger-than-life nature of these lovers without any glittering fairy hoopla. This palace is a place of business and Theseus removes himself to deal with his public and the less stately sniping and whining of the young lovers and Hermia’s father. It is a painterly set that highlights the business of the realm while introducing the grandness of the story that will become less mundane when it moves from the library to the forest.

A decade and a half after Moshinsky, Adrian Noble's 1996 film for the Royal Shakespeare Company leads into the second set of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* films. Noble begins his vision with a misty night, suggesting the fantastic from the first moments of the film. The camera then moves in through the window to focus on a marvelous child's bedroom filled with large, old-fashioned, imaginative toys like clowns, marionettes, and a puppet stage. The audience sees a boy holding a book while he sleeps. A close-up reveals the book to be *A Midsummer Night's Dream* illustrated by Arthur Rackham. This would seem to privilege the text for the film except that this particular text is known for its illustrations and the cover favors the moderately known illustrator over Shakespeare, thus making even the book visual in this film world. After establishing
the boy’s world, the film enters his dream and shows a doorway and the boy walking into the shot and to the door. The camera follows him as he opens the door and enters a new world, signaled by the dull-yellowish walls from his hallway turning to bright green in the hallway into which he steps. A statue of a faun guards a second door at the end of the new hall. The boy opens this green door to reveal a red hallway and another door and as he open this door Shakespeare’s plot begins. This is not an epic fantasy, but a surreal, dreamy one. This is not the story of myth and legend, but a story of discovery as the boy enters the world of the dream and begins to understand his own nature through the characters and situations he dreams and encounters. By invoking well-known children’s book illustrator Rackham with his fanciful drawings, Noble places the piece within the world of fantasy for children, yet he complicates that by giving the boy a series of doors and passages through which he must pass as he moves from his childish realm into the grown-up world he moves into in his dreams.

Hollywood’s second foray into *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Hoffman 1999) subtly invokes the 1935 film as the title sequence begins with a night sky over mountains and bushes. It also suggests that the fantasy elements will be brought to the fore in the film as tiny bits-of-light fairies dance over a night sky and illuminate the film title in bits and pieces. Once the day has dawned, the very human wedding feast preparations commence with a multitude of servants preparing grounds and food as the credits roll. There is, however, one more bit of fairy. Two little people in the midst of the bustling kitchen seem to be stealing silver and a victrola while fairy lights dance around them. This is fantasy Shakespeare and does mix the fantasy with the mortal world, but it does
not sustain the fantasy the way the earlier Hollywood film did. The film also undermines the fantasy by its nineteenth century setting and the portrayal of Theseus and Hippolyta as Victorian types, the coy woman and dashing man. These are not the larger-than-life characters who add a fantasy element to the real-world part of the film. At this point, the fantasy is hovering in the background, but the film itself seems to be trying to give a more realistic picture of a bustling nineteenth century estate in “heritage film” mode (Lanier 156). By invoking, but downplaying, the fantasy elements, this film separates itself from its Hollywood predecessor and opens up one of its themes—the tension between the fantasy of the night and the forest and the industry of the day and the estate.

The BBC's second attempt at *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a romp. It returns to the full fantasy version of the 1935 Hollywood picture, but in a lower key befitting television. This modern retelling of the story is not an epic fantasy so much as it is a playful fantasy. The fairies rule from beginning to end. As credits roll, the camera shoots up from the ground to show light gleaming through a forest reaching to the sky. This tracks down to a front view of a sparse forest and an argument commences as “Love Potion #9” plays in the background. After panning a full 360 degrees, the camera shoots upward again and lands on Puck sitting in the tree branches watching what is going on below as Oberon and Titania argue in the background. Puck narrates for the audience, introducing the king and queen of fairies and explaining that this is “Dreampark” and the fairies are present to help straighten out love problems, including those of Theo and Polly and their daughter and her friends. As he walks through the woods and out of the scene, Puck casually touches a hanging purple blossom and it turns yellow. Then he leaves and
the medium shot of the tree shows all the blossoms turning yellow. Casual magic abounds from this Puck. The supernatural takes over in this version. The setting, while not the mythological Greece of the play—and in fact leaving out the legendary Theseus and Hippolyta—is nevertheless a fantastic setting. The whole set, not just the woods, is the place of the fairies and the place of magic. From the moment the mortals enter the play, unbeknownst to them, they are already part of the fantasy world. In an unusual move, Oberon, Titania, and Puck open the play and acknowledge that they will be manipulating the events to come. The love potion is present from the beginning and everything that happens, whether it seems natural or supernatural, stems from the fairies' machinations. They may be benevolent, restoring couples to love, but they are ever present and ever magical. From the opening scene, the fantasy in this version permeates reality. The film uses the fantasy as a way to not just make *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* relevant to a twenty-first century audience, but to actually move it into the twenty-first century. The domestic comedy plays out, but it does so within this magical space.

The opening moments of the films of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, even though most of them are set in the mortal realm, set the tone for the film, create an atmosphere, and intimate what kind of fantasy the work is exploring. This fantasy is then followed-up through the characters, particularly characterizations of the three major fairy parts, Oberon, Titania, and Puck. Act two of the play opens with Puck and another fairy discussing Oberon and Titania’s dispute over the changeling. In the 1935 version, 14-year-old Mickey Rooney plays Puck as a “knaveish sprite” (II.i.34). He is mischievous and animalistic, Oberon’s harsh and screechy servant juxtaposed against the lightly
dancing bright and airy fairies who serve Titania. He is earthy and coarse where they are otherworldly and refined. Played by Mickey Rooney, he is part of the Hollywood appeal of the film, while the other fairies are part of the classical appeal. This Puck takes delight in his mischief. He is a boy playing a boy, clearly enjoying the havoc he wreaks even as Oberon both sends him out to do so and then works to rein him in. He will never fully be reined in. There is just a bit of wildness in this very classical production, and Puck brings much of it.

The only other young Puck appears in the darker BBC film. The character of Puck embodies Moshinsky’s vision of the supernatural. Played by an early-twenties Phil Daniels, Puck is a fast-talking, black-coiffed and made-up, pointy-teethed punk. According to Susan Willis, Moshinsky claims to have wanted a Puck less “sweet” and “impish” and more “A Clockwork Orange” (Kubrick 1971) (153). It is an apt description for this character, the “shrewd and knavish sprite” introduced through his monologue of mischief. He could be in A Clockwork Orange at this point, the young punk gleefully reciting his litany of misdeeds against a fully dark background, but using the fairy who alighted on his back as a prop, holding him upside down and gesturing with him. This Puck is more than just mischievous; he is mean. This is a dark wood, and Puck is its dark spirit. In a nearly opposite characterization, Puck in the BBC Shakespeare Retold series is somewhat Christ-like. This benevolent fairy with requisite brown hair and beard and gentle cadence calls himself and the fairies “spiritual relate[s]” (Fraiman). He opens the film, narrates it, and has power in the form of the love juice in his hand. He also seems to be able to share glimpses of the future whenever he lets fall a drop of the liquid. Just as
the devilish sprite embodies a dark vision, this Christ-like Puck embodies the lightness of this film. He may have mischievous moments, but everything he does is meant to forward his call to straighten out mortals’ love problems.

The other three Pucks seem similar to one another. Middle-aged men play them as Oberon’s lackeys. The original RSC version has a pointy-eared, green-skinned Puck who makes faces as he playfully interacts with Titania’s fairy. This is the most comical of the films, and this Puck is the most good-natured and playful sprite. The 1996 RSC version doubles the fairies with Theseus, Hippolyta, and Philostrate, thus Theseus’ master of revels sent to stir up the Athenian youth is also Oberon’s servant who is doing some of that stirring up. This connects the two stories and adds to the dream atmosphere. When we first meet the character as Puck, he swings slowly down from above on an umbrella and languidly explicates the situation between Oberon and Titania. This Puck is at his leisure as he controls the magic and entertains the observing boy. This A Midsummer Night’s Dream continues to invoke classic children’s fantasies with an allusion to Mary Poppins as Puck enters by umbrella. Puck as nanny may be a reach, but the child is still working to integrate the grown-up story of the lovers with the childish fantasies he knows. Finally, Stanley Tucci in the 1999 Hollywood film is a faun who is part ribald mischief-maker who observes the other fairies and mortals and toys with them and part Oberon’s buddy who lounges and chats with him. He is the Puck who is most intrigued by the mortals and their contraptions as he moves from riding a tortoise to riding a bicycle in the first instance of the takeover of the supernatural world by technology, a theme of this film.
Puck introduces the fairy element into the film, but the rest of the fairies and how they interact with the mortal realm also shows the purpose to which the fantasy is being put. In the first version, this is all extremely elaborate. The lengthy dance, the music, the shimmering lights, the costumes, the mists, the sheer number of fairies, gnomes, and unicorns, and the magical entrances, exits, and movements all aid in making fantasy the substance of this film. By choosing to emphasize the fairy elements with the classical music and balletic dances, Reinhardt is able to bring high culture forms to his film to fulfill Warner Brothers' purpose in making this a prestige film. The time and money allotted to these elements even as the film goes over time and over budget, shows how important they are to the vision of the film and the purpose behind it (Jackson, *Shakespeare Films in the Making: Vision, Production, and Reception* 67). Shakespeare may be prestigious anyway, but fantasy Shakespeare with classical arts is that much more so.

In addition to providing classical high culture elements to the film, the fairies add a layer to the themes of power and love. Oberon is clearly a powerful figure, sitting astride a horse and wearing a tall, brambly crown and shimmering black cape. He is angry and speaks sternly to Titania. Titania contrasts this in every way. She is light and airy and glittery and from her lower vantage point, she counters Oberon’s anger with mirth. He looks like he should have the power in this supernatural love match, but his power is completely negated by her refusal to play. Then Oberon turns to scheming to beat Titania, but it is clear he needs underhanded help to win. By sheer personality, she clearly has the advantage. After this argument, the natural and supernatural worlds
commingle in this production as the fairies observe and meddle with the mortals while continuing to engage in fairy dances, pantomimes, and processions. Oberon listens in on and tries to aid Helena, even as Puck is mischievously averting his attempts and delighting in the chaos he creates. Magic abounds in this forest for Titania who turns to the transformed Bottom and brings him into her fairy bower through a processional of fairies with Mendelssohn's wedding march playing in the background while the changeling boy is left alone and heartbroken to be scooped up by Oberon. In the end, Oberon becomes the benevolent winner as he sets all matters right, but Titania, while chagrined at having fallen for Bottom the ass, is hardly cowed. She once again takes the higher way by making it into a great joke on herself. As the two fly away together, there is a mutual triumph in having found a way to come together in love and leave the mortals to remember the night as a dream. It is a night transformed by magic shown through classical forms. It is innocent with light and music, a shimmery night in which anything untoward stays behind the mist and the dancing figures and all is well in the morning.

In the early RSC version, the fairies are part of the natural world surrounding the estate. They have green skin and wear few clothes. As Titania and Oberon spar, they appear and reappear in different parts of the forest, emphasizing themselves as beings of the forest and their power and argument as having an effect on the natural world. They are a part of the natural magic of the world and one believes that their words make a difference to the natural order of the moon and the seasons. The moments that their argument is back-and-forth, they are filmed in shot-reverse shot close-ups, emphasizing the importance of their words. When one is describing and explicating, the set behind that
one becomes important as the fairy blends into the forest world. The mortals in this fairy world clearly stand out as not belonging. They are awkward and grimy and the emphasis on comedy continues through the interactions of the fairies with these interlopers and of the mortals with one another as everything goes wrong for them in the woods. When Puck gives Bottom an ass's head, it is just that, a costume style donkey face and ears with his own hair. The scene concentrates on Titania's mistaking Bottom's vulgar, donkey-like voice and visage for something beautiful and shows her magic as she disappears and reappears in front of him to keep him in the wood. The juxtaposition between the over-large, loud beast and the delicate fairies as well as Titania's obvious delight in Bottom makes the scene comical rather than fantastic, even though the man has turned into an ass. The fantasy of this film blends its comic nature with the idea that the fairies are an intrinsic part of the natural world in a way the civilized mortals never will be.

The first BBC version, working with a more natural than supernatural fairy world, takes an almost opposite approach to the RSC film. Titania, embodied by Helen Mirren, stands tall and stately with her long blonde hair and a flowing white low-cut gown that draws attention to her. Oberon does not enter, but the camera turns and shows him like a statue mounted upon his steed, his long hair flowing and eyes flashing as he exclaims angrily, “Ill-met by moonlight proud Titania” (II.i.60). Titania holds the changeling child protectively as the caustic and chilling argument ensues between the two. The fairy king and queen are fighting and their words are spiteful. While it is often played in a lighter fantasy mode, the words the characters speak support the darker interpretation and the darker interpretation supports Moshinsky's dark fantasy. Titania describes a world that is
in the midst of ominous seasonal changes and Oberon threatens her outright. This is not a light romp in the woods, but a forbidding fantasy of a people who are truly unhuman. The fantasy continues in the night with a fang-baring Puck delighting in spitefully messing with the young mortal lovers, with poor Bottom as he drags him by his feet, threatening him, and with Titania as he pushes her into the arms of this ass. This is the version that degrades Helena most, making her into the “spaniel” she references and that emphasizes the monstrous nature of Titania's infatuation with Bottom, the ass. It is the film that follows the darkest interpretations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and does so through these dark moments of fantasy in the wood.

The later RSC film continues its fantasy with another classic children’s fantasy film reference. Titania floats onto the scene in a bubble, much like Glinda the Good in *The Wizard of Oz*. Much later, when Titania has found Bottom in her red umbrella bower and he has taken her for a ride on his motorcycle, they land among the fairies and the film again invokes *The Wizard of Oz* as fairies look like the Cowardly Lion, the Scarecrow, and the Wizard. The film also references the more contemporary classic children's fantasy film, *E.T.*, when the mechanicals meet again and Peter Quince riding a bicycle with a basket is silhouetted against the moon. These iconic references remind the viewer that this is a small boy’s dream. He is envisioning it, at least in part, based on other fantasies he has seen. It also places this story in relationship to these other stories, these coming-of-age films, but also films that are about finding family, home, security, and friends. He seems to be trying to find these things as he watches and encourages the grown-ups playing around him; however, he is not merely an observer. As Oberon seems
to manipulate the lovers in the woods, a camera shot from above shows the boy hovering over the puppet stage, seeming to manipulate Puck and Oberon as if they were marionettes. The boy is working Oberon and Puck to help Helena, the grown-up in whom he has taken an interest. The fantasy shows manipulation on several levels. Oberon uses personal magic, manipulating the actions of the lovers with actions such as becoming a snarling beast before Demetrius, comforting Helena, and floating Hermia away while giving her dreams of a serpent. This is much more personally active than Oberon often is. The film also makes clear just how much Puck is manipulating the lovers and his part in Titania’s mortification. The bright fantasy forest of the dream with doors on the stage for the lovers to run in and out of becomes a true stage within the film and the dream as the boy manipulates from above and the characters manipulate from within.

The 1999 Hollywood film returns to a more traditional version of Oberon and Titania and their fairy world. Oberon, glittering and wearing a headpiece of horns, causes rocks to shatter and fires to start in an attempt to hamper Titania's cortege. Titania's procession halts before Oberon and opens to show the glittery gossamer fairy. The king and queen argue about the upcoming nuptials of Theseus and Hippolyta—returning those nuptials to their legendary origins—and the changeling child. After Titania's final denial to Oberon, she, the child, and her fairies fade out and become the twinkling, dancing lights the audience saw earlier. These scenes contrast Titania's entourage with Oberon's and show the kind of fantasy in which this film engages. Oberon's folk are of the earth while Titania's are ethereal. Oberon's assemblage is a kind of version of the mortal world stripped of the veneer of civilization. The fantasy comes from them being fantastic.
creatures with wings, horns, and/or tails living roughly in the woods. They are not specifically performing magic, but they are fantastic creatures. Titania's fairies, conversely, are the magical people of the air. They magically shift from the almost religious aspect of women cloaked in white to the lights twinkling in the air. While they may not look like fantastic beings when in their human garb, it is Titania's fairies who seem to carry magic intrinsically within them. These groups provide contrasting elements of fantasy, elements of earth and air, and work to make the film a fantasy film—at least in the forest—peopled with fantastic bestial creatures and unearthly fairies. The fantasy does begin to fray as the film moves on and the fairies begin to use mechanical contraptions as well as magic. Titania brings Bottom—a dandy who believes he has been transformed by top hat and walking stick into a gentleman but who has truly become an ass—into her bower by a pulley, which works and then fails. Bottom delights the fairies with the magic of technology when he teaches them how to use the phonograph. By the end, the magic is slowly being replaced by technology, symbolized by the bicycle and the phonograph as the fairies learn to use these items. This is a fantastic world that is on the verge of the industrial revolution. The nineteenth century setting and the ubiquitous bicycle show that, while the fairies have prevailed this day in righting the wrongs of the lovers—and leaving them naked to clean up their issues—that fantasy may not last. What was preeminent in the 1935 film as a way to show off technology is overshadowed in the 1999 version by that very concept of technology.

The final film, the BBC Retold version, continues as a thorough, light fantasy. Oberon tries to talk to Theo about love and along the way explains that climate change
has nothing to do with global warming and everything to do with his fighting with Titania. The fairies pervade this world so thoroughly, they are to blame for upset in the very fabric of the universe. The fairies also seem to be the only characters to ever employ Shakespeare's original lines, signifying that there is a kind of magic in the old verse. Oberon and Puck wind in and out of the scenes through the night in the woods. They also use specific magic when they give the lovers the potion. Rather than just using misdirection with mist and thrown voices, Oberon stops time and Puck physically moves the young people to cause mischief and make the confusion worse. Later, Oberon comforts Hermia and helps her to sleep in preparation for the final restoration of the couples and Puck moves the couples again to put things right. They are fully manipulating the mortals with their magic. This is their purpose and they will do whatever they is needed to fulfill their roles as love-bringers. When Titania falls in love with this Bottom, the other fairies appear for the first time to prepare the bower while a tiny Puck nestles in a tree watching them. When they later present the bower, it is a true fantasy scene. It begins by acknowledging the Greek origins as men in mail and skirts stand sentry, a woman walks through the twinkle-light lit cave with a tower of luxury chocolates, and a luxurious mix of glistening decorations and lush nature makes up the bower itself. This is fantasy opulence set in the forest. It is probably the moment most reminiscent of the more traditional versions of the play as Titania woos Bottom and the fairies serve them. While the fairy scenes play back and forth between traditional and contemporary ideas, all of them emphasize the fantasy inherent in the set-up of the piece. The fairies are running the show in Dreampark as they attempt to solve the mortals’ love
problems while their own love games rip at the world. They are benevolent, yet they have much to learn as their actions must be done and redone before everything is finally settled. They may be the spiritual guides, but they are also the mischief-makers and the two aspects must be reconciled through Oberon and Titania before they can truly help anyone else. It is whimsical fantasy, but there is a heaviness to the whimsy when the fairy king and queen have the very issues they are helping to solve in the mortals with further reaching consequences.

The openings of the *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* establish the atmosphere and nature of the films that come. The portrayal of Puck opens the fantasy portion of the play and seems to set the tone for that fantasy. The other fairies and their interactions with the mortals expand on the films’ themes as they explore the fantasy of the films. Finally, the films end with a final moment that speaks to the fantastic nature of the films and the purposes the fantasy has been serving in the films, that is, the blessing of the house and Puck’s epilogue.

As it has with the fantasy throughout, the 1935 film makes the most of the play's final scene, the fairies' blessing of the house. As the mortals make a grand exit showcasing each happy couple, all the fairies, led by the reconciled Oberon and Titania, dance together in the house with the shimmering lens effect suggesting the magic of the scene. Theseus, with a conciliated Hippolyta at his side, gives a final speech bidding everyone to go to the fairy hour of the night and Puck performs his epilogue, his clear face surrounded by shimmering light. When he finishes, he bows, closes a door, and the shimmering light covers the screen, ending with the film's signifier of fantasy. Puck’s
epilogue can provide a way out of fantasy for this play, with the idea that the supernatural world is all part of the “Dream” of the title; however, this film does not really take that route. Puck gives the speech, but it is a conditional speech—“If we shadows have offended” you may believe this to be a dream, but the shimmering lights remaining even as Puck vanishes show that it is not really a dream. This is a fantasy film from the invoking of the mythological back-story at the beginning through to the shimmering lights at the end. Hollywood's first really big Shakespearean production uses the magic of film effects and the possibilities of film grandeur to make an elaborate fantasy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The fantasy allows for the long running time, the extended dance sequences, and the use of classical music that make for a prestige piece that a mere comedy would not have been. It also allows the filmmakers to use effects that show how a film version can move beyond the theater and how film can become a home for Shakespeare's plays in ways unique to the medium. Where the fantasy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may have come from the words of the text in Shakespeare's day and from an overly elaborate but jarringly unrealistic set in nineteenth century theater, it is the natural mode of the filmmaker who gets to create his world. While the fantasy worked for the kind of film Reinhardt and Dieterle had been commissioned to make, it also worked for the story they were telling. By the end, all the couples are together, but it is a thoughtful intimacy that uses humor—much as Titania has throughout—to diffuse the power structure. Theseus responds merrily to the blustering Egeus, the young women good-naturedly let the young men make serious pronouncements, and Theseus tries to laugh off the magic of the night. It is Hippolyta who gives the final serious note to the
film as she thoughtfully suggests there may be something in the lovers' story. She has begun and she ends the play as the match—and maybe even the better—of Theseus, the Amazon warrior who chooses to be won by the demi-god Duke.

The 1999 film has tried to move itself away from the pure epic fantasy of the earlier Hollywood vision, but it still leaves the end slightly more reality than dream. By the end, the film has presented the idea that the magic is fading from the world as technology enters it. With the fairies' embrace of technology, their part ends and the film continues in its Victorian reality until Oberon's blessing of the house, which brings back the twinkling-light fairies to bless each couple. The two young couples look up from their marriage beds as if they finally see the fairies, but Theseus and Hippolyta ignore them or remain oblivious as they dance joyfully together in their room. Puck, of course, has the last word. He appears in the courtyard as a sweep, his horns covered with his hat as he gives his epilogue. He does, in the middle of it, lift his hat, forcing the audience to see his fantastic self and belying the notion that the supernatural elements were actually a dream. The film ends with Bottom fingering the gold, leafy ring with which he awoke and watching the fairy lights disperse, suggesting that even he knows it has been somewhat more than just a dream. Then Puck gives him an apologetic look and finishes the epilogue: “So, good night unto you all./Give me your hands, if we be friends,/And Robin shall restore amends” (Epilogue 14-16). The film has it both ways. The reign of the fairies may be ending, but they were there and there is still magic to be had. The mortals may slowly forget what transpired, remembering it as a dream, and the fairies may fade out of the consciousness of the people altogether as they did when the modern world
closed in after the industrial revolution and technology became like magic, but they were there, once upon a time, in the forest of the night.

Finally, The 1968 RSC film ends, as is its wont, with the full comic spectacle of the mechanicals' play and then the fairies' blessing and Puck's epilogue. This is the most supernatural this film gets as the fairies pop in and out and appear and disappear through the house, playing as mischievous sprites and then, led by Oberon and Titania, earnestly taking lighted tapers through the house while singing their blessing. A serious Oberon blesses the couples, throws glittering fairy dust about, and sends forth his fairies. The final moment returns to the beginning, the estate outside the house, where Puck appears and disappears. He speeds through the epilogue, circling the house, tracked by the camera as he does so. He seems to be trying to get through it as quickly as possible, almost as if the fairies need to leave the house quickly so the mortals can get on with their dreams. In this film, the fairies are of the natural world, yet they seem to take great delight in their brief final moments in the manor. They do not make themselves known to the mortals; they remain the spirits of the forest, and they take their duty to bless the house seriously, but they also continue the playfulness of the production with their delight in the things of civilization. It is Puck who seems to understand that they need to finish and disappear once more into the forest, leaving the manor mundane once more in the early light of dawn.

In the 1996 RSC version, the ending is extended and the dream nature celebrated as the boy seems to find what he has been looking for. Oberon releases Titania from her spell and everyone unites in the theater where the boy is an often seen part of the
audience. The Pyramus and Thisbe play set is the puppet stage from the boy's room. When the play is over, Hippolyta congratulates Bottom with a familiarity that reminds the audience that she may or may not be Titania. As the clock strikes midnight, lights go off and Puck gives an ominous, chilling version of his “Now the hungry lion roars./And the wolf behowls the moon” speech to a theater empty except for the boy watching from the balcony. The boy joins him on stage and Puck opens a door to backstage where we see the fairies standing on the lake singing their blessing. Puck, suddenly gentle again, takes the boy's hand and walks him through the mist and light bulbs toward the fairies. Oberon picks up the boy and hands him to Titania, giving him the part of the thus-far-unseen changeling child. Oberon then gathers water in his hands, consecrates it, and gives it to the fairies as he speaks his blessing. Finally, the fairies stand still in the background while Puck gives the final “If we shadows” epilogue, taking the boy's hand again at the “Give me your hands” (Epilogue 15) line and leading him back onto stage where all the characters dance together, lifting him above the crowd and holding him in the air until he finds himself being set down with Oberon and Titania in front of the group gathered for a curtain call of sorts. This ending clearly emphasizes the dream nature of this production. The way the scene skips around, characters become part of the play, but also fulfill their roles, and the quick tonal changes follow the nature of a dream. In the end, it seems the boy is ready to be a boy still. The scenes with the lovers in the forest, his sympathy for Helena, and his exploration of the love plot have given way to himself as the changeling child, the boy who wants to find home and family. Just as the characters did in the fantasies the film has referenced, *Mary Poppins*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *E.T.*, the boy has
found his home with his parental figures, though in this case they are the dream figures of Oberon and Titania. He is not ready to grow up. He will continue, for a bit, to be the boy in the dream.

After a highly sensual scene with Oberon and Titania's reconciliation and a sumptuous scene back inside the palace with Theseus and Hippolyta and the young lovers, the 1981 BBC film ends dark and frantic. While music with an insistent beat plays in the background, Puck stands on the table and sweeps with a vengeance as he incites the fairies with his lion and wolf speech. Oberon carries on in the same tone as he bids them light the house. It is only after Titania calls for a blessing of the place that Oberon grows gentler and sends the young fairies out with a real blessing. The fairies disperse and the camera moves to Puck lounging in a chair and suddenly “If we shadows have offended” takes on real meaning. He has offended. While everything came out okay, it was through no fault of Puck. He has taunted, tempted, teased, and tortured his way through the film. He now grins his fanged grin and dismisses it all as a dream, ingenuously promising to make amends, and saying the final goodnight to the audience. This is a nightmare vision of the dream and it does not let itself off the hook at the end. It is sexual and sensual and the world is still somehow not quite right. Oberon and his fairies may bless this house with marital bliss and perfect children, but imperfection lurks outside. It seems that the fairies work to make things right, but the gleam in Puck's eye is too insistent to believe. This Puck is not done. He may lounge for a moment and say goodnight, but there is something more in his eyes. He ends the epilogue with the
goodnight without making the overture of friendship. This Robin does not ask to take our hands and he shall not quite “restore amends” (epilogue 16).

While all the versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* end with the fairies' blessing and Puck's epilogue, the 2005 contemporary version adds one more bit of magic re-emphasizing the magical nature of the play that Puck established at the beginning. Hermia and Demetrius' abandoned engagement party becomes a renewal of vows for Theo and Polly and the security guards are set to entertain the guests. The fairies help these mechanicals with their performances so that they are not merely so bad that they are funny, but the audience believes they are actually good. The illusionist becomes a real magician and Bottom's painful comedy act becomes funny. This a true act of kindness by these benevolent fairies. Finally, as the film ends, Puck returns to his spot in the tree and addresses the audience, “If you did get offended, the best thing, the third and final nugget from the bank of Puck: Pretend it were a dream.” There is no actual dream here, merely the offer of one if the audience needs the out. This has not been a lie or a dream, but a fanciful venture into the world of the fairies and their lovely Dreampark. This is a light romantic comedy. Love ends the day and love conquers all. Even Titania and Oberon settle their differences and Oberon shows his true nobility by his kindness to the mechanicals. The world can once again be at peace, the climate can return to normal, and the people can enjoy their true love in this gentle fantasy.

**Conclusion**

The films of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* explore every kind of fantasy and interpretation possible for the text. All of these films include the mad night in the forest,
but the appeal of the fantasy takes precedence in most cases over the questionable nature of the love story. The earliest version interrogates somewhat the structure of power in the love stories, but allows them to end happily. It is an epic fantasy that uses film effects to showcase film possibilities with the dancing fairies taking precedence over the love story. The early BBC version brings a darker cast to the love stories, bringing out their bestial nature and ending with an unsettling Puck leaving one wondering how happy the ending really is. It is a dark film that brings out the underside of fantasy as an unrepentant Puck shows how his supernatural power can be abused. The first RSC version plays up the comical parts of the love stories, emphasizing the battle-of-the-sexes moments and using the fantasy to enhance that. It downplays the fairies as they blend in to nature and work behind the scenes until they disappear altogether. The second RSC film shows the love story from the perspective of the boy who is learning about love for the first time. It is tentative and sympathetic toward the lovers, but in the end the emphasis is on the fairies. The lovers are interchangeable and bland and eventually fade out while the fairies stand out with their bright colors as they fulfill the boy's dreams of home and family and remain with him in the end. In the 1999 Hollywood film, the love story is overshadowed by Bottom's story. It allows him to bring to the fairies the magic of technology as the film shows just how technology will become the magic of a new century. Bottom delights the fairies as much as they delight him, and he is left with the ring as an emblem of the night and with his dignity intact, but with wistfulness at the loss of the fairy world. The contemporary BBC film updates the love stories into almost contemporary clichés. Theo, the businessman, must be reminded of his romantic side. The young lovers choose
passion over prospects and then get both. It is the lightest of fantasies with Puck as a
Christ figure who uses his magic to make sure everything ends in harmony. Each film
brings forth a different idea of love, of fantasy, of what the dream can be, but each one
does it through Shakespeare's story within the specific nature of film. The possibilities of
film allow all of it—the fanciful and fantastic, the dark and the bright, the epic and the
comic—to shine with movie magic.
Chapter Four

One Century's Comedy Is Another Century's Drama

The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest on Film

Every time a filmmaker turns to Shakespeare as a source there are issues to consider and updating to do—even if the film attempts to recreate Shakespeare's time period. This becomes particularly apparent with two of Shakespeare's comedies: The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest, both of which have, in twentieth and twenty-first century film, shifted in genre from comedy to drama. As with many of Shakespeare's comedies, these plays have dramatic situations at their core. In The Merchant of Venice, Shylock takes his opportunity to either make money or get his revenge on his perceived enemy, Antonio. Once vengeance is in his sights, he cannot shake that desire. In The Tempest, Prospero wrecks a ship to claim his opportunity for revenge. It is never certain he will relent until he actually does. While in both cases tragedy is averted, both of these plays contain themes and tropes of revenge tragedies within them. In this sense, they have never been broad or farcical comedies such as The Comedy of Errors or The Taming of the Shrew. Nevertheless, both plays are categorized as comedies and contain comedic themes, plots, and characters. The Merchant of Venice is about how the “good” Christians get the better of the villainous Jew, both in the main plot and in the subplots concerning Jessica, Shylock's daughter, and Launcelot Gobbo, his servant. The Tempest is a love story for Ferdinand and Miranda while Stefano, Trinculo, and Caliban provide an amusing subplot paralleling the power struggle that makes up the main plot. Both these
comic and dramatic threads run through the plays and what a production chooses to emphasize can alter its generic nature.

Filmmakers have capitalized on the dramatic situations and downplayed the comedic emphases that may have been present on the early modern stage. The paths the plays have taken from comedy to drama seem as if they would be similar given some of the critical issues of the plays, but, in fact, are quite divergent. The looming issue with *The Merchant of Venice* is the antagonist, Shylock. One cannot have a comic, villainous, stereotypical Jew as the adversary. What has been problematic since the nineteenth century, has, as it is written, become impossible since the Holocaust; Shylock cannot be played as the text portrays him. Changing the nature of Shylock also changes the nature of the characters surrounding him, thus changing the essence of the whole play. What once may have been comical becomes thoughtful and dramatic—not necessarily a tragedy, but certainly a tragicomedy or historical drama. *The Tempest* has a corollary issue with the portrayal of Caliban, Prospero's slave. In a post-colonial world, criticism has been harsh on Prospero for enslaving the island native and considering him merely a monster. In spite of the academic criticism and various attempts on stage to bring this issue to the forefront, films of *The Tempest* do not seem to be as concerned with Caliban as films of *The Merchant of Venice* are with Shylock. Directors seem apprehensive to touch *The Merchant of Venice*, but they have a bit of a love affair with *The Tempest*. The path *The Tempest* has taken to becoming a drama is not as much because of the character, but through its directors. Film directors seem to glory in the idea of Prospero as a serious, obsessed man, bent on revenge and manipulating the action of the play. This
characterization of Prospero lends itself to making dramatic versions of the play, dramas averted only at the last moment from becoming tragedies. This is a director's film, and the directors are making serious pieces with emphasis on the psyche and big ideas of art and language and life. Thus both The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest become very different pieces on film than they are on the page and have been on stage. Though the reasons behind the shifts are different, both comedies have become contemporary dramas.

**Saving Shakespeare from Himself: The Merchant of Venice**

*The Merchant of Venice* is one of the middle group of Shakespeare's comedies, sometimes referred to as the festive comedies. It is at its center a fairy tale with the poor young man who must earn the love of the rich young woman by completing the task left by her late father. This is complicated in the play by the poor young man, Bassanio, borrowing money from his rich friend, Antonio. This merchant's money is tied up in merchandise and thus he borrows ready money from the villain of the piece, the Jewish moneylender, Shylock. This is complicated even more in the twenty-first century by three issues: the Jewish villain, the racism inherent in the scenes with Portia's suitors, and the nature of Antonio's love for Bassanio. The first of these is the looming issue, but the other two must also be considered in a twenty-first century production.

In the play, Shylock, the moneylender, is a comic villain, a Jew based on no actual Jew—Edward I had expelled all Jews from England in the thirteenth century—who has somehow influenced the representation of Jews in literature ever since his inception (Bloom 174). This character, as Shakespeare wrote him, cannot exist in a post-Holocaust American or British production. Shakespeare is too influential and too revered for such a
character written by him to exist as merely anything—comical or villainous. The audience takes Shakespeare too seriously to brush off this character and characterization. Those producing a version of the text must make some justification for Shylock or give him some sort of pathos, making him neither too villainous nor too comical. He must somehow become a sympathetic character in his own right, even as he continues as the antagonist of the piece.

Another problem in a contemporary version of *The Merchant of Venice* is the issue of Portia's suitors. The very nature of Portia's situation in which she continues under the control of her late father through the casket choice seems as if it would be problem enough, but the contemporary audience seems to be more forgiving of patriarchy than it is of other issues. The problem is the suitors, each of whom represents a different ethnicity, and each of whom Portia summarily dismisses by noting a caricature of that ethnicity. This seems to be written as a funny scene based on amusing stereotypes, but one asks whether it continues to be funny in the twenty-first century and what it says about Portia to have her dismiss these men based solely on their background. A production must decide how Portia will respond to the unseen suitors as well as how to portray the two foreign suitors the audience actually sees, Morocco and Aragon.

Finally, there is the ambiguous sexuality of melancholy Antonio, the title character, the merchant of Venice. A twenty-first century production should consider Antonio and Bassanio's relationship. There is no question that the men love one another. The question becomes whether this is a mentor and mentee type love, a passionate friendship, or an erotic love. If there is an erotic element in the relationship, is it one-
sised from Antonio to Bassanio or has it been mutual even though Bassanio is now seeking and enlisting Antonio's help in gaining a wife? This question was probably not as arbitrary in the early modern era as it is in the twenty-first century, but it has become an issue to take into account.

There are various contemporary critical reactions to *The Merchant of Venice* as a comedy; the issues of Shylock, Antonio, and Portia's suitors; and the acceptability of and possibilities for contemporary performance of the play. Margery Garber says that the play has become “the site of very great anxiety—anxiety about religion and religious prejudice, about the play's depictions of Jews and of Christians, and also about the place of sexuality and gender” (282). She discusses ways in which contemporary productions work through these anxieties and shows how “the ambivalence and ambiguity that emerge from a reading or staging of the play are not a sign of its failure, but rather of its signal success” as it “produces upon the audience the effect that it also instates and inscribes in its characters” (283). Lynda Boose avers that while the problematic nature of the play is usually assigned to the problem of Shylock in a post-Holocaust world, she finds the feeling of unease left by the play to be centered in its comic, Christian plot, suggesting that this unease cannot be summarily dismissed as anachronistic. While noting that it is a comedy, she suggests that the way Portia manipulates all the bonds in the play and the way the play ends with a coarse and anxious Gratiano make it an uneasy comedy, even on the early modern stage (252). Thomas Cartelli, too, sees the usual discussion of Shakespeare's supposed Elizabethan anti-Semitism to be an oversimplification of the issues of *The Merchant of Venice*. He uses Marlowe's hostility to Christianity in *The Jew
of Malta and 2 Tamburlaine as comparison pieces for Shakespeare's merchant and focuses on Antonio and his melancholy as the dramatic plot for the play with Antonio's treatment of Shylock being the matter the audience should ponder (258). He also lists various portrayals of Jews in medieval and Renaissance literature that are not simply anti-Semitic, arguing that there is no necessary historical anti-Semitism in Shakespeare's England. James O'Rourke argues—based on a close reading of the text and understanding of the historical moment—that the play is an anti-racist reaction to the hanging of Rodrigo Lopez (375). Heather Hirschfeld views Shylock's part in the play as an enactment of the idea of the “conversion of the Jew” in the Elizabethan understanding of the doctrine of predestination in reformation theology (62). Thomas H. Luxon also suggests a reformation theology with Shylock as a “blind and stubborn” Jew, but Portia playing Balthasar/Daniel as the “true” Christian Jew (par. 9). Marion Perret attempts to recreate the original performances of the play, noting that, while the play as originally conceived is a comedy, the original Shylock may not have been a comic villain, a tradition that more likely began with Granville's interpretation of the character (263). Because in Shakespeare's England, usury was a legal Christian practice, she suggests that Shylock's money lending practices would cause the audience to critique not the Jew, but the practicer of usury, whomever that might be (262). John Picker takes C.L. Barber's notion that Shakespeare's comedies form communities by exclusion of some characters and shows how the denizens of The Merchant of Venice work to stifle Shylock while he undermines their attempts, eventually undermining the closure of the play (173). James Shapiro assumes The Merchant of Venice is a “problem play” without a satisfying comic
conclusion and links that dissatisfaction to the way Shakespeare unsuccessfully tries to contain Marlowe's Jew of Malta with his own Jew of Venice (269-70). All of these critics do show problems with Shylock the character, but they also express unease with the play as a whole, perhaps based on Shylock, but stemming from more than the single character.

Unlike the problem of the maligned Shylock, the ambiguous nature of Antonio's love for Bassanio is not going to keep the text from being performed, but, if a production chooses to consider the issue—as most seem to—it does lead to a less satisfyingly comical conclusion since Portia saves Antonio's life only to leave him bereft of his closest companion. Critics have discussed various ideas of the nature of Antonio's love and how much that matters to the play. Steve Patterson posits that this is a play that explores the idea of “amity” love between men that might be sexual in nature but that comes prior to a companionate marriage (10). He suggests that the play lifts marriage above amity and leaves Antonio silenced (“I am dumb”) in the midst of the married couples (32). Cynthia Lewis calls the play a “tragicomedy” based on the ambiguity of Antonio's situation as an alien in the world of couples. She does not see any evidence for the idea of Antonio as homosexual, but suggests that his melancholy does not have a source and is part of his inherent ambiguity as a character, the ambiguity that leaves him alone at the end of the play reminding the audience of “our own inadequacy that both precedes and results from our judgments” (30). In an article from 1970, Laurence W. Hymen tries to turn literary attention from Shylock to Antonio as the more important character. He assumes a rivalry between Portia and Antonio for Bassanio's love without insisting on any erotic element of
that love (110). He sees the idea of the bonds in the play as the critical aspect of the text. Allan Holaday discusses Antonio's besetting sin of pride and suggests that the play is as much about his salvation as any other matter (109). As early as 1957, William B. Dillingham writes a note that reminds the scholar that in the Renaissance people believed bodily humors produced emotional states and a Renaissance audience would recognize Antonio's melancholy as emanating from the physical cause of black bile rather than an emotional anguish over the possible loss of Bassanio (419). Whatever the early modern explanation might be of Antonio, in the twenty-first century this character provides an opportunity to explore issues of sexuality and the alienation of the homosexual individual in a society that continues to privilege heterosexual couples.

There is some critical discussion of the casket scene with Portia's suitors, though it is such a small part of the play it does not gender as much discussion as Shylock or Antonio. Gustav Ungerer looks at the political and economic relationship between England and Morocco in the Elizabethan era to show how Morocco's casket choice reflects the Elizabethan view of Morocco as simultaneously ally and alien. Richard Kuhns and Barbara Tovey make the claim that Portia is not actually making racial comments about the early suitors she describes but we never see—that these characteristics are not particularly related to the countries of origin. Instead they venture to suggest that the suitors are based on earlier writers and this seemingly pointless and distracting conversation is an opportunity to poke fun at and show Shakespeare's independence from his literary forebears (327).
These critics highlight some of what is troubling about *The Merchant of Venice* regardless of the performance context. It is a play filled with anxiety for its characters and that anxiety transfers to the audience. Four hundred years after it was written, our history has made that anxiety even greater than it originally might have been. Robert L. King reports from a panel discussion responding to a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* that emphasized the alien-ness of all the characters and took into account the issues of history and society the question of Rabbi Leon Klenicki, “‘After Auschwitz, why put on this play?’” (59). Even with the production's careful regard for the question of Shylock, the Rabbi did not see a need for this particular piece of literature to ever see production. In spite of this kind of sentiment, directors do produce this play on stage and very occasionally on film—though more often for television than for the cinema. Perhaps it is the fairy-tale plot, perhaps the opportunity for an actor to portray Portia, the first of Shakespeare's great comic heroines, perhaps a desire to save Shakespeare from himself and re-read his characters with a twenty-first century sensibility that draws producers to the play. Edward Said speaks to this notion: “We must therefore read the great canonical texts...with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented in such works” (66). A filmmaker can attempt this task by making production decisions that emphasize a particular ideology, one that works to engage the play by either downplaying or emphasizing what is troubling about it. In the 2000s, in very different ways, two film directors attempt this project with *The Merchant of Venice*. In his 2001 television version, Trevor Nunn attempts to make a comedy film set in the 1930's in a German cabaret. Even though it is a
comedy, Nunn has obviously thought through the issues of the text and makes attempts to deal with them through setting, action, and character, giving the comedy an undercurrent of pathos if not tragedy and ending it on a solemn note. In 2004 Michael Radford directed a big and splashy *The Merchant of Venice* with Al Pacino in the role of Shylock. This film is a grand historical drama that centers on Shylock and his Jewishness, working to contextualize it in sixteenth century Venice as if Shakespeare were a realist.

Perhaps because it is a British television production, few academic critics have written about Trevor Nunn's *The Merchant of Venice*. Kenneth S. Rothwell does describe it in detail in one article. His ostensible subject is the way Portia and the casket scenes highlight the “mystery, magic, and menace that sustains the play” (215). He actually spends much time discussing Nunn's filming and the way the director sets up this television film in the mode of a classic cinema film. Critics have written somewhat more about Michael Radford's big-screen exploration of *The Merchant of Venice*, the only English-language sound feature film made of the play. All of them recount the historical realism for which Radford was endeavoring and the way he mediates the anti-Semitism apparent in the play. Monique Pittman describes Radford's attempt to return to “authentic” Shakespeare by making the film a period piece set in sixteenth century Venice. She concludes that while trying to make the film timeless, Radford makes it very much for “a post-9/11 world” and in trying to make it palatable he veers too far to an “uncomplicated vision of religious and ethnic tolerance” (29). Laury Magnus discusses Radford's “subtler updating” for his version of *The Merchant of Venice* through a “distancing” of the “experience of Shakespeare's characters speaking the words” through
the “mise en scène, a historical framing of the film's action, and...liberal cuts that are sometimes judicious but are, on the whole, morally evasive” (110). She concludes by noting the melancholy with which Radford ends the film and the “limited success” of his “safe locale,” this screen version of *The Merchant of Venice*, a safe place for “global viewing” (118-19). Mark Thornton Burnett writes about Radford's film from the perspective of what is appropriate for “the twenty-first century's global marketplace” (89). He shows how the “film is less anti-Semitic as it is about anti-Semitism” and how it relies upon “the use of the documentary mode, the privileging of set-pieces, structural reorganization and the deployment of visual motifs” to achieve its end (88-89). He boldly concludes that the film's idealism is a kind of Holocaust memorial and shows how art can aspire to the future while healing the past (106). Samuel Crowl centers on what he considers Al Pacino's “intelligent, subtle, and accomplished” performance as Shylock (118). He notes the dissonance between the way Radford as director and Pacino as actor treat Shylock and suggests that this works to complicate and contextualize the portrayal, keeping Shylock from being merely victim or merely villain (120). He ultimately praises Radford's “tough and troubling” investigation of this text (124). However successful they might think the film was, critics agree that in making a “historical” *Merchant of Venice* Radford uses the possibilities of film to update the text and re-write Shakespeare even as he claims his authority.

In the more modest television version, Trevor Nunn changes the setting in a bid to keep the comic genre of the play. He sets the play in a highly stylized cabaret in Weimar Germany, the decadent time between the two world wars, and invokes classic film styles
through a series of sepia-toned and black and white film reels that play out behind the opening credits. The film is an unassuming comedy. It is the wit in the lines—Shakespeare's words with generous cuts—and the lightness of the setting that keep it in the realm of comedy. The characters keep the dialogue light and allow the comedy to show through. While it is ostensibly a comedy, there is an undergirding of something more serious within the film. The issues previously mentioned do come into play in this film to add a layer of something more ominous to the outer levity in a way that the time period Nunn chooses speaks of tragedy waiting on the edges of this time between two wars. Antonio's unrequited love, Portia's inability to make her own choices, and Shylock's desire to avenge real wrongs flow through the comedy as an undercurrent of tragedy—the individual sorrows cannot be entirely mitigated through the witty dialogue and successful love campaigns.

The film opens in a club with Antonio playing at the piano. This Antonio is played by David Bamber as a doughy intellectual whose mysterious melancholy can be interpreted as an unreturned longing for Bassanio (Alexander Hanson). In the first expository scene between the two men, as Bassanio explains to Antonio what he needs to court Portia, Antonio glances at him longingly, plays with his hair, and both solicits and avoids his touch. The words are Shakespeare's, but the subtext Nunn and Bamber have chosen is suppressed passion.

Portia's (Derbhle Crotty) racist accountings of her early suitors is somewhat mitigated by using only three of the suitors and showing the men on film reels. The issue of origin slides by because the pattern of man, origin, and criticism does not repeat often
enough to be set. The audience can see Portia making comments about the actual men whom the audience sees with their ethnicities only a way of describing and distinguishing them. The context suggests Portia's caustic humor comes more from her frustration at being forced to marry the man her father chooses from beyond the grave than from a real personal animosity. The film plays straight with Morocco, the first of Portia's suitors who chooses to risk himself for her. Morocco is a black man, but his only exoticism is wearing subtly Moroccan style pants with his traditional pinstriped black suit, though his servant wears a caftan. Morocco is charming with Portia and they verbally spar as equals. His choice of caskets is thoughtful, though wrong, and he leaves weeping. Aragon is presented in a more typical, amusing scene. He is a redheaded Spaniard who comes in mutely, dances as his accompanist plays guitar, and finally speaks in overblown, but broken English. It keeps the film in the comedy realm, but seems a dissonant choice after playing Morocco so straight. Morocco seemed like he was a fair match for Portia; Aragon does not, though he does seem like a fair match for the “blinking idiot” he finds in the silver casket.

The final casket scene with Bassanio is appropriately comedic—this is the love comedy part of the play—and suspenseful as Portia tries to prolong the process and then visibly prays while Bassanio makes his decision. Once he chooses the lead casket, Portia and the audience should be out of their suspense, but the nervousness of Bassanio combined with the hopeful giddiness of Portia give the scene a surprising intensity of emotion. Once the suspense is over and Portia releases her emotions, the scene adds a fun moment of dancing and leaping and tossing out of the caskets as Portia celebrates her
freedom from the trial. Gratiano and Nerissa's coupling simply adds to the joy of the moment and it seems as if Lorenzo and Jessica's will too as they walk into the merrymaking together, until Lorenzo and Salerio step forward to bring the somber news of Antonio's losses. As with much of this film, these scenes show comedy on the surface with the rumble of sorrow underneath. One cannot forget that the seemingly decent Morocco has squandered his only chance for marriage and thus happiness and, just as all delight seems to have come to the main characters, sorrow once again raises its head. There is no joy in this film without grief.

This film's Shylock (Henry Goodman) is a middle-aged man with graying trimmed hair and beard who wears a suit and a skullcap. When he first describes Antonio and his dealings with him, he is speaking directly to the camera in a close-up, giving his perspective on the situation and his motivation for his animosity. He is also humanized when he takes leave of his daughter Jessica—even as she plans to run away from him—and they sing together a duet in Yiddish just before he hears of the masque and yells at her and slaps her and then seems to repent and touch her tenderly. As Rothwell notes, he seems manic, as if he cannot control his emotions and reactions (208). The camera shows a non-comical Launcelot Gobbo as silent witness to the father's emotional and physical abuse quietly shedding a tear for the daughter. Shylock's most famous, quoted, and imitated lines of this play, his “I am a Jew” speech, undercut the comedy of the film in the same way the various layers do throughout. Salerio and Solanio are baiting Shylock even as they discuss the possibility of Antonio losing his argosies and being unable to repay his debt. Shylock stops their humor by giving a quietly serious version of
the speech explaining why he hates Antonio and other Christians who regard him as a lesser man. He gets overexcited only at the end of the speech as he seems to grow aroused over his idea of vengeance. This scene reinforces the idea of a manic Shylock as his emotions go back and forth from glee to despair as he contemplates what his daughter has taken from him, but also learns that Antonio may yet lose.

In the rowdy cabaret that is the stage for Lorenzo and Jessica's elopement, comedy is interspersed with personal drama of the characters. Launcelot, now the clown, performs a kind of stand up comic routine on the stage. The masque that accompanies the elopement is a mirthful parade. While the men are merry, however, Jessica betrays the ambiguities of the situation, looking stricken rather than giddy or joyful. The audience also sees Antonio and Shylock pass one another in the street, a portentous moment. The idea of the elopement, of Lorenzo stealing Jessica from her impossible father, is jovial; however, as happens throughout this film, the shabbiness of the situation, the unhappiness under the surface, threatens to break through. Jessica had to leave, but she takes no joy in hurting her father.

Thus far tension, glances, and serious moments have all undercut the comedy that is present in the film, but all comedy ends with the trial as Shylock continues in his manic mode, quietly demanding his pound of flesh while going back and forth between anger and seeming reason. Antonio continues as the solitary man who seems willing to accept his fate. He dismisses Shylock as doing no more than one might expect from a Jew and looks suggestively at Bassanio as he speaks the line, “You cannot be better employed, Bassanio, Than to live still and write mine epitaph” (IV.i.116-17). When Portia enters as
Balthasar, the young lawyer, the intensity rises as she implores Shylock to choose mercy and he snarls his demand for justice. An interesting moment is captured when Balthasar has affirmed Shylock's right to take the pound of flesh. Antonio summons Bassanio who kneels before him. Antonio takes Bassanio's hands and the film cuts his monologue about fortune to the very end: “Commend me to your honourable wife./Tell her the process of Antonio's end./Say how I loved you” (IV.i.268-70). The shot shows Antonio looking down at Bassanio in the foreground with Portia/Balthasar standing in the background watching. Portia knows exactly how much Bassanio means to Antonio. The moment ends awkwardly as Antonio throws himself against Bassanio who holds him at a slight distance. Bassanio is not sure what to do with his passionate friend, but his disguised wife sees his discomfort and can take heart that he has chosen her. Then, when Shylock takes the knife and prepares to cut into Antonio, even he hesitates. It is not until he begins to run at him taking a second try that Portia bids him tarry. Portia not only stops him, but she turns the tables against him and takes everything from him. The trial is suspenseful and dramatic and would likely be so even in a more overtly comical production of the play. After all, Shylock is trying to legally murder Antonio. This production that blends the comedy with pathos throughout makes the trial the moment gravity overtakes levity.

The film never really regains its comic form. Jessica weeps in Lorenzo's arms as she listens to music--“I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (V.i.68)--and presumably thinks about her father. The love portion of Jessica and Lorenzo's scene is cut entirely. The ring business is not played for laughs either when the women ask the men to give them up or when they demand their return. These are moments that could lend
themselves to spirited comedy, but this film prefers a bittersweet ending. Portia and Bassanio's reconciliation is sweet as she replaces the ring on his finger, but it is not amusing. The reconciliations are interrupted by two poignant moments. Antonio—though Portia has given him the good news that his argosies are safe—stands alone and lonely amidst the three couples. Then Jessica reads the terms of the judgment against her father, drops to the floor, and sings a lament. The camera draws back to a tableau in all blues, grays, and silvers of the three couples and Antonio gazing into the distance while the waves sound in the background. It is suddenly not a comedy at all, but a meditation on what has transpired and what the future holds.

When the film begins, it seems that Trevor Nunn is attempting to make a comedy of *The Merchant of Venice*; however, the darkness, ever present on the edges, takes center stage by the time the film ends. He presents the film as a classic comedy reminiscent of early film comedies and sets it in a gilded time with a party atmosphere. Yet even in this quietly comedic version, the drama overshadows the comedy. What starts as a comedy cannot end that way. The theme of the film becomes not the joy of heterosexual coupling and the beating of the Jew at his own game, but the alienation of any character who does not quite fit the cultural norm. This is not unintentional. Just as the setting is a society on the edge of calamity, that time just before the outbreak of the horrors of war, so the film is a comedy on the edge of tragedy, a quiet tragedy that leaves two men alone and broken and the happy couples somberly watching.

Michael Radford does not even attempt comedy in his 2004 cinematic *The Merchant of Venice*. If one listens to Radford's DVD commentary, he does really seem to
be trying to save Shakespeare from himself. He does not understand the play as a comedy at all, but as a tragedy with Shylock as Shakespeare's “first great tragic character.” Then, since Shylock is this “great tragic figure,” he claims “there's nothing anti-Semitic about [the play].” At the end of the trial scene, he does not think that Portia is being “malicious” in her terms, but that she is merely carrying out the legalities of the situation (Radford and Collins). He believes Shylock is caught up in something akin to “road rage,” realizes he has gone too far in trying to take Antonio's life, and “abdicat[es] dignity for himself.” Radford's film seems to be his apology for Shakespeare as he explains in the commentary just what Shakespeare and Shylock were thinking. The way Radford works to defend Shakespeare is largely through extra-textual visuals, particularly contextualizing the setting and then bringing closure to the film.

One of the choices Radford makes as director—to help the audience understand and accept *The Merchant of Venice*—is to contextualize it. He sets it in the late sixteenth century in Venice. The opening scene shows three gondolas, the front one bearing cassocked priests and a cross. The words “Venice 1596” appear on the screen. As the writing remains, the scene fades to black and is replaced by a close-up shot of a torch burning Hebrew books. Context is then provided by a roll-up of text and continues to intersperse explanatory text with appropriate scenes: “Intolerance of the Jews was a fact of 16th Century life even in Venice, the most powerful and liberal city state in Europe.” The scene again shows the priests moving on the water in a gondola and then goes black to share: “By law the Jews were forced to live in the old walled foundry or ‘Geto’ area of the city. After sundown the gate was locked and guarded by Christians.” This is followed
by a shot of a gate being closed and locked and another statement: “In the daytime any man leaving the ghetto had to wear a red hat to mark him as a Jew.” These words give way to a shot of a jostling crowd with some men wearing red hats and one man shouting “usurer, usurer.” The next text crawl explains: “The Jews were forbidden to own property. So they practiced usury, the lending of money at interest. This was against Christian law.” The scene shows one hand placing a coin in another. The next text says, “The sophisticated Venetians would turn a blind eye to it but for the religious fanatics, who hated the Jews, it was another matter...” The priest in the gondola shouts condemnations to usurers. This leads to a crowd throwing a Jew from a bridge into the water and Antonio (Jeremy Irons) spitting into Shylock’s (Al Pacino) face, a moment Shakespeare’s play refers to, but does not show. The credits then commence with Al Pacino’s name over the flames as Hebrew books burn and a Latin chant plays in the background.

This set-up grounds the film in sympathy for Shylock. It describes and presents the oppressed conditions under which Jews lived in sixteenth century Venice. It gives a face to Shylock and shows his personal degradation at the hands of Antonio. In addition, the casting of Al Pacino, one of America’s most respected dramatic actors, as Shylock, gives him an automatic sympathy and gravitas he might be lacking otherwise. Scholars do not know if the original Shylock was played by leading actor Richard Burbage or by Thomas Pope a comedian and villain (Perret 263), but this Shylock is definitely not played by or as the clown. None of this early film business appears in the text, but it is in the purview of the moviemaker to add these moments. He is not adding words, but atmosphere and context. This is not a Shylock who hates Antonio merely “for he is a
Christian” or because “He lends out money Gratis, and brings down/The rate of usance here with us in Venice” (I.iii.37, 39-40). In fact, except for the first line, “How like a fawning publican he looks” (I.iii.36), this speech is omitted altogether. Much of the general dialogue from act one scene three is cut, but Shylock does speak his personal reasons for disliking Antonio:

Signor Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have reviled me
About my monies and my usances.
Still I have borne it with a patient shrug,
For suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe.
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat, dog,
And spit upon my Jewish gabardine,
And all for use of that which is mine own. I.iii.102-9

By showing the scene in which Antonio spits on Shylock, the film reinforces these motives for Shylock's harsh treatment of Antonio. Shylock does not hate him for being a Christian and a rival merchant who does not charge interest, but for personally and intentionally reviling him and spitting on him. Once again, this allows the viewer to sympathize with the Jew.

Michael Radford not only wants a sympathetic Shylock, but he also wants a sympathetic Portia and Antonio. Because the play puts Shylock in opposition to Portia and Antonio, making all three sympathetic is a difficult task. Radford does not excuse Antonio's behavior to Shylock, but he does give him a different sorrow to bring him sympathy, that of unrequited love for Bassanio. In the DVD commentary he discusses the homoerotic nature of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship, suggests that Bassanio is manipulating Antonio, and notes that much of Portia's tenacity in the trial has more to do with testing Bassanio's loyalty than trying Shylock. It is this unrequited love that makes
Antonio sad, and this is why the audience can sympathize with Antonio even in the midst of his treatment of Shylock. The first time Antonio appears in the play, it is to spit in Shylock's face, not an endearing moment. The second time the audience sees Antonio—still in the extra-textual credits—he kneels to be blessed by a priest and then stands and watches, gazing longingly, as Bassanio, sipping from a goblet, floats by in a gondola. The third time Antonio appears, the play proper begins with his line, “In truth, I know not why I am so sad” (I.i.1). While Salerio and Solanio discuss his melancholy, Antonio looks through the window and again watches as Bassanio floats by with friends. Solanio says, “Why, then you are in love” (I.i.46) and both he and Salerio laugh as if this is a great joke while Antonio answers, “fie, fie, fie” (I.i.46), protesting strongly even as he gazes through the window at Bassanio. As Bassanio asks Antonio for money to court Portia, Antonio looks away, swallows hard before answering, and walks away from his friend even as he does give him the means. This is the Antonio the audience sympathizes with, the Antonio who represses his own desires to put himself on the line and help his friend.

Later, Antonio stands alone in the pouring rain watching Bassanio leave. This scene is interspersed with scenes of Shylock realizing Jessica has run away. He walks through his empty house calling for her and then sobs out his grief. He, too, ends up standing alone in the pouring rain. Radford's film juxtaposes the two outsiders, Shylock and Antonio, each in his own heartache, connecting them and allowing sympathy for both. The next time the audience sees Shylock, he becomes stubborn about Antonio looking to his bond. In context right after his loss of his daughter, the mood for this
section is sadness and anger over his daughter that he is acting out through his agreement with Antonio. It leads into his famous set piece, “I am a Jew.” He has shown his anger and hurt over his daughter, and that stays with the audience as he explains that Jews have feelings just like Christians. Having seen both men's sorrows, the audience is able to feel sympathy for both Antonio and Shylock even as they enter the trial and Shylock becomes obsessed in his revenge. Radford suggests that Shylock is caught up in a rage of the moment during the trial. This rage is made understandable by Pacino's Shylock conflating the Christian man with whom Jessica eloped with the Christian man who now stands before him in court.

The third actor in the trial is Portia, and Radford works to make her a sympathetic character as well. The biggest issues with Portia in the twenty-first century are her acceptance of the patriarchy that allows her father to plan her life from beyond the grave and a basic racism that can be hard to swallow. Making such a realistic historical drama acts to mitigate the first issue. The audience accepts that Portia will be under the power of her father in sixteenth century Venice. On the other hand, the historical context does not mitigate the issue of racism, perhaps because Portia is not just passively complicit with a racist society as she is with a patriarchal one, but is actually an actor within it. The film tries to justify her racism by once again showing what is not in the text. Portia's introduction comes as she and Nerissa peer over a balcony to watch the unsuspecting and unworthy suitors gorge themselves on Portia's hospitality. They have a mostly serious expository conversation about the caskets and Portia's father's will, but then grow merry as they describe the suitors upon whom they and the audience are spying. The film plays
up the suitors with some of its few funny scenes. Indeed, Monique Pittman suggests that making all of Portia's comments that could be construed as racist into humor, the film attempts—perhaps not entirely successfully—to ignore Portia's racism (22). Rather than “ignoring” her racism, what Radford seems to be doing is continuing his project of historically contextualizing it. This should be a humorous scene and peeping in at the suitors while listening to the playful exchange, the audience may gain a notion of the kind of humor Shakespeare was writing. The three suitors Portia discusses are fully playing up the behaviors she mocks. Then Morocco and Aragon come in full costume with multiple attendants in what seem to be “comic set pieces” to hazard for her (Pittman 22). Her reactions to them seem to stem from anxiety as Morocco shows a physical aggression and Aragon a silliness of mind. They are racist scenes played for humor, and as Pittman points out, a bit out of place in this serious film that tries to absolve Shakespeare of any racist inclinations (22). They are, however, helpful in contextualizing Portia's behavior and may work toward making her sympathetic. She must open her house to these boorish suitors, one of whom may become her head of household. Unlike in Trevor Nunn's production, these are not possibly worthy suitors and they fully deserve the death's head and the blinking fool they withdraw from their chosen caskets. Radford does cut Portia's most damning statement after Morocco has chosen wrongly, “A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. Let all of his complexion choose me so” (II.vii.78-79). In the film he is wrongly suited for her because of his aggression and his attitude in choosing—not merely because of his “complexion.” The big, comical stereotypes make the scene racist, but Portia does not appear unsympathetically so.
Antonio, Portia, and Shylock converge in Antonio's trial. The viewer is reminded just before the trial of Shylock's personal misfortune by the silent but obvious presence of a wistful Jessica while Portia and Bassanio discuss Antonio's situation and prepare to help him against her father. After Portia and Nerissa have left Belmont in Lorenzo's hands, but before the trial, Lorenzo and Jessica gaze over the water listening to music and Jessica sadly says, “I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (V.i.68). Moving this scene from after the trial to before and making it an entirely melancholy scene—cutting the dialogue about tragic lovers—again reinforces Shylock's humanity. His daughter is not entirely satisfied with what is happening nor with her part in it, yet she is not able or willing to stop it either. For better or worse, her father is her father and she has escaped his house, but she cannot fully turn her back on him or turn her thoughts from him, hence neither can the audience forget that the Shylock they will see is a man who grieves for the wife who died and the daughter who left him.

The trial itself begins with both Shylock and Antonio stating their cases, quietly, both looking defeated before they even begin while the crowd rails around them. When Portia joins the trial as “Balthasar” the young doctor, sympathy begins to turn from Shylock as he continues to stand by the law over mercy even as Portia/Balthasar gives him the opportunity to choose mercy for Antonio and gain for himself by doubling the bond. Shylock grows angrier and angrier. Meanwhile Antonio is bound and says his final, loving farewell to Bassanio. Radford suggests that Portia's drawing out of this scene is not so much to torture Shylock as to try to gauge her new husband's relationship to Antonio. While the two men do show their bond of love, the idea that Portia is watching
them is not made entirely clear. When she stops Shylock from piercing Antonio's flesh, Portia is not watching Antonio and Bassanio. This is about breaking Shylock. The scene is not cut short. Portia/Balthasar adds insult to injury as she presses each point of the law against Shylock. It is Antonio who seems merciful as Shylock begs the court to “take his life” rather than make him live with its "justice" while Antonio instead returns to him half of his estate and agrees to use the other half in trust for his daughter's Christian husband, provided Shylock become a Christian convert. Shylock weeps, and rocks, and whimpers in abjection as he agrees to the “mercy” the court bestows upon him. Michael Radford likens Shylock's behavior in the trial to “road rage.” Once he has begun, he cannot stop and in the end he realizes that he has gone over the line; thus his sentence is fair. This justification does not seem to work as well as the simple fact that no one—except maybe Gratiano—is happy at the end of the trial. The Christians have broken Shylock, but Antonio is merely sad and Portia must now use the ring business—sometimes amusing, but not in this film—to test her husband's love for her over that for his friend. The trial is a moving scene, but it is also heavy-handed without a clear victor. Yes, Antonio has ostensibly won, but what does any of it matter to this melancholy lover? He will never have he whom he truly desires.

After the trial, the only thing left is the ring business, which this film plays quite seriously as a test for Bassanio. Whom does he love, Portia or Antonio? The scene is dark and filmed in blues and grays as the couples work to figure out just where they stand with one another. Antonio must relinquish Bassanio to Portia before Portia relents and presents the ring. The film also takes pains in the last act to remind the audience that all is not
well, that a man has lost his essence. It does this by paying special attention to Jessica.

When Portia returns home, rather than speaking to Lorenzo and Jessica together, she greets Lorenzo and then alone seeks out a solitary Jessica to speak the lines: “This night, methinks, is but the daylight sick./It looks a little paler. 'Tis a day/Such as the day is when the sun is hid. Peace” (V.i.123-25). This seems to be Portia's acknowledgment of Jessica's grief for her father. When Bassanio then brings Antonio to Belmont introducing him as “the man” (V.i.133), the camera turns to Jessica so the audience can see her agitated reaction to this man whom her father tried to break who instead broke her father. Yet, as this film clearly shows, she is the one who hurt her father most, who sent him into the abyss that ended with his attempt on Antonio's life. In this vision of the play with a sympathetic tragic figure in Shylock, Jessica is a complex character who had to leave her father to be with the one she loved, yet who is unhappy with herself for that. Zuleikha Robinson works to express the ambiguities in this character through a few brief scenes and shots of her looking ambivalent, sad, and agitated, as well as glad in her newfound freedom and love.

The last line of the film is Gratiano's last line of the play, “Well, while I live I'll fear no other thing/So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring” (V.i.305-06). After Gratiano follows Nerissa inside, the film continues with wordless scenes. Just as it contextualized the story with extra-textual scenes at the beginning, the film brings it to a thoughtful if somewhat heavy-handed close by presenting three moments of solitary exile. After Gratiano has entered the house, Antonio stands alone outside the walls at Belmont, awkwardly pacing, unsure where he belongs. The scene changes to the Venetian ghetto
and the Jews filing in through the gates in the evening. They enter and the forcibly converted Shylock, no longer a member of his “tribe,” is left alone on the outside as the gates close. Finally, Jessica runs in the dawn through the grounds of Belmont down to the lagoon where two fishermen create a version of Carpaccio's painting, “Hunting on the Lagoon.” The audience sees a close-up of her sad face looking over the lagoon and then down where a close-up shot of her hands folded together reveals the ring that had been her mother's, the ring her father heard she had exchanged for a monkey. She has not completely reviled her father and thus she isolates herself from the happiness within Belmont. The film ends with this image of Jessica, a long shot of her from the back, a dark form in the dawn, watching the fishermen over the lagoon. Antonio, Shylock, and Jessica, juxtaposed in their isolation and exile, close this film with the melancholy of alienation with which Antonio opened the text.

Harold Bloom claims that “Portia would cease to be sympathetic if Shylock were allowed to be a figure of overwhelming pathos” (171) and “that we tend to make The Merchant of Venice incoherent by portraying Shylock as being largely sympathetic” (172). He does admit that he does not think it is possible to recover Shakespeare's actual Shylock and wonders “what it would cost (and not only ethically) to recover the play's coherence” (172). Michael Radford and Al Pacino attempt to do just what Bloom decries in Radford's The Merchant of Venice by attempting to make both Shylock and Portia sympathetic. Does the film become incoherent? It is not William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice even though it uses many of his lines. In spite of its historically hyper-realistic setting, it does not seem as if Shakespeare would recognize very much
about this production. But that may not be the point. Shakespearean critics are divided over whether this is a successful adaptation of the play. Samuel Crowl says the genre of Shakespearean films “has been enriched by [Radford's] Merchant and Pacino's Shylock” (125). Mark Thornton Burnett seems to believe the film—particularly the characterization of Jessica—goes far to memorialize the Holocaust (106). Larry Magnus calls it a “limited success” (119). L. Monique Pittman thinks Radford's intentions are good, but that it “appropriates Shakespeare too insistently for an uncomplicated vision of religious and ethnic tolerance” (29). She suggests that contemporary society might appreciate a film that questions the secular idol called Shakespeare. Finally, Rob Conkie finds it so sanitized that he calls it “dishonest” (563). The film is not inherently “incoherent” though it has a tendency to cut dialogue to skew toward Radford's interpretation, not an uncommon practice either in film or theater, but a little problematic when Radford claims to be guided by Shakespeare's authority. It does seem to sacrifice Portia to a certain extent in favor of Shylock. She is so sanitized she becomes unreal and not a character who provokes emotion. She is cool and logical even as she attempts to understand her new husband who is also kind of a cool character. It is the three characters with whom the film ends—Antonio, Jessica, and Shylock, each of whom is wrapped in his or her own world of exile and grief—who gain the sympathy of the audience and make this adaptation what Radford meant it to be, a film that honors Shakespeare while still playing to twenty-first century sensibilities. The one thing it is not is a comedy, but even Trevor Nunn's version shows that what begins as a comedy may not end that way. The Merchant of Venice may be counted among Shakespeare's comedies and it contains
scenes that can certainly be played comically, but the core scenes, Antonio's trial and even Bassanio's trial in Belmont, are serious, life altering business. This is what the films note. It may be that these characters and their situations should provoke thought rather than laughter, so perhaps privileging the dramatic is a satisfying solution for a twenty-first century production of *The Merchant of Venice*.

**Channeling Shakespeare: The Director and *The Tempest***

*The Merchant of Venice*—when it is produced at all—has shifted in genre in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to become a drama because the horrific reality of the last century does not allow the Jewish villain to be played broadly or farcically. *The Tempest* has also shifted genres in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but with some differences. Academics have long placed *The Tempest* with *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale* in the category of “the late romances,” suggesting that while they are a kind of comedy, they have other important aspects such as redemption in the end, the supernatural, shipwrecks, and a mix of the civilized and pastoral.55 Critics also discuss the revenge tragedy qualities of the play, suggesting that it is only the turn at the end that makes it a comedy instead. Much of the play is concerned with Prospero's vengeance on his brother, though whether he ever means to fully punish him—letting Ariel change his mind at the final moment—or just test and chastise him is open to interpretation. While all of this is true, *The Tempest* also contains some marks of pure comedy. Stefano, Trinculo, and Caliban together form a comic subplot that mirrors the main plot. The play adheres to the unities of time, place, and action in a way none of the plays has since the early *The Comedy of Errors*. A traditional romance should, like *Pericles*, take place over
a long time and distance. In *The Tempest*, this aspect is fulfilled only in back-story—not in the time of the play itself. *The Tempest* could be an outright comedy, but the maturity of Shakespeare's writing, the nature of politics involved in Prospero's story, the idea that this is Shakespeare's final play and his goodbye to the world, and the more sober back story have long coalesced to produce it as a more thoughtful play. In a post-colonial world, we must add to the above, the charged issue of the character of Caliban, the island native made a slave by the colonizing Prospero, even though Caliban is not the main antagonist and does not present quite the insuperability that Shylock does in *The Merchant of Venice*. It seems it would be possible to be thoughtful about the characterization of Caliban, but still make a comedy version of the play. In fact, while film directors are thoughtful about Caliban and do not make him a simple comic character, they do not seem to be as concerned with showcasing a post-colonial Caliban as twentieth-century criticism would suggest they might be. If it is not going to be filmed as a comedy, it would make sense for *The Tempest* to be formed into a full-fledged fantasy piece like its supernatural companion, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This does not happen either. While, unlike *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest* has found a home on film, it is not mainstream film and thus is not a mainstream comedy or a fantasy. *The Tempest* has found its home in independent or art film. It seems that the Prospero who directs the action in the play proves to be irresistible to the art film director. Directors weave their magic with Prospero to present a very specific and quite dramatic vision to their audience.
Caliban seems to be the first issue one must confront in a twentieth century version of *The Tempest*. Even though he has only 180 lines, he makes his presence felt throughout the play (Vaughan 390). This may be in part because, as Prospero's servant, he becomes part of the mise-en-scène. He also seems to figure large in Prospero's and Miranda's imaginations and they in his as they describe his background and he attempts to conquer them (I.ii.347-65, III.ii.82-98). Finally, he is the island native, and that gives him an exoticism that directors spotlight. Virginia Mason Vaughan traces his history of transformation on stage from “drunken beast in the eighteenth century to noble savage and missing link in the nineteenth, to Third World victim of oppression in the mid-twentieth” (390). Trevor R. Griffiths traces colonial Caliban's history in English performance criticism from the native, noble savage, republican, slave, or missing link of the nineteenth century to Beerbohm Trees' Caliban-centered “not comic” version of the early twentieth century to various allegorical and symbolic versions as well as continued ideas of the native in need of paternal government or the missing link in the early twentieth century to the colonial critique with Caliban as black rebel of the later twentieth century (159-80). Caliban is clearly a product of his times, the kind of character who reflects the time the play is presented. Each of the films of *The Tempest* represents that twentieth century fascination with the character, giving him prominence in various ways, serious and grotesque, but not as comical as he might have been on the Jacobean stage nor as post-colonial as one might expect on the postmodern stage.

Caliban is not the only challenge in filming *The Tempest*. Except for the spirits in the masque, Miranda is the only woman in the entire play. She has to carry all of
womankind on her young shoulders. She is often portrayed as an innocent raised away from society, but some films give her more subjectivity than others. Some of the films also find ways to acknowledge or work around Miranda as the sole woman in the world, using flashbacks that show Sycorax or even Claribel or Miranda's mother. Women may be given short shrift in this play, but the issue is obviously in the consciousness of twentieth century directors.

Beyond Caliban and Miranda, there is also another consideration in The Tempest: the man himself, Prospero. Twentieth century films of The Tempest are not mainstream Hollywood movies with a splashy sorcerer in Prospero—though they might have been. The version of The Tempest that is most Hollywood is the 1956 science fiction film, The Forbidden Planet. After an absence on the big screen, 1979-1991 saw three versions of The Tempest, none a mainstream Shakespearean film. Granted, by their very nature of being Shakespearean adaptations, many such films veer toward independent or art film status, but two of these versions of The Tempest are clearly art films, each with its own take on the director of the action within the play, Prospero. The Tempest seems to be the ideal opportunity for a director to meditate on ideas of power, control, and magic. Peter Greenaway's Prospero’s Books is most clearly in this mode as a meta-film showing Prospero as the actual writer of The Tempest. Derek Jarman's version is a dark, sexual, fantastic film set in a crumbling mansion with Heathcote Williams as a young Prospero. Paul Mazursky's film, Tempest, is a somewhat different case. Mazursky's film is not a mainstream “Shakespearean” film, but it was released as a mainstream comedy that translates The Tempest to the modern world with a Prospero who, in the midst of a mid-
life crisis, decides to leave the world behind and settle on a small Greek island. The Greek island setting and eccentric characters lend an unconventional ambience to this film as it plays with ideas of ownership and control on the island. These are all mature films that use the character of Prospero to explore the idea of the play, of Shakespeare, of The Tempest. None of them recreates it exactly—nor do any of them try. What may once have been a comedy that became a romantic tale of shipwreck and high fantasy, has become, in twentieth century film, a text about what it means to direct, to control, to play with people's lives. It is dark, thoughtful, and unconventional.

There seems to be more academic criticism on Prospero's Books than any other Shakespearean film, perhaps because of the meta-literary nature of the production, but The Forbidden Planet, Jarman's The Tempest, and Mazursky's Tempest have their share of criticism as well. Mariacristina Cavecchi and Nicoletta Vallorani begin discussing all four films in their Shakespeare Bulletin piece. They point to the importance the films give to language—emphasizing words and knowledge in what is a primarily visual form (35-36). They also point to space and the way each film takes the simple description of Prospero's “poor cell” and translates it visually to become a symbol of the man—a thoroughly filmic act (36-37).

Criticism of The Forbidden Planet tends to discuss how science fiction translates Shakespeare. Merrell Knighten posits that, though the plot and characters are there, the idea of Morbius' id as Caliban suggests Faust and makes the theme of The Forbidden Planet more Marlovian than Shakespearean (36-37). Simone Caroti conversely suggests that Caliban as Morbius' id is quite in line with The Tempest's themes—at least as they
were interpreted in the mid-twentieth century—and that just as Prospero must let go of his id and superego—Caliban and Ariel—so must Morbius, but since his id is part of himself, he can do so only by choosing death, a somewhat harsher ending than in Shakespeare, but covering the same ideas of humanity and power (11-12). Ruth Morse contends with this idea of Morbius descending from multiple characters when she asserts that any contemporary version of *The Tempest* descends not only from Shakespeare's text, various performances of the text, and cultural ideas associated with it, but also the vast body of literature created from and since the seventeenth century original. She shows how *Frankenstein* and *Robinson Crusoe* help shape any modern ideas of Prospero and *The Tempest* (166). She also connects Morbius with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (169). This is what a deeper look at the character of Morbius will show—how the character type has descended from both Faust and Prospero, Frankenstein and Jekyll and Hyde, and even Crusoe as lines of descent move back and forth among versions of the story of a sorcerer who evolves into a scientist who must find his way alone in a new world.

Critics have paid more attention to Derek Jarman films other than *The Tempest*, particularly *Jubilee* and *Edward II*, but *The Tempest* does receive some attention as Jarman's foray into Shakespeare and the first and currently only “traditional” feature film of *The Tempest*. Diana Harris and MacDonald Jackson, writing in view of Jarman's death, revisit Jarman's *The Tempest*, examining the ways Jarman's was a precursor to Greenaway's film, how Jarman mocks not only imperialist ideologies, but also gender stereotyping and how, in the end, Jarman's film privileges the “farewell to the stage” interpretation of the play (90, 97). Jim Ellis suggests Jarman's *The Tempest* is as much a
critique of twentieth century England as his other films. As the crux of that critique, he points to the masque, a political form in the seventeenth century, that Jarman uses to end his film. He also challenges a frequent criticism of Jarman's film—that Caliban is played by a white actor thus de-emphasizing twentieth century colonial readings of *The Tempest*. He suggests that by making Caliban white and monstrous he challenges the audience to see in the character a more complex and less pre-conceived “racial other” (269). The “masque” at the end then uses the blues and camp to bring together the community of “queers and blacks,” critiquing the post-war idea of these as “threats” to England as a nation (279) and showing redemption by bringing the marginalized peoples to the forefront of the community (280).

There seems to be limited academic criticism of Paul Mazursky's twentieth century update, *Tempest*, but what there is focuses on defending the film against the harsh reviews it garnered from film critics when it was released. Michael Yogev defends it against popular critical detraction by comparing it with Shakespeare's text and suggesting that thematically it is more like the original—particularly in the disillusioned artist at the center—than popular critics understand. Walter R. Coppedge defends the film against the same harsh criticism by describing his pleasures in viewing it and showing how Mazursky “transcend[s]” Shakespeare, suggesting that film critics misunderstand the project and the long history of radical Shakespearean transformations (19). Sharon O'Dair builds on Yogev and Coppedge to attempt to rescue Mazursky's film from the critics by delving into eco-criticism and discussing it as a “green” film as Phillip/Prospero tries to save himself by retreating to “unspoiled nature” in the postmodern pastoral (176). Paul
Haspel suggests the problem for the film critics comes from the discontinuity between
“Shakespeare's ambiguous, unstable tragicomedy...and Mazursky's fundamentally comic
and optimistic worldview” (130). While I am not certain Shakespeare is as tragic as
Haspel believes, the critical problem with this film may be that it indeed is a comedy
while most versions of *The Tempest* emphasize the drama.

Of all the *Tempest* films, Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* receives the most
criticism, perhaps because it is unique as a Shakespearean film as well as within any
other categorization of film. Ryan Trimm discusses it as a heritage film that reworks the
notion of heritage film by replacing an elaborately historical setting with a bare sound
stage thereby “forging a world of simulacra” (45). James Tweedie gives it a political
shape as an artifact of Margaret Thatcher's England that works to “shake the cultural
underpinnings of Thatcherism's mythical nation” (122). Douglas Lanier discusses how
*Prospero's Books* plays with the way society gives primacy to text in Shakespeare's plays
by showing that text in creation and hailing the relationship between Prospero as artist
and the text *The Tempest* creates. Dan DeWeese discusses Greenaway as the perfect
director for the metatheatrical *The Tempest* as Greenaway aligns himself with the critics
who see the play as being about everything except the narrative itself (159). Mariacristina
Cavecchi discusses it as a “mannerist” or post-modern film that conjures from the text
whatever images it chooses (86). Maurice Yacowar, calling it Greenaway's “most daring
work” (689), makes a connection between *Prospero's Books* and the five hundredth
anniversary of Columbus's “discovery” of America (696). Evelyn Tribble questions the
primacy of the visual in films and discusses the importance of sound in *Prospero's Books*,

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pointing specifically to water sounds that match the water images Greenaway uses (166-67). Critics have different slants on just what Greenaway's project does, but most seem to agree that it is a version of *The Tempest* that finds a way to cinematically re-create and pay homage to Shakespeare's play.

While critics have shown a great interest in the cinematic versions of *The Tempest*, they tend not to see a disconnect between the dramatic nature of these films and the comic basis of *The Tempest*. In fact, if anything, they—and the directors they are discussing—view the source as some sort of dramatic magnum opus of Shakespeare's, his great finale and goodbye to the stage. This is not necessarily a “wrong” reading; this was probably Shakespeare's final individual play before he retired to Stratford and Prospero does give a final farewell speech in which he asks to be set free. Whether the author is also saying farewell is not clear, but the speech does exist and readers have long interpreted it as Shakespeare's good-bye. The play also plays with ideas of revenge throughout and brings in forgiveness and redemption only in its closing. It is also a highly visual play that includes the spectacle of the masque. On the other hand, it is also a comic play about young love and courtship with a low story of comic revenge to complement the high story of revenge and forgiveness. These aspects become less comic in some versions of the film, especially as they involve Caliban, a creature no one wants to make merely comical. These ideas come together in different ways for different versions of the films. As mentioned above, none of these films is a mainstream Hollywood Shakespearean adaptation. Each film is carrying on some other kind of work. *The Forbidden Planet* is a genre film, an example par excellence of 1950s science fiction.
One can consider *The Tempest* (1979), *Tempest* (1982), and *Prospero's Books* (1992) as part of a fuller body of work by their directors under an auteur theory. There seems to be something about *The Tempest* that appeals to the director, and, as the criticism of these films shows, it is the director's vision of Prospero that becomes the vision of *The Tempest* on film.

The first full-length sound feature film of *The Tempest* is *The Forbidden Planet*. If readers view *The Tempest* as a colonial narrative, in the 1950s the natural progression of colonization seems to be into space, hence *The Tempest* becomes the source for a story of the scientist—the organic literary descendent of the wizard—and his daughter alone on the planet and the crew from the space ship that finds them. The basic elements of the story exist as they do in all the versions of *The Tempest*, but there are shifts in the story that involve both the Prospero and Caliban elements that show how the story—even in a highly genre-conscious outer space film—is a drama that is more involved in the Prospero character's psyche than in any of the narrative plot elements. Dr. Morbius and his completely innocent daughter Altaira are the sole survivors of a colonizing expedition to the planet Altair IV. The United Planets have now sent a ship commanded by Commander Adams (a serious Leslie Nielsen) to investigate the disappearance of the colony. The ship and its crew impose themselves on the planet—Dr. Morbius does not draw them there—but go on to re-enact the basic story of *The Tempest* as Commander Adams and Altaira fall in love while Dr. Morbius tries to deflect the ship's crew from discovering exactly what has happened on the planet. This film does not introduce any female characters beyond Altaira, but uses Altaira to contrast with her father and portray...
a kind of edenic innocence—communing with animals and unconscious of her own
desirable femininity—until she meets the commander, discovers desire, and loses the
innocence that allowed her to be one with the natural world. While Altaira remains
important throughout the film and survives her father to be carried away on the ship as
the planet is destroyed, the film's primary interest is in the character of Dr. Morbius and
his relationship with his surroundings, including the Ariel and Caliban characters.

Probably The Forbidden Planet's most lasting legacy is its Ariel character, Robby
the Robot. Robby is a bulky, metallic robot who walks on two legs, has gears in his
bubble head, and flashing lights on his chest. He is generally referred to as the Ariel
character as he aids his master in whatever needs doing. Through the science that has
designed this robot he has seemingly magical abilities and can “conjure” food and
clothing. He must obey humans in all things except that it is impossible for him to cause
harm to a person. This is reminiscent of Ariel's bond to Prospero as he must serve his
master, but this film is not concerned with the personhood of the robot, therefore he lacks
Ariel's desire for freedom. In this film without an island native, Robby the Robot also
plays a version of Caliban. Ariel and Caliban have not been entirely conflated in this
version, but Robby does take some of Caliban's persona. This is particularly clear in one
of the more amusing scenes in the film. The cook takes the part of Stefano, the drunken
butler, and they play out a version of Act II scene ii. The cook asks Robby where he can
find alcohol and Robby grabs the Cook's bottle, chugs it, and belches. He then offers to
make more for the cook and in a later scene, the cook falls down in grateful worship on a
pile of bottles. This is not an exact replica of the scene in The Tempest when Caliban
meets Stephano and Trinculo, but it is amusing and it does involve alcohol and Robby's reaction to it, though it is the cook rather than the robot who is left in awe. It is a subtle nod to the low comic subplot of *The Tempest* that does not really get played out.

The second incarnation of Caliban follows immediately on the scene with the cook. Lieutenant Farman takes advantage of Altaira's complete innocence and total lack of knowledge by introducing her to kissing. He claims that it is “nothing really personal” but is “an old custom” that is “good for you and stimulates the whole system” (Wilcox). He kisses her four times, each time drawing her closer and lingering longer, though she acknowledges that she feels no stimulation from his kisses. On the final kiss, an angry Commander Adams—not Dr. Morbius—interrupts them. The Lieutenant leaves and the Commander and Altaira argue in a much more stimulating scene. This scene with Farman takes the place of the mentioned but unseen attempt by Caliban to rape Miranda. The lieutenant tries to seduce an innocent Altaira who does not understand his motives, but like Miranda toward Caliban, she feels nothing for him. She is annoyed at being interrupted, but her chemistry is with the Commander, not the Lieutenant. This scene brings in the sexual component Caliban's attempted rape did in the play, but under different circumstances and for a different purpose. In the film, this moment emphasizes and begins to corrupt Altaira's innocence and allows the Commander to save her and spar with her in a kind of “battle-of-the-sexes” scene.

The previous two scenes are moments that echo scenes in the play with Caliban. There is a much more ominous incarnation of the character in the film. A mysterious entity on the planet is sabotaging the ship. It is enclosed behind a force field, but the cook
meets it when he finds his bottles of liquor. The entity makes it through the force field and murders the engineer who is trying to fix the sabotaged part. This entity parallels Caliban in the way it seems to have something to do with Morbius, yet is not controllable. It seems to be native to the planet and is the entity that killed the original settlers and is working against the ship. It is the monster. It is not really Caliban, but in the lack of a true parallel, it plays the part. It is the uncontrollable element on the planet, the natural element that is taking care of itself and its own. With the danger and the deaths, however, this is not a comic relief monstrous fish-like creature Caliban, but an ominous monster. It turns the film into a darker drama than the edenic beginning suggested it would be. This film is no longer comedic and this Caliban is truly frightening. In the end, it turns out that this monster is actually formed from Dr. Morbius's id. Dr. Morbius tampered with knowledge he could not handle from the Krell, the original inhabitants of the planet. His tampering caused his id to become a monstrous entity that worked to protect Morbius himself by killing anyone who questioned him: the original explorers, his wife, and now the crew of the ship. He is the monster. *The Tempest* on film centers on its Prospero character. In this case, it is the scientist who gives up everything for knowledge. This is the character Knighten compares to Marlowe's Faust, the scientist with the single-minded quest for knowledge. It is also the Prospero who was usurped and exiled due to his choice of books and knowledge over his kingdom. This notion of Prospero's id as Caliban shows a 1950s preoccupation with Freudian analysis, but it also has interesting implications for the character of Caliban. In some discussions, Ariel and Caliban are considered two sides of Prospero himself. In this film, Caliban is
Prospero. One cannot be separated from the other. Everything Prospero despises in Caliban is actually himself. He is the monster and, in the end, this makes this film not just dramatic, but a tragedy. Morbius sacrifices himself to stop the monster. The film ends with a bittersweet scene on the space ship where Robby has found a new place as “astrogator” and Altaira stands with the Commander as they blow up Altair IV and the commander reminds humanity that we cannot strive to become God. This is a film for the 1950s as humanity explores its own psyche while contemplating what we might do to ourselves via knowledge and science. Morbius/Prospero is his own worst enemy and is corrupted by trying to grasp something beyond him. This is a film from a world that has unleashed the power of the atom without fully understanding the consequences. It is a cautionary story about the harm that can come from grasping knowledge without understanding.

As a genre film, *The Forbidden Planet* stands on its own as a version of *The Tempest*. The other three films, made significantly later and within a fairly short period, have in common the idea that they very much represent their individual director's work. They are the kinds of films in which the director is discussed most prominently in criticism and can therefore be viewed under the lens of the auteur theory. The auteur theory originated in France in the 1950s as a way of looking at the body of work of a particular director. According to Peter Wollen, it originated from a regard for the work of American film directors that had been kept from France during the Nazi occupation in World War II and brought freshly to them after the war (519). It was a way of regarding studio directors as more than just parts of a machine, but as individuals with distinct
visions that came out again and again through each film even as the films themselves were of different genres and modes (Wollen 520). Andrew Sarris, the American film critic best known for distilling and popularizing the auteur theory for Americans, suggests that an auteur's work will show three distinctives: “technique, personal style, and interior meaning” (517). Each of these considerations will show the mark of the auteur. When critiquing a film under an auteur theory, the critic regards each film as it shapes a particular vision of the corpus of the director (Wollen 529). While auteur theory came from a specific time and place and it does have problems—namely that the director is not the only author of a film—it continues to be bandied about and may be useful in analyzing films that bear more the mark of their director than any other possible “author.”

As Catherine Grant reminds the reader, recognizing auteurism has become a way of distinguishing foreign and independent films from Hollywood genre films (102). Richard Koszarski defends the use of auteur criticism as both an ongoing project even when it is not called such and as a way to examine the work of filmmakers not included in earlier studies (355-56). If, as I am suggesting, the films of The Tempest are directed by the kind of director one can call an auteur, what becomes important about them is not so much how they translate Shakespeare's play, but how they use Shakespeare's play to present their continued vision. Over and over in criticism of these films, this idea rises. Jarman says that he likes the idea of repentance in The Tempest, but except perhaps at the very end, his film is as dark and as much an indictment of contemporary society as his other films (Ellis 265). It is part of the “late-1970s and early 1980s British counterculture” that characterizes his films (Harris and Jackson 90). Mazursky, perhaps less of an independent
film auteur than the other two, nevertheless is a director who is closely associated with his films. He is a comic director who “enjoys poking fun at human frailties and foibles” and who “prefers happy endings” (Haspel 130). Critics also think his films are “personal” and “autobiographical” (Quindlen 63). Thus is his Tempest. Greenaway's films are about “the order that civilized men try to lay on Mother Nature” (Pally, "Order Vs. Chaos: The Films of Peter Greenaway" 3). They are “metaphorical” films more concerned with “mise-en-scène than in montage” (Gras 123). All of these comments suggest that these are pieces in the oeuvre of the auteur rather than the kind of Shakespearean film that will, for instance, introduce a student to Shakespeare's text. The audience watches them because of the director—not because of the source.

Derek Jarman was a British filmmaker from the 1970s until his death in 1994. Two identity traits are always mentioned when critics write about Jarman: first he was queer and second he was English (MacCabe, "British Cinema Now: Art: Derek Jarman: The Lost Leader" 27). His films reflect these two aspects of himself. Most of his films are historical in some way and they open a door to queer history as well as critique contemporary England. These are the marks of Jarman the auteur, Sarris' “interior meaning” of his films. He was also a painter and a set designer and his films have a “strong visual emphasis” that reflects these pursuits as does his attention to the meshing of sound and scene in his films (The Tempest DVD Special Features: Original Presskit). His earliest film experimentation was with eight-millimeter shorts, a form he never entirely abandoned, and this, too, affected his later filmmaking. Jarman also, by choice or necessity, tended to make low-budget films with a camp sensibility. He stayed in England
when many of his peers left for Hollywood and worked with the funding he could scrape up (Grundmann 24). *The Tempest* was his third feature film. His first, *Sebastiane*, told the story of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian and was “an investigation of male sexuality and homosexual desire” (MacCabe, "Derek Jarman--Obituary" vii). Renaissance/punk inspired *Jubilee* in which Queen Elizabeth I and John Dee visit modern England followed this. *The Tempest* is then his first foray into adapting an early modern play, but hardly his first consideration of the period. His assertion is that perhaps all of Western Civilization and certainly the Renaissance were queer (Holmes 57). He follows *The Tempest* with more historically, literarily, and biblically inspired films, including *The Angelic Conversation*, a version of Shakespeare's sonnets, and *Edward II*, an adaptation of Marlowe's play, both of which emphasize a homoerotic reading of their source texts. Almost singularly among Jarman's films, *The Tempest* does not contain overtly gay content, but it does get included under “Gay and Lesbian Films”—at least at Netflix—and it contains some homoeroticism. Jarman's *The Tempest* is a re-thinking of a foundational piece of Renaissance literature.

Jarman's *The Tempest* is both traditional and avant-garde. What dialogue it employs is Shakespeare's, but it cuts and re-arranges freely. The setting is a crumbling mansion rather than an exotic island, a way to make the film on a lower budget, but also in line with Jarman's view that the play is gothic in nature (*The Tempest DVD Special Features: Original Presskit*). Many “outdoor” scenes take place indoors in rooms bereft of furniture—particularly in the love story. Ferdinand chops wood and Ferdinand and Miranda play badminton in one of these rooms. It is like they are play-acting the scenes,
knowing their world is not quite the real world. The film also takes place over the course of a night rather than a day, the better to showcase the darkly dramatic nature of Jarman's vision of the play. He categorizes it as “full of drama and poetry, fantasy and darkness...an enclosed world, almost a nightmare” (The Tempest DVD Special Features: Original Presskit). The “Original Press kit” included on the DVD, uncredited but presumably Jarman's view, calls it “the last of the great plays of William Shakespeare. Traditionally—for convenience—placed amongst his Comedies, it is in fact nothing of the kind.” There is no suggestion in this film that The Tempest might be a comedy. Jarman mediates Shakespeare for his viewers, making a film that works to “make the whole accessible and immediate to filmgoers” in which Shakespeare is most certainly not “treated as a museum-piece” (The Tempest DVD Special Features: Original Presskit).

One way Jarman moves out of tradition with his Tempest and re-forms his Renaissance text is with the female roles. Rather than having an overly innocent Miranda, Toyah Wilcox, whom Jarman had previously cast in Jubilee, plays Miranda as something of a wild child. She has grown up on the island with a laissez faire father. Her hair in dreadlocks and gown in disarray as she plays childish games with Caliban give her a sense of freedom from constraint unusual for Miranda. In addition to Miranda, Jarman includes a version of the masque at the end of the film and casts Elisabeth Welch as the “Goddess,” stepping in for Iris, Ceres, and Juno in the play. As this exotic persona sings Stormy Weather, all the elements of the film come together and find resolution. It is the blues music and the exotic singer that opens the stage to redemption and resolution after the “stormy weather” of the tempest. Finally, Jarman includes a female character who, in
the play, is mentioned but never seen, Caliban's mother, Sycorax. In a flashback, Prospero recounts to Ariel the story of Ariel's imprisonment by Sycorax (I.ii.251-86). During Prospero's voiceover, the audience sees the naked large body of the “blue-eyed hag” as she takes pleasure in inhaling smoke from a hookah, rocking and nursing an adult Caliban, and pulling a chained Ariel toward her. Her pleasure turns to pouting as Ariel falls to the ground before he reaches her, denying her his naked body. This is a brief scene, but it sets a tone for these parallel characters, Ariel and Caliban. It is a highly sexualized scene, one that provides pleasure—though incomplete—for Sycorax and Caliban and suffering for Ariel. This is not a favorably exotic Sycorax. This is a repulsive witch living for physical pleasure. This is the unruly sexualized matriarchal power that Prospero and his European male kindred must suppress. It is not sentimentalized matriarchy. It is vulgar. It suggests the need for Prospero. Yet the film in itself is not necessarily espousing the need for Prospero, but is opening up for interrogation the “interconnections of racism and misogyny in colonialist discourse” (Ellis 270). The scene does show what the power of the island was before Prospero—and perhaps places Prospero in a better light than recent thinking would do. It also shows whence Caliban came. The two characters, Sycorax and Caliban, bear a similar demeanor and presence. The man-child who baits Miranda is following his mother's sexually charged bearing and actions.

This brief image of Sycorax is contrasted with the two other women in the film. In an earlier complementary flashback, the audience gets a glimpse of Miranda as a child. As a music box plays, Prospero gives Miranda a glimpse of their past—Miranda as a
round-faced, curly-haired cherubic child wearing a multi-layered, fully-concealing dress smiling at the camera as her aristocratic father dotingly looks on. This is the picture of civilization contrasted with the barbarity of Sycorax. Even if Miranda does not grow up entirely civilized, civilization is her heritage. The other contrast with Sycorax is the “Goddess” at the end. Played by the American born black actress Elisabeth Welch, the Goddess brings in the positive exoticism that this film's Sycorax lacks. Just as Prospero gives Ariel his final charge and then his freedom, the Goddess enters wearing a flowing gold dress and gold feathery headdress and singing “Stormy Weather” as the entire cast stops what they are doing and quietly looks on in wonder. This benevolent presence signals that everything has been set to rights and marks the beginning of Ariel's freedom that Sycorax malevolently took from him and Prospero, forcefully if not unkindly, kept from him. This is not typical representation of women in The Tempest. By making Miranda more wild-child than pure innocence, Jarman complicates the resolution of her marriage to Ferdinand. She may be a political pawn Prospero is using to regain his place of power, but she is also her own person making her own choice. It is not entirely clear that this marriage will tame her. The goddess brings a presence of the exotic and power as she sweeps through and speaks to the storm of the whole play. Sycorax shows Caliban's origins and Ariel's past, but also shows whom it was that Prospero fought and overpowered. It gives an image to the one who was there before him and helps query his place on the island. It also gives an odd humanity to Caliban as he takes in sustenance from this maternal creature whom he lost. In this film, the women are present and
provocative, but each one plays to something of a type and they do not substantially change the masculine order of power present in the play.

While the portrayal of Caliban has become an ongoing concern in twentieth century versions of *The Tempest*, Derek Jarman chooses to do the unexpected with this casting choice. The expected twentieth century view is a “sympathetic” Caliban with a nod toward the problem of colonialism and slavery in a seventeenth century text (Ellis 268). Jarman reportedly originally planned to follow this trend with “‘a black, beautiful, sympathetic Caliban, wearing a mother-of-pearl necklace to symbolize the loveliness of the world he had shared with Sycorax’” (qtd. in Ellis 268). Ellis suggests that this image is so expected, it would not have brought anything new to the role (268). Instead of the sympathetic black man, Jack Birkett, a blind, white actor/mime, plays this Caliban. He is older than Prospero, wears a tattered black butler's coat, and cackles and leers at Miranda. In his first scene, the audience sees a close-up of Caliban eating a raw egg. He is human, but he is monstrous, too. Jarman films him in close-ups and the over-exaggeration of his mouth, the cackling laughter, the gestures he makes all work to make him, if not monstrous, at least creepy. He plays the fool with Stephano and Trinculo and realizes in the end that he has been a fool, yet he never really seems repentant—just with eyes open to reality. He is more edgy and offensive than comic. There is a certain amount of meditation on his place on the island and whether it is his by inheritance, but it does not make him sympathetic. This is a grotesque and serious Caliban who is of the earth and of the island, but not quite of the people.
Probably the most unusual casting choice in Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* is that of Prospero himself. Prospero is a fascinating character. It is possible to interpret him as a stand-in for Shakespeare, in this his final play, giving up his books, saying farewell to the stage. One can also see Prospero as a stand-in for the director as he directs the plot of the story. In some ways, this seems to be Jarman's emphasis. First, his Prospero, Heathcote Williams, is surprisingly young, not yet forty at the time of this film and only two and a half months older than Jarman himself. Second, Williams' reputation at the time was that of a writer and a magician rather than an actor. Jarman claims that, in fact, “he IS Prospero” (*The Tempest DVD Special Features: Original Presskit*). This is a personal Prospero indeed. The first scene shows Prospero dreaming the shipwreck and whispering the words of the play as if directing the action, events we soon discover he conjured through his enslaved spirit, Ariel. He then goes to his study, which is filled with the trappings of a magician—particularly in writing all around the walls and floor—and draws a magic circle as he continues to direct the action. This is a quiet, thoughtful magician who seizes an opportunity to right the wrongs from his past by manipulating the present. He continues in this form, the continued presence throughout the film, background to and conjurer of the plot. The end makes this particularly clear as he wraps all the plot-lines up in the “masque” and then he returns to his bare room and speaks not the words of farewell to the stage nor the drowning of the books, but instead, the words of the director who has seen his action completed, the words Prospero speaks directly after the Masque in the penultimate act of the play text:

> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, thin air;
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea all which it inherit shall dissolve;
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.148-57)

In the play, this is after the spirits have performed the masque, so it is speaking specifically of the spirit actors; however, Jarman uses the words to convey a message about the whole film. In this film, everything has melted into the air and dissolved, leaving only Prospero, the director, behind to sleep and to dream on what he conjured in his vision. It is not the writer giving up his books, but the director realizing his whole world is just a stage. It is Shakespearean as we think of it, almost Macbeth-like, but it is not a usual take on *The Tempest*. It is Jarman giving voice to the director and questioning what is left of the “great globe” as he ends the dark film in the dark solitude of sleep.

Dark colors, nude men, voices playing over the action, these are marks of a Derek Jarman film and these are part of *The Tempest*. It is in some ways a very traditional film with Shakespeare's story at its center and the characters at least somewhat recognizable. It has a narrative line and, while Shakespeare's order is shifted, it follows a narrative order. It is also extremely untraditional. It is a dark film, both literally in lighting and set and figuratively as the story plays out dramatically in the crumbling world Prospero has formed. It is and is not Shakespeare. It is typical Jarman, but not in every way. It is Jarman because it critiques the world crumbling around him. It is Jarman because within the crumbling world there is a hope of reconciliation. It is Jarman because it is very
British, but portrays Britain under a cloud, trying to move forward in a crumbling world. It is not Jarman in that it does not explicitly explore issues of homosexuality, yet it is Jarman as it explores issues of relationships among and between men. With its exaggeration and gilt and glitter, there is a camp sensibility that is also Jarman. The film ends with the “masque,” a glamorous ball with a delighted Miranda, sailors dancing, a cowed but not entirely repentant Caliban and drunk Stefano in costume and Trinculo in drag, and Elisabeth Welch playing the Goddess singing “Stormy Weather” just after Prospero reclaims his dukedom, forgives his brother, frees Ariel, and indulgently watches Miranda and Ferdinand. Then, the very end allows Ariel to play with freedom as he tries finding a place in the house and eventually flits away, disappearing in a flash leaving Prospero alone, sleeping, but thinking as a director of the end of the play. It is a fitting conclusion to this film and gives the audience the same kind of spectacle a masque would have as an interlude in Shakespeare's time. This is a film that could have been made only by Derek Jarman, yet it follows a long theatrical tradition of playing with Shakespeare. It is The Tempest, but it is The Tempest through the lens of a director who, in 1979, is learning the power of re-telling the past as he changes characters, perspectives, and emphases while maintaining the crux of the play, for him the possibility of redemption even as the world continues to crumble. Jarman specializes in the notion of crumbling civilization whether it is contemporary Britain, ancient Rome, or Medieval England. The Tempest, set in a crumbling mansion, shows this clearly. Yet, somehow, Jarman manages to show hope within the tatters. Prospero, even while he remains in his decaying rooms, gives up his need for control and revenge. He forgives his brother and frees Ariel and
Miranda, finding redemption for himself in these actions. He may not leave his “island,” but he is no longer cut off from the world and the world is no longer a set for despair, but has become a place of hope.

While Derek Jarman is artful and focused enough to be casually referred to as “auteur,” this is not so with Paul Mazursky, director of the 1981 contemporary version, Tempest. While Mazursky has found some critical success—though not much for Tempest—he seems to be too mainstream, too light, too prolific to really fit into a contemporary definition of auteur that seems to include darker, more independent filmmakers. This casual usage is suspect given that the origins of auteur theory stem from French critics finding a way to discuss American studio directors. These were the mainstream directors—not the independent or art directors who are now casually considered “auteurs.” Given this, Paul Mazursky who also writes many of the films he directs and whose films tend to explore similar themes in a similar style, may be considered something of an auteur. If he is not a “true auteur”—whomever that might be—at the very least, it may be more useful to examine his version of Shakespeare in light of his other films than as something overtly Shakespearean, though Shakespeare as a source is certainly present.

Perhaps the most distinguishing attribute of Mazursky's Tempest is that it is a comedy. This is not universally praised or even understood in light of the original. Paul Haspel notes the “discontinuity between William Shakespeare's ambiguous, unstable tragicomedy...and Mazursky's fundamentally comic and optimistic worldview” (130). If all the critics expect Shakespeare to be dramatic and ambiguous, a film like this will be a
disappointment because it is, at its core, a comedy; however, if one expects Paul Mazursky's films to be comedies, then this film will not disappoint. This may be the sole comical film version of what was once a kind of comedy, and yet that may be why it was singularly unsuccessful. The public is conditioned through films of the tragedies and histories to think of Shakespeare as serious business and through twentieth century criticism to see The Tempest as part of that serious business, as some kind of colonialist revenge drama that oppresses the native and ends in tragedy barely averted.

What does happen with Mazursky's film, and why it is easier to see Mazursky than Shakespeare even if one claims The Tempest (the play) as a comedy, is that Mazursky leaves The Tempest to tell his own story. The film begins on the island to which Phillip (John Cassavetes), the Prospero character, has retreated with his daughter, Miranda (Molly Ringwald), and his current companion, Aretha (Susan Sarandon), but it quickly moves to a flashback that will tell Phillip's story. While Shakespeare includes expository information about the past in the form of Prospero telling Miranda their story, it is one scene of the play. Mazursky's exposition, the non-Shakespearean flashback, is about half of the film. This is the personal story, the perhaps autobiographically inspired moments critics claim as Mazursky's trademark (Quindlen 63). If every film is about Mazursky, in this one he may be found in the middle-aged architect who is somewhat disillusioned with his own life. Even if Phillip is not Mazursky, he is critiquing his kind of upper middle class American malaise. This Prospero is not a magician, but he is a builder and, in a nod to the original, he builds—or has built—an amphitheater. In a version of the masque, the characters perform a kind of dance in the amphitheater as
couples come together and Phillip realizes he no longer needs the island, but can return to
the mainland with Antonia, his wife (Gena Rowlands), and Miranda, his daughter.
Finally, as he hurries from the helicopter on the roof of a building in New York, he stops
and winks at the audience and the scene abruptly returns to the amphitheater on the island
where each actor in a medium shot comes out of a doorway and bows and then joins
hands for a final curtain call as the credits roll, suggesting the whole film was merely a
play in the amphitheater on Phillip's (or Kalibanos’) island. Mazursky has created a fun
film that gives a wink to Shakespeare but is about a twentieth-century American man. In
the time on the island, the unreal life that takes its moorings from the play, Mazursky uses
Shakespearean ideas to work out Phillip's issues.

The film uses ideas from *The Tempest*, but it also plays loose with them. If one
looks only at Mazursky's film, one might not notice the dearth of women in *The Tempest.*
Of course there is Miranda, played by Molly Ringwald as a “typical” cultured teenager
who is somewhat bored on the island—bored enough to appreciate Kalibanos' offer of
television but not bored enough to explore her sexuality with the much older
goatherd—who finds immediate like with the teenage boy who finds his way to the
island. Mazursky adds women beyond Miranda. Ariel becomes Aretha, a flesh and blood
human woman played by Susan Sarandon. This Ariel was a dog-walker in Athens who
came expectantly to the island with Phillip, but has become disillusioned with the island
life and the man's crisis. She made the choice to come to the island, but now seems to
feel caught and imprisoned on it. She also is “freed” when, at the end of the film,
Phillip—with Aretha's encouragement—returns to his wife. Fulfilling her role as Ariel,
she tells Phillip “it's time to forgive.” They have a good-bye dance and the next time we see her she dances with Phillips' rival while Phillip finds his wife and asks her forgiveness. Phillip's wife, Antonia, seems to be filling in for Prospero's brother. She betrays him, not by taking his kingdom and exiling him, but by cuckolding him with his business rival, Alonzo. She also is the one who invokes the desire for freedom. The Aretha character may be Ariel and she may be disillusioned with Phillip's island life, but her leaving of him is bittersweet. In the flashback when Phillip learns his wife is having an affair, she says, “I want my freedom” and he gives it to her, only to have her return to him in the end. The women may be playing Ariel, but they do not really want to be freed. It is Phillip who has some sort of power over them—not as a sorcerer, but as a man. The women are present, but the film belongs to Phillip.

In twentieth century versions of The Tempest, Caliban as a character comes to the forefront and is one of the reasons the play may not be considered a comedy. Mazursky resolves this by making Kalibanos, played by respected stage and film actor Raul Julia, a lusty but quite human goatherd who considers the island his own, but also immediately takes Phillip for his “boss.” He is an amusing character, awkward from too much time alone on the island, but funny rather than monstrous and really quite romantic. In keeping with Shakespeare's story, he does lust after Miranda, hiding to watch her skinny dip in the ocean and seducing her with his television. This does not come across as a power play, but more of a last-two-people-on-earth-let's-get-together scenario. She turns him down and Phillip finds out. Phillip takes Kalibanos out in the sailboat where he pushes him into the water with the mast and beats him. Eventually Phillip goes too far and when
Kalibanos starts to sink, Phillip jumps in and saves him. It is a fight from the play, the reason Caliban has become an outcast, but here it takes place in the present and is kept light and comical. In the end, in this film, even Kalibanos finds love. During the masque, he meets the languid and searching but unsophisticated Dolores who came on the boat with Alonzo. She appreciates his “poetry.” Thus Caliban in the comedy is a comic figure. He plays the clarinet to his goats, writes songs, and lusts after women, but he is no kind of monster and he really has nothing against Phillip. Critics accuse Mazursky of being “superficial” (Canby D19), and Kalibanos may be a character who bears out that criticism. He is fun and Julia certainly plays him with flair and style, but there are no questions concerning him. The viewer is left with amusement rather than any sort of grappling with the world.

*Tempest* is a light film that explores the middle-class anguish of the late seventies and early eighties through the lens of Shakespeare. It is much more contemporary than Shakespearean and is clearly more Mazursky than Shakespeare. It is a transitional film for Mazursky who moves with it from purely American films to films that explore the intersections between America and other parts of the world (Haspel 138). It is a film that takes the supernatural aspects of Shakespeare's play and gives them natural bodies, at once making the characters more personal—a mark of Mazursky—and the story less exotic and more blunt, less fanciful and more human. This may be its very downfall. Its problem is not just that it is an optimistic comedy in Mazursky's style, but that these characters, as upper middle class Americans, are dull to watch. They may be personable, but they are not particularly interesting. They live slightly above most of us in a
superficial world that films of the early eighties developed, but alone on an island or working through their own malaise feels just a little trite.

*Prospero's Books* calls itself an “adaptation of *The Tempest.” Among a group of independent films, it is by far the most “art-film” like. The other films all follow the basic, traditional narrative structure of *The Tempest.* *Prospero's Books* is a meta-narrative. It is a story that tells the story of the play through words, music, and still and moving pictures. It is almost impossible to describe without going into vast detail. The film begins with white text scrolling on a black background. The first note is entirely traditional, establishing the story of the play, Prospero and Miranda exiled on a faraway island. The second establishes the conceit of the film, “One evening, Prospero imagines creating a storm powerful enough to bring his old enemies to his island. He begins to write a play about this tempest, speaking aloud the lines of each of his characters. It is the story of Prospero's past, and his revenge...” (Greenaway). This is *The Tempest* as Prospero, the character, is writing it. The word scroll demonstrates the dual nature of the production, one that starts as an adaptation, acknowledging the setting Shakespeare has created, and then moves into being a free form of ideas that meld in Prospero's mind to tell the story. While this note emphasizes the idea of revenge, suggesting this might be a “revenge tragedy,” it does not really play out that way. It is too cerebral to be merely tragic. It is a film, as Greenaway says, about “organizing, learning, and knowledge” (Pally, "Cinema as the Total Art Form" 7). As an “art film” it defies easy categorization as comedy or tragedy or even tragicomedy. By working through its twenty-four “books,” it
seems to cover every possible emotion and category while remaining a step back from any of them. It is a film seen through the “Book of Mirrors.”

This film was a chance for John Gielgud to be Prospero, to embody a character he had played many times on stage and desired to play on film. In this film he becomes, not just the character but also the essence of the whole play, he embodies *The Tempest*. It was also an opportunity for Peter Greenaway to unite with Shakespeare to envision the creating of this text, these characters, and this world. Greenaway's films tend toward the metaphorical and in that mode, this is not a narrative production of *The Tempest* but an imagining of the idea of Prospero writing and directing the plot of the play, manipulating each of the characters for his own purposes. It takes that idea—that Prospero is a stand-in for Shakespeare and that the magician is the writer and director of the little island plot as he causes the shipwreck and brings the cast together to find his revenge—and makes it quite literal. He tells the audience of his past, writes his present, and imagines the future. Infused with this idea that Prospero is writing the play is the notion that the play emanates from a set of books, those books that Gonzalo “of his gentleness, / Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me / From mine own library with volumes that / I prize above my dukedom” (I.ii.166-69). The film imagines what these prized books might have been and uses them as the backdrop and foundation for this new text Prospero writes. Each book speaks to a certain part of the play. This is Peter Greenaway's vision of what Prospero would have needed to survive and thrive on the island, raise a daughter, and exact his revenge on his brother.
The center of *Prospero's Books* is absolutely Prospero. He is Prospero, but he is the rest of the parts as well. This is a one-man tour de force. Prospero speaks the lines aloud, everyone's lines, as he writes the play. He has several modes and the film interweaves among them: Prospero hunched in the study writing, Prospero walking regally through the stage attended by Ariel and others, and Prospero describing and watching scenes as they are played out. He sometimes wears a blue garment embroidered with mystical symbols. This gives way at times to a similar red garment. He also occasionally goes without the outer garment, leaving him dressed in a white shift. He also ends up naked at one point. At the end of the film, he dresses in the cloak and ruff of the courtier, but gives the ruff to Ariel. These various costumes show him as magician, writer, Duke, and man. He plays all these parts within the film. He is the writer creating the world, the magician within the created world who can form the tempest and command Ariel, the father to Miranda who explicates the past even as he is writing it, and the man on whom his own forces are acting as he begins to understand his scheme for revenge and learns to temper it with mercy. This Prospero is a regal Prospero. He is tall and stately, with gray hair and a well-cropped beard, looking every bit the Duke and the magician. He is the embodiment of the old mage, come to the end of his life, grown wise through the years, and ready to redeem the past through vengeance first and forgiveness second. It is the image of the actor who has become Prospero and the director who sees this particular world through the single character.

This film flashes between the traditional and the avant-garde. The whole idea of Prospero narrating the play as the action takes place in the background is untraditional,
but the words he speaks and some of the scenes played out are actually quite traditional.

One of the most conventional aspects of the film is Miranda. Played by Isabelle Pasco, she is the beautiful, innocent Miranda not seen on film since *The Forbidden Planet*. She wears a gauzy white dress affirming her innocence. Miranda is besot with Ferdinand and amazed at the world and silent as her father speaks all of her lines. Because this film is so concerned with Prospero, Miranda fades into the background. It is difficult to capture her spirit in her silence. There are two short flashback views of Miranda that would not make it into a play, but play a part in this image-filled film. The first is of Miranda as a child in the court playing with a toy boat, cared for by four waiting gentlewomen. This child is a regal Miranda who knows what it is to be a child in court. She may not remember this time, but it connects to the contemporary Miranda and suggests that this world her father is creating is also wrapped up in her childhood. The boat he wrecks was once her play toy. The other flashback shows Miranda as an infant lying in a cradle while her mother, along with the waiting gentlewomen, hover over her. This brief image recognizes that Miranda did, once, have a mother who cared for her.

This film also shows the other mother, Sycorax. She is very much a "foul witch," a naked, fleshy woman sitting at the edge of a tempestuous lake while a witch doctor dances before her. The film shows her being brought to the island, banished from Algiers (I.ii.268). It also shows her giving birth to the inhuman child, Caliban (I.ii.286). This *Tempest*, conceived entirely in Prospero's mind, does not provide any counter ideas to Sycorax as the foul witch. Caliban is then marked by his inhuman birth. He is reflected in "The Book of Earth," yet he desecrates even this book as his entrance is marked by raw
eggs, long black charcoal scratches, viscous liquid, and an unsavory mass all falling onto the open pages of the book. The music playing at this point is insistent, pushing forward as Miranda and Prospero walk toward Caliban. Caliban is an almost-naked lithe dancer. He emerges from a pool of water onto a rock and moves rhythmically as the Prospero narrator tells his story and Prospero and Miranda look on. Caliban is marked with disgust, yet there is something sensual and aesthetically pleasing in him, too. He is of the earth and he moves with the earth. Because he never speaks his own words, he seems very much the puppet dancing on Prospero's strings, yet trying to create dissonance in that dance as he makes his moves. Eventually he works with Stephano and Trinculo to try to overcome the master, yet even this act is doomed to failure because it is the master creating the plot. This is not a Prospero who casually forgets about the island inhabitants, but one who continues to mastermind their every act.

Ariel is probably the most unorthodox rendering of a character in Prospero's Books. Ariel is multiple. He is always male with curly red hair and a redhead's complexion, but he is many. There is a child Ariel, an adolescent Ariel, and several adult Ariels. The various Ariels swing above the water and follow Prospero's instructions. The child Ariel urinates on the boat to signify the tempest that shipwrecks the king's party and starts the action. When Prospero reminds Ariel that the magician saved the sprite from Sycorax, the flashback is quite literal. Prospero speaks all the lines as the camera focuses on him and then on a grown-up Ariel lounging under water enduring Prospero's reminder of his former torment. When the young Ariel refuses to obey Sycorax, the film shows the adolescent Ariel being cloven into the pine, his pain made real in his expression and
tortuous screams as he is overtaken by and melded into the tree until he becomes so much a part of it that beetles make their way out of his mouth. This is one of the moments in which this film fully shows what one can only picture when hearing the play. In the last act, three Ariels—young, adolescent, and adult—seem to take over the writing of the play and remind Prospero what it means to be human; however, they are not yet free. Their freedom does not come until the very end, after they have helped Prospero “drown [his] book[s]” and “break [his] staff” (V.i.57, 54). In the play, Prospero says he will do this. In this film, he and Ariel complete the task. Once they are finished, the only book remaining is Shakespeare's book of plays. The magic is gone, but the writing is left. Finally, Prospero frees Ariel. Prospero stands alone on stage and gives his epilogue and then the young Ariel returns to swing one last time, running and leaping toward the camera and shifting into the adult Ariel as he takes the leap.

*Prospero's Books* is all serious because it is all narrated by the serious voice of Prospero and filtered through his serious mind. It is completely and utterly Prospero's story as the director and the actor work together to give the sorcerer the added authority of the pen as he writes his own play and manipulates the characters as he chooses, speaking the lines for each of them as the magic of film creates the images that the lines both evoke and invoke. Yet somehow behind all these images and flashes and small scenes and ideas of toy boats in underground lakes and nude spirits milling about is a fairly conventional and earnest rendering of Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare's words are spoken and the basic characters of the story maintain their conventional personas. Prospero is regal. Miranda is pure. Ferdinand is a young lover. Caliban is a monster of
sorts. Ariel is a sprite and a slave. The narrative gets played out as it always does with a plot of revenge turning at the last moment to forgiveness and freedom. It is perhaps a not unconventional telling of *The Tempest*, yet to call it a conventional film would be doing it a great disservice. It is far from that. It is an experiment in narrative. It is idea stacked upon idea as image is stacked upon image upon music upon narrative voiceover. It is a meditation upon *The Tempest* even while it is an adaptation of the play. It is a picture of the author's mind as Prospero writes the play that fills the blank pages in the final book, the only book not lost to the ages, “The Book of 36 Plays,” that is, Shakespeare's plays. This film pays scant attention to the more recent post-colonialist criticism of *The Tempest* but draws from the sometime popular critical notion that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's farewell to the stage and Shakespeare puts himself into the character of Prospero as he creates his final play. This is the unfolding of that creation as Peter Greenaway envisions it, Sir John Gielgud embodies it, and late twentieth century film magic makes it possible.

**Conclusion**

Comedy serves a purpose. There is catharsis in comedy just as there is in tragedy. To laugh at the ridiculous, to watch the underdog overcome his supposed betters, to see characters surmount their problems to arrive at happy endings, these are all plots that draw audiences together and give them an emotional release. A dark undercurrent flows through all of Shakespeare's comedies. There is not a single comedy that does not also examine questions of existence. In the broad farce, *The Comedy of Errors*, Egeon's life is on the line. *The Taming of the Shrew* shows a woman's attempt not to be subjugated by men. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* questions ideas of power and sexuality. By embedding
these issues within the comedy, the audience can share the laughter and note that happiness does not come without sacrifice, but that the joy overtakes the sorrow. By emphasizing the dramatic elements of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, contemporary filmmakers remove the joy that comes when an audience laughs together. There is no catharsis of shared laughter. There is no questioning of the foibles of the characters. There is no wondering how far Prospero or Shylock can press the situation before it becomes unfunny since it was not funny to begin with. Thus, the question becomes, what replaces the comic catharsis? As dramas, are these films still relevant?

The film versions of *The Tempest* are interesting, even rich, particularly as material for academic study. To see how Derek Jarman approaches Shakespeare and turns Prospero's edenic island into a crumbling society is fascinating. To note the technology Peter Greenaway uses as he studies ideas of Shakespeare in *Prospero's Books* engenders multiple articles. These are not, however, films that bring catharsis to the viewer. By focusing so much on Prospero, these films, along with Mazursky's, limit their perspective and their reach. When the audience sees every character only through Prospero's eyes, the ability to use the richness of the characters diminishes. Sycorax, a character the films discover and one who is intriguing in criticism, becomes merely monstrous. Caliban, by Prospero's necessity, cannot be more than a grotesque slave. Miranda and Ferdinand are pushed to the side. It becomes the story of a self-centered man trying to hold on to power and revenge old wrongs without opening his own life to scrutiny. It loses the community essence of comedy without gaining the universality of the best tragedies. As pieces of the auteurs' oeuvre, they are worthwhile, but as gripping dramas of human life and emotions,
they are lacking. Only the science fiction genre piece, *The Forbidden Planet*, really seems to find a story worth telling, one that raises questions while engaging the viewer with its characters and narrative line.

*The Merchant of Venice* is different. There could be much comedy in *The Merchant of Venice*, but the trial at its core is a serious undertaking. The films use this inherent seriousness as well as the ideas of alienation that run through the play and build on them to make a poignant, barely averted tragedy. There is no pretense in these films that the ending is happy. While the comedy catharsis is definitely lacking, there is a sorrowfulness that allows emotional release. Shylock's shame, Antonio's isolation, and, especially, Jessica's grief give depth to these films. This is the master move and both Nunn and Radford make it; they give Shylock his humanity by bringing to the forefront the background character, Jessica, his daughter. A merely comic version of the play could present her as the shallowest of creatures, running away in the night and selling her mother's ring for a monkey. Both of these films make her a thoughtful, sincere, and complex character. She must leave her father, but it grieves her to do so. Both films end with the image of the sorrowing daughter, in one singing a lament while her friends surround her in support and in the other gazing alone into the water. By ending on this note, the films leave the audience in somber thought rather than chuckling over the triviality of the ring business after seeing a man broken. The other characters, and maybe the viewer too, become a little more human because Jessica cannot allow them to simply dismiss her father.
Chapter 5

Hamlet, the Comedy

People call William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (*Hamlet*) “the outstanding masterwork of the past 1000 years” (Draudt 71). While this is perhaps a hyperbolic assertion, there is no doubt that *Hamlet* is one of the best known and most quoted Western texts. It is a part of Anglo-American cultural consciousness. Because *Hamlet* is so well known, so often studied in schools, and so frequently produced as both play and film, it also becomes fine fodder for appropriation, particularly comic appropriation. Its very intensity and unceasing march to tragedy makes it particularly susceptible to comic interpretation when jokes depend on the incongruity of their material. A traditional adaptation of a play like *Hamlet* may suggest that it is in fact William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. A comic version turns on the idea that it is not Hamlet, but that the film viewer indeed knows *Hamlet*. Using such a familiar source allows the comedian to take twists and turns with a minimum of set-up. The incongruence of the utterly tragic with the comic allows the audience to laugh in relief as well as amusement as the familiar plot winds in unfamiliar ways. There is also a cultural cachet to citing Shakespeare, particularly such a well-respected and well-represented play as *Hamlet*. The notion that a film borrows from this particular play lends the film automatic gravitas—deserved or not. Parodying Shakespeare seems to also be an unproblematic way of mocking other issues—layering the objects of parody. Finally, comic appropriation of Shakespeare can be a means of tribute to his legacy, poking fun while
still invoking the themes that make the play continue to resonate with a twenty-first century audience.

These notions of the comic uses of *Hamlet* are fluid. The most thorough and postmodern adaptation, Tom Stoppard's film of his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, uses every possible notion of Shakespeare in its meta-narrative relocation of the play to the point of view of the minor and ineffectual title characters. Most other comic film appropriations and adaptations do fit largely within one comic purpose. Parodies of Shakespeare that are also parodying other notions of Hollywood and film play out in *Last Action Hero* (McTiernan 1993) and “The Producer” episode of *Gilligan's Island* (Lupino and Cahan 1966). Disney's animated feature, *The Lion King* is perhaps the ultimate example of using *Hamlet* as cultural capital, but Bob and Doug Mackenzie's 1983 film, *Strange Brew*, works within this notion as well. The Reduced Shakespeare Company with their *The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)* has based their whole enterprise on this cachet, yet their rendition of *Hamlet* pays tribute to Shakespeare in the midst of farce. Finally, the first season of the Canadian television series, *Slings & Arrows*, works as appropriation of and tribute to *Hamlet* and Shakespeare on the contemporary stage as the fictional New Burbage Theatre Company performs *Hamlet* while the themes and plot echo in the story of Geoffrey Tennant, the new artistic director for the company.

While adaptations take on different aspects of *Hamlet*, there seem to be characters, scenes, and themes that occur repeatedly. First, to be *Hamlet*, there must be a Hamlet, a prince of some kind who generally has an “uncle” who has denied him his
place. The “uncle” is often married or linked to a mother figure. The ghost of the father also shows up. There is usually some sort of representation of the parallel family: Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia. Perhaps because Tom Stoppard brought them to attention with his play in 1966, even though they are relatively minor characters in Shakespeare's play, there seem to be a fair number of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern types in the take-offs. Conversely, surprisingly absent is a representative of Horatio. In comedy, Hamlet is bereft of his one true friend. Most versions find a way to include the murder and revenge plots as well as musings on death complete with a skull and questions of Hamlet's sanity. Scenes that make their way into the adaptations include Hamlet's “To be or not to be” soliloquy (III.i.58-92), his casting off of Ophelia (III.i.122-30), and her madness and death (IV.v). These are all moments, characters, and motifs that signify Hamlet and become part of repurposing the text.

In A Theory of Adaptation, Linda Hutcheon begins to form a definition for and way of looking at adaptation. She observes that film adaptations of literature are “perceived as lowering” the source, but that pleasure for an audience comes from familiarity and repetition, thus making adaptations safe business choices (3-5). She suggests that adaptations should not necessarily be judged by fidelity to source material, yet they may be analyzed in conversation with their sources since an adaptation by nature is engaged intertextually with its origin (6-8). Adaptation as Hutcheon uses it is a fairly benign term. More codified is the term appropriation, which connotes claiming a new ownership of the material for a specific purpose. In her introduction to Shakespeare and Appropriation, editor Christy Desmet discusses the idea of experiencing appropriation by
comparing it to “living in a public park” (2). She discusses how Shakespearean appropriations present the convergence of “private interests and public situations” and notes that they abandon any verisimilitude in the work (2). That is, the appropriators use the public situation of their source material and the new form they are giving it to imbue it with a new meaning as they re-form it, but they do not expect anyone to take it as realistic. This “re-vision” might come from love or hate, could have political or business implications, and may challenge or affirm the dominant culture (2-3). Appropriations have a purpose and use the signifier, Shakespeare, to foreground that purpose.

In “Hamlet Part Eight, the Revenge,” Kay H. Smith examines *Hamlet* as the specific Shakespearean signifier for a number of contemporary adaptations including *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, The Lion King, Strange Brew,* and *The Last Action Hero*. She writes that the Disney producers give a “sprinkling of ‘Hamlet-dust’” to *The Lion King* to give the animated film a “serious theme” and allow parents to recognize its “literary underpinnings” (139). She sees the use of *Hamlet* in *Strange Brew* as opposite that of *The Lion King*, suggesting that, while the “‘Hamlet-dust’” is more present in the comedy, it is inconsequential, present only to heighten the silliness and produce laughs (139). Smith then discusses at some length the relatively brief moment of *The Last Action Hero* that sets up a dichotomy between a hesitant Hamlet and an active Jack Slater, establishing some of the meta-filmic themes of the action hero in the story and in the story-within-a-story; however, she concludes that this ends up “diminishing *Hamlet* while not enhancing itself” (146). Finally, Smith contrasts Stoppard's play version of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* with his film adaptation, noting that by adding
so much more of *Hamlet* into the film, he diminishes his re-creation of the minor characters. They go back to being behind the scenes rather than central to them (147-48). She concludes that “sampling” the iconic high cultural signifier that is *Hamlet* in low culture forms is a risky move that can be fruitful, but more often leaves both source and adaptation lost in insignificance (148). What Smith suggests may certainly be true if the high-culture/low-culture dichotomy stays firmly in place, but these very films interrogate that notion as they bring the so-called high culture into the mass marketplace.

**Hamlet Behind the Scenes: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead**

When it comes to comedy versions of *Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is in its own category. It is not a parody or a contemporary re-telling or even really a tribute to *Hamlet*. It began in the tradition of the theater of the absurd as a play that cited *Hamlet*. It told the story of two minor characters from *Hamlet*, Hamlet's school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and followed their absurd and insignificant lives to their inevitable conclusion, the line at the end of *Hamlet* by the English Ambassador: “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead” (V.ii.315). In play form, it is the story of Hamlet's schoolmates with glimpses of Shakespeare's play in the background. It is its own story, yet it would not exist without *Hamlet*. In the film this remains true, but Stoppard, who re-wrote his script and directed the film more than twenty years after the play debuted, has included more segments from *Hamlet*. Much critical attention, and even popular reviews, focus on the differences between the stage version and the film. Film critic Roger Ebert gives the movie zero stars, claiming that what was a “fascinating” play simply cannot work on film. Academic critics tend to be less harsh in their
judgments. Elizabeth Wheeler notes the differences in play and film, but suggests that Stoppard's changes succeed in the new medium as he “revels in the detailed physicality of place missing from theatrical productions” (5). She praises the “delightfully funny sight gags” that make Rosencrantz seem innocently smarter than he is in the play. She notes that the theme of the ending changes as well. The film ends with the players recreating the play, ever after including the insignificant but always present Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Anna K. Nardo argues that, contrary to popular opinion, through the use of play and place, the film presents as complex an exploration of ontology as the play did (113, 115). Susan C. W. Abbotson goes even further to suggest that the film has countered the main criticisms of the play and achieved a unity of theme—individual moral responsibility—that the play did not. She claims that Stoppard has rid himself of the distracting Beckett and Pirandello parallels and reclaimed the text in a more mature and clearer form (171-73). If one considers the Beckett-esque qualities of the play a problem, this is praise. There is a loss of that particular kind of existential stasis in the film, but the existential questions remain as *Hamlet* gets played through over and over.

While much is written about the film and play, the question is whether the film becomes a comic version of *Hamlet* and for what purpose does it cite *Hamlet*? By adding more of *Hamlet* into the film, Stoppard deepens the connection between the film and its inspiration. As it invokes the characters and shows the scenes, it becomes a version of *Hamlet*, albeit a fleeting one that dips in and out of the play. The film focuses on the troupe of players that enact the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*. The players meet up with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the head player (the Player) invites the boys to get
“caught up in the action,” and participate in the play. This opens the question of reality within this convoluted world of play, film, and life. While *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is not precisely a re-telling or parody of Hamlet, it is a version of the play in the way the events of *Hamlet* are played out throughout the film. They are, in fact, played out over and over again such that it becomes almost a *Hamlet* mosaic, the bigger film made up from this cycle of *Hamlets*. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern step into Act Two of *Hamlet*, watching a silent version of Hamlet and Ophelia's quarrel and then joining the scene when Claudius asks them to spy on Hamlet (*Hamlet* II.ii.1-53). When they have completed the moment from *Hamlet*, the men step out of their *Hamlet* parts and talk about where they are. Rosencrantz wants to get out of the play, to go home. Guildenstern assures him that they are in the right story, that what is happening is what is supposed to happen, even if it does not feel right. When they come across Claudius again, they note, “We are going around in circles” (Stoppard). This is the crux of this film. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are caught up in the play of *Hamlet*, going around in circles, playing with words, and waiting for their truth. The remainder of Act Two plays through with the boys moving between participating and observing, finally noting, “This place is a madhouse” (Stoppard). They can see the madness within the whole of the story—not just in Hamlet.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* moves back to the players who seem to be acting out a comical dumb show version of *Hamlet*. The Player forecasts what will happen to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. “Watch your heads,” he says, claiming to have “been here before” (Stoppard). This pantomime includes Hamlet on the ship, a woman
tossed about in an imagined storm; Ophelia's death, the actor dancing and turning faster and faster behind a blue cloth; the funeral and Laertes' and Hamlet's reaction; the Player as Hamlet holding the skull; the duel between Hamlet and Laertes with invisible poisoned weapons; the king toasting himself with poisoned goblets; and everybody's deaths. These are all moments that happen in *Hamlet* after Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have exited for the last time, but are offered here in a kind of loop, as if they have happened before and will happen again. This play-within-a-play is not *The Mousetrap*, a play that echoes *Hamlet*. It is *Hamlet*. It is amusing and knowing and prescient, but it covers the highlights. It gives some commentary on the play: the ship as a woman tossing Hamlet about, the king presenting himself with the poisoned goblets, and the Player winking in the end, noting that it is a play and he will rise again. The characters watch it, laughing and clapping, but they do not recognize it. The Player winks toward Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but they are still lost within this play in which they are caught up. No one but the Player recognizes that this plot, playing out to its inevitable conclusion, has played before and will play again. Indeed, the story of Hamlet moves on after this interlude, picking up and relentlessly advancing. The film returns to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern watching *Hamlet* as it moves forward, catching a bit of Hamlet's “to be or not to be” soliloquy and his conversation with Ophelia, but more concerned with their own musings on existence. The film ends on the ship to England with Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Hamlet until the pirates come and Hamlet exits. Guildenstern seems to kill the Player, but it turns out his dagger is fake. As the resurrected Player explains the inevitability of death, the end of *Hamlet* plays out silently and artistically, moments
pieced together like a mosaic as each death comes. Finally, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern find themselves in nooses, realizing they missed the certainty of their own deaths. The ambassador walks into the bloodbath in *Hamlet* and announces, “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead” as the characters fall into their nooses and the players pack up and move forward.

This is not precisely the story of *Hamlet*. If a viewer does not know *Hamlet*, this film will not provide that knowledge. The viewer who does know *Hamlet* will recognize the story as it plays out. Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia are all there. Hamlet's argument with Ophelia, “To be or not to be” soliloquy, and his pondering over the skull all show up. With the exception of the ghost, the film cites the classic moments. It is these important bits of *Hamlet* as they concern two bit players and it is the play of *Hamlet* as it is seen in the mind of the Player. The reality of *Hamlet* seems to be happening, but because the film begins and ends with the players, the reality is mixed in with the play that the players have performed before and will perform again. This is where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come in. They do not recognize the play and they do not recognize the part they will play in it. They try to change the ending, but they cannot. The dagger Guildenstern uses is merely a prop, but the noose is not.

*Hamlet* is present throughout *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, playing in the background as well as forming much of the text, yet viewers consider the film a comedy. At first glance, this film would seem to follow the tragic trajectory. The main characters are killed in the end, after all, along with most of the rest of the cast. Yet it is a comedy, and that comedy rests in the nature of the protagonists. They are bumbling fools.
In *Hamlet* they seem to be sinister, true spies for Claudius. In this film, they just kind of blunder through, not really actors in their own destiny, making what happens to them comical. Their vapid dialogue as they try unsuccessfully to make sense of the world they inhabit is amusing, particularly in contrast to the classical dialogue surrounding them. This is the comedy of the film—the dissonance between these two fools and the rest of *Hamlet*. Within *Hamlet*, they are part of the tragedy, but given prominence, the characters cannot sustain the depth of a tragedy, thus they become part of a comedy. Though the characters' nonsense is amusing, the film is not unadulterated comedy. There are also vestiges of the theater of the absurd in the film. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern still play nonsense games. While they might move around more, they are still waiting for the action to come to them. They still ask existential questions that are beyond their means to answer. They are still caught up in a tragedy that will end badly for them. Even though the film centers on ideas of existence and questions of what is real and what is an illusion or a scene from a play, it does so firmly from the side of play. Just as Guildenstern will throw an absurd number of heads in a row, so everyone will die in *Hamlet*, and the players will pack up and play it all again. This is an original piece that does not really parody or pay tribute to *Hamlet*, but points out the problems of Hamlet's existential angst. It has its own plot that borrows from, but does not copy, *Hamlet*, and that plot leads to its own questions of reality and existence that differ in their very essence from Hamlet's great dilemma. There is crossover between the texts, but Hamlet's great question considers his own actions while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot even question their own existence.
Hamlet Parodies

To parody something is to use its own elements to re-write it comically. Satire is the use of humor to “critique or censure people and ideas” (Stott 153). Parody is often used in satire, particularly gentle satire, as a text pokes fun at what it is parodying in order to critique it. Both Last Action Hero and “The Producer” episode of Gilligan's Island satirize elements of the very show business of which they are a part, and both of them parody that ultimate text, Hamlet, as part of their satire. Arnold Schwarzenegger's film is a satirical version of the kind of action films for which Schwarzenegger is famous. It is a metanarrative that forces the action star into the “real world” where he has to consider the consequences of his actions. Without delving deeply into the Hamlet intertextuality, Jonathan Romney discusses the film-within-a-film or mise en abîme and notes how it indeed becomes the “last action” film because, once it shows the implausibility of action films, the audience will no longer be able to take them seriously (Romney 7, 9). This presupposes that the audience has taken action films seriously up to this point or that a “willing suspension of disbelief” is not already a part of the enjoyment of the genre. Eric S. Mallin thoroughly reads the brief Hamlet moments of Last Action Hero as both setting the theme for the film, “what is real?” and as a subversive interpretation of Hamlet that may be more in keeping with the original intent than more sanitized and romanticized versions (128-30). Smith notes that Last Action Hero begins with the tension between the teacher's words that Hamlet is the “first action hero” with the choice of screening the Olivier Hamlet, known for emphasizing Hamlet's hesitation (145). She suggests that in the end the film negates its own point and “legitimizes
Hamlet's scruples because the thoughtless heroics of Schwarzenegger's Jack Slater ultimately fail to engage the audience” and contends that the film diminishes both itself and Hamlet through the failed citation (146).

From Mallin's praise of the Schwarzenegger/Slater character as a better Hamlet than most Hamlets to Smith's denunciation of the Hamlet sampling, critics deliberate about how the film establishes its own notions by opening up Hamlet. While these ideas can withstand some deliberation, the brief use of Hamlet in the film is largely parody. It is a juxtaposition of two disparate things to begin the greater satire the film attempts. The film is satirizing action films, the kind of films for which Schwarzenegger is famous. By bringing the action film hero into the real world, the film is opening up the fissures in action films, particularly the lack of consequences for their characters' actions. Spoofing Hamlet at the beginning of the film shows the parodic nature of the film and reveals the lack of concern about consequences in action films as it juxtaposes Hamlet's most notorious moment of hesitancy with an action hero's most conspicuous moment of acting without forethought. The film doubly sets up the parody. First, the teacher tries to make Hamlet appeal to the students by emphasizing the violence in the film and calling Hamlet the “first action hero.” Danny thus thinks that Hamlet will be some sort of Jack Slater type character. The film shows a clip of an actual Hamlet that emphasizes Hamlet's lack of action, one that famously thematizes his hesitancy. The moment the film screens is that ultimate moment of hesitation, the moment Hamlet has the ideal opportunity to kill the king, “Now might I do it pat,” but hesitates because “a [he] is praying” and he does not think it fair to send the villain to heaven while his father languishes in purgatory
(III.iii.73-78). Thus Hamlet chooses inaction. Even before Danny's daydream of a different Hamlet, this is not a verisimilitudinous scene. This is a knowing inter-textual set-up for a parody of the lack of reality in movies. Joan Plowright, Laurence Olivier's widow, plays the teacher. This immediately gives the scene a lack of reality, at least for anyone who gets the joke. Further, *Hamlet* is a wildly inappropriate text for these students and the scene the teacher shows contains nuances and connotations they will not understand. The scene is comprised of two soliloquies, Claudius's and Hamlet's. Of course the students are going to drift into daydreams. They do not understand the implications Hamlet feels, the issues of heaven and purgatory. Finally, if the teacher were really trying to suggest an “Action Hamlet” she might show them Franco Zeffirelli's version with action star Mel Gibson rather than the Olivier film. This is not, ultimately, a deep moment. It forces itself into the film to set up a comic moment and show Danny's mindset.

The parody itself is in the form of a film trailer for Jack Slater's *Hamlet* and it covers almost all of the high points of *Hamlet* while invoking various clichés and other films. Danny creates a *Hamlet* that would appeal to a ten-year-old boy. Schwarzenegger in the Jack Slater persona smokes a cigar and confronts Claudius, “You killed my father” and throws him through a window where he falls to his death like a Disney villain (McTieran). Hamlet then seems to be contemplating the skull, but in fact makes it a weapon, throwing it at a soldier. The ghost turns up and this Hamlet shoots him, too. The non-existent Horatio is invoked when the voiceover narrator says, “No one is going to tell this sweet prince 'good night.'” The parody ends with Hamlet intoning, “To be or not to
be. Not to be.” In one minute, this parody hits almost every Hamlet highlight. It has Hamlet and Claudius, the ghost, the skull, Horatio, and “To be or not to be.” Each of the moments is twisted as Action Hamlet pushes, throws, shoots, and bombs his way through the mini-film, but it is recognizable as Hamlet through its citations. It specifically parodies Olivier's Hamlet as this Hamlet is only about action, but it also begins the satirizing of action films that is the greater project of the film as it shows how ludicrous an action film might be. Hamlet cannot blow everything up or there is no play. One minute is about as long as it could be. It also problematizes action films by what it leaves out: the women. There is no room for Gertrude or Ophelia in Action Hamlet. The scene is an adept parody. It is played as a film trailer, a film-within-a-film, but also as the boy's imagination. It takes a piece of culture of which most consumers are aware, but which is inappropriate in its context, and rewrites it to show the mind of a ten-year-old and the problematic clichés of action films. It is also an instance of a low culture form, the action film, making fun of a high culture form, a Shakespearean play. This brings the audience in on the joke as they laugh at the hapless teacher who attempts to bring the classic to her students by unsuccessfully comparing it to what they might know. The audience therefore becomes part of the conspiracy of the parody, owns the Schwarzenegger Hamlet, and waits to see what the film will satirize next. The remainder of the film continues the satirization of action films, but does not cite Hamlet.

The Gilligan's Island parody of Hamlet is a fairly straightforward satire of several aspects of show business. The foremost victim of the satire is the egotistical movie producer. Harold Hecuba (Phil Silvers) crashes his plane on the island and immediately
takes over, making all the castaways his personal attendants in exchange for a promise of rescue. After he insults Ginger's acting, the group decides to stage a play to showcase Ginger's skill. The episode then mocks the Hollywood and Broadway tendency to look to high culture forms such as Shakespeare to give cultural cachet to the more populist form of the musical comedy as seen in such shows as *The Boys from Syracuse* (Sutherland 1940) and *Kiss Me, Kate* (Sidney 1953). The castaways decide to stage a musical comedy version of *Hamlet* set to the music of *Carmen*, providing a double dose of high culture by citing both Shakespeare and the opera. The show proceeds to present the castaways' version of *Hamlet*, parodying the play through song. The Professor (Russell Johnson) introduces the play with Hollywood's favorite line, “This is the story of a man who could not make up his mind” (Cahan and Lupino). Gilligan opens the show as Hamlet, singing, “I ask to be or not to be.” The Howells as Claudius and Gertrude join him, singing merrily with him, giving a comic spin to that momentous soliloquy and completely undercutting any idea that this is *Hamlet*. There is no angst. The Howells are Gilligan/Hamlet's loving parental surrogates. In the next scene, Hamlet tells Ophelia to “Get thee to a notarary” and Ophelia sings to him. Gilligan cannot even say the lines and Ginger overacts the part. That is in the nature of her character. Each of the *Gilligan's Island* characters is a type, and this episode highlights and parodies Ginger as the Jane Russell-esque starlet who wants to be a serious actress. Ophelia's song is interesting in that it is the clearest moment in this jumbled mess of a *Hamlet*. Rather than succumbing to madness because of Hamlet's antics, this Ophelia tells him exactly what his problem is and how she feels about that, “Hamlet dear, your problem is clear, avenging thy father's
death/You seek to harm your uncle and mom, but you're scaring me to death.” She takes over the stage, upstaging Hamlet, and tells him to quit moping and return to her. In a 1966 television show that parodies *Hamlet*, Ophelia becomes the voice of reason, the take-charge woman who can bring Hamlet through his sorrow. She overacts and upstages Hamlet, even knocking him down, because this is her show, her moment to shine, and that means being in control rather than giving up control. Mary Ann and the Skipper play Laertes and Polonius as the former gives comical asides to the audience while the latter blusters through his advice in song. The rest of the cast joins him as the chorus. This five-minute “*Hamlet in Song*” hits many of the highlights of *Hamlet*, the main characters, the idea of revenge, and several of the most famous speeches and lines. It does it quickly and playfully, leaving no suggestion of anything actually serious about *Hamlet*. This suggests a basic criticism of American musical comedies, that even when they try to tackle heavy subjects, the characters breaking out into song breaks the mood and leaves them either uneven or overly light. This is also just funny, especially for an audience used to over-serious, over-dramatic versions of *Hamlet*.

Harold Hecuba, the producer, sees the castaways' rehearsal and decides he will take over the production, directing “Harold Hecuba's *Hamlet*” (Cahan and Lupino). This may be a direct jab at Sam Taylor's supposed credit to himself for “additional dialogue” in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1929) and is most certainly a dig at the character of the producer who dares put his name above even Shakespeare's. He takes over the entire show, racing through it as he acts and sings all the parts, male and female, getting more disheveled with each scene and costume change. Inevitably, he leaves the castaways on
the island when he is rescued so that he can produce and take credit for his new musical version of *Hamlet*. There is much silliness in this episode, but it is also a rather pointed critique of musical comedies reaching beyond their sphere, the stereotypical egotistical Hollywood producer who runs roughshod over everyone else, and, perhaps, popular entertainers overreaching and daring to produce *Hamlet*. It also laughs at *Hamlet* the play by making it clearly comical with doting parents and a resolute Ophelia. This is *Hamlet* made for a 1960s television audience with its surrogate family and strong yet feminine woman.

**Hamlet-dust, a Sprinkling of Culture**

Kay H. Smith coins the term “*Hamlet*-dust” when discussing the way the producers of *Strange Brew* and *The Lion King* seem to sprinkle bits of *Hamlet* onto their stories to accomplish the opposite tasks of accentuating the silliness or adding to the classiness (139). Although *Strange Brew* closely follows the *Hamlet* plot and characters, Smith seems to be the only critic to mention it as an adaptation. Unlike *The Lion King*, the *Hamlet* themes do not form part of popular reviews of the film, either. Unlike later contemporary Shakespearian updates, it seems to be too silly to take seriously.

Nevertheless, it does use *Hamlet*, and while that is part of the film’s comedy, it also may be part of its problem—no one gets the joke. If the producers do not mention *Hamlet* in their press release or pre-screening interviews and movie critics are not mentioning it in their reviews, it is not surprising that it does not, in the end, enhance the film (Maslin 8) (Kempley 17) (Godfrey) (Warren). The *Hamlet* citations seem to come off as more of an inside joke than anything else. Stephen Godfrey calls Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis,
the writers, directors, and stars, “as quick, bright and articulate as the Bob and Doug are not” (par. 10). These men use Shakespeare throughout their movie in everything from names to places to plot points, yet they do not claim Shakespeare in the film or the publicity for the film.

In *Strange Brew*, the McKenzie brothers show their “film,” a fake futuristic science fiction film that stops after a few minutes when they begin talking just as they did in their Second City Television (SCTV) sketches to an unappreciative audience who wants their money back. They drive home and the real movie begins as they go to “Elsinore Brewery” to try to get free beer. Once there, they discover the owner's brother has murdered the owner and married his wife. The rightful heir, the usurper's niece, Pamela, attempts to stop her uncle and his nefarious sidekick from taking over the world through beer laced with drugs. There is even a “ghost,” security videos showing the murder of the father. The boys get haplessly caught up in the plot—reminiscent of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Stoppard's play—and eventually save the day. Because the film is basically silly, the *Hamlet*-esque moments are also silly. *Hamlet* does not lend authority to the film. It seems to exist for the opposite reason, to show just how trifling the film can be. For instance, the ghost scene, that frightening scene that establishes the story in *Hamlet*, becomes a brief moment with a video game. Pamela notices a video game, “Galactic Border Patrol,” malfunctioning and examines it more closely. Suddenly, after displaying high scores for “John Elsinore,” a video plays of Pamela's father's murder. She says, “They killed him,” and moves away in despair. This is a clever way of bringing in the ghost, but it also trivializes it. A video game diminishes the nature of the
scene. This is not paranormal visitation from purgatory; it is a technological
entertainment device used for nefarious purposes. This eventually contrasts with a gag
that cites *Star Wars* instead of *Hamlet*. The villains trap Bob and Pamela in a beer vat, a
version of the Star Wars trash compactor. Doug and Jean, Pamela's boyfriend, clad in
Stormtrooper-like armor, rescue them. It turns out Bob saved them by drinking all the
beer in the vat. He has ballooned up like Violet the blueberry in *Willy Wonka and the
Chocolate Factory* (Stuart 1971) and talks about needing to “take a leak.” Pamela goes to
find help and sees an electrical charge that becomes a holographic image of her father
who shoots lasers to form the words, “Oktoberfest/Stop them/nice effects, eh!” (Moranis
and Thomas). This is a spookier version of the ghost scene, but coming right after the vat
of beer and urine and complete with fake looking special effects blowing up the roof and
Bob putting out the fire by urinating on it, the thoughtful *Hamlet* moment gets lost in the
greater silliness. The references to contemporary films, the body function gags, and the
pace of the film overshadows anything that gives its *Hamlet* notions any depth. By
linking *Hamlet* with beer and urine gags, by making something that contemporary Anglo-
American culture considers so weighty into something weightless, the McKenzie
Brothers emphasize their own buffoonery. *Hamlet* becomes comedy by being made silly.
It simply continues the work of Bob and Doug McKenzie in their SCTV skits.

The other outcome of this kind of use of Shakespeare is the lowering of high
culture. By following the *Hamlet* story so closely yet making it absolutely superficial,
there is a suggestion that the revered high culture form is no different than two Canadian
comedians portraying beer-guzzling Canadian yokels. It is all entertainment, but
everything is equal in entertainment. Bob and Doug can find their way into *Hamlet* as easily as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can. On the other side of that, is the notion that this is an inside joke, a nod to those who might catch the higher culture references. Moranis and Thomas are intelligent well-educated men who can portray yokels with a wink because they also know and understand *Hamlet*. The problem with this interpretation is that, while it may have been personally satisfying to Moranis and Thomas to riff on *Hamlet*, their audience was not present to catch the references. The publicity and reviewers did not mention them and, in 1983, before the rise of the videocassette, those who physically went to the movies made up the audience, in this case beer-swillers not the theatre crowd. It is only with the release of the digital video disc (DVD) version almost twenty years later that the Shakespearean connections begin to be mentioned and appreciated with comments like “Brilliant. Stupid, but brilliant” and “‘Hamlet' done by Canadian drunks! Absolute genius!” (Tomatoes). While the accessibility of DVD and the spate of Shakespearean adaptations in the 1990s have brought attention to Elsinore Brewery, this film was not made to collect on its Shakespearean heritage. It is merely the continuing *Adventures of Bob and Doug McKenzie*, two hoser from “The Great White North.”

*The Lion King* may appropriate less from *Hamlet* than *Strange Brew* does, but the film and filmmakers use the appropriation much more significantly. Kay H. Smith acknowledges that *Hamlet* in *The Lion King* “adds depth to the story” and helps bring out the “serious theme” of “tragedy and redemption” (139). Richard Finkelstein cites Pierre Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital to discuss Disney Studios' appropriation of high
cultural forms and “timeless” stories in service of its conservative agenda (180-81). Noting that *The Lion King* appropriates both *Hamlet* and *Henry IV Part I*, he mentions how Timon is a kind of transgressive Falstaff leading the Prince Hal-like Simba astray in a homosocial relationship until Simba takes up his mantel of heterosexual manhood and forsakes Timon (188-89). He then goes on to note the *Hamlet* appropriations, particularly as they work to lend seriousness to *The Lion King* and, conversely, support an Oedipal reading of *Hamlet* (190). Stephen M. Buhler writes extensively about *The Lion King* and *Hamlet* as he notes how the film both appropriates and re-writes *Hamlet* as it upholds traditional readings of literature, nature, and culture and the necessity for a masculine savior (119-23). He also points out the varied public responses to Disney's appropriation of Shakespeare and basic criticisms of the film (118-19). Doug Stenberg adds *Macbeth* to *The Lion King*'s Shakespearean citations, making a good case for Scar as Macbeth and Simba as Malcolm, while also noting the *Hamlet* and *Henry IV Part I* echoes. He notes the basic criticisms of *The Lion King*, that it is “sexist, racist, homophobic, and violent,” and connects these criticisms to the traditional undergirdings of the film as they echo the archetypal themes of Shakespeare's plays (36). Stenberg is one of the few critics to note that the *Henry IV* incorporation forms the comic portions of the film (37). Each of these critics points out the way *The Lion King* utilizes *Hamlet* and other Shakespearean texts. They note the cultural work being done as the Disney Corporation publicizes its appropriation of *Hamlet* to add depth to its film while continuing its conservative, heterosexual, phallocentric project. A few of these assertions seem shaky. Nathan Lane may have been playing Timon “gay,” but very few viewers might consider that Simba
ever actually toys with adolescent homosexual desire during his sojourn with Timon and Pumbaa (Buhler 119; Finkelstein 188). The subtext is more visible to the critic looking for it than the viewer merely primed by Disney to see this as a version of *Hamlet*. Disney uses *Hamlet* in its promotional materials. An article in *The New York Times* that makes the connections with *Hamlet* adds to the publicity (Finkelstein 190). *Hamlet* is the gold standard for literature and *Hamlet* connections, particularly when the critics take them positively, can aid the cultural project of the text (Buhler 119). This works in *The Lion King*’s favor as this cartoon becomes the worldwide top grossing film of the year and as of 2003 held the record for top home video sales ("A Banner Year for Movies" 21A) (Netherby 4). It also eventually moved up the cultural ladder to become a highly regarded Broadway musical. *The Lion King* certainly fulfills Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital: it adeptly uses the cultural knowledge and aesthetic taste of the dominant class to insure its own legitimacy—and thus success—and continues the project of forwarding the credit and power of that group (56-57, 63, 70).

Disney appropriates *Hamlet* and emphasizes the connections to *Hamlet* in *The Lion King* to appeal to educated adults and add an aura of deeper meaning to the film, yet *The Lion King* is still an animated feature primarily meant for children. While it contains some serious moments, it is primarily a comedy. *Hamlet*, though it contains some comic moments, is primarily a tragedy. Every scholarly article about the Shakespeare connections in *The Lion King* also mentions *Henry IV Part I*, yet the popular press and Disney publicity does not (Klass). *Hamlet* is more familiar, more often filmed, and more respected. It is, after all, the “outstanding masterwork of the last 1000 years” (Draudt 71).
The Lion King is recognizably Hamlet. The basic set-up is present. Simba/Hamlet's uncle (Scar) kills his father (Mufasa) and takes over the kingdom. The nephew must return to the kingdom and confront his uncle. The most often cited Hamlet moment in The Lion King, the one pictured on the theater poster, is the ghost scene. Simba's father returns to him as a ghost in the clouds, gives him the task of saving his kingdom, and implores him to “remember” (Allers and Minkoff). Even this moment is less Hamlet than it might have been. In Hamlet, the ghost tells his son his own story. He is caught in purgatory, “confined to fast in fires” (I.v.11). He wants Hamlet to revenge his murder and remember him, the king (I.v.25, 91). In The Lion King, the father commands his son to save the land and to remember who he, Simba, is. The ghost of the father and the word remember connect the scenes, but they are very different in intent, purpose, and tone. There are a few more tenuous connections between the texts. Scar does not marry Simba's mother, Sarabi, but he does force her to hunt for him. Nala, Simba's childhood playmate and romantic foil, may be a kind of Ophelia, though one who actively searches for a solution and helps bring Simba back to his senses and his people. Zazu could be a kind of blustering Polonius. Since these are archetypal, Shakespearean characters, one can strain to make connections. Pumbaa and Timon form a kind of comedy duo Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The set-up of the plot and the tenuous connections between characters who are not really alike are all of Hamlet that there is, yet from the New York Times on, The Lion King is “Hamlet in fur” (Klass 1). Hamlet begins with the ghost; that happens about two-thirds of the way through The Lion King. Simba's angst lasts for a few minutes and is caused by his belief he caused his father's death; Hamlet's for the whole play and is

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caused by his uncle's murder of his father and marriage with his mother. *Hamlet* is about revenge against the usurper; *The Lion King* is about saving the kingdom from the usurper. Simba even offers to let Scar live in exile, though Scar's actions force Simba to throw him to his death in the end. Disney invokes *Hamlet* in *The Lion King*, but that is all. The film is not a *Hamlet* adaptation.

To present an ambience of depth, *The Lion King* cites *Hamlet*, but to make a comedy film for children, it turns to *Henry IV* instead, still citing Shakespeare, but this time quietly with primarily Shakespearean scholars noting the appropriation. In *Henry IV Part I*, Prince Hal has an ambivalent relationship with his father and is a disappointment to him, cavorts with a fat man and his companions, and accepts his destiny when the time comes. Over the course of the three plays in which he appears, Prince Hal becomes the very kingly Henry V. This is much more the trajectory of *The Lion King*. Simba disappoints his father, leaves, cavorts with a fat warthog and his meerkat friend, and eventually rises to the challenge and accepts his destiny, becoming a king in the image of his great father. This story is also what makes *The Lion King* a comedy: just as, particularly in *Henry IV Part I*, Falstaff and company are purely comic characters, cavorting in the tavern, causing mischief, bragging about deeds they have not done, playing tricks on one another, so Pumbaa and Timon are thoroughly comic characters, cavorting in the jungle, singing “Hakuna Matata,” not letting life get in the way of fun. The time Simba spends with them is all in fun. He does leave it in the end, again like Prince Hal. Since this is a lighter version of the story, Simba does not deny his friends the way Prince Hal does—and unlike Falstaff in the battle with Hotspur, Pumbaa and Timon
prove truly helpful in his battle with Scar—but he does leave them for something nobler. Unlike Hamlet who loses Ophelia, the Prince Hal-like Simba is able to be with Nala in the end just as the young King Henry courts and marries his Katherine. *The Lion King* is a comedy complete with romance based on the lighter parts of a history. The film finally ends on a note of new life within the “circle of life” (Allers and Minkoff). Because Simba has grown so fully into his father's image—even misrecognizing himself and being misrecognized by Scar—it is as if Mufasa never really died. The king is dead; long live the king.

Once they cited *Hamlet*, the makers of this film did not really need to dig further into Shakespeare. They could have done what many other comedy films have done and begun with a Shakespearean premise, but gone their own way once they established it. Instead, *The Lion King* really does turns to *Henry IV*. While it is not *Hamlet*, and really could not have been *Hamlet* given its audience and purposes, it carries the weight of tradition behind it. It seamlessly gives the audience a Shakespearean experience in such a way that many viewers will not realize that *Hamlet* is not the basis. The target audience of children will not know one prince from the other and most of the adult audience, having maybe read *Hamlet* once upon a time or just having the idea of it in their cultural consciousness, will not notice this either. *Henry IV* lends the film gravity, gives it a story with strength behind it, and allows the film to be a comedy without changing the Shakespearean plot completely; however, it does all this silently, letting the idea of *Hamlet* lend its strength of name to the enterprise. Disney is a master of marketing and publicity as *The Lion King*'s renowned marketing blitz and highly successful product tie-
ins for both children and adults show (Fitzgerald 8). Consumers immediately believed in *The Lion King's* importance and showed this through film attendance and product demand. Prince Hal, arguably a more lovable character than Hamlet, who knows how to manipulate a situation for his gain, is one more aspect of this great Disney machine. Disney knows how to make its story appealing to the greatest possible audience, and Prince Hal is nothing if not appealing, lovable rascal and prodigal that he is.

**Hamlet Tributes**

The Reduced Shakespeare Company's farce, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)*, filmed for PBS television in 2000, lies somewhere between parody and tribute. This is a three-man play—Reed Martin, Austin Tichenor, and Adam Long—that claims to produce all 37 of Shakespeare's plays in about an hour and a half. They warn English majors not to come, yet the writer/actors know and understand their Shakespeare, allowing them to take the best-known elements of each play and turn them into parodies of high cultural “Shakespearean Acting” mixed with popular forms such as television and sports. They present *Titus Andronicus*, the cooking show, and the history plays as an American football game. Jean Peterson, reviewing the original London opening of the play, notes that “sending up Shakespeare actually takes a back seat to the real target of the RSC's gleeful satire: Bardolatry” (24). The first half of the show covers all the other plays, while the second half concentrates on *Hamlet*. This *Hamlet* was the company's first piece, a stand-alone sketch they wrote in 1981 for Renaissance Faire production (Company). They added the rest of the show later, when they had venues with longer running times. It is with *Hamlet* that the show privileges tribute over parody. It is still
funny. It highlights preconceived notions people have about Shakespeare and *Hamlet*, but also has moments that suggest the high regard in which they hold the play, half-parodically and half-seriously setting it above even Shakespeare's other plays. The section opens with Adam Long arguing that he is unable to “do justice” to *Hamlet* and running out. This is kind of a dull and annoying interlude in the play, but it serves to enhance the reputation and anticipation of *Hamlet*. When they do begin the scene, they introduce *Hamlet* as “perhaps the greatest play ever written in the English language” (Kafno). The company has dismissed the comedies entirely, made the histories into a sporting event, barely noted the sonnets, and spent some time on the other big tragedies, but here they establish *Hamlet* as somehow different than the rest of the plays. Even in farce, *Hamlet* stands out and receives a full comic treatment—shifting between farce and melodrama.

The *Abridged Hamlet* includes the high points. It moves quickly through Hamlet, Horatio, and the ghost, Polonius and Ophelia, the players and the play-within-a-play, Hamlet's “To Be or Not to Be” soliloquy, an extended “get thee to a nunnery” scene, Hamlet's mother, Polonius' death, Laertes' return, Ophelia's flower scene and suicide, Yorick's skull, the duel, and the deaths, though Fortinbras and Horatio do not appear to pick up the pieces. Admittedly, these moments are not serious and they are interspersed with comedy bits—King Hamlet's sock puppet ghost, Ophelia overplayed by a man in drag, Hamlet performing the Mousetrap with more sock puppets, and Yorick's skull becoming a warning against diet pills—yet *Hamlet* somehow makes its way through the nonsense. Two scenes stand out: “Get thee to a nunnery” and Hamlet's soliloquy. The
“Get thee to a nunnery” scene breaks up the action and, in a comic tradition, includes audience participation. The actors bring a female audience member onto stage to play Ophelia. They teach her to scream dramatically and then turn to the audience to help her understand Ophelia's motivation. They break the audience into Ophelia's id, ego, and superego and provide lines to recite. The ego runs around on the stage, symbolizing Ophelia's “ego on the run” (Kafno). To represent Ophelia's confused id, one group in the audience will be chanting “Maybe. Maybe not.” The superego they split into three groups: section A, the masculine voice, “Get thee to a nunnery,” section B, the voice of Ophelia's libido, “paint an inch thick,” and section C, the modern context, making Ophelia relevant, “Cut the crap, Hamlet, my biological clock is ticking, and I want babies now” (Kafno). The scene then plays out farcically with the ego running around on stage while the audience chants these statements, but it provides more than mere farce. It acknowledges some of the difficulties with Ophelia the character. It makes her multi-dimensional, if a little mad, as the dimensions overlap and create chaos. It also raises contemporary Freudian notions of Hamlet, though centering on Ophelia rather than Hamlet. Finally, it tries to make Ophelia relevant to contemporary women, though in what is likely an intentional comical failure, it does so by making her need Hamlet so she can be a wife and mother. This is not actually a contemporary Ophelia. While this is a farcical, chaotic scene, it emphasizes *Hamlet* among the 37 plays and makes the moment memorable for the audience. It is not serious, but it invokes thoughtful ideas about *Hamlet* and the characterization of Ophelia. Eventually, Adam Long returns in drag to finish the role of Ophelia, but the entire audience has partaken of this character.
The other standout moment of this production is Hamlet's soliloquy. In the end, this is not “To be or not to be.” Tichenor as Hamlet begins “To be or not to be,” but quits when the audience laughs. He sits on the stage weeping while Long and Reed discuss the soliloquy and decide to skip it. Thus far this is an overwrought way to get out of presenting Shakespeare's most famous soliloquy. The mood, however, quickly changes. Reed, while agreeing that “To be or not to be” is overrated and unnecessary, finds himself opining the importance of “What a piece of work is man” (II.ii.293-94). Long glances at the still upset Hamlet, shrugs, and turns to the audience. He explains the problem, describes the speech and, alone and still on the stage, he eloquently recites it—creating an intimate moment with the audience as he renders it movingly. This is the moment this production favors, Hamlet's despair over man's place in the world, Hamlet's wonder at the majesty of the world and man, but anguish that “man delights not me” (II.ii.298). The show is silly. It makes fun of Shakespeare and of those devoted to Shakespeare. It plays with people's preconceived notions of the play. But then it stops for a moment, creates a somber mood, and notes that man is an incredible creature who is also merely dust. This is the message they invoke from *Hamlet*. They know Hamlet is disappointed with the world around him. This disappointment is palpable. The utter simplicity of this moment, the bare stage, no props, no antics, just one actor speaking from his heart shows where the heart of this farce lies. They are perhaps downplaying themselves and the triviality of what they are doing as they, for a moment, reach out, paying tribute to an unexpected moment from *Hamlet*. It is an intensely emotional moment, the only one like it in the production. In essence they are saying, *Hamlet* is
important. Then they stop the antics for a moment to let the audience think about humanity's existence. This is tribute in the midst of the frivolity, a frivolity they acknowledge by the very moment they choose to emphasize.

*Slings & Arrows*, a Canadian television series, also takes its *Hamlet* seriously and pays tribute to the play within the broader context of the comedy capers. The show is about the New Burbage Theatre Festival, a fictionalized version of the highly regarded Stratford Festival, and in the first series their main show is *Hamlet*. This series adeptly combines motifs from *Hamlet* used comically with somber moments from the play as the artistic director plans it and the actors rehearse and perform it. The scenes from the play are serious, but they are interspersed with the comedy of the theatrical company and its life. This is a six-hour television series that covers one season of the theater company, and the set-up is complicated, with several nods to *Hamlet*. Oliver Welles (Stephen Ouimette), the artistic director, is run over by a truck and returns as the ghost to plague his one-time protégé Geoffrey Tennant (Paul Gross) who replaces him as artistic director. Geoffrey cannot face the festival's planned production of *Hamlet* because the last time he played the character, under Oliver's direction, he had a nervous breakdown and jumped into Ophelia's grave. Between his one-time madness and his seeing and speaking with a dead man, the other characters wonder if Geoffrey is mad now. Geoffrey's former girlfriend, Ellen Fanshaw (Martha Burns), is also a principal player in the company. Having once played Ophelia to Geoffrey's Hamlet she continues as his romantic foil. There are even two gay character actors, Frank and Cyril (Michael Polley and Graham Harley), who provide dry commentary throughout the series and may stand in for
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Finally, Oliver has requested that his skull be rendered from his body and used as a prop in any New Burbage production of Hamlet. These elements all echo Hamlet, but are played for laughs. When Geoffrey talks to Oliver, he does not find a cause on which to meditate; instead, he makes inappropriate remarks to an empty seat or seems to be yelling at various actors to “shut up.” Ellen is not pining for Geoffrey; she is sleeping with a boy toy. Oliver's skull becomes a prop as Geoffrey procures it and plays with it. Even the show's theme song projects this comical Hamlet trajectory as Cyril and Frank sing, “Cheer up Hamlet” and tell him that he needs to buck up because he is tedious, embarrassing, and sulky (Wellington). All of this signals Hamlet, but it also enriches the comic story in a different way than the “Hamlet-dust” of The Lion King or Strange Brew. Slings & Arrows does not try to recreate Hamlet. It uses the motifs to tell its own story, the story of a theatre company and the lives and loves happening within. The plot does not follow Hamlet; it pays attention to it. In the final hour, these moments have built so that Geoffrey and Ellen can have a serious conversation about their past in the midst of Hamlet. They stand on the stage and the production they were in seven years before surrounds them as they discuss their past heartbreak. Geoffrey explains what happened when he went mad. Hamlet saying his lines to Ophelia became Geoffrey saying his lines to Ellen, “I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up my sum. Why did you fuck me over, Ellen? That's what I was really asking” (Wellington). Geoffrey could not go on in the play after that moment. The other actors tried to cover, but “you can only go so far without your Hamlet before you hit a speech” (Wellington). He had nothing to offer, so
he jumped into the grave leaving the production undone. *Hamlet* has now come full circle for Geoffrey and Ellen. The show has built to this confrontation and carries it off in the world of *Hamlet* even as they are Geoffrey and Ellen—not Hamlet and Ophelia. The older couple remembers their young selves, the way in the moments after Geoffrey's blackout they lived out their *Hamlet* parts: Geoffrey went mad and Ellen tried to drown herself in the river. This healing conversation about Hamlet and the past is between the actors in the present—not the characters in the past. It is a conversation Geoffrey and Ellen can have that Hamlet and Ophelia were denied.

*Slings & Arrows* is basically a comedy series, but in addition to the *Hamlet* bits nestled in the comedy, the show includes serious moments from the play and Geoffrey and Oliver's commentary about it. The rehearsals for the play show just how much this television series cares about *Hamlet*. Claire (Sabrina Grdevich), the actor playing Ophelia, is terrible. She does not understand her character and she cannot act. Geoffrey takes the time to explain in depth her motivation, giving the television audience a glimpse into a director's take on *Hamlet*. To explain the flower scene, he describes how Ophelia is a child who has lost all the men who have heretofore ruled her and is looking for direction or a return to her childhood innocence. The actress does not understand his point, but the audience begins to see that Geoffrey is a sensitive director who thoroughly understands Shakespeare. The *Hamlet* bits in the comedy give some depth to the series, but it is with the real production of *Hamlet* that the show begins to showcase its theatrical roots. Many of the producers and performers of *Slings & Arrows* were involved in the Stratford Theatre Festival. With these rehearsal scenes and eventually the play
performance, this becomes a hybrid production—television and theater. Watching the rehearsals invests the audience in the theatrical part of the show. Presented on a mostly bare stage with minimal costumes, this is a more intimate Hamlet than many viewers will have seen. They can sympathize with Kate, the understudy who has her big chance, with Jack, the American movie star who is afraid he cannot pull off the too-familiar part of Hamlet, even with Ellen, the diva who resents everyone and everything, but was once young and excited about acting. Geoffrey's final advice to Jack is that the play stands on its six soliloquies—"O that this too, too sullied flesh, O what a rogue and peasant slave am I, To be or not to be, 'Tis now the very witching hour, Now might I do it pat, how all occasions do inform against me" (Wellington). If the actor can nail the six soliloquies he succeeds. The film shows the play mainly through these six soliloquies from various perspectives—audience members watching the stage, the actors and crew backstage, Geoffrey and Oliver from the side, and Richard, the stage manager, from the other side. By the end, the viewer can imagine the entire play. Jack does what Geoffrey in his time could not; he makes it through Hamlet. Geoffrey has brought the company together with the successful show and redeemed himself. Through Hamlet, it has become the anti-Hamlet. Rather than returning home and watching everything fall apart, Geoffrey returns home and pulls everything together. This television show is a tribute to the stage and a tribute to Hamlet. Geoffrey the director says, “I just happen to believe that this play is the single greatest achievement in Western art” (Wellington). It seems this is what the producers believe. They gently weave Hamlet into their series, providing with a light touch a ghost, a skull, a love story, and a brooding hero and then, once they have
established the characters and begun their story, delving into the play itself. In so doing, they contrast their story with the play and honor Hamlet while giving themselves the opportunity to return to New Burbage next year. Hamlet and Ophelia may be dead, but Geoffrey and Ellen live to love and argue for another season.

**Conclusion**

Hamlet may or may not be the greatest play ever written or even Shakespeare's greatest play, but it is the one that gets the most attention. It lives in the cultural consciousness. Because of that, it receives not only serious attention, but mocking attention as well. Its very earnestness makes it ripe comic fodder. Hollywood may have a difficult time making funny versions of Shakespeare's actual comedies, sidelining them in favor of the tragedies or making them nearly unrecognizably earnest or contemporary; however, they seem able to take this tragedy and make it quite funny. The comedy versions of Hamlet are true comic pieces whether they are farcical, dark, silly, or thoughtful comedies. While the nature of the comedy Hamlets differs, they do share some notions. Perhaps most importantly, they bring attention to the character of Ophelia. Last Action Hero has no room for romantic tangles and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead shows just the Ophelia of the background scenes. All the other productions reinvent her character to make her a partner for Hamlet, a potent presence in the story. Gilligan's Island gives her song the bulk of play plot and she has a clarity of mind Hamlet needs. Strange Brew actually switches the gender roles of Hamlet and Ophelia. The Lion King creates an Ophelia (Nala) who can match Hamlet in a fight, bring him to his senses, and mate him as his equal. The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)
draws special attention to Ophelia, having the entire audience play the part as they think about how the play and Hamlet oppress her. *Slings and Arrows* shows a mature Ophelia who failed at her suicide attempt and lives to play Queen Gertrude and try to understand her Hamlet, the love of her life, even while she has moved on with her own life, at least superficially. Each of these productions notes that in a comedy in the twentieth or twenty-first century, Ophelia is problematic as she is traditionally conceived. Ophelia becomes an actor in these stories; she is no longer merely acted upon.

Comedy revisions of *Hamlet* happen in several ways. Because people know it so well, it is an easy text to use in satire. A parody can hit the highlights and make fun of whatever it chooses from action films to Hollywood producers. The brief moment of *Hamlet* in *Last Action Hero* sets the stage for what the film is attempting. It shows a different kind of Hamlet to prime the audience for a different kind of Schwarzenegger. It is funny and unexpected and works better than most of the film that contains it. The *Gilligan's Island* parody is gentle fun as it pokes fun at the producer, starlet, and mode without being mean-spirited or aspiring to greatness. *Strange Brew* is much the same way. It is making fun of its heroes and of Shakespeare, but is not really using Shakespeare to elevate itself. It grasps the cultural capital, but lets it float away, making a silly movie even sillier by its suspected aspirations. *The Lion King*, on the other hand, makes the most of its *Hamlet* connections, even when they fall apart upon close examination. *Hamlet* is so well regarded, that using it as an underlying source for another film can raise up the second film. This works beautifully in *The Lion King*. The publicity and the press believe that *The Lion King* is a version of *Hamlet*, thus it becomes more
than just a cartoon for children. It gives the adult audience something to observe and makes them feel superior for noting the citations. These citations, however, are not as strong as the publicity might suggest, and the film uses the less recognizable *Henry IV* to bolster its Shakespearean status, a maneuver that does not matter to those who believe *The Lion King* is *Hamlet* in the savannah. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)* and *Slings & Arrows* both use comedy to play with ideas of the stage and the texts, but in the end show their allegiance to Shakespeare, the text, and the stage. The one serious moment in the whole Reduced Shakespeare show is a soliloquy from *Hamlet*. The play's importance is unexpectedly indicated by a sudden declamation of a serious moment. It is as if the cast members really do want to know “What piece of work is a man!” (II.ii.294). *Slings & Arrows* picks up on this same technique but shows all six monologues as it both cites *Hamlet* in its comedy and honors it in its theatricality. It is a blend that pays tribute to Shakespeare while creating something new. Finally, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* stands on its own. It tells its own story of existential angst against the backdrop of *Hamlet*, but it never really makes fun of *Hamlet* or builds it up in a way that pays tribute to it. *Hamlet* merely exists in conjunction with the characters whose story cannot be told apart from that of the Danish prince. They will always die pointlessly because Hamlet switched the letters, yet they will always return when someone revives the play. *Hamlet* has become its own world, and it is vast enough that it can handle the mockery and the tributes. Even though some of these productions seem to diminish both themselves and *Hamlet*, that may not be possible. Each time it is cited, each time it reshapess itself into a new form, each time the characters struggle
through questions—seriously or comically—of existence, the text that is *Hamlet* becomes something beyond a five act play Shakespeare wrote five hundred years ago. *Hamlet* has become the epitome of the Shakespearean enterprise because it has worked its way into the public consciousness. It is a public text and no single production can diminish that. Every time someone invokes one of the characters, themes, props, or speeches, it becomes even more ingrained in the fabric of culture. Everyone knows *Hamlet*, so everyone can play the *Hamlet* game and claim Shakespeare.
Endnotes

1 The BBC project actually produced a never released version of *Much Ado About Nothing* before *As You Like It*, the first comedy to actually be shown as part of the project.

2 By calling his forest Arden rather than the French Ardennes of his source, Shakespeare imbues it with several idyllic meanings. Arden was an English forest, but it also continues to conjure the French Ardennes while also recalling Shakespeare’s mother’s maiden name—Arden, and becoming a portmanteau of the romantic pastoral paradise Arcadia and the Christian paradise Eden.

3 Susan Willis asserts that while television seems visual, it functions as an oral medium. Because it is smaller than film and more intimate it “requires a synthetic response, an involvement and completion by the audience that is analogous, if not entirely equivalent, to the demands of Elizabetan performance on its nearly bare stage” (81).

4 This speech—a cliché in the Renaissance—seems often to be presented in the twentieth century as a serious rumination on life. C.L. Barber complains that critics have made too much of Jaques melancholy as a “psychology” (228) and finds particularly troubling the idea of him as “Hamlet in motley” (232). Marjorie Garber, noting that his melancholy is an affectation, suggests the speech be milked for all its satiric drama with Old Adam entering just in time to contrast the final description (*Shakespeare After All* 452).

5 As Golding translates Ovid, “The King of Goddes did burne erewhyle in love of Ganymed/ ... And so soring in the ayre with borrowed wings trust up/The Trojane boay who still in heaven even yit dooth beare his cup,/And brings him Nectar...” (X.161, 165-67).

6 Again, Garber assumes a “female/female homoeroticism figured in the play by Phebe’s infatuation” (*Vested Interests* 76) that just does not exist in this film.

7 In *Measure for Measure*, the ending is happy enough for Claudio and Juliet, but the relationship between the Duke and Isabella remains ambiguous and Angelo, the villain, is left untouched. *Troilus and Cressida* cannot even really be considered to have a happy ending. Neither Troilus nor Cressida dies, but Troilus is left brokenhearted to die in the war and Cressida becomes a symbol of unfaithfulness.
Susan Willis notes this in her chapter, “Moshinsky's Television Artistry.” She suggests that Donald Sinden as the King made the scene even more sexual that Moshinsky had intended.

Walter N. King, in his article “Shakespeare's 'Mingled Yarn,’” suggests that Shakespeare, too, was more interested in the complicated psychology of these characters than he was in the types they might portray or in some “moral uplift” to be found in the fairy tale ending (34). He argues that the inconsistencies in character that concern twentieth century critics who feel they must defend Helena are the reality of a character who is true to life, but not a moral exemplar.

Shakespeare's language sets a possible sexual overtone for the scene when Lafeu leaves Helena with the words, “I am Cressid's uncle, / that dare leave two together; fare you well” (II.i.96-7). Lafeu may simply be suggesting that he does not know what future consequence this interview will lead to; however, since Cressida's uncle, Pandarus, left the two young lovers, Cressida and Troilus, together in order to consummate their relationship, this seems to be an odd parting gesture of concern for the maid and the king who should be more a father figure than a possible lover. Whatever Lafeu's intent, it is a reminder of sexuality and sets the tone for the sexualized scene that follows in Moshinsky's BBC production.

Howell uses minimal sets and does not change them from scene to scene. Her four film Henry VI-Richard III series creatively uses a single set made of wooden platforms on which all the action takes place.

In working toward a definition of comedy, Andrew Stott lists several audience expectations including, “during the course of its action, no one will be killed” (1). The deaths of Mamillius and Antigonus do seem to keep this from being a true comedy.

This is not a tragicomedy that mixes the two forms throughout the play. If taken as a tragicomedy, the switch between the two genres is a definite moment in the middle of the play. C.B. Hardman points to act three scene three lines 112-113 and calls it a “hinge” that directs the understanding of Shakespeare's dramatic construction.

Shakespeare does this in the early comedy, The Comedy of Errors, and in the later romance, The Tempest.

It is even more amusing if one knows Jane Howell's use of a repertory company of sorts in her six plays for the series. Peter Benson played the pious but impotent King Henry VI in the Henry VI plays. This small role in The Winter's Tale is a complementary contrast as he plays the high-spirited but inept and lowly servant to the clown.
This concern was voiced by Jack Gold, director of the project's *Merchant of Venice* about what he considered a disappointing performance by his Lancelot Gobbo. He asserts that the actor was excellent in rehearsals when all the studio hands acted as a kind of audience, but lacked the same comic quality for the actual performance when everyone had to be silent (Willems 72).

Sebastian and Cesario of the BBC *Twelfth Night* seem so different that the effects of their twinning seem almost ludicrous. Given their different genders, one might not be able to use the same actor in the roles, but something more could have been done to show the twinning.

There are additional notions from St. Paul's later letter to the Ephesians—the hierarchy of the family, the city as a center of commerce, and the cult of the virgin (Artemis/Diana originally and then Mary in the Christian era)—that tie thematically into the play, but may be lost to a contemporary audience (Garber, *Shakespeare After All* 164; Hart 347).

The tarot cards are death, the wheel of fortune, the sun, and (probably) the ace of cups. While death may seem to suggest Egeon and his death looming near, each of these cards actually represents transition and new beginnings.

Egeon's wandering is assumed, but not specified in the play text. He does not actually appear again until the final act.

As in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Comedy of Errors* also contains a pair of sisters—one compliant and one defiant.

C.L. Barber uses a quote from *The Taming of the Shrew*'s induction to begin his book, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, but only to begin his comparison of comedy to the traditional folk games a Christopher Sly would have known. He makes no suggestion that *The Taming of the Shrew* is such a comedy (3, 12).

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* have their share of film adaptations, but the former tends to become a fantasy and the latter a drama.

This is a slight expansion in *Shakespeare, The Movie II* of her article, “A Shrew for the Times” in *Shakespeare, the Movie*.

Just for comparison, romance—though not specifically teen romance—films from 1999 include *Notting Hill* and *The Runaway Bride* starring Julia Roberts and *Message in a Bottle* starring Robin Wright Penn. All of these can be found on Blockbuster's list of top romance films of the year, and I saw all of them in the theater in 1999. They do not...
have the character interest that *10 Things I Hate About You* does. In my greatest test for a film, they do not hold up to repeated viewing. *Never Been Kissed* is another interesting film from the same year with which to compare *10 Things I Hate About You* because it is also based on a Shakespearean play, *As You Like It*, and it seems to be a teen romance film. The difference is that it is much more loosely based on the play and never used Shakespeare in its publicity or credits, and it is not really a teen film since the protagonist and her love interest are a teacher and a journalist in their twenties. Again, *10 Things I Hate About You* ends up having more interesting characters, in great part because Patrick and Kat are high schoolers and make high school mistakes and decisions even while they seem to mature as they relate to one another.

26 This contrasts the much earlier John Hughes films used most often in criticism to exemplify the high school romance film. In the two Hughes' films with a female protagonist (played in both by Molly Ringwald), *Pretty in Pink* and *Sixteen Candles*, the protagonist ends up with the handsome, but not very interesting, school heartthrob. Patrick is not this character. He is eccentric, a little scary, and a lot goofy. He is in some ways the goofball best friend and handsome leading man combined into one.

27 Shirley Henderson, the actress who plays Kate in the *Shakespeare Retold* version, actually appeared in the Bridget Jones films as Bridget's best friend, Jude, making this an apt comparison. Wray does not acknowledge that the *Bridget Jones* films are themselves based on books that are based on the other great source of literary adaptation, Jane Austen. *Bridget Jones's Diary*—book and film—was based on *Pride and Prejudice*. *Bridget Jones and the Edge of Reason*—the book more than its loosely adapted film—was based on *Persuasion*. Therefore, to an extent, Wray is comparing a contemporized literary adaptation romantic comedy with a contemporized literary adaptation romantic comedy rather than original contemporary romantic comedies. In the article she does give general ideas of romantic comedies rather than merely discussing Bridget Jones.

28 Russell Jackson suggests that the audience expectations of the stars provide a kind of frame for the two Hollywood films (110).

29 Michael Anderegg claims most Shakespeare film adaptations include some sort of literary framing device to draw attention to the literary/Shakespearean nature of their material (3-4). Perhaps surprisingly, the *The Taming of the Shrew* films do not do this. They bring the audience directly to the story—if anything downplaying the adaptation expectations.

30 The opening street scene is inspired by Serlio's comic street scene, but the more often discussed vision of Miller's are the indoor, Vermeer inspired scenes. He precisely reproduced "Young Lady and Gentleman at the Virginal" for the wooing scene (Willis 111).
This has long been infamously, scoffingly, and erroneously reported as “additional dialogue by Sam Taylor.” In fact, David Garrick gave the lines to Katherine much earlier and the credit actually reads “adaptation by Sam Taylor.”

Diana Henderson seems to be of two views on this issue. In “A Shrew for the Times, Revisited,” she critically points to Katharina's domesticity—complete with scarf on her head—as an example of problems in the film. In “Collaborations with the past,” she suggests Zeffirelli's vision and modern fast-paced camera work presenting Katharina's perspective along with Petruchio's all create a more nuanced The Taming of the Shrew, one that was “undoubtedly a popular success as well as the most layered and lasting of cinematic Shrews” (186).

In her chapter on The Taming of the Shrew, Henderson analyzes Freud's “A Child Being Beaten” and uses it as a heuristic to read The Taming of the Shrew, giving a particularly thorough reading of Miller's BBC film.

Kiss Me Kate was originally presented in 3D; therefore, actions like the throwing of the bouquet straight off of the balcony, toward the camera, are remnants of the 3D experience. Katherine throws things in most of the film versions, but this one takes it a step further to enhance that 3D sensation.

In the 1950s, when this film was made, spanking was still generally accepted and quite prevalent. Today, of course, many consider spanking to be violent and humiliating and an inappropriate discipline technique even for a child.

Before exiting, the two mobsters sing “Brush Up Your Shakespeare,” reminding the audience of the film's origins and the place Shakespeare has in the cultural conscious and, specifically, as cultural capital.

Henderson suggests this is specifically a non-violent recreation of the Burton/Taylor scene from the 1967 film (Collaborations with the Past 197).

Henderson finds the poem particularly incongruent with Kat's intelligence and interests up to this point in the film, calling it, “nursery doggerel...not even rhyme, not even rhythm, not even verse at all. Dr. Seuss would be abashed” (Collaborations with the Past 197).

Melissa Jones suggests that real life school violence and a turn to movies to teach values and secure a cultural legacy resulted in such conservative films as 10 Things I Hate about You (139, 144).
He seems to be doing this as almost a gesture of good will—let her know the true me—but it takes the place of Petruchio coming to the wedding in beggar's clothes. It works for the purpose of being embarrassing to Kate.

These are more than merely filmed plays. The productions both started in the theater, but were re-envisioned for filming and made as films. They retain some elements of their theatrical origins, but are performed in the studio and on location—not on the stage. Even Reinhardt's original filmic version came ultimately from years of theatrical staging in Europe and the US and specifically from a 1934 production at the Hollywood Bowl.

Shakespearean scholars tend to group Dream with the comedies rather than romances (The Tempest, Cymbeline, Pericles, Prince of Tyre, and The Winter's Tale). While a case could be made to include Dream with the romances simply because it includes the supernatural, that is only one part of the definition of a romance.

He also includes the 2001 version directed by Christine Edzard, which is not readily available for viewing.

Note the proliferation of versions of The Taming of the Shrew with patriarchal power on full display.

Cartelli discusses Antonio's “frustrated” love for Bassanio as one reason for Antonio's melancholy. He does not specify, but I assume by using that term he is suggesting this is an erotic love (258).

She actually accuses anyone who does see such evidence of “fabricating” it (21).

There were silent versions and there are television versions, but Radford's is the first full-length cinema feature.

Kenneth S. Rothwell identifies this song as “Eshet Chayil” or “A Woman of Virtue” (208).

While the commentary can help us understand Radford's direction, the movie must stand on its own and show his vision without the aid of the commentary.

In line 103, the film uses the word “reviled” instead of “rated.” The rest of the speech follows the text word for word.

On the other hand, Jeremy Irons, in the DVD special feature “The Merchant of Venice: Shakespeare through the Lens,” says that he “didn't play Antonio gay.” He talks
instead about the deep nature of male friendship in the Elizabethan period that the contemporary world does not comprehend. His suggestion is that Antonio has subjugated his emotional life to his work. While Irons may not have been playing Antonio “gay,” the subtext is present in the film.

The film makes another slight emendation by substituting truth for sooth.

Antonio adds a third “fie” to the text.

This final “peace” is an addition to the play text.

I question somewhat the special categorizing of these plays. These aspects of romance are true for each of them and definitely for The Tempest, but many of the earlier plays have similar motifs. Twelfth Night has all the aspects of the romances except the supernatural, but neither Cymbeline nor The Winter's Tale can absolutely be classified as supernatural. This categorization is a nineteenth century addition to the original and sometimes ambiguous categories of comedy, tragedy, and history, and it seems to be taken as absolute when it is merely one more way to look at the plays. While The Tempest was probably Shakespeare's final full play and his prowess as a mature writer is fully on display in it, I contend that it has as much in common with some of the earlier plays as with the later ones, perhaps as a fulfillment of earlier ideas.

It is almost surprising that in the late 20th and early 21st century with the short resurgence of Shakespearean films and the greater prominence of fantasy sword-and-sorcery films, there has not been a big, splashy Hollywood version of The Tempest. A Midsummer Night's Dream fulfills the role of fantasy Shakespeare, but that is a lighter love-and-fairies fantasy. It will be interesting to see if The Lord of the Rings et al influences Julie Taymor’s The Tempest. Meanwhile, there are also rumors of a Forbidden Planet remake in the works with J. Michael Straczynski writing and—in a very unconfirmed rumor—James Cameron directing. If James Cameron really is at the helm, this becomes the biggest possible Hollywood style production.

One of the things I have noticed working with Shakespeare's comedies and more mainstream films is that they do not come in for as much academic criticism as the tragedies do. There is obviously some, but in some cases it is fairly scarce. Just as comedies are not produced as often on film, so they are not studied as thoroughly in academia. This trend is reversed for film versions of The Tempest, perhaps because it is treated so seriously in film, perhaps because critics find more to say about art films than mainstream films, and perhaps because Prospero weaves his magic around the critic as much as the director.
Altaira's innocence is a theme of the film. She is the first daughter of the planet, named for it, and in total connection with the planet and all living things until she becomes corrupted by human love. There are ideas of Eden in this film.

Robby made numerous film appearances after *The Forbidden Planet*.

This monster that killed the original settlers and that takes form of a sort under the blaster fire from the ship's crew is also clearly an inspiration for the “smoke monster” on television's *Lost*, something of a version of *The Tempest* itself.

Each of these directors is also listed as a screenwriter for the film, sharing the credit with Shakespeare (Jarman, Greenaway) or Shakespeare and Leon Capetanos (Mazursky). This bolsters the idea of director as author, at least in these films.

This is my interpretation of the film. Some critics assume a same sex relationship between Prospero and Ariel in the film (Harris and Jackson 90). I think people expect such a relationship in a Jarman film, but that it is not actually present in this one. Jim Ellis gives a similar perspective, citing Jarman's feeling that such an approach would be “too predictable” (271).

Claire Davenport plays Sycorax. One of her outstanding attributes is her size as is suggested by some of the roles she has played including Fat Dancer, Fat Lady, Stout Lady, Fat Lady, Fat Stripper, and Big Peggy (IMDb, “Clare Davenport”).

Welch's father was of African and Native American descent. Her mother was Caucasian of Scots and Irish descent (IMDb, “Elisabeth Welch”).

This line invokes yet another film, *The Princess Bride*, that satirizes a different kind of action film and is framed as a story being read to another young boy.
Works Cited

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