THE CONCEPT OF OTHERNESS

IN

SHAKESPEAREAN

FILM

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Summary

Using Lacanian theory and more specifically Lacan’s essay on ‘The Mirror Stage’ as a foundation for thinking about the cultural project of reproducing and popularizing Shakespeare, the main purpose of this thesis is to consider various definitions of otherness and examine how they can be applied to Shakespearean film. The notion of otherness goes beyond differences between race and gender and also includes the psychoanalytic dialectic between the self and the other. In the case of Shakespearean film, the concept of otherness is a very important one not only because of the innate differences that exist between ‘reel’ and ‘real’ Shakespeare but also because Shakespeare can be considered a cultural other for most of us in the twenty-first century. Taking this into account, this paper will focus on the following films: Ran (dir Akira Kurosawa 1985), Shakespeare in Love (dir John Madden 1998), Love’s Labour’s Lost (dir Kenneth Branagh 2000), A Midsummer Night’s Dream (dir Michael Hoffman 1999), 10 Things I Hate About You (dir Gil Junger 1999), Hamlet (dir Michael Almereyda 2000), Titus (dir Julie Taymor 1999) and Looking for Richard (dir Al Pacino 1996). These films will be discussed in relation to the concept of otherness which is defined according to difference, alienation, duality and narcissism. Exploring the otherness of the medium and the otherness of the past, the first part of the thesis will concentrate on how the different directors confront the issue of otherness due to our alienation from the Shakespearean past and the separation between high culture and mass culture that the cinematic medium brings about. The second part of the thesis will examine how
otherness is represented within the films by discussing self-reflexivity as an ‘other’ tradition and the issue of woman as other.

In the course of exploring various aspects of otherness as they are played out in the films, this thesis also draws from Lacan’s ‘The Mirror Stage’ in order to study some of the implications that are raised as a result of the notion of otherness. The films’ ability to mirror and reflect Shakespeare as well as contemporary society can be read in relation to Lacan’s ‘Mirror Stage’ which describes the split between the image in the mirror and the self in reality. Because the image in the mirror can never be a true reflection of the self, the mirror stage identifies the reflection as other. This then raises several implications for Shakespearean film that come about as a result of the film/mirror’s ability to distort and misrecognize Shakespeare even as it reflects his texts. Finally, I will also argue that although otherness affects our preconception and value of Shakespeare as self, this othering can also provide a multiplicity of interpretations which can ultimately prove useful to our understanding of Shakespeare.
Chapter One

Introduction:

The Mirror Has Two Faces:

Self And Other

In

Shakespearean Film
The aim of this thesis is to explore the recent cultural project of reproducing and popularizing Shakespeare in conjunction with Lacan’s theory and concept of otherness and what otherness means when it is looked at from different angles. Through an analysis of film style and technique which can be considered an(other) language or discourse, this thesis firstly attempts to deal with the problematic nature of the self before going on to explore how notions of otherness may be amplified or modified as they are tested against the films. Although this paper is not strictly structured according to a Lacanian theoretical framework, Lacanian theory, and his essay on ‘The Mirror Stage’ in particular, provides a foundation for thinking about various aspects and definitions of otherness such as duality, alienation, alterity, difference, binary opposition and the self/other dialectic as they are raised in each of the chapters as well as the films. Lacan’s reference to the mirror also has multiple significance since, like the concept of otherness, the symbol of the mirror is also open to many interpretations like reflection, distortion, fragmentation, misrecognition and idealization which have important implications for the purposes of this thesis.

The term ‘other’ is a polysemic one which depends very much upon the context in which it is used and although the term has its first roots in psychoanalysis and Lacanian theory, the word and its connotations have expanded to include various other aspects and disciplines including postcolonialism and feminism which deal with otherness in relation to cultural and gender differences. This widescale application of the term is both a problem and an advantage. On the
one hand, it widens the scope of this thesis to a great extent by providing a multiplicity of definitions and angles which can be a useful element in analyzing different aspects of otherness within Shakespearean film. On the other hand, however, it must be acknowledged that in the course of examining the various approaches to otherness, complications may arise due to the inevitability of different theories intersecting and questioning the assumptions of one another.

Before elaborating on my own approach to otherness in Shakespearean film, I will begin by outlining some of the basic ways in which Lacanian theory and otherness have been applied to various fields within psychoanalysis and literary theory.

The link between psychoanalysis and literature has long been established since both disciplines involve the “interpretation of texts whether written (literature) or spoken (by the analysand to the analyst). Both disciplines thus seek for a meaning beyond the immediately apparent context of the text, both seek an enhanced understanding though with different goals” (Barker 201). It is therefore not surprising that psychoanalysis and Lacanian theory have informed the works of many literary theorists like Homi Bhabha, Julia Kristeva and Laura Mulvey. One of Lacan’s most frequently cited essays is ‘The Mirror Stage as a Formative Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.’ ‘The Mirror Stage’ takes as its starting point the fascinating spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror. Lacan’s interest in the mirror stage lies in the process of identification and the transformation that occurs in the subject when he “assumes an image and experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and
the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates - the child’s own body and the persons and things around him” (1). For Lacan, ‘The Mirror Stage’ “exhibit[s] in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. This form would have to be called the Ideal-I” (2). ‘The Mirror Stage’ thus functions as an example of the split between the image and the reality, a split which is evident in the lack of motor-coordination in the child. Lacan thus describes ‘The Mirror Stage’ as a “drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation - and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of totality” (4).

While Lacan uses ‘The Mirror Stage’ to explore psychoanalytic concepts like the ego, the id and the Ideal-I, ‘The Mirror Stage’ has also been applied to feminism, postcolonialism and film theory. In terms of film theory, for example, the screen’s ability to reflect contemporary culture has frequently been likened to a mirror. The screen’s association with the mirror has also brought about various arguments on the illusion of the cinema and the spectator’s false identification with the stars on screen and this false identification has been explored by Christian Metz who examines the cinema as an imaginary signifier. Feminist film theorists like Laura Mulvey and Kaja Silverman on the other hand have widely employed Lacanian theory not only because of the idea of the cinema (screen) as a Lacanian
imaginary (mirror) but also because of the idea of visual pleasure and the gaze - where the male spectator is encouraged to identify with the male character in the story who can control events better than the spectator in the same way that the image in the mirror has a stronger sense of motor co-ordination. Psychoanalysis and Lacanian theory have also been used in critical analyses of Shakespearean plays as well as in the works of postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said, whose approaches to postcolonialism involve an analysis of the subaltern other who faces colonial oppression. Homi Bhabha, especially, draws on psychoanalytic theories of “identity formation and the adoption of the mirror as the figure for discussing how vision and difference contribute to self image” (Low 468). As in the case of postcolonialism, which fights against the relegation of the colonized subject to the position of subaltern other, feminist theory also fights against the labeling of woman as other, since psychoanalysis has conformed to society in regarding woman as man’s other so that women are frequently defined in relation to men, especially in their roles of wife and mother.

As seen from the above discussion, psychoanalysis and Lacanian theory have been applied quite extensively to literary texts, Shakespearean drama and non-Shakespearean film (especially in relation to feminism). However, although the concept of otherness is very relevant to Shakespearean film, there has been little or no work done in this area. Instead, in the case of Shakespearean film, most critics like Anthony Davis and H.R. Coursen prefer to examine the issue of cultural
production by studying the process of translation from text to screen. Over the years, Shakespearean film criticism has also become more and more diverse with new scholars and critics entering the field. The study of Shakespearean film now includes critics like Kenneth Rothwell, Richard Burt and Courtney Lehmann and their approaches to Shakespearean film cover a wide spectrum ranging from psychoanalysis to cultural studies, postmodernism and popular Shakespeare. Most criticism, however, still tends to center around the “erosion of Shakespearean textuality and authority in postmodern and early modern culture” (Lehmann preface) or the conflict between the visual medium and the verbal text. Tracing the ways in which the films omit certain lines or scenes, such criticism often focuses on the directors’ aims and reasons for radically altering the texts and how Shakespeare is used as a platform through which the directors pursue their own agenda.

In contrast to this preoccupation with the directors’ goals and the conflict between the visual and the verbal, this thesis takes as its starting point the fact that Shakespeare on film serves as an(other) Shakespeare and that like the infant in the mirror stage who defines himself through an identification with the image, film Shakespeare, too, serves as an attempt to reinforce and redefine the idea of selfhood and the notion of Shakespeare as self which is defined by Shakespeare’s textual and cultural authority. In the course of the discussion, I also suggest that the notion of the self is a problematic one so that any attempt to familiarize and define the self through the image results in defamiliarization and alienation. This defamiliarization and alienation imply that the concept of the self has itself become ‘othered’ so that
Shakespeare goes through a crucial reversal where his position of self is changed to that of other. The concept of otherness thus plays an extremely important and relevant role in Shakespearean film since most people not only encounter Shakespeare through the other medium of the screen as opposed to the stage and the text, but also since Shakespeare can be considered a cultural other for most audiences in the 21st century. This is not only because his plays reflect the otherness of the past but also because of our alienation from English and Elizabethan culture.

Before elaborating on my own framework for each of the chapters, it will be useful to first look at two important terms that are used in this thesis, namely the ‘self’ and ‘other’. Because the notions of self and other are inextricably linked, my contention that Shakespearean film provides us with an(other) version of Shakespeare and that Shakespeare can be considered our cultural other inevitably raises the question of what is Shakespeare as self since the notion of otherness predicates that there should be a self in the first place. The other is a condition of the self and the nature of selfhood is problematic because there is no pristine self to begin with. According to Lacan, for example, there is “no idea of a highly coherent, specialized, centered self. For Lacan, self at the mirror stage is but the reflection of an alienated other” (Rogers 38). Lacan’s argument that there is no true self is especially true in the case of Shakespeare since Shakespeare the person is dead. Despite Lacan’s view that there is no unified ‘I’, however, there is still a very strong belief in the continuing existence of true Shakespeare which is related to our
desire to produce the Shakespearean self as author. This is then signified by the authenticity and originality that is manifested in Shakespeare’s name and cultural authority. According to Freud, names “have, for certain people the full meaning of a thing…The proper name, like the dead person is untranslatable: it [can] only be exchanged in a rigorous sense for the person himself…All the attributes of the dead person can be reworked but his name is untouchable” (qtd in Laplanche 244). Indeed, because the idea of true selfhood is an illusion, the name ‘Shakespeare’ and Shakespeare’s authorship is our only link to the actual self of Shakespeare and because of this, the name and the written texts provide the actual, authentic experience of Shakespeare which brings to mind issues of originality and value that are raised and emphasized differently by the films. This is further evident in the ways in which the film medium often highlights and emphasizes Shakespeare’s name either by marketing the films as translations of the plays or by explicitly stating through the titles that the films are adaptations of the plays. That is, the power of Shakespeare’s name is highlighted in the same way that a brand name is highlighted so as to provide a sense of authenticity to the films which are ultimately imitations and defined in contradistinction to the real thing.

Another important term to consider is the ‘other’ which can be used in relation to Shakespeare as well as the medium of Shakespearean film. Because the self is dependent on and defined through the other, the idea of Shakespeare as self also points to the existence of Shakespeare as other which can be seen both within and beyond the films. For the purposes of this thesis, the other can be defined as
something that “resembles” the self but is at the same time “exterior” to it due to the fact that it is “distinct, different [and] beyond [the] reach and control of the self” (qtd in Silverstone 134). Moreover, in relation to Lacan’s idea that there is no one unified and reliable self, I suggest that the other, too, can be regarded as a fragmented and multiplied term which can be defined in different ways and used on several levels. That is, with regard to Shakespearean film, there is not just one other, but various levels of otherness that layer and interrogate one another due to the implications that come about as a result of alienation, misrecognition and binary opposition. This analysis of otherness will be examined in four chapters, each of which will focus on different aspects and definitions of otherness in light of the following films; Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran* (1985), Al Pacino’s *Looking for Richard* (1996), John Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), Michael Hoffman’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1999), Gil Junger’s *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), Julie Taymor’s *Titus* (1999), Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000) and Kenneth Branagh’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (2000). These films were specifically chosen because of the diversity they provide since they fall into distinctly different categories from art films (*Ran, Titus, Hamlet*) to popular films (*10 Things, Midsummer Night’s Dream*) and even documentaries (*Looking for Richard*). Also, with the exception of *Ran* which provides an interesting contrast, all the other films are fairly recent and were produced in the last five years leading up to the millennium. Most of the films were also targeted at a mainstream audience and all these factors allow us to open up the discussion of Shakespeare and otherness.
especially in terms of exploring the directors’ strategies in remaking and reinterpreting Shakespeare and the inherited past.

Looking at these eight films in general, Chapter Two focuses on the otherness of the cinematic medium and the features of the screen which creates a mirror that makes the othering process possible. The past decade has seen a proliferation of Shakespearean film in cinemas worldwide and productions like Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Richard Loncraine’s *Richard III* (1995) come in various forms and styles. Indeed, the only common denominator among such films seems to be the fact that they all aim to play up their otherness or difference from the texts by breaking down any preconceived expectations that the audience may have about a Shakespearean play. While conservative audience members may express shock and even disgust at the predominance of such ‘vandalized’ Shakespeare, it would perhaps be prudent to stop and consider at this point that otherness and ‘vandalism’ is not limited to the film medium since radical and alternative versions of Shakespearean plays have also appeared quite regularly on stage. Indeed, Shakespeare has often been regarded as “an elastic writer [who] can be stretched in many ways before he snaps” (Elsom 4). In most cases, however, the tolerance of such elasticity seems to be confined only to stage productions which still command connotations of art, culture and respect; attributes which are more in line with notions of highbrow art.

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1 The concept of ‘vandalized’ Shakespeare which I have previously discussed in my Honours Thesis comes from the term “creative vandalism” which was first coined by Jonathan Dollimore. Taking
In contrast to theatre which has a strong cultural standing, the film medium often evokes associations of mass culture and dumbed down Shakespeare. My main contention in this chapter is that since otherness exists in both Shakespearean stage and film productions, it is not so much the otherness that occurs within the films that is crucial but the otherness of the medium that is of primary importance. Thus, the main aim of this chapter is to examine the otherness of the medium and how this affects our notion of the self which in this case is defined by Shakespeare’s authorship and cultural authority. The theoretical bases for this chapter stem from Walter Benjamin’s, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s, ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.’ Both essays highlight the issue of how art is betrayed or replaced by mass culture and technology so that originality and value is reduced or compromised due to the emphasis on popular culture, external packaging, technology and marketing strategy rather than poetry and classic tradition. On the one hand, films that are modeled on the rules of the culture industry do provide us with an alternative image of Shakespeare and an idealized image of the text due to their ability to reflect and mirror Shakespeare through the glitz and glamour of Hollywood. At the same time, however, we must not forget that the mirrors can also be “fun fair mirrors [which] reflect only to distort” (Silverstone 65) and this point is particularly relevant with respect to the pop culture of many of the films such as 10 Things I Hate About You. To some extent, this distortion and

the permanent edifice of the wall to represent Shakespeare’s written texts, the term refers to films
idealization provides us with a new version of Shakespeare that completely replaces and eclipses Shakespeare’s authority as an icon of high culture. However, in Chapter Two, I argue that this alternative image is nevertheless useful since it works to reconstruct the identity of Shakespeare which is necessary in order to ensure continuity and relevance.

In Chapter Three, I take the above arguments further by considering Christian Metz’s arguments on the cinema as an imaginary signifier. Although the cinema screen is likened to a mirror in film theory, Metz points out that there is one thing that can never be reflected on screen and that is the image of the spectator himself. As far as cinema is concerned, it is always the other who is on screen and because of this, Chapter Three begins by reversing the position of Shakespeare from self to other. This reversal is also evident in the otherness of the past and the main aim of this chapter is to examine the ways in which film as other can, at least temporarily, cancel out the otherness of Shakespeare by using popular conventions and genres to create a parallel updated past that audiences can relate to. In the course of adapting Shakespeare’s plays to a global medium like the cinema, the filmmakers inevitably have to come to terms with the issue of history since the Shakespearean past represents a culture and history that we are unfamiliar with and alienated from. Keeping the texts in their original form provides a barrier to most people’s understanding of and engagement with Shakespeare since as Elsom points out, which take up a deliberately antagonistic relationship to the texts by challenging or redefining them.
contemporary British audiences find Shakespeare’s language difficult enough. He uses many unfamiliar words, but that is simply where the problems start, for he also employs Elizabethan rhetorical devices with great skill. Our ears are not trained to catch the tricks of assonance, dissonance, changing stresses within the verse line, alliteration and punning rhymes…a modern audience may pick up one of the meanings to a Shakespearean line, not realizing that there may be others. If native English speakers have such problems with Shakespeare’s language, then aren’t non-English ones facing almost insurmountable hurdles? (35)

Taking into account our alienation from the other Shakespearean culture and history and the fact that the past is different for people in different parts of the world, Chapter Three examines the context of updating Shakespeare and how this is used as a strategy for dealing with the otherness of the Shakespearean past. Examining Ran, Shakespeare in Love, A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Love’s Labour’s Lost which are set in the past, Hamlet and 10 Things I Hate About You which have contemporary settings and Titus and Looking for Richard which use shifting time frames, Chapter Three analyzes otherness in terms of alienation as well as identification since most directors use mise-en-scene to create, or attempt to create, a parallel world that a mass audience can enter and identify with through the use of intertextual references, familiar generic conventions or re-contextualized contemporary themes. Thus, although Shakespeare is our cultural other, he can also be made our contemporary since “Shakespeare left behind a rich wardrobe of clothes, props and ideas which we [can] wear according to our moods and necessities” (Elsom 3).

Ultimately, however, the directors’ attempts to assimilate the otherness of Shakespeare can only be temporary due to the recurring problem of
defamiliarization that is raised in Chapter Two. Taking this into consideration, Chapter Four returns to an analysis of Shakespeare as self and the films as other. The main purpose of this chapter is to examine Lacan’s ‘The Mirror Stage’ in the light of self-reflexivity. The films analyzed in this chapter are Pacino’s Looking for Richard (filmed in a documentary style that reflects and questions the process of staging and filming a Shakespearean production), Shakespeare in Love (which actively fictionalizes the life story and love story of William Shakespeare in a way that parallels the love story of Romeo and Juliet) and Michael Almereyda’s recent production of Hamlet (a postmodern film which repeatedly uses the motif of filmmaking). These films are self-reflexive in the ways in which they undermine the cinematic illusion by foregrounding the creative process. The construction of artifice is displayed and made more evident through a mirroring process where there are usually two parallel plots that mirror and reflect each other. More importantly, however, this chapter explains how the actors and directors use their own creative forces to create a symbolic author function which serves as a substitute for Shakespeare. Through self-reflexivity, these films thus attempt to deal with the problematic issue of the self by reinserting the author function within the films themselves.

My final chapter concentrates on an example of otherness that exists within the films by turning to the subject of woman as other in order to discuss the conflict between the subject/self (Shakespeare) and the object/other (Hollywood). This conflict is played out in terms of the differences between the representation of, and
the audience’s relation to, women in Shakespearean drama as opposed to women in Shakespearean film. Opposing Freud’s view of women as ‘lack’ or ‘other’, feminist critics like Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous have all argued for a way to “challenge the discourse of philosophy and psychoanalysis which exclude women as subjects” (McCartney 604). Helene Cixous, for example, advocates the necessity for woman to write herself. This form of writing, *écriture feminine*, is not restricted to women and Shakespeare is one example of a male writer who can be said to practice *écriture feminine* by giving voice to his female characters, especially in the comedies which often have a very pro-feminist theme. Apart from exploring the roles and representations of women in Shakespearean drama, this chapter also examines the portrayal of women characters in *Shakespeare in Love*, *Hamlet*, *Titus* and *10 Things I Hate About You*. This analysis is carried out in relation to Laura Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze in her essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ so as to suggest that there is an apparent paradox between the dramatic representation of women and the cultural and filmic representation of women due to the casting of the female characters. This is because the casting of actresses like Gwyneth Paltrow and Julia Stiles can dampen the pro-feminist themes in the plays since they represent conventional standards of beauty and are more often seen on magazine covers and in films where they sell themselves as objects of male desire.

Through the analysis of the various aspects of otherness which are defined in different ways in each of the chapters, this thesis hopes to provide a more thorough understanding of the othering process of adaptation and the many
implications that are raised in the course of adapting Shakespeare from text to screen. It is also hoped that exploring Shakespearean film through the self/other dialectic will result in a better appreciation and understanding of the film medium and its implications.
Chapter Two

Shakespeare Through The Looking Glass:

The Otherness Of The Medium

In

Shakespearean Film
In their book, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt begin their introduction with an example from Amy Heckerling’s *Clueless* (1995), which is a contemporary adaptation of Jane Austen’s eighteenth century novel, *Emma*. In one particular scene, the Emma/Cher character is in the car with the Mr. Knightley/Josh character and his girlfriend, a pseudo-intellectual type who is discussing Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Polonius’s “to thine ownself be true” (I.iii.78) speech. Unfortunately for her, the girlfriend wrongly attributes the speech to Hamlet and Cher cuts in to point out that the speech was not given by Hamlet at all but “that Polonius guy”. Promptly offended, the girlfriend smugly replies, “I think I know my Shakespeare” only to have Cher confidently declare, “I think I know my Mel Gibson”.

The above instance perfectly encapsulates several important points that will be raised in this chapter concerning the otherness of the medium and its effects on the Shakespearean self which is, in this case, defined by Shakespeare’s textual and cultural authority and the authenticity and originality that his name provides. Firstly, the *Clueless* example sets up a distinct separation between screen Shakespeare and textual Shakespeare, a separation that comes about as a result of the nature and properties of the screen which acts like a mirror in its ability to reflect as well as distort our original preconceptions of Shakespeare as an icon of high culture. Secondly, the *Clueless* example reflects some of the implications arising from the otherness of the medium by cleverly depicting the power and
pervasiveness of the film medium today, such that even someone like Cher who is completely clueless, as the title of the film suggests, can still come away from a film with some knowledge of Shakespeare. Moreover, the example also points out the film medium’s ability to familiarize Shakespeare by transferring our point of identification since Cher’s awareness of *Hamlet* (dir Franco Zeffirelli 1994) is not so much due to her recognition of Shakespeare’s literary status but more because of her adulation of Mel Gibson as one of the more popular and recognizable icons of pop culture. This pervasiveness of the medium indicates that we can no longer value Shakespeare in the same way. Indeed, the power of the cinematic medium can be said to replicate the power of the image in Lacan’s mirror which provides a more coherent and unified self for the infant who is, in reality, “unable to walk, or even stand up” (Lacan 1). Because of the power of the image, film Shakespeare does often seem to marginalize ‘real’ Shakespeare and this is even more evident today since most people read Shakespeare “backward[s]” (Burt, *Shakespeare After Mass Media* 308) from screen to text. In the course of my discussion on the otherness of the medium, however, I argue that by producing a Shakespeare that is distinctly separate from our original understanding of textual Shakespeare, the cinematic medium reinforces and ensures the continuing relevance of Shakespeare in contemporary society.

One of the major factors that contributes to the otherness of the medium is the cinema’s association with the culture industry which is explained in relation to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s influential essay, ‘The Culture Industry:
Enlightenment as Mass Deception.’ According to Umberto Eco, the culture industry “couples the idea of culture – which implies a private and subtle contact of souls – with that of industry – which evokes assembly lines, serial reproduction, public distribution and the concrete buying and selling of objects made into merchandise” (4). The issue of whether or not the notions of art and culture are corrupted or sullied by the notion of industry has often been debated, but for Adorno who coined the term ‘culture industry’, the issue is extremely clear. Following the arguments set out in his and Horkheimer’s essay, it is obvious that Adorno unequivocally condemns the culture industry and its products and this condemnation of the culture industry can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the culture industry reduces everything to the level of a commodity and as Adorno and Horkheimer put it, “movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an industry in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce” (121).

This sentiment is further reinforced by Adorno in a later essay, ‘The Culture Industry Reconsidered’, where he says that while supporters of the culture industry point out that this ‘rubbish’ is “harmless” and can even be said to “bestow all kinds of blessings” like the “dissemination of information [and] advice”, this information is in fact “meagre or indifferent” and the advice “vacuous and banal” (18). Moreover, the messages that the culture industry propagates are often not as harmless as they are made out to be since on “countless occasions”, attitudes like hate and violence “which the culture industry calls forth, are anything but
harmless” (19). Adorno’s argument about the reduction of art to a commodity is also evident in Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ where Benjamin says that “the situation into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is depreciated” (223). Benjamin goes on to talk about two aspects of a work of art, namely its authenticity - which is the “essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced” - and its aura - which is “a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art” (223). Both of these aspects, according to Benjamin, cannot be captured and are lost in the course of mechanical reproduction.

The reduction of art's status to a commodity in the culture industry also leads to standardization and repetition where, like the products churned out on an assembly line, everything is “cyclically recurrent and rigidly invariable” (Adorno and Horkheimer 125). The individual in the culture industry is an illusion...He is tolerated only so long as his complete identification with the generality is unquestioned....instead, pseudo-individuality is rife...what is individual is not more than the generality’s power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly that it is accepted as such. The defiant reserve or elegant reserve of the individual on the show is mass produced like Yale locks whose only difference can be measured in fractions of millimeters. (154)

This form of standardization and repetition is perhaps most evident in the film industry which makes use of stock conventions and tried and tested formulae and plot patterns where more often than not, “as soon as the film begins, it is quite clear
how it will end and who will be rewarded, punished or forgotten” (125). Even directors like Orson Welles who often “offends against the tricks of the trade” is dismissed by Adorno and Horkheimer because his “departures from the norm are regarded as calculated mutations which serve all the more strongly to confirm the validity of the system” (129). The culture industry is also criticized for its ability to “rob the individual of his function” (124). Pleasure is equated with not having to think about anything and because of this, the “effort required for the [individual’s] response [should be] semi-automatic. No scope is left for the imagination…all the other films and products of the entertainment industry which they have seen have taught them what to expect; they react automatically” (127). Indeed, films often seem to work increasingly to prevent the individual from thinking since “before a movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene that it is already changed. It cannot be arrested” (Benjamin 240). Quoting Duhamel, Benjamin writes, “I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images” (240). The culture industry thus effectively wipes out the individual and his ability to think for himself. The artist himself no longer exists since art in the culture industry “becomes an industrial product. According to this logic, art is created not by some solitary genius but by market trends, mass production, tailorization, reproduction, and, of course, consumption” (Lehmann 221). Likewise, the actors/actresses within the culture industry are reduced to stereotypes valued for their star quality and persona rather than for their acting or their individuality. The individual within the audience also loses his
independence and autonomy since although it can be said that he makes the choice to purchase the product of the culture industry, this independence is an illusion since entertainment and “enjoyment becomes mechanized – courtesy of two-hour movies, three-day mini-series, sixty-minute records – to the point where it ‘is entirely extinguished in fixed entertainments’” (Lehmann 221). Thus, the only thing the consumer has to do is purchase the product since all other decisions are already made for him. This control over the individual is becoming increasingly evident now with sequels and trilogies like The Lord of the Rings (dir Peter Jackson 2001), and The Matrix (dirs Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski 1999) which whet the audience’s appetite through a form of serialization and continuation that is usually only seen on television. And judging from consumers’ reactions to such films, there is no question of not watching the second and third installments once the decision has been made to watch the first. Instead, most resign themselves to wait patiently for the directors and studios to decide what they should watch and when they should watch it.

While Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin tend to place all films into the same category and condemn them, many of their arguments cannot be fully applied to most if not all Shakespearean films. This is because many recent productions of Shakespeare stand at the crossroads between the mainstream Hollywood film and the independent art film. Hollywood films can, for the most part, be defined as entertainment products that are produced for the general population. On the whole, these films conform to the rules of Classical Hollywood Cinema (CHC) which
privileges coherent story lines, heterosexual romance and acceptable stylistic conventions like continuous editing.

Throughout the years, however, the Hollywood film has itself evolved such that even mainstream films do not completely fit into the model of the culture industry. Today, many Hollywood studios practice niche marketing to cater to various consumer groups and within the period of a year, studios often offer various types of film ranging from the summer blockbusters like The Matrix, The Lord of the Rings and Spiderman (dir Sam Raimi 2002) to pseudo-art films like Seabiscuit (dir Gary Ross 2003) and Monster (dir Patty Jenkins 2003) which are aimed at impressing both the public as well as the critics. Moreover, the distinction between high art and mass culture does seem to be becoming more and more blurred so that it is no longer true to say that all art films are anti-CHC films which lie at the other end of the spectrum. Likewise, it has also become extremely difficult to qualify the status of recent Shakespearean productions since from the outset, these adaptations call to mind associations of high culture and literary art due to their obvious albeit tenuous relationship to the Shakespearean text. At the same time, however, these films are also somewhat related to the Hollywood mainstream film since they aim to bridge the gap between art and entertainment. This attempt to bridge the gap between art and entertainment is not only due to choice but also necessity. On the one hand, many directors like Branagh and Junger tend to consciously remake Shakespeare according to recognizable Hollywood conventions and genres so that the plays are refamiliarized and recontextualized for
a contemporary audience who may find it difficult to engage with and relate to the language and issues in the text. On the other hand, this recontextualization is also necessary so that the audience does not get put off by the academic staidness of the text. The link between the film industry and capitalism is a deep seated one and as Thomas Doherty puts it,

with few exceptions…motion picture production responds to the immutable laws of consumer demand. Virtually all movies begin as commodities – not just commodities, to be sure, but at least commodities…In this light the history of American motion pictures may be viewed as a commercial history, the story of businessmen and entertainers trying to gauge the barometer of public taste for financial profit. Movie patrons voice their preferences by casting an economic vote at the box office window; moviemakers read the returns and respond accordingly. (17)

To avoid alienating the majority of filmgoers many Shakespearean productions have become increasingly intertextual so that the Lacanian mirror, in this case, is used more for its capability to distort rather than reflect the reality of the Shakespearean self (as represented by the text). This intertextuality is evident in several ways and as Andrew Tolson explains,

media texts offer meanings to their ‘readers’. These readers may make their own interpretations, but we will also see that meanings are derived from meaning systems, to which everyone (more or less) in our culture has access. The text itself works to structure these meanings, so that our experience of them is organized; and the text also ‘speaks’ to its potential reader in a certain way. At the same time, however, as we have insisted, the reader is neither naïve nor innocent, but rather comes to the text with all sorts of prior knowledge and expectations. The reader will already know a lot about the text even before s/he opens its pages and, as s/he reads, will be able to relate the text not simply to personal experience of ‘life’, but more precisely to a knowledge of other texts. The modern consumer of the media is a reader of many different kinds of text, which inter-relate and feed off each other. (xiv)
The films’ ability to inter-relate and feed off other films is firstly evident in the use of common styles and conventions that are frequently borrowed from other popular and well-known films. One example of this is the CHC’s tendency to favour neat resolutions and happy endings which is evident in Love’s Labour’s Lost which rewrites the ending of Shakespeare’s play by reuniting the lovers at the end of the film. This feature can also be seen in Taymor’s Titus which initially appears to throw most CHC conventions aside (through the use of incoherent plot sequences, defiance of stylistic conventions by breaking the 180 degree rule, practicing discontinuous editing and breaking the cinematic illusion with characters who directly address the camera) only to end with a clichéd and sentimental finale where Young Lucius picks up Aaron’s baby and walks off towards the promise of a new dawn which is unmistakably represented by the image of sunrise. Titus also uses time-splice or bullet-time technology which was made popular in the blockbuster film, The Matrix while Love’s Labour’s Lost, on the other hand, is remodeled on classic Hollywood musicals. This is a genre that seems to be currently enjoying a revival as seen by popular films like Moulin Rouge! (dir Baz Luhrmann 2001) and Chicago (dir Rob Marshall 2002) and even teen-centred television shows like Buffy the Vampire Slayer which recently produced an episode that paid homage to the musical genre. 10 Things I Hate About You also follows the teen movie path which Luhrmann began in Romeo + Juliet by giving the film a contemporary setting replete with pop music, hip, stylish clothes and
young faces which are familiar due to their popularity on television shows and sitcoms. While none of Junger's cast has the star quality of Leonardo Di Caprio (who went on to become one of the more popular Hollywood stars due to his role as Romeo in Luhrmann’s film and also his Romeo-like role in the extremely successful *Titanic* (dir James Cameron 1997)) or even Claire Danes, they do nevertheless provide currency because of their familiarity on television shows. As Tolson points out, television actors are personalities or celebrities rather than stars in the cinematic sense. Their notoriety results from their fairly constant presence on the medium rather than their rarity; they are familiar rather than remote; they are present in the actuality of the television image rather than the photo effect of the cinema image. (130)

The familiarity of television stars as well as popular Hollywood stars is chiefly achieved due to the star system which has been frequently used to sell movies and ensure audience support and recognition. The star system is an extremely important aspect of media history and “in much the same way as the concept of genre, stardom emerged gradually in the first decade of the cinema, to appear as a fully institutionalized concept around 1914” (Tolson 122). The star system is not only based on the actor’s body of work and this probably accounts for the fact that not all actors have made the all-important transition from mere actor to Hollywood star. Instead, to qualify as a star, “screen actors had to achieve identities which extended beyond their performances in particular films. It was [this] development which produced the shift from the ‘picture personality’ (known only
by his or her appearances in films) to the star with a public biography and
‘persona’” (122). This public persona is achieved through what John Ellis calls
“subsidiary forms of circulation” (qtd in Tolson 127) which include newspaper and
magazine articles, gossip columns, interviews and publicity appearances on
television shows. Such publicity keeps the star in the public eye even when they are
not appearing in films and this allows them to retain currency in the eyes of the
public, a currency that ensures their relevance and status to audience members who
will be able to recognize and reflect on their prior knowledge of the stars and their
previous projects when necessary. As Benjamin point out, the actor or star is almost
like a

stage prop, chosen for its characterization and…inserted at the proper place. In
facing the camera, the actor knows that he is ultimately to be transported
before the public, the consumers who constitute the market. The market,
where he offers not only his labour but also his whole self, his heart and
soul, is beyond his reach. During the shooting, he has as little contact with it
as any article made in a factory [since]…the cult of the movie star, fostered
by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the
person but the ‘spell of the personality’, the phony spell of the commodity.
(232)

The star system is all the more obvious in light of current casting decisions
in Shakespearean films which are made based on popularity and profitability rather
than skill and this is evident from the influx of Hollywood stars like Gwyneth
Paltrow, Michelle Pfeiffer and Ethan Hawke who are now given lead roles in
Shakespearean films. Julia Stiles, for example, has appeared in not one but three
recent teen adaptations of Shakespearean films namely, 10 Things, *Hamlet* and *O*
(dir Tim Blake Nelson 2001), an adaptation of *Othello*. Thus, as Adorno,
Horkheimer and Benjamin point out, the Hollywood star is reduced from a person to a product or an object with a purpose, and often, the casting appears to be deliberately designed to remind you not only of the star’s current performance in the current film but also of his/her previous films and performances that are available for sale or rent. The use of stars like Calista Flockhart and Anthony Hopkins, for example, is self-reflexive in that it creates multiple frames that reflect and defamiliarize each other. Our understanding and enjoyment of the Shakespearean characters are thus mediated through our understanding and enjoyment of their onscreen and offscreen personalities. In *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for instance, the audience will have no problems identifying with Calista Flockhart as Helena since her Helena is simply played out as an extension of her popular TV character Ally McBeal who also frequently moans and groans about her inability to find and keep a man. This is also true of Anthony Hopkins in *Titus* and the use of James Dean in *Hamlet*. In *Titus*, for example, Anthony Hopkins draws from not one but two of his Oscar-winning performances that the audience can identify with and relate to. In the first half of the film, his Titus is resigned to sacrificing his sons for his country and this reminds us very much of the self-sacrificing butler, Mr. Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day* (dir James Ivory 1993). In contrast, Anthony Hopkins’ final moments as Titus are played out as the bloodthirsty cannibal, Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (dir Jonathan Demme 1991) when he kills Demetrius and Chiron, bakes them into meat pies and feeds them to their mother. Similarly, Michael Almereyda mediates Hamlet’s
indecision and inability to act by dramatising Ethan Hawke watching James Dean’s performance in *Rebel Without A Cause* (dir Nicholas Ray 1955) which has been consistently popular with successive generations for its on-the-mark rendering of what it’s like to grow up bewildered in America. Ninety percent of the film’s evocative power comes from the charismatic performance of James Dean, the young method actor who achieved instant icon status as the personification of the moody, unfocused 1950s teen. (Doherty 106)

Through the use of Hollywood stars and popular genre conventions, the Shakespearean texts and characters are thus placed in the domain of pop culture and this makes the films self-reflexive about contemporary culture as well as Shakespeare since Shakespeare is defamiliarized through pop culture and contemporary culture is defamiliarized by being reflected through a classical mirror. Adorno and Horkheimer may be quick to suggest that this defamiliarization results in a ‘cheapened’ version of Shakespeare which simplifies the text such that classical Shakespeare or high culture is placed within the frame of Hollywood conventions and mass culture. This would also mean that the meaning and value of the plays are distorted due to their relocation from the sphere of high culture, which evokes poetry and classic tradition, to that of mass culture which evokes entertainment and excitement. Adorno and Horkheimer’s believe in the culture industry’s ability to drain the authenticity and aura of the work of art is also highlighted in Shakespearean film since redefining the plays according to the standards of mass culture also changes Shakespeare’s status as author. Shakespeare’s status comes largely from his name and the “author’s name, unlike
other names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead...the author’s name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and culture” (Foucault 346). The film medium, however, often depicts a clash between two authors, namely Shakespeare and the director of the film and “the work which once had the duty of providing immortality now possesses the right to kill, to be the author’s murderer” (Foucault 343).

Adorno and Horkheimer’s negative impression of the film medium’s status in the culture industry should not, however, be taken for granted. The word medium indicates a process of mediation where the directors of the films act as mediators or interpreters who negotiate between the text and the film in order to bring Shakespeare to the masses and make the plays more familiar to the general population. As seen from the examples above, in the course of this negotiation, most of the films employ similar tactics that point to their association with the culture industry. Despite these similarities, however, the status of Shakespearean films are nevertheless different from that of the mainstream Hollywood film and instead of repeating Adorno and Horkheimer’s mistake of generalizing all films, it is important to value each film individually. The films’ relationship to the culture industry does not always signify a lesser or inferior product and this is especially true because the culture industry does not take into account the complex negotiation that exists between the film and the audience member. In the case of Shakespearean film, for instance, Adorno’s statement that the individual is robbed
of his function and his ability to think no longer applies since many Shakespearean adaptations immediately call to mind our knowledge or expectations of the text. This is not only true for competent audience members who are familiar with the text but also for others whose knowledge of the text may be limited to key scenes such as the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* or the “to be or not to be” soliloquy in *Hamlet*. Adorno’s point that the artist no longer exists within the culture industry is also invalid not only because the films are based on the creative genius of Shakespeare but also because of the artistry of the directors themselves. While some directors like Junger and Hoffman may capitalize on tried and tested formulae to ensure the popularity of their films, there are also auteurs like Kurosawa, Branagh and Taymor whose originality and vision add another dimension to the Shakespearean text.

Looking at the films from a Lacanian perspective also allows us to consider Shakespearean film in a different light. By creating its own place within the sphere of high art and mass culture, Shakespearean films are not only attempting to fill the gap created by the self in reality and the image in the mirror. Instead, the mirror stage can also be read as an attempt to construct identity and in this sense, the films and the directors appear to be reconstructing the identity of Shakespeare through this new technological medium of film. According to Lacan, identity is shaped through the mirror because the image appears unified in relation to the reflected world. The “self is a misrecognized object of the imaginary…and the self can only grasp itself through reflection in and recognition by the other” (Elliott, 123). It is
through this reflection in the mirror that the infant is able to understand his relationship to the world around him and it is through this filmic reflection of Shakespeare that directors reconstruct the identity of Shakespeare for a new generation. Identity is something that is continually reshaped and reconstructed and the search for self is perhaps more relevant than ever in these postmodern times where traditional roles are no longer valid or viable. As Lehmann and Starks point out:

In our visual culture, the fate of “Shakespeare” not only as Author but as cultural icon depends upon the Bard’s continual re-inscription in film and popular media…Shakespeare’s historical signification as theatre or “high art” can no longer be sustained in a culture that is increasingly “mass.” In this context, the elitist Shakespeare of old is relegated to the status of historical artifact. What defines Shakespeare’s popularity now, as Richard Burt argues, is the “teensploitation” movie which accounts for the fact that many of the upcoming Shakespeare films are clearly written for and marketed to pre-teen and teenage audiences….Shakespeare needs the movies not only to insure the ongoing cultural relevance of his plays, but also to render them accessible to postmodern audiences, bridging the gap that separates us from early modern England. (Spectacular Shakespeare 12)

An increasing number of critics now subscribe to Lehmann and Starks’ view that “Shakespeare’s historical signification as theatre or ‘high art’ can no longer be sustained in a culture that is increasingly ‘mass’” and that “Shakespeare needs the movies” to ensure a continuing relevance. While Shakespeare may need the movies to stay relevant through the mass familiarity that Hollywood and cinema in general provides, the movies, too, need Shakespeare not only to provide “an aura of instant authority” (Lehmann and Starks, Spectacular Shakespeare 12), but also to serve as a global signifier; a global platform which directors can use to
work out important and relevant issues like history, race, gender and even politics. Indeed, our need for Shakespeare is precisely what prompts us to continue to make Shakespeare relevant despite the problems of defamiliarization that are raised as a result of the attempt at familiarization. In the following chapter, this problem of defamiliarization is briefly discussed in its capacity to reverse the role of Shakespeare from the position of self to that of other. I will then go on to examine how the directors use Shakespeare as a platform to deal with the issue of history and the otherness of the past by updating the texts through popular genres and conventions.
Chapter Three

Shakespeare Our Contemporary:

The Otherness of The Past

In

Shakespearean Film
As explained in Chapter Two, in the process of translating Shakespeare from text to screen, many directors attempt to reconstruct Shakespeare’s identity through the otherness of the cinematic medium. This reconstruction of identity through cinematic conventions is, however, problematic because of the nature of the cinema itself. According to Christian Metz:

Film is like a mirror but it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although as in the latter everything may come to be projected, there is one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator’s own body. In a certain emplacement, the mirror suddenly becomes clear glass…Since the spectator is absent from the screen, contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as a subject but only with the objects that are there without him. In this sense, the screen is not a mirror. The perceived, this time, is entirely on the side of the object and there is no longer any equivalent of the own image, of that unique mix of perceived and subject (of other and I) which was precisely the figure necessary to disengage one from the other. At the cinema, it is always the other who is on screen; as for me, I am there to look at him…I am all perceiving…absent from the screen but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it, the instance in other words which constitutes the cinematic signifier (it is I who make the film). (173)

In the symbolic medium of the cinema, Shakespeare’s position as self is thus reversed to that of other and this is not only evident because “at the cinema it is always the other who is on screen” but also because of otherness in relation to history.

According to Dennis Kennedy, Shakespeare is “foreign” (12) or other to all of us and because of this, many people regard the texts as obstacles that need to be overcome before we can understand, enjoy and engage with Shakespeare. One of
the primary issues that obstruct our engagement with the text is the issue of the otherness of the Shakespearean past. Otherness in this chapter can be defined in relation to alterity, difference and alienation. Although critics like Jan Kott have stressed that Shakespeare is our contemporary due to the universality of his themes which can be widely applied to all of humanity, there is still a fundamental difference or otherness between Shakespeare and us that has to be acknowledged before we can assimilate the other into the self and call Shakespeare our contemporary. As Burgess points out, if we fail to recognize the otherness of the past and instead choose to reconstruct it in our own image, we “construct only a version of [ourselves], [our] prejudices, a version of the present. [Our] enriching encounter with the alien past [thus] becomes a cosy self-confirming fireside chat with [ourselves]. To encounter the other, [we] must first grasp the nature of its otherness” (36).

The Shakespearean past can be defined as one that represents a different culture and history, a culture and history that is completely other or foreign to our contemporary culture and lifestyle. This problem of otherness is all the more evident in the arena of Shakespearean film since cinema is a medium that depends and thrives on its ability to capture a global audience. As such, in the process of adaptation, the otherness of the past is one of the major issues that directors of Shakespearean films have to deal with since international audiences are especially alienated from a heritage and culture that are not their own and a past that is extremely different from their current contemporary experiences. The issue of
history and the otherness of the past thus also raises the question of whose past and whose history. This is because Shakespeare is a colonial text and the background of the Shakespearean past is different for both the filmmakers and the viewers since spectatorship is mediated by different locations and the past is different for people in different parts of the world. The process of adaptation thus sets up a tripartite relationship between Shakespeare, the director and the audience and very often, this relationship forms the basis of the directors’ filmmaking strategies so that every adaptation is a combination of Shakespeare’s ‘textual past’ as well as the directors’ own past which come together to create a ‘cinematic present’ that the audience can appreciate, enjoy and relate to.

Since film was described and explored as an(other) medium in Chapter Two, this chapter aims to suggest that film as other can be used to cancel out the double other of Shakespeare. This is because most directors choose to cope with the otherness of the past not just by updating the past in a present context but, more significantly, by re-contextualizing this past through cinematic codes and generic conventions. Chapter Three thus discusses the mise-en-scene of the films in order to examine how the directors carry out what Terence Hawkes calls “the transfer of emphasis from ‘text’ to ‘context’” (preface). This strategy is analyzed in relation to eight films, namely, Ran, Shakespeare in Love, Love’s Labour’s Lost and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, which are set in the past, 10 Things I Hate About You and Hamlet, which have contemporary settings, and Looking for Richard and Titus which conflate time through their shifting frames of reference.
The issue of how we should inherit the past and how we should re-make it is inherently and inevitably linked to the question of present identity. Our self-identity or where we are is defined by our history and heritage or where we come from and because of this, the past can be used to mirror our image of ourselves in the present. The films thus represent a way of looking at ourselves from what we remake of the past. This need to redefine our present identity through the past and to re-make the past in our own image is evident in Ran, Shakespeare in Love, Love's Labour's Lost and A Midsummer Night's Dream which, in the process of updating Shakespeare for the present, recreate parallel pasts that we can relate to as a strategy to deal with the otherness of the texts and the Shakespearean past. In Ran, for example, Kurosawa works out our relation to the past by substituting the unfamiliar and other Shakespearean past with a parallel Japanese past that aims to engage audiences by redefining Shakespeare's tragedy and re-working history as story. Moreover, Ran works very much like Throne of Blood (dir Akira Kurosawa 1957) which:

dispenses with Shakespearean dialogue. Instead of trying to translate his poetry into Japanese, Kurosawa renders it as imagery….But what might be stressed is that the shift in the mode of signification from words to images also involves, and is motivated by, an act of cultural perception. Kurosawa’s adaptation of the play does not simply move it to an analogous period of Japanese history, he transforms it according to a different cultural ‘way of seeing’. The images that he has created are not cinematic equivalents for the play. They go beyond the source to render the thematic and emotional world of Macbeth through indigenous aesthetic modes. The shift of signification is not simply from one form of communication to another: it is not just the difference between word and image that is important: it is also the differences of perspectives that one’s native culture provides. (Prince 143)
Redefining the play according to his own native culture, Kurosawa claims the text as his own and re-makes Shakespeare in his own image. While the Japanese elements in the film may prove to be alienating to non-Japanese viewers, however, Kurosawa does, to some extent, work around this problem by playing up the human drama and tragedy and encouraging the audience to relate to the otherness of the past on an emotional rather than intellectual level and this is mostly achieved through his re-contextualization of history as story.

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* begins in media res at a point where we are not sure about the differing relationships between Lear and his three daughters. In *Ran*, however, Kurosawa provides most of his key characters with a past. As a reader himself, Kurosawa had problems relating to the play and could never understand why Shakespeare had not provided his characters with a past. He explains, “we are plunged directly into the agonies of their present dilemmas without knowing how they came to this point. How did Lear acquire the power that, as an old man, he abuses with such disastrous effects? Without knowing his past I have never really understood the ferocity of his daughters’ response to Lear’s feeble attempts to shed his royal power” (qtd in Goodwin 197). Kurosawa gets around this problem by creating a past for his characters, a past that is very much contrary to Shakespeare’s. Hidetora Ichimonji, for instance, differs from King Lear in the sense that while Lear is at worst a foolish old man “more sinn’d against than sinning” (III.ii.59), Hidetora is a warlord who gained power by violently and cruelly
destroying people around him. Tsurumaru in particular stands out as an obvious reminder of Hidetora's sinful past, especially since he appears at the point when we are just beginning to pity Hidetora due to his sons’ abandonment and his madness. Holding the scroll of the Buddha, which is a constant image in the film, Tsurumaru’s character also seems to signify the rules of karma which postulate that what goes around comes around. Thus, although in *King Lear* our sympathy for Lear and Gloucester is heightened after the Gloucester blinding incident, here, Tsurumaru’s blinding and the image of the Buddha explain the suffering and hopelessness that surround Hidetora.

Apart from evoking strong emotional responses through plot changes, Kurosawa also uses the strategy of refiguring Japanese samurai culture into recognizable cinematic codes. The film thus privileges visual images rather than verbal language in order to deal with the otherness of the past. While not all audiences may be competent with Shakespeare’s text, cinema as a mass medium is coded with its own unwritten language which includes elements like costuming and the use of repeated motifs and symbols. Kurosawa’s mise-en-scene, for instance, despite its strong Japanese flavour, is filled with visual codes that can be picked up even by an audience which has mostly been weaned on mainstream Hollywood films. Tsurumaru’s long hair, white kimono and indistinguishable features, for example, are coded according to Japanese stage conventions for a ghost. Hidetora’s descent into madness is also evident from the costuming and make-up that reflect the chaos within his mind. His loss of power is also communicated visually and
symbolically through techniques like framing. Instead of Oswald insulting Lear, for example, the first instance of disrespect in Ran comes from Lady Kaede. This insult is visually executed since the scene is filmed from an overhead shot taken from Hidetora’s point of view as he looks out the window and sees his concubines kneeling to the side as Kaede passes.

Imagery is also used to evoke an emotional rather than an intellectual response and keeping this in mind Kurosawa frequently chooses to depict scenes that are not given much focus in the text. Examples of this include the scenes of the boar hunt and the battle scenes. In Shakespeare’s King Lear, we never see the hunting scene that is reported in Act 1.3 before Lear’s entry into Goneril’s palace. In contrast to Shakespeare who only stresses the animalistic nature of characters like Edmund at certain junctures of the play, Kurosawa stages the hunt at the very beginning, thus effectively highlighting this as a metaphor that runs through the entire film. The scene also sets the tone for the violence and predatory nature of the humans that we see in the course of the film and by incorporating “this profound conceit and [giving] it dramatic presence” Ran, like Throne of Blood, highlights “a stronger intertextual relation to Shakespeare in terms of the play’s figurative language rather than in terms of incident, characterization or description.” (Goodwin 199). This emphasis on figurative language is evident through another symbol introduced during the opening scene. It is here that we are first introduced to Hidetora who faces the camera with an arrow pointing directly at us in a shot that ends any notions of a benign king. The symbol of the arrow, which emphasizes
Hidetora’s status as a warlord and warrior, also leads us directly into the next scene where the legend of the arrows, which is borrowed from Japanese medieval history, is played out. Although Hidetora uses the arrow as a weapon when he kills the boar and during all his battles, he uses the same symbol to teach his sons strength and unity. The arrow thus becomes an “ironic and contradictory symbol” (Goodwin 201).

The most elaborate part of Kurosawa's strategy for reinterpreting his source material is the battle scene. Unlike other films which depict wars with loud explosions and shots of huge and impressive looking weapons, Kurosawa’s battle scene disturbs us with its simplicity. For the most part, the fall of Hidetora is displayed as a silent film montage which highlights the intensity of the massacre. “Much of the sequence is silent, with only a dirge-like musical accompaniment intensifying images of incredible violence” and “in regard to the sequence’s audiovisual montage, Kurosawa has explained: ‘in eliminating the sounds from the scene of the battle I wanted to indicate that the perspective was that of the heavens: the heavens watch such unthinkable and bloody battles and become literally mute” (Goodwin 212). Amidst the chaos on screen all we see are arrows flying, men falling and piles and piles of bodies all over the place. Only the yellow and red colours of Taro and Jiro’s men are readily discernible through the battle thus effectively displaying their vast numbers. Long shots and overhead shots alternate with close ups to show the large scale of the battle as well as the individual suffering, and in between the shots of carnage are shots of the sky as if god is
watching but not doing anything about it, thus replicating the paganistic universe of
*King Lear* where Gloucester says, “As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods. / They kill us for their sport” (IV.i.42-43) At one point, Hidetora tries to fight back but this mostly resembles “an absurd pantomime” (Goodwin 212) as his sword breaks like a toy sword forcing him to retreat into the flimsy and temporary sanctuary of a wooden structure that looks like it is about to collapse. The battle raging outside is continued on a smaller scale inside as his concubines and followers kill themselves and each other while others try to protect their lord before succumbing to death themselves. Finally, Hidetora sits silently with his eyes closed waiting for death but this stillness soon gives way to the tension within and he gets up, moving this way and that, apparently looking for a sword with which to kill himself. Unfortunately, “Hidetora cannot find a suitable sword with which to bring an honourable death through hara-kiri” (Goodwin 205) and he finally walks out like a zombie and passes through the assembled forces of the army which has parted, creating a path for him to walk through. As Hidetora walks out the gates of third castle, it looks for a second like Jiro is going to help him but he is eventually left to walk alone across the plains in an image that recalls the nightmare he referred to in the first scene. Describing the battle scene, Prince says:

dispassionate long shots offer images of the sun blotted out by rolling black clouds, a samurai holding his severed arm and laughing demonically, another reeling with an arrow through his eye, masses of muskets sparking like fireflies, rivers of blood gushing down the castle walls, samurai riddled with arrows like porcupines and quivers of flames dancing over mountains of corpses. The images accumulate in intensity piling horror upon horror and Kurosawa structures them in terms of flow of movement and
compositional energy as in the old Kamakura-era narrative scroll. But this is to be a scroll of hell. As Kurosawa describes in his screenplay, ‘It is a scene of human evil doing, the way of the demonic Ashura as seen by a Buddha in tears. The music superimposed in these pictures is, like the Buddha’s heart, measured in beats of profound anguish, the chanting of a melody full of sorrow that begins like sobbing and rises gradually as it is repeated like karmic cycles, then finally sounds like the wailing of countless Buddhas. \(288\)’

More than anything, the battle scene serves as an excellent example of how Shakespeare can be done without his language thus eliminating the otherness of the text. The silence and emphasis on images rather than words also allow us to engage in the unfolding human drama and tragedy. In this sense, Kurosawa uses visual cinematic language to counter the academic staidness of Shakespeare’s written verse and ultimately, our engagement with the film and the text is on an emotional rather than intellectual level since we are reacting to the tragedy of Hidetora's experience and the emotion of the scene. The film also effectively displays cinema’s ability to co-opt the other into the ‘I’ such that Kurosawa can draw from his own native culture and rewrite and reinterpret Shakespeare’s King Lear on his own terms by actively using a parallel Japanese samurai past to counter Shakespeare’s unfamiliar Renaissance one.

Like Ran, Shakespeare in Love also provides us with a parallel account of the past. Unlike Ran, however, the Shakespearean past is not completely other or unfamiliar for the makers and many of the actors of Shakespeare in Love who are from England and who may be more familiar with the culture, classicism and tradition of Shakespeare. In the case of Shakespeare in Love, the otherness of the
Shakespearean past is thus not so much signified by an alienating and unfamiliar culture but more by an unfamiliar era. To cope with this form of otherness, the film gives us a past that serves as a mirror for us in the present. This is done by creating a newness in relation to the now obsolete Elizabethan past so that the old-fashioned Renaissance past is replaced with a parallel past that is very much based on the present moment.

Set in the Elizabethan era, Shakespeare in Love is one of the few films in recent years to draw directly from a Renaissance past and a Shakespearean heritage. Films set in the Elizabethan era are usually unpopular because they evoke connotations of academia and staidness. The success of Shakespeare in Love, however, can be attributed to many factors including a strong cast and a witty script. Of primary importance is the tone of the film which encourages us to laugh and poke fun at the iconic figure of Shakespeare as author, and the freshness of the whole enterprise which maintains a strong sense of the present even as it romanticizes the past, the figure of the author and the immediacy of what it meant to write at that moment. This freshness is largely achieved through the romance of Shakespeare and Viola which serves as an updated parallel of Romeo and Juliet which is one of Shakespeare's most enduring and popular plays.

The film's strategy of creating recognizable parallels between the past and the present is evident from the opening scene which begins with an exterior shot of the theatre before cutting to an interior shot which reveals balconies and an empty stage. We then move to an extreme close up of a script on the ground entitled, The
Moneylender’s Revenge. The sound of high-pitched screaming from offscreen interrupts the smooth flow of the shots and the camera suddenly tilts upwards and very quickly zooms through a black curtain thus landing us backstage. Ironically, we soon realize that The Moneylender’s Revenge is not playing onstage but backstage as we see Philip Henslowe screaming as his booted feet hang perilously over a fire at the mercy of the moneylender, Hugh Fennyman and his two henchmen. While this initial introduction does not introduce us to the main character immediately, it is nevertheless a scene that effectively foreshadows the film to come, since in the same way that the script of The Moneylender’s Revenge leads us to the actual playing out of Fennyman’s revenge, so too will the script of Romeo and Ethel the Pirate’s Daughter and later and more accurately Romeo and Juliet, lead us to the actual playing out of the romance between Shakespeare and Viola. Apart from setting up the parallels between the play and the fictionalized account of Shakespeare and Viola’s romance, this opening scene is also extremely important in terms of engaging the audience since it creates a fluid and believable world that we can enter even as we are aware of its fictionality. This invitation to the audience to engage with the play is all the more obvious through the symbol of the theatre since we are encouraged to not only enter the world created by the mise-en-scene but also to participate in it. This is not always possible in films like Hoffman’s Midsummer Night’s Dream and Titus which often provide highly stylized and static shots and landscapes that distance us from the films instead of encouraging engagement.
The mise-en-scene of the film authentically recreates the Elizabethan era through the use of elaborate sets and costumes which successfully depict a whole range of Elizabethan characters from the lower classes to the aristocracy to the queen. The overall tone of the film, however, is pseudo-Shakespearean, since even as it romanticizes the past, it reflects characters or events that prevail now in our current time. In this sense, we are always aware of two parallel historical contexts occurring simultaneously and reflecting and playing off each other as we recognize names from the past like Philip Henslowe, Christopher Marlowe and Ned Alleyn, represented by famous faces in the present like Geoffrey Rush, Rupert Everett and Ben Affleck. Our recognition of the current Hollywood stars thus allows us to relate to the historical names and this same strategy is extended to the film as a whole which updates the context of the romance between Shakespeare and Viola in contemporary terms so that we can better relate to the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet.

The use of parallels to bridge the gap between the past and present is evident from the beginning of the film which shows us the widely different worlds that Shakespeare and Viola come from. While the feud between the Capulet and Montague families is left largely unexplained in the text, the film re-contextualizes the feud as competition between the theatre companies and re-conceptualizes the tragedy between the lovers in terms of issues like differences in social status and class hierarchy which are identifiable even in today’s context. Will Shakespeare is thus depicted as a struggling artist perpetually searching for inspiration as he goes
about his daily life amongst the working classes. Viola on the other hand is first introduced to us in a scene where she sits amongst a group of ladies glowing luminously in a pale blue gown as she watches a play. Her social circle includes several prominent members of the aristocracy including Lord Wessex and the queen. Unlike other Shakespearean films where the audience has preconceived expectations of how key scenes should be played out or how key characters should look, Shakespeare in Love reverses this process of expectation and anticipation by emphasizing the creative process. Rather than let us rely on our memory of reading the text, the film keeps us in the present moment where Shakespeare uses his own romance and life as a source of inspiration for his writing. Lord Wessex thus takes on the character of Paris in his courting of Viola and he also doubles as Balthasar who miscommunicates important information by telling Viola that Shakespeare is dead. There is also the equivalent of the Capulet ball, swordfights played out during the rehearsals as well as the inevitable balcony scene which begins traditionally with the line, “Romeo oh Romeo” only to end untradi tionally with Shakespeare climbing up the trellis and coming face to face with the nurse. The parallels are not restricted to Romeo and Juliet but also extend to other plays as well since common Shakespearean techniques and devices like cross-dressing and the play-within-the-play structure are alluded to in the course of the film. The tragic tone of Romeo and Juliet is also given a parallel here in the sense that the lovers are not united in the end. While Romeo and Juliet leaves us with a sense of the cruelty of fate, however, Shakespeare in Love ends on a more promising note since its end is also the start of
Twelfth Night, thus signifying that the priority is still art.

This prioritization of art is evident in the film as a whole since although it achieves popularity by catering and appealing to a mass audience, it also does not disappoint competent audience members who appreciate Shakespeare and are familiar with the texts. The film thus not only provides us with a romanticized version of the Renaissance past but, for competent audience members, it also points back to our own past relationship to Shakespeare’s texts. A more competent audience will thus be able to pick up references to Hamlet in the part where Fennyman picks up a skull and holds it in a reference to the gravedigger’s scene. Another hilarious moment occurs when Lord Wessex staggers back after seeing what he thinks is the dead Marlowe pointing at him in church in the same way that Roman Polanski’s Macbeth staggers back upon seeing the ghost of Banquo in the banquet scene. The film also makes allusions to Shakespeare’s contemporaries who make guest appearances in the film. John Webster, the macabre playwright who wrote violent and bloody plays like The Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil is interestingly represented as a young schoolboy who perversely enjoys feeding rats to cats.

Christopher Marlowe also makes a brief appearance. After seeing his initial muse Rosaline in bed with Burbage, Shakespeare dejectedly walks out and burns Act One of his play then titled Romeo and Rosaline. He goes to a tavern and meets Christopher Marlowe who proceeds to give him not only the basic storyline for his play but also helpfully provides the name Mercutio which Shakespeare admits is a
“good name”. The Christopher Marlowe episode is interesting because it engages the audience on the level of their ability to recognize ‘stars’. In this case, the audience who is familiar with Shakespeare may be just as excited to see Christopher Marlowe doing a cameo role in a Shakespeare movie as they are to see Rupert Everett doing a cameo role in the film. Thus, the Marlowe episode is important because it alludes to the Shakespeare as Marlowe debate and plays on the idea that Marlowe had a hand in writing Shakespeare’s plays. It also reveals the importance of casting in any film since the film’s contemporary look is at least partly if not mostly achieved through the casting of actors who are very obviously current even though they are playing period roles.

Apart from the variety of British actors, the film also includes stars like Gwyneth Paltrow, Geoffrey Rush and Ben Affleck. Paltrow and Affleck, especially, lend a contemporary presence to the film not only because of their status as Hollywood stars and box-office draws but also because of the much-publicized offscreen romance taking place between them during the filming and release of Shakespeare in Love.

Apart from satisfying a competent audience through the Shakespearean allusions and successfully and refreshingly portraying Romeo and Juliet through Shakespeare and Viola, the film’s success is mainly due to its strategy of locating these parallels and allusions in the present. Although it is set in the Elizabethan era, the film does still manage to create a contemporary outlook through style and characterization. Henslowe, for example, serves as a parody of the Hollywood
producer who only cares about box-office success and audience response. During rehearsals, he continually reminds Shakespeare that the audience likes to see something to do with “love and a bit about a dog”. Even towards the end of the rehearsal period when everybody else is caught up with the tragic love story while Shakespeare narrates the events leading up to Romeo’s banishment, Henslowe says hopefully, “this must be the part about the shipwreck”. Thus, although Henslowe looks and sounds like an Elizabethan gentleman, his stock character is nevertheless relevant and recognizable in entertainment and conventions in our age and time. The characterization of Shakespeare and Viola is also contemporary and they are seen as very human characters who go through what ordinary people go through like writer’s block and falling in love. In one scene, Shakespeare is seen doodling as he spends his time writing different variations of his name rather than working on his play in a joke that alludes to the fact that there are several known signatures of Shakespeare’s name. And in another scene, we see him drawing inspiration from a man on the street from whom he borrows the line, “a plague o’ both your houses” (III.i.87). Through this film, we are thus let into the creative process of a Shakespeare who is not set up as an icon who is beyond our grasp but as a strikingly likeable human character who, like all writers, needs inspiration in order to write passionate plays that last forever.

Updating and recognition are also achieved through intertextuality in terms of the different styles and genres used. In the beginning of the film, for example, as Henslowe walks through the street, he not only steps into a dung cart but also
narrowly misses the contents of a chamber pot that is almost poured over his head. This sequence reminds us of slapstick comedies like Mr. Bean while the scene where Shakespeare goes to his necromancer and lies on a couch complaining about his writer’s block seems to be taken straight out of a Woody Allen movie. And when Shakespeare chases after Thomas Kent and jumps into a boat yelling, “follow that boat”, we cannot help but feel that it is the right line but the wrong mode of transportation since we are more used to the cliché of people yelling ‘follow that car’ in detective shows and thrillers. The contemporary references are thus not merely random utterances but recognizable events borrowed from Hollywood, television and pop culture rather than an Elizabethan tradition. Thus, Shakespeare in Love consciously redefines our past as an image of our present by actively fictionalizing a supposedly true account in the life of Will Shakespeare and by providing us with a parallel past that we can identify with and relate to because of its currency and its ability to constantly remind us of its contemporary presence. The old-fashioned and obsolete Elizabethan past is thus replaced and updated with a parallel past that privileges contemporary themes and popular cinematic conventions even as it maintains the literary and artistic high art status of Shakespeare’s text. This refreshing sense of newness and currency which infuses an undeniable and infectious sense of fun into Shakespeare is chiefly achieved through the tone of the film which privileges comedy and parody. By not taking itself too seriously the film is able to cleverly draw from various Hollywood and pop cultural elements that help to cancel out or assimilate the otherness of
Like *Shakespeare in Love*, Branagh's *Love’s Labour's Lost* also uses the strategy of providing the audience with a parallel past to replace Shakespeare’s Elizabethan past. Drawing from his own past experiences as a Shakespearean and Hollywood actor, Branagh consciously sets out to “merge and mingle the canonical with the commercial…[and tries] to reclaim Shakespeare for the popular culture that originally spawned and nourished his art” (Crowl 36). Thus, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* attempts to specifically use film as other to cancel out the otherness of the Shakespearean past by updating and naturalizing it through the golden age of Hollywood musicals and the popular American icons of the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s. This approach is apparently aimed at creating a sense of nostalgia for both the American movie musical as well as Shakespeare. However, the film failed at the box-office because for the young people who make up the vast majority of the viewing public, classic figures like Cole Porter, George Gershwin and Irving Berlin are ultimately just as foreign as Shakespeare. Despite this, however, the use of the golden age of Hollywood musicals does allow Branagh to draw on the classicism and nostalgia of that era to reflect the classicism of Shakespeare’s text.

Set in an imagined Europe just before World War Two, the film urges the audience to recognize and respond to the classic tradition of Shakespeare through the parallel classic Hollywood heritage of the great MGM musicals. Instead of writing original songs like those in *West Side Story* (dirs Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, 1961), Branagh places Shakespeare's language side by side with
classic Hollywood show tunes like Cole Porter’s ‘I Get a Kick Out of You’ and Irving Berlin’s ‘There’s No Business Like Show Business’ so as to capitalize on the nostalgia that people may automatically feel upon recognizing the classic show tunes. Thus, his film uses the formulae of the golden era Hollywood musicals in order to bridge the gap of history, and through this parallel account of a 1950s past, he aims to create nostalgia for and engagement with Shakespeare through our nostalgia for and enjoyment of a showbiz, golden era past of Hollywood.

In order to prompt his audience to recognize Shakespeare through Classical Hollywood Cinema, Branagh first recreates the time period of the film through the mise-en-scene as well as recognizable conventions and genres that are consistent with that period. One example of this is the very beginning of the film where the caption reads, “introducing the ladies of France” and “the men of Navarre”. What follows is a series of glamour shots introducing the actors and the roles they play, each one looking like the glamourous actresses of the 1930s and 1940s with bright, vibrantly coloured costumes and glossy curls. As with most musicals, the costumes of the men and women are also colour-coded. The ladies’ dresses are co-ordinated to match not just the jackets, but in one particular scene, even the ties, waistbands and other accessories that the men carry. Thus, the king and the princess wear red while Berowne and Rosaline are in blue, Longaville and Maria in green and Dumaine and Katharine in orange.

The conventions that represent the golden era of the Hollywood musicals are thus set side by side with Shakespeare's play and the most important and
recognizable part of that era, namely the song and dance numbers, are used to recontextualize and parallel the most important part of Shakespeare's play, namely the language. Indeed, the musical genre is precisely what facilitates the accessibility and familiarity of Love's Labour's Lost and realizing this, Branagh is quick to link Shakespeare with the classic show tunes so that the leaving behind of books, both academic and Shakespeare, is obvious from the very beginning of the film where rather than sign the oath, Berowne and the others break into the rather apt “I’d Rather Charleston”, a number from Gershwin’s Lady Be Good. Branagh’s setting also aims to facilitate a double level of signification such that the audience not only recognizes the musical conventions but also recognizes Shakespeare through this familiarity. Although the characters in most musicals seem to burst indiscriminately into song whenever the opportunity arises, the point behind the genre is that the songs serve as a cue to highlight the emotion that the character feels. Branagh’s songs, too, serve a purpose and although Shakespeare’s lines are cut drastically to make way for the song and dance numbers, the songs are nevertheless cued to the lines. The song, ‘I Won’t Dance,’ for instance, begins as Berowne asks “did not I dance with you at Brabant” (II.i.114) and the song ‘Dancing Cheek to Cheek’ which begins with the line, ‘heaven, I’m in heaven’, takes its cue from the line, “And when love speaks the voice of all the gods/ makes heaven drowsy with the harmony” (IV.iii.343-344). In one particular scene of the film, Branagh starts beating out the rhythm of an iambic pentameter with his feet in a tap-dancing sequence and the “down-and-dirty choreography” (Garrett, online) of
the cabaret styled ‘Let’s Face the Music and Dance’ number replaces the sexual wordplay and puns in the play. The emotions that the songs evoke are thus used to replace and parallel the meaning of Shakespeare’s lines and as Branagh puts it,

The play responds very well to music. There are many references to music and dancing in it and the elegance, style, and wit of the play seemed to me to sit well in a context not unlike the Hollywood musicals of the thirties and forties…Writers like Cole Porter or Irving Berlin or George Gershwin whose lyrics are arguably as witty, in their own way, as Shakespeare was in his time and just as full of conceits and verbal trickery. Shakespeare was trying to convey how silly and stupid and agonizing it is to be in love [and] the songs we have chosen convey all of the same vicissitudes of love. (qtd in Crowl 39)

Branagh's strategy of using a parallel account of the past thus enhances the meaning and accessibility of the play. Beyond this, however, his specific use of the golden era of Hollywood musicals also aspires to create nostalgia for the past, a nostalgia for classicism and heritage that applies to both Shakespeare as well as Hollywood. This nostalgia is not only recreated through the song and dance numbers but also through various other Hollywood conventions. The comedy of the film and the text, for example, is enhanced through the clowns, Don Armado and Costard played by Timothy Spall and Nathan Lane who in the tradition of vaudevillian acting make use of physical comedy in their performances as well as their songs. ‘I Get a Kick Out of You’, for example, is sung by Don Armado who goes around literally kicking everything in sight. And in ‘There’s No Business Like Show Business’, Nathan Lane leads the whole cast in an uplifting performance that effectively proclaims Branagh’s status as a showman in the Shakespeare business.
The film also adds nostalgia by playing out trademark routines like the Esther Williams synchronized swimming scenes and the Fred Astaire chair flip dancing sequence that Adrian Lester as Dumaine does in the song, ‘I’ve Got a Crush on You.’ The goodbye scene on the plane is also modeled on the farewell scene in *Casablanca* (dir Michael Curtiz 1942) and in it the men wear fedoras like Humphrey Bogart.

Nostalgia is also recreated through the look and style of the film which calls our mind back to other classic films of that time. Like *The Wizard of Oz* (dirs Victor Fleming and Richard Thorpe 1939), for example, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* also requires us to suspend our disbelief, for instance in the ‘Dancing Cheek to Cheek’ song where the men start levitating and floating in the air before they appear in top hats and coat tails, framed in the double French doors of the library, ready to dance with their colour co-ordinated partners. Likewise, the newsreels are reminiscent of films like *Citizen Kane* (dir Orson Welles 1941) although their black and white grainy documentary-like footage, images of fighter planes and explosions and warnings of “imminent catastrophe” are designed and presented as a parody and mock-up of history. This makes it obvious that although the backdrop is that of war the love story will be kept firmly in the foreground. As the song, ‘There’s No Business Like Show Business’ promises, “show people smile when they are down” and the most important thing is to “get on with the show”. Thus, even though slower, more poignant numbers like ‘They Can’t Take That Away From Me’ may slow down the upbeat tempo of the film, this is only temporary since we know that
like the fast motion montage sequences of the newsreels, the characters will zip through the bad patches and be ultimately reunited.

To maintain audience engagement, Branagh also scrapped his earlier plan of shooting the film in black and white which he felt would distance the audience and instead went with the use of “intense primary Technicolor, a Stanley Donen-influenced look” (Garrett, online) borrowed from the 1950s. The cast of Love’s Labour’s Lost was also assembled with the audience in mind and while Branagh insists in interviews that he does not respond to the pressures of commercial casting, all his films include both American stars and British stage actors. Likewise, this film includes not just British actors who can speak the part, or even musically trained actors who can sing the part, but Broadway stars like Nathan Lane and American actors commonly seen in teen flicks like Clueless (Alicia Silverstone) and Scream (Matthew Lillard, dir Wes Craven 1996).

Despite Branagh’s many attempts to bridge the gap between the “canonical and the commercial” his substitution of Shakespeare with classic Hollywood song and dance numbers did not work well with mainstream audiences. His strategy, however, does rather interestingly deal with the issue of history and the question of whose past in a way that most films do not. Although Branagh has actively engaged in several Hollywood movies like Celebrity (dir Woody Allen 1998) and Wild Wild West (dir Barry Sonnenfeld 1999), he is most well-known for his Shakespearean productions from Henry V (1989) to Much Ado About Nothing (1993), Hamlet (1996) and Love’s Labour’s Lost. Branagh’s roots, however, are
not in America or England and in all his Shakespearean productions he can be said to both adopt and adapt Shakespeare who can be regarded as “the historic signifier of all things quintessentially English” (Lehmann 174). This adaptation of Shakespeare for himself and others is carried out by drawing from his own mixed heritage and past to come up with films that everyone can enjoy and claim for their own. As Crowl explains:

[Branagh’s] family roots are in Protestant Northern Ireland, but his artistic energy flows from the American films and their iconic heroes he absorbed as a boy in Belfast. Branagh’s biography reveals that he draws potential rather than paralysis from finding himself placed between rival legacies, traditions, and cultures. Protestant and Catholic in Belfast; English and Irish in Reading (whence his family moved when he was ten); and Stratford and Hollywood in his Shakespearean career. (26)

In recognition of his own past and scattered roots, Branagh has always called himself a popularizer aiming to entertain people and “bring Shakespeare to a wider audience by ‘telling the story with the utmost clarity and simplicity.’ Branagh wants ‘different accents, different looks’ to produce Shakespearean films that belong to the world’ (qtd in Crowl 29) and this is probably most evident in his casting decisions which offer

a specific demonstration of how his theory of ideological quilting works in practice. Aspiring ‘to create a level playing field’ of actors through ensemble casts comprised of RSC veterans alongside inexperienced Shakespeareans and non-English actors, Branagh explains that ‘I…like the clash, if you like, of accents and sounds, so that we don’t try to homogenize the sound of Shakespeare, which again, in its clichéd form, is equated with some kind of overblown theatrical delivery, usually English in accent…In casting different groups of people, however, you…start to create a more level playing field…from quite different cultural viewpoints.’ (Lehmann 174-175)
The otherness of the past is thus not only mediated through ‘Hollywoodization’ to make it more familiar to a mass audience. Instead, Branagh goes one step further in dealing with the issue of history since the use of young and untrained Hollywood actors like Alicia Silverstone and Matthew Lillard shows that Shakespeare can belong to anyone and everyone and not just to stage-trained British actors.

Like Love's Labour's Lost, Ran and Shakespeare in Love, Michael Hoffman's A Midsummer Night's Dream is yet another film that uses a historical setting to re-contextualize and update Shakespeare. Choosing to set his film in the recent past rather than in the more alien Elizabethan past, Hoffman's film attempts to cash in on the popularity of recent successful period films like Emma (dir Douglas McGrath 1996), Portrait of a Lady (dir Jane Campion 1996) and Sense and Sensibility (dir Lee Ang 1995) which starred mainstream actresses like Gwyneth Paltrow, Nicole Kidman and Kate Winslet. As in these three films, Hoffman's cast includes big television as well as Hollywood stars like Calista Flockhart, Michelle Pfeiffer, Rupert Everett, Kevin Kline and Stanley Tucci. Like Sense and Sensibility and Emma, Hoffman's film is also set in a perfect vision of pastoral idyll, replicated through the gorgeous Tuscan countryside which stands in as the fictional village of Monte Athena in Italy at the turn of the 19th century. To a large extent, the film does adhere to the formulae and conventions of the 19th century melodrama by using the appropriate settings, costumes, language and key emotions. While the use of such formulae and conventions serve to provide us with a romanticized version
of the past, for the most part, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* seems to represent a failure and inability to deal or cope with the idea of the Shakespearean past. This failure and inadequacy is mostly revealed through Hoffman’s mise-en-scene which is filled with trite and clichéd choices like the bicycle which fail to make us engage with the text and the past.

Hoffman’s film can be split into two main worlds. The human world, set in Tuscany, is very obviously remodeled on Kenneth Branagh’s *Much Ado About Nothing* which was one of the most commercially successful Shakespearean films to be adapted on screen. Beginning the film with Theseus and Hippolyta’s wedding which takes place in a piazza before a grand Renaissance house, Hoffman uses vivid Technicolor and soft lighting so that the human world is perpetually bathed in a pretty golden glow which emphasizes the bright daylight and lovely green terraces of Northern Italy. This Italian setting also conveniently allows for the operatic soundtrack which features songs from Felix Mendelssohn’s ‘Midsummer Night’ as well as Puccini and Verdi which help to enhance the romanticism that the Italian setting evokes. In contrast, the fairy world, which looks borrowed from “the magic wood that Max Reinhardt had reconstructed in his 1937 Hollywood Dream,” (Kauffmann, online), is depicted as “mysterious, magical and threatening. [Oberon's world includes] a great valley where former Etruscan temples and tombs are overgrown with roots and greenery while Titania’s world is inspired in part by pre-Raphaelite paintings. It is more feminine and a little fairy bar adds a modern touch” (Hoffman, production notes, online).
Hoffman's choice of the Italian setting, operatic soundtrack and pre-Raphaelite inspirations is obviously used to reflect or evoke notions of aristocracy, classicism and nostalgia. Nostalgia, however, is an emotion that is predicated on memory and recognition and although the beauty and charm of the Italian setting is undeniable, it is nevertheless also unfamiliar and unrecognizable especially to an international mass audience. The operatic soundtrack, for instance, is not something that a mass audience can relate to as opera itself is not an art form that caters to the masses. The heavy reliance on Italian culture may thus prove to be just as alienating as a Shakespearean past since, unlike Kurosawa who also substitutes Shakespearean culture with his own native Japanese culture, Hoffman's film does not successfully re-contextualize history as story or translate Shakespeare's language into metaphors and central images that can be picked up by a mass audience. On the other hand, while the Italian setting and operatic soundtrack may not be familiar or recognizable to a mass audience, it nevertheless automatically evokes a sense of classicism that Hoffman capitalizes and trades in so that the high art status of the setting and soundtrack is conveniently equated with Shakespeare’s text and his film.

Hoffman's overly simplistic substitution is also evident in some inexplicably odd additions that he incorporates into his film; additions that have little or no bearing on our understanding of the play. While the romance in the film is expressed through the soundtrack, the comedy in the film is expressed through the highly unlikely prop of the bicycle. For some reason, Hoffman seems obsessed
with the need to provide his characters with a mode of transportation and in his production notes, he says, “in the beginning I just had an image of a fat Puck riding through the Tuscan countryside on the back of a turtle” (Hoffman, online)

Somehow, his image of a turtle turned into the “newfangled” creation of the bicycle and for Hoffman and some of the actors, the bicycle serves as the basis for the comedy in Shakespeare’s classic play. The bicycle also replaces Shakespeare’s wit and wordplay by transforming comedy to a physical level where Hoffman highlights the “absurdities of people chasing after love on a bicycle.” Helena, especially, is a character that is particularly obsessed with her bicycle and for Calista Flockhart the bicycle helped to conceptualize the role since “it was especially heavy for her and presented an obstacle, a visual symbol of the insecurities and negativity that Helena carried around with her” (Hoffman, online); a symbol that she is eventually able to leave behind as seen in the final moments of the film where Helena discards her bicycle somewhere between mud-wrestling and pathetically chasing after Demetrius.

Apart from the addition of the bicycle, Hoffman also provides his own version of certain characters. Bottom’s character, for example, is fleshed out to create sympathy and in the earlier part of the film Shakespeare’s Bottom is transformed into a man with an unhappy marriage and a wife who puzzlingly enough speaks only Italian. In contrast to Shakespeare who works on the level of imagery and language, Hoffman also tends to reduce everything to the level of superficial visualization. Our introduction to Bottom, for instance, takes place in
the town-square where the camera pans around the area before settling on a man leading a donkey across the screen. As the donkey walks across the screen from left to right, Bottom comes into focus on the right of the screen, sitting at a table in a conspicuous white suit, white hat and a bow tie. This is a rather ridiculous and unnecessary move that is probably meant to foreshadow the ass-head episode later on.

On the whole, Hoffman’s film does provide the viewer with a visual and aural feast, a feast that is emphasized not only by the soundtrack, setting and attractive Hollywood and television stars, but also by the opening shots of the film which literally convey the idea of a feast through the excessive images of ripe tomatoes, glistening red cherries and roasted chickens. In this sense, Hoffman’s strategy seems to suggest a need to treat his film as something to be consumed and recognizing the audience’s need or expectation for classicism in a Shakespearean adaptation, he fills his mise-en-scene with trite images like the bicycle or stock clichés like the re-characterization of Bottom as an unhappily married man. While the emphasis on visual beauty is undoubtedly easy to consume and digest, it is precisely this visual overload that causes the film to fail. Hoffman’s choice of images and his emphasis on superficial visualization create a flat, one-dimensional, papier mache world that is difficult to engage with. Indeed, the film often resembles a glossy advertisement with its saturated images and emphasis on visual appeal, from the beauty of the Tuscan countryside which looks like an advertisement promoting Tuscany as a tourist hotspot, to the star appeal of the
Hollywood and television stars who are used to sell almost everything, including, in this case, Hoffman’s film. And while the Hollywood stars and pastoral setting do provide a visual opulence, it is often difficult to decipher the purpose behind such excess and spectacle since this does nothing to help us engage with Shakespeare and also fails completely in terms of dealing with the otherness of the past. As Samuel Crowl puts it, Hoffmann cannot resist the temptation to crowd the screen with ripe images that, all too often, do not link up imaginatively with anything in the text. He attempts to open his film with a visual sequence as potentially inviting as Branagh’s in Much Ado About Nothing, but he fails to understand how cleverly Branagh used the words of Balthazar’s song about the inconstancy of male wooers as a textual license for his approach. Hoffman has a fertile cinematic imagination, but his art is only fitfully in control of his Shakespearean material… [so that his images] collide with each other, confusing rather than clarifying. (Crowl 180)

This confusion is largely due to the fact that Hoffman attempts to absorb the otherness of Shakespeare through popularization (Hollywood) and idealization (beautiful imagery). Unlike the other directors, he does not draw on the otherness of the medium through intertextual references or popular conventions and because of this, his film distracts us rather than engages us.

In contrast to the above-mentioned films which are set in the past, 10 Things I Hate About You and Hamlet are two films that focus on contemporary American situations by drawing on the idea that how we see ourselves in the present is interestingly evident in the ways that we choose to remake the past. 10 Things I Hate About You deals with the otherness of the past by popularizing
history and naturalizing the past by relocating Shakespeare in the sphere of popular culture. In recent years, pop cultural versions of classic texts have been rather popular and this is evident from films like *Clueless*, *She’s All That* (dir Robert Iscove 1999) and *Cruel Intentions* (dir Roger Kumble 1999) which are contemporary adaptations of Jane Austen’s *Emma*, Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* and Choderlos de Laclos’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuse* respectively. Most teenagers would not voluntarily embrace the Shakespearean heritage unless they are required to do so in school and realizing this, Gil Junger’s film adopts the strategy of popularizing the past and re-makes Shakespeare through the popular genre of the Hollywood teenpic. In a bid to show the American teen audience that the Shakespearean past can serve as a mirror for their present Junger’s rather drastic rewriting of the text does at times seem to oversimplify and negate the important issues in the play. Ultimately, however, through extra-textual elements, the film does manage to reinforce Shakespeare’s status as an icon of high culture and show that this form of high culture still has a place in contemporary American society.

Imitating the formulae and conventions of all Hollywood teenpics, Junger eradicates Shakespeare’s language and sets his film in a high school. The most important aspect of teen movies is the casting and realizing this, Junger’s cast stands out not for its acting ability but for its recognizability and popularity since many of his actors are crossovers from popular television shows like *3rd Rock From the Sun*, *Party of Five*, *Veronica’s Closet* and *The West Wing*. The teen actors are further cast as stereotypical stock characters who inevitably appear in all teen films,
namely the school jerk, the rebel, the geek, the dumb blonde, the popular girl and the outcast or outsider. The setting of the film allows for other teen movie staples like the prom scene and the party scene which are used as turning points that help to develop the plot as well as the characters’ moral integrity. The predictable teen setting and stock characters also allow for the re-contextualization of the plot and Petruchio, or Patrick in this case, represents the rebel who is willing to take risks by getting close to Kat who is more an outcast than a shrew. While Kat's character does sometimes scream at people and spout some sarcastic and cynical lines, in this version, she does not begin as a shrew or an outcast. Instead, she used to be popular until she decided to alienate herself after sleeping with Joey (the obligatory villain character who thinks he is God's gift to women) and realizing that she did not want to be pressured into doing anything just because everybody else was doing it or because it made her popular. Junger thus re-contextualizes the text such that it addresses contemporary teen issues like sex and peer pressure. Kat and Bianca’s father is also re-characterized as a gynecologist so that his reluctance to allow Bianca to date makes more sense in the context of the fact that he has seen and been scared off by numerous teenage pregnancies.

The contemporary setting coupled with the women’s liberation movement and political correctness also imply that Junger cannot realistically equate feminism with shrewishness and because of this Kat’s feminism is indicated through her familiarity with feminist writers and her preference for a female rock group that goes by the name of ‘Letters to Cleo’ which, as Burt points out, serves as a “subtle
reference to Cleopatra” (Spectacular Shakespeare 215) who is another strong, pro-
feminist Shakespearean character. Interestingly, while Kat is characterized as a 
feminist, she is not really a shrew and her character definitely does not undergo any 
taming in the way that Shakespeare’s Kate does. Instead, Kat is shown to be a kind 
and sensitive person who agrees to go to the party and the prom just so that her 
father will allow Bianca to go as well. Her intelligence is also emphasized 
especially in relation to dumb male characters like Joey since she seems to be one 
of the few students in the class who is aware of literary figures like Ernest 
Hemingway, Charlotte Bronte, Sylvia Plath and Simone de Beauvoir. Moreover, 
although the male characters do try to manipulate Kat’s feelings through the bet, 
Patrick, unlike Petruchio, does not dominate Kat or deprive her of food, sleep and 
clothing. Often, it is the female characters who physically abuse the men as seen in 
the prom scene where Bianca hits Joey several times. In contrast, Patrick is a 
gentleman who frequently rescues Kat from awkward situations and who refuses to 
take advantage of her even when she is drunk and willing. Thus, Junger omits the 
final ambiguity of Shakespeare’s play and the portrayal of the inequality between 
the sexes and instead leaves us with an overwhelming sense of ‘girl power’, a 
concept that is especially popular now in the age of films like Charlie’s Angels (dir 
McG 2000), cartoons like Powerpuff Girls and pop groups like the now defunct 
Spice Girls.

Junger’s remaking of the past thus serves as an interesting translation that 
does to some extent succeed in using the past as a mirror to reflect the present
image of the American teenager. Despite rather radically re-contextualizing Shakespeare’s text through the pop cultural conventions of the teenpic, Junger’s film still foregrounds Shakespeare’s status as cultural icon…The film sets up Shakespeare as the cultural authority to quote, as a model for students to imitate. The teacher says, for example, that Shakespeare ‘knows his shit’, even if he is white and male. This shared appreciation of Shakespeare transcends [his and Kat’s] earlier disagreement about the canon…Shakespeare is [also] unsurprisingly made the ultimate authority on romantic love. (Burt, Spectacular Shakespeare 216)

This is evident from Kat’s re-appropriation of Sonnet 141 which is dedicated to Patrick, and Michael and Mandella’s romance which begins after they both realize their shared passion for Shakespeare. Thus, although Junger’s strategy of popularizing and naturalizing the past through the teenpic genre suggests an alternative version of Shakespeare that is irreverent in terms of tone and attitude, the film does not completely negate the value of Shakespeare and instead foregrounds his status as a cultural icon in contemporary society.

Like 10 Things I Hate About You, Michael Almereyda's Hamlet also naturalizes the past by updating the play through contemporary settings. Unlike 10 Things I Hate About You, however, Hamlet does not naturalize and popularize the past to cater to a wider market. Instead, in the course of updating Hamlet and making it a millennial Shakespearean film, Almereyda directly confronts some of the key issues that are raised as a result of history and the otherness of the past. One example of this is the uncertain and chaotic times represented by the end of the 20th
century and the birth of the new millennium. During this period more than any other, there seemed to be a need to look back and redefine who we are and where we come from before coming to terms with where we are now. Almereyda's choice of updating *Hamlet* is especially relevant to this need to question our self-identity and redefine where we come from since the play is filled with philosophical questions that Hamlet asks himself in a bid to probe within himself and seek his purpose in life. Thus, as in *Titus*, the key themes in the play are given a wider significance as they are used to mirror some of the issues that we face in contemporary culture and society. In order to deal with the otherness of the past, the key speeches and events in the play are also re-contextualized according to contemporary references so that like *Shakespeare in Love* we are given a parallel account of the past that we can more readily relate to. Unlike *Shakespeare in Love*, however, this parallel account is not achieved through parody or wit. Instead, Almereyda explicitly uses the medium of film to update the otherness of the past in a way that reflects the issues in the play.

One of the most interesting things about Almereyda's film is its mise-en-scene. Set in Manhattan where Denmark is a “multi-national media conglomerate facing a hostile takeover bid by outside interest, Fortinbras,” Almereyda’s film is pervaded by a “mood of corruption, paranoia and narcissism” (Groen, online). This paranoia and narcissism is strongly reflected through the mise-en-scene of the film which is filled with surveillance cameras, reflective glass skyscrapers and other symbols of modern technology so that almost every scene includes shots of high
tech devices like fax machines, camcorders, Polaroid cameras and electronic surveillance tools. The ghost of Hamlet senior, for example, disappears into a Pepsi vending machine while the “get thee to a nunnery” (III.i.122) speech is left as a message on Ophelia’s answering machine. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, dressed in black leather, meet Hamlet in a techno-pub of some kind and later, Hamlet sends them to their death using a message communicated by e-mail. The “how all occasions do inform against me” (IV.iv.32-66) speech is done in front of a mirror in the toilet of an airplane and Horatio picks up Hamlet from the airport in a motorbike.

At first glance, this saturated display of modern devices may appear to be a simplified way of adding a contemporary look and feel to the film. As the film progresses, however, we realize that Almereyda's strategy works more along the lines of Kurosawa rather than Junger since, like Kurosawa, he strives to create and enhance understanding by transferring the meaning of the play through visual images. This is done by transforming the central metaphors and conceits of the play so that they are applicable to the contemporary setting. One example of this is the theme of spying and play-acting which Almereyda picks up and emphasizes from the beginning of the play by re-characterizing Hamlet as a filmmaker who carries a camera around in order to capture the various levels of performance and deception that surround him. The motif of filmmaking and surveillance also becomes an extended metaphor that runs through the entire film. This metaphor seems to reflect our culture’s obsession with the media where anything and everything that happens
anywhere in the world is continuously and repeatedly reflected through the help of the omnipresent and all-seeing eye of the camera. Thus, Almereyda looks for visual parallels to mediate the otherness of Shakespeare’s text and the saturated images of technology, media and consumer culture are mostly used to depict the “the crush and visual overload of postmodern urban life [which becomes] a rich contemporary cultural equivalent for the political and familial claustrophobia that threatens Hamlet and Ophelia” (Crowl 188).

Apart from the mise-en-scene which achieves currency through the technological devices that represent Shakespeare’s themes as well as an ongoing desire to look within ourselves, the key speeches and events in the play are also given currency through Almereyda’s strategy of providing a parallel account of the past that we can relate to more easily. Indeed, in line with his aim of creating a millennial Shakespeare, Hamlet often resembles a postmodern pastiche where all the key scenes from the play are repeatedly re-staged in interesting, unusual and self-reflexive ways. This technique also allows Almereyda to make subtle changes to the character of Hamlet to fit the contemporariness of his adaptation as well as the ability of his actor. As if realizing that the Shakespearean language is too much for Ethan Hawke, Almereyda does all the major speeches in voiceovers leaving Hamlet to stare moodily at his image in the mirror or at his reflected self in his films. This “‘nobody understands the real me’ persona is something that Hawke has done very well in his previous films, Dead Poets Society (dir Peter Weir 1989) and Reality Bites (dir Ben Stiller 1994)” (Christley, online). Apart from voiceovers,
Almereyda’s Hamlet also records his own speeches and replays them so that like the many reflections in the film, the major speeches, too, are replayed several times thus reflecting off each other. The “to be or not to be” (III.i.56-88) soliloquy, for instance, is first introduced to us through a Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. Hamlet is in his room watching a colour documentary on his television where the monk talks about how “to be” or “inter be” or “how to coexist with other living things in the natural world…The Buddhist Guru’s “inter be” soliloquy has all of that holy man’s guileless charm and humility. It is a surprising and ingenious countertext of Eastern transcendence pitted against Hamlet’s anguished existentialism.” (Stone, online)

In another version of the “to be or not to be” soliloquy, Hamlet watches an image of himself on a large screen TV where he holds a gun to his head then to his mouth and back to his head again in a move that reflects his indecision. This image is paused and replayed three times so that all we hear is not the whole speech but “to be”, “to be” over and over again. The soliloquy is also repeated in a Blockbuster Video Store. As Hamlet looks around, the soliloquy comes on in a voiceover and continues to be heard as he walks through rows of tapes that fall into the category of action films. The word “action” that is mounted on the shelves where the tapes are kept screams silently at him and at us with every step that Hamlet takes and this interesting method of portraying Hamlet’s contemplation of action is enhanced by the television monitors mounted on the walls of the store which are playing scenes from an action movie (The Crow II: City of Angels, dir
Tim Pope (1996) with explosions and other typical action sequences. Hamlet’s lips then start moving as we hear the line “conscience doth make cowards of us all” (III.i.83) before cutting to a monitor showing a character walking away from an explosion. Thus, Almereyda does not superficially use his movie star actor to mediate our understanding of Shakespeare’s hero by identifying him with the action heroes that we see in pop cultural movies. Instead, the various ways in which the “to be or not to be” speech is done manages to highlight all aspects of the lines from Hamlet’s philosophizing to his indecision and lack of action. Doing the soliloquies as a voiceover also adds an interesting dimension to Hamlet since it portrays an obvious separation between Hamlet’s thoughts and actions. His thoughts seem to go on uncontrolled but he seems to have a lot of trouble translating the mental to the physical.

The key speeches are not only re-contextualized through parallel contemporary situations but in some cases, Almereyda chooses to provide parallels that are directly linked to recognizable filmic or generic conventions and even recognizable media icons. One example of this is the “O what a rogue and peasant slave am I/ Is it not monstrous that this player here…” (II.ii.523-580) speech where Hamlet is lying in bed watching James Dean the rebel without a cause. Thus, Almereyda’s Hamlet, unlike Shakespeare’s Hamlet, is not fascinated with theatre but film, and it is the movie star James Dean who inspires him to “catch the conscience of the king” (II.ii.580) with a filmlet of his own called The Mousetrap. The Mousetrap is an intertextual silent montage of shots taken from other sources
like advertisements, avant garde cinema, classical Hollywood cinema, pornography and computer animation and graphics. Like an avant garde film, this short film mixes genres starting with an image of a blooming rose and then a shot of a happy family like those seen in American commercials of the sixties. This is followed by a black and white shot of a father and son playing, a shot of a turning globe and then a shot of a poison bottle with the picture of the skulls and crossbones on the front. The film then changes from moving images to sketches with a menacing looking man in a hat staring at the camera and then another man lying down. With animation and computer graphics, a drop of poison is put in the ear of the man lying down and there is some silent film footage of a man stumbling around and then getting shot before going to a shot of people falling like dominoes. The rose is then shown dying followed by a boy hiding while watching a man and a woman. At this point, the film switches to pornographic shots of a couple and then people clapping before a crown is placed on a man’s head. The story of King Hamlet is thus given a more accessible, parallel account which is recreated through other immediately recognizable and relatable generic conventions and styles.

Thus, Almereyda’s context of updating *Hamlet* successfully plays out the key themes of confusion, spying and self-doubt by re-contextualizing the play as a postmodern one.

where Hamlet’s cries of confusion are echoed at every turn by the recorded image;...It is a *Hamlet* that has been reconstructed as a fable of postmodern identity crisis - one where a media saturated world comes to echo, mirror, and amplify the crises of indecision that run through the central character’s head but which ultimately abandons him under its oblique eye (Scheib,
Through the mise-en-scene and re-contextualization of the key speeches, the film also takes on a parallel contemporary significance as it serves as a commentary both on *Hamlet* as well as white corporate America. The film thus deals with issues like “our culture’s obsession with its self, the human condition and how it has changed over the centuries” (Parks, online). Hamlet’s inability to make decisions under pressure also speaks to modern youths, the Generation Xers “who feel paralyzed in today’s world of tumultuous technological and societal change” (Leong, online). This parallel is especially relevant in bringing the story up to date and as critic Rick Groen puts it, “on the whole *Hamlet* is a mirror which gives back the reflection of the age that is contemplating it” (online). Almereyda’s film thus “translates *Hamlet* into a contemporary visual idiom: ‘The chief thing was to balance respect for the play with respect for contemporary reality – to see how Shakespeare can speak to the present moment, how they can speak to each other’” (qtd in Crowl 191-192). In this sense, *Hamlet*, perhaps more than any other film, accurately summarizes the reasons behind the recent proliferation of Shakespearean film by dramatizing our culture’s need to remake the past in our own image. As Lehmann points out,

> When Hamlet is not shown watching movies in Almereyda’s film, he is engaged in making and, in effect, re-making films, as he rifles through old footage from home movies of his parents, Ophelia and himself, hoping to find the perfect take on his own past... Using film as a revisionary medium, this quintessentially postmodern Hamlet seems to operate under the assumption that by playing back these primal scenes, he can edit and, ultimately, master them, as he zooms in on particular frames – freezing and
manipulating them in time and space…[However] Hamlet ‘can only create a pastiche of images from various media, he cannot, in a modernist sense, create original art. Moving from silent film to classic Hollywood cinema, TV and advertising, Hamlet’s short film fails to do much more than chronicle the history of the image.’ (98)

While Hamlet’s attempt may fail, however, the films do represent a way of reconstructing the past in our own image so that we can understand it better and on our own terms. In this sense, Almereyda’s strategy of dealing with the otherness of the past by updating it through contemporary themes and parallel visual idioms, like filmmaking, for example, is an interesting, relevant and successful one.

As seen from our discussion above, most films are set in specific time periods and these specific settings constitute different strategies which the directors use to help audiences relate to the otherness of the Shakespearean past. In contrast to such films, Titus and Looking for Richard are two recent Shakespearean adaptations that employ shifting frames of reference. While this strategy of conflating time may initially seem confusing and disorienting due to the fact that it defies traditional approaches to Shakespeare and film, the strategy is an interesting and useful one as it identifies the main themes of each text and attempts to show how these themes relate to each frame of reference so that the conflation of time itself serves as a strategy for coping with the otherness of the past.

Julie Taymor’s Titus, for instance, depicts an “interplay of periods [and] a combination of references [which] superimposes several time strata” (Deprats 76) through its references to contemporary settings, 1930s fascism and the Roman
Empire. Instead of using these changing time frames to simply enhance our understanding of the plot or story of the play, Taymor's conflation of time is used as a strategy to play out the key themes in the play. Thus, Taymor chooses to adapt *Titus*, which has been widely acknowledged as one of Shakespeare's most violent and bloody plays, and highlights the senseless violence that runs through the play so as to make a commentary on the escalating violence that has continued to pervade our society throughout history; a theme that is even more relevant now in our post-September 11 society.

While the other directors’ strategies for updating the text focus mostly on genre conventions, Taymor’s strategy is to concentrate on thematic development through stylization in order to make a serious commentary on violence and “how we make entertainment out of violence” (qtd in Starks 122). This commentary is achieved and enhanced through her strategy of conflating time since throughout her shifting frames of reference, the violence is the one thing that remains constant and unchanging. On one level, Taymor’s commentary on violence seems rather ironic since her film itself “makes entertainment out of violence” by presenting us with highly stylized and sensationalized images of violence which are a common feature in the cinematic medium. Taymor’s film thus makes full use of the otherness of the medium as an important part of her strategy which also aims to “[unsettle] the audience and [force] it into an awareness of the spectator’s role…in the act of viewing horror” (qtd in Starks 122). Thus, “although it tells a story from the past, the film [and Taymor flaunt their] understanding of the present” (Hopkins 50) and
through her strategy of conflating time, Taymor links the history of the world to Shakespeare’s history in a way that does indeed “make Shakespeare still our contemporary” (Hopkins 54).

Taymor’s strategy is obvious from the very start of the film which begins in a contemporary-looking kitchen with a close-up shot of a boy, dressed in a casual black T-shirt, with a brown paper bag over his head. Only his eyes are visible to us through the holes in the bag and this image serves as a graphic match when we later see the soldiers wearing their helmets. As the camera tracks backwards, it reveals through a medium long shot, that the boy is playing with his toys and his food while the sound of cartoons comes from the television set offscreen. A handheld camera provides disorienting shots of the boy playing as he dunks his toys in a glass of milk and then squirts ketchup as a substitute for blood. The sound from the television set or elsewhere gets louder and louder until it becomes unbearable and then there is an explosion. “As the child destroys the toy battlefield, the room explodes with a real bomb, a real war is at hand.” (Stone, online) A man who looks like a thug, but who is identified as a clown in the credits, then appears in a sleeveless black t-shirt and biker gear and miraculously transports the crying boy to a completely different world. We are now in an area that looks like a coliseum, the “first great theatre of cruelty” (Stone, online), and for a while there is complete silence until the clown lifts the boy over his head and a cheer goes up from an as-yet invisible crowd. The boy, identified much later as Young Lucius, picks up one of his toy soldiers from the ground and from the toy soldier we look to the side and
see real soldiers marching out with precise and synchronized movements like a choreographed opening number from a Broadway show. As if her opening scene is not disorienting enough, Taymor switches time frames again slightly later during the election scene which is situated against the backdrop of Mussolini’s EUR building. The boy from the future is sitting on the steps and a newspaper blows in from offscreen left leaving us uncertain as to which time frame we are in. Before we can figure it out the boy starts running down the steps to the street where people are watching a motorcade. The music turns jazzy and we are introduced to Saturnine who is dressed in the Hitler fascist colours of black and red. Another car also makes its entrance from the opposite direction but this time it is a white car with Bassianus speaking through a loudspeaker. The whole scene reminds us of a political rally with Bassianus and Saturnine resembling political figures. As both parties reach the steps, Marcus Andronicus, Titus’s brother, comes from the building dressed in a white suit with a Caesar-like toga draped over it. These few expository scenes which introduce us to most of the key players in the film serve as an excellent example of Taymor's strategy as she takes us through various time frames which are represented by the respective settings of the nondescript contemporary kitchen, the coliseum and the political rally.

Like the various settings, Taymor's characters also symbolise different dimensions and Titus and his sons, for example, are dressed in traditional Roman warrior gear. Tamora’s costume, on the other hand, is made up of a “gleaming golden naked torso” (Stone, online) of a woman and her make-up resembles
something out of futuristic science fiction shows like Star Trek or Babylon Five. While Tamora and Titus seem to represent past and future, Demetrius, Chiron and Young Lucius seem to have a contemporary presence with costumes like jeans and t-shirts, in contrast to the other characters more elaborate costumes. Demetrius and Chiron especially are characterized as street punks with their bleached blond hair and leather outfits. Resembling 20th century teenagers or hoodlums, they seem to have a penchant for sex and violence and their enclave is a gangster’s paradise with a pool table, video arcade games, rock and heavy metal music and drugs. Taymor’s strategy of conflating time frames is thus evident throughout the film not only in terms of the mise-en-scene but also in terms of style. Many critics have compared her film to films of the horror genre but in reality, Taymor draws from various genres and periods. Titus borrows from contemporary sensationalistic violent films like Pulp Fiction (dir Quentin Tarantino 1995) and Gladiator (dir Ridley Scott 2000) as well as postmodern films like The Matrix. Her film also features what she calls Penny Arcade Nightmares or P.A.N.s which resemble anything from avant garde expressionism to stylized MTV videos. These P.A.N.s, which occur at different points throughout the film to reflect the character’s inner torment, take us back to “the origins of film in England’s music halls and Penny gaffs and America’s vaudeville and nickelodeons” (Crowl 207).

The mise-en-scene and style of the film thus display Taymor’s strategy of straddling different time frames. What is more interesting, however, is how violence is depicted throughout these shifting time frames since Taymor very often
emphasizes how violence is perversely enjoyed as entertainment. At the start of the film, for example, violence is seen as part of child's play, a form of entertainment for the boy who imaginatively uses his toys (ranging from Roman soldiers to G.I. Joes to Star Wars figures to reflect the changing time frames) and household items to play out an aggressive scene. From this contemporary scene, we are taken back to the beginning of civilization with Taymor's depiction of Roman warriors and the setting of the coliseum which is another place where violence was enjoyed as entertainment. Indeed, Taymor's emphasis on violence as entertainment is continued throughout the film in several scenes before coming to a climax at the end. In another interesting scene that takes place later in the film, Titus looking half crazed, runs through the house and chops off his own hand on a kitchen cutting board before giving it to Aaron the Moor who in turn hangs it in his car like a decorative ornament. This motif of torn body parts, which is from the play, is continued in the next scene where a van drives up to the house, with the clown and a young girl inside. Cheerful music starts playing as the girl skips around putting out chairs and inviting Titus, Lavinia and Marcus to sit. As young Lucius and the others watch this street circus performance in anticipation and amusement, the clown opens the van as if raising a curtain, only to reveal Titus’s hand and the heads of his sons. Violence and perversity is thus played out as performance not only in this scene but also in the final moments of the film when Titus executes his revenge.

Titus’s plan to grind Demetrius and Chiron’s blood and bones and make
pasties first hits us when we see the two brothers stripped and hung upside down
like meat in a butcher’s shop. The next shot shows us two hot pies sitting by the
window cooling as the curtain blows gently in the wind and an Italian song plays in
the background. Somehow, the scene serves as a morbid reminder of the hot cross
buns nursery rhyme, a point that is heightened when Titus appears absurdly dressed
as a chef. He and Young Lucius serve the pies to Saturnine and Tamora and the
camera provides us with an extreme close up of their mouths as Tamora chews her
own sons. At the end of the song, Lavinia comes in dressed in a black veil and
Titus talks about the rape before suddenly snapping her neck and laying the dead
body down gently. When Saturnine says to fetch the rapists, Titus does an absurd
dance and points to the pies saying, “there they are, eaten by their own mother.”
Events happen very quickly after this and as Tamora starts choking, Saturnine
jumps onto the table, grabs Titus and stabs him with a candlestick only to have
Lucius grab his neck and drag him across the table. As Saturnine is pushed onto a
chair, everything suddenly slows down as Taymor uses time-splice editing. The
camera then pans around the stark white dining room and we see that Lucius and
his son are not frozen like the others. Lucius shoots Saturnine and after that single
shot, the camera pulls back as if recoiling from the shot and returns us to the
coliseum that we were in at the start of the film. Our confusion at being suddenly
deposited in the coliseum in the beginning is repeated here when we are left to
wonder whether the whole film was real or not since we see people sitting in the
stands staring at the spectacle of the dining room which now appears to be a small
set in the center of the coliseum. As we watch the people of Rome watching the scene with shock and silence, we wonder if they too are an audience in the film. But the film blurs the lines between reality and theatre again when all the players in the feast scene get up and walk away leaving only the dead people behind. Marcus then addresses the audience in the film and identifies Lucius as the new emperor. The film ends with a new order in Rome and as the Romans go on with their lives, we see the boy from the future pick up the moor’s child and walk away with him towards the sun rising in the distance.

Through Titus, Taymor deals with the theme of violence and its repercussions and her strategy of conflating different time frames allows her to straddle various periods and draw from other films so that the otherness of the past is cancelled out. The film also deals with the immediate issue of history and how we inherit our past since her conflation of past, present and future, her foregrounding of Young Lucius as a central character and her emphasis on violence as spectacle seem to suggest that we are all affected and implicated in the violence regardless of whether it takes place in the past or present and regardless of whether we are actively involved in carrying out that act of violence or passively watching it happen and letting it happen. In this sense, Taymor's “Titus is not the tragedy of a man, it is the tragedy of mankind. It is not a catharsis but an opportunity to witness the Roman Empire and reflect on our own orgies of violence” (Stone, online), and this commentary or statement is particularly relevant now more than ever. While Taymor’s strategy of conflating time is an interesting one that succeeds in putting
across her message of how violence affects all of us, the stylization and sensationalism of the film often blur the true intent of her message which is symbolized through the image of the child. Taymor re-contextualizes Young Lucius as an omnipresent main character in her film and the purpose of this is to place him as a predominantly silent witness to all the violence in the film. Young Lucius does not begin so innocently as shown by the opening scene where his aggression is revealed through his play.

By the end of the film, however, he appears to be used as a rather cliché symbol of hope and innocence as he carries Aaron’s baby towards the sunrise. This symbol is, however, an extremely important one as Taymor explains that “the development of the child from innocence through knowledge to compassion is, to me, essentially the most important theme [of the film]” (qtd in Crowl 206). While the audience, like Young Lucius, are silent witnesses to the violence in the film, Taymor’s sensationalistic and highly stylized violence presents such a visual overload that it is difficult to make the transition from knowledge to compassion, especially since most of cinema has always encouraged us to engage with violence as entertainment. In this sense, Taymor’s film sometimes resembles Hoffman’s since the visual excess tends to drown out the more important aspects of the film.

Like Titus, Looking for Richard is a documentary-style Shakespearean film which employs the strategy of conflating time in order to deal with the otherness of the past. Unlike Taymor's Titus, which takes us through various time frames, however, Pacino's film focuses on two specific time periods, namely the
Elizabethan past and contemporary society, to bridge the gap between past and present and show that regardless of the play's alienating language and culture, it can still speak to the present moment and engage a contemporary audience. Like Branagh, Pacino also directly deals with the question of whose past and chooses to deal with the otherness of the Shakespearean past through his own tradition and heritage as a Hollywood actor and this is obvious from the film’s heavy dependence on interviews with famous and respected actors and actresses like Vanessa Redgrave, John Gielgud and Kenneth Branagh.

Pacino's strategy of conflating time is more seamless than Taymor's because of his realistic documentary-style which allows him to crosscut between his performance of the key scenes from Richard III and his attempts to get to the heart of the play with his friend Frederic Kimball. Pacino's crosscutting between past and present thus allows him and his fellow actors to stage the traditional Elizabethan version of the play in an attempt to urge the audience to engage with the play not so much by contemporizing it but by explaining it as they go along. Unlike films like A Midsummer Night's Dream which use Hollywood stars to add glitz and glamour to their films, Looking For Richard seems to go out of its way to reduce the glamour factor of its stars and display them as ordinary people who are, like us, trying to come to terms with the otherness of the past. The film is thus largely made up of rehearsals, conversations with scholars and footage of Pacino talking about Shakespeare to other popular and respected actors like James Earl Jones, Kenneth Branagh, Kevin Kline and John Gielgud who have played Shakespearean roles.
before. The documentary style also allows Pacino to focus on the other stars of the film, the average man on the street who is the target audience for most if not all films including Shakespearean adaptations. Pacino's film thus goes one step further in the enterprise of re-making Shakespeare and inheriting the Shakespearean heritage for our own since, unlike films like *10 Things I Hate About You* which seek to naturalize the past and find contemporary parallels to engage the audience, Pacino actually features the audience in his film in an attempt to find out what they want and how they think. This leads to one of the most refreshing and humourous parts of the film where Pacino imitates reality-TV shows and brings his cameras out onto the street, prompting one woman to incredulously ask, “you gonna do it with your American accent?” Through this, the film successfully shows the prevailing attitudes towards Shakespeare and the mass public’s alienation towards the otherness of the Shakespearean past so that the need to deal with this otherness through various strategies of updating become all the more important and obvious.

While the interviews on the street do not meet with a very enthusiastic response, Pacino perseveres and does seriously and sincerely try to mediate the otherness of the past by splitting the film into logically organized sections. The film thus begins with “the quest” where Pacino, armed with a copy of the Cliff Notes to *Richard III*, explains in a voiceover that “it’s always been a dream of mine to communicate how I feel about Shakespeare to other people.” He and his friends aim to “take this one play, *Richard III*, analyze it, approach it from different angles and communicate our passion for it and communicate a Shakespeare that is about
how we feel and how we think today.” The second part of the film, “the play” moves in more specifically on the text itself with Pacino acknowledging that it is “a difficult play”. He then tries very hard to get a response to the play from people on the street, most of whom start shaking their heads as soon as he mentions Richard III, until he starts prodding them with descriptions of Richard (“he was a humpback with one arm”) and lines from the play (“A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!” (V.iv.8)). While the description of Richard gets no response, one person does remember the line thus highlighting the currency of some of Shakespeare’s most popular lines which also serve as signifiers. Indeed, like all other directors, Pacino, too, seems to recognize the currency of the lines and his film, like others, is peppered with constant repetitions of the popular lines like “now is the winter of our discontent” (I.i.1) and the line applying to Lady Anne, “I’ll have her; but I will not keep her long” (I.ii.238). Trying hard to make his audience follow the plot, Pacino also often narrates the story and what is about to happen before actually showing us a staged version of that scene which is done in full Elizabethan gear including costumes and a medieval setting where Pacino says “since the play takes place in this period, it might be helpful for us to rehearse there”. While the museum looks effective from the outside in terms of setting the period, the staging of the scenes in long dark corridors and winding staircases to symbolize the scheming and the secrecy is rather predictable.

The film thus works mostly when Pacino and Kimball strip bare the production process as they go in search of possible settings, argue among
themselves about how best to play a part or simply try to look for inspiration in various places such as in Shakespeare's bed and the site of the Globe Theatre under reconstruction. In this sense, the strategy of conflating past and present through the conflation of space does work to some extent in introducing us to Shakespeare’s world and urging us to appreciate Shakespeare and his texts. More than enhance our understanding of the play, however, the film and its strategy teaches us an important lesson for all Shakespearean films since the most interesting parts of the film are the contemporary scenes rather than the traditional staged version of the play. Thus, Pacino’s film successfully displays current attitudes towards Shakespeare, since through its interviews with ordinary people who show little interest in Shakespeare, it reaffirms the other directors’ need to re-contextualize Shakespeare in order to make it more accessible and recognizable to a mass audience. This is most evident from the reactions of the people on the street during the interviews which reveal that he has to really prod before getting a response to Richard III. Nobody seems interested and we get the impression that they would not give him the time of day except that he is after all the Godfather. As he walks down the street and into Central Park, for example, during the Shakespeare at Central Park sequence, we can see lights from cameras flashing from offscreen and as old ladies wave at him, the idea that we cannot ignore is that they are not looking at him and snapping photos because he is Richard III but because he is Al Pacino.

Pacino’s endeavour to bring Shakespeare to the masses even fails in the academic environment as shown by a scene where, while he is saying the “now is
the winter of our discontent” speech in front of a group of students, the camera cuts to the back row where two students are making out. Thus, although the film sets itself up to be a production for the people, it more often than not emphasizes the fact that most ordinary people are not interested in Shakespeare unless the otherness of the past is made to apply to the present moment. This is obvious from the fact that the only people besides the cast who show any enthusiasm for the project are the Shakespearean scholars, academics and actors whom Pacino interviews. Pacino’s strategy for dealing with the past thus takes into account his own past but not the past of his viewers since the film draws from his own history and heritage as Hollywood actor. This is most obvious in the scene where Kimball loses his temper and says, “you are making this documentary to show that actors are truly the possessors of this great tradition, proud inheritors of the understanding of Shakespeare and then you turn around and say I’ve got to get a scholar to explain it to you.” While this strategy may not be as effective as that of Shakespeare in Love or Ran, it is still successful to some extent since although Pacino’s viewers do not share his acting heritage, they can and do relate to him in his capacity as actor and Hollywood star. This level of engagement is even more relevant since Pacino’s star status is made all the more obvious by the fact that in the course of the film, we also get a glimpse of his filmography as he goes from the clean shaven blind old man in Scent of a Woman (dir Martin Brest 1992) to a bearded character in Carlito’s Way (dir Brian De Palma 1993) two movies which were made in between the filming of Looking For Richard.
As seen from the above analysis, in the process of mediating the otherness of the text and the past, most films regardless of the era in which they are set re-contextualize the past through recognizable conventions or parallel accounts to engage with the audience and mirror contemporary culture or, through this mirroring, make a commentary on contemporary society. Most of the films also actively and consciously use cinematic codes, techniques and conventions to naturalize the past or create parallel accounts of the past that we can identify with.

The films’ reworking and re-contextualization of the ‘textual past’ thus serves as a useful tool to cancel out and absorb the otherness of Shakespeare and although mediating Shakespeare through popular culture may ultimately and inevitably lead to defamiliarization as discussed in Chapter Two, this re-contextualization is nevertheless important and necessary in ensuring the continued relevance and survival of Shakespearean texts in contemporary culture and society. As seen by Metz’s quote at the beginning of this chapter, the (Shakespearean) other cannot exist if the “I” is not there to perceive it. This ambiguous and multivalent relationship between the films, Shakespeare and the audience will be taken further in the following chapter which explores the issue of self-reflexivity in light of the frame of the mirror which draws attention to itself.
Chapter Four

Looking For Shakespeare:

Self-reflexivity in Shakespearean Film
The advent of postmodernism has brought about previously unfamiliar terms like self-reflexivity, metafiction, metatheatre and metacinema and as Patricia Waugh points out in her book, *Metafiction*:

> The historical period we are living through has been singularly uncertain, insecure, self-questioning and culturally pluralistic. Contemporary fiction clearly reflects this dissatisfaction with and breakdown of traditional values…[We] no longer live in a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices [and] impermanent structures. The materialist, positivist and empiricist world-view on which realistic fiction is premised no longer exists. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that more and more novelists have come to question and reject the forms that correspond to this ordered reality (the well-made plot, chronological sequence, the authoritative omniscient author, the rational connection between what characters ‘do’ and what they ‘are’, the causal connection between ‘surface’ details and ‘deep’, ‘scientific laws’ of existence). (6-7)

Waugh’s statements on fiction and metafiction can also be applied to Shakespearean film since in the course of playing out the uncertainty and insecurity of a historical period, society usually turns “inwards to [its] own medium of expression” (Waugh 11) in order to find answers. Film, which can be considered the medium of expression of the 20th and 21st century, has also increasingly exhibited a dissatisfaction with and breakdown of traditional modes and values so that in this era of postmodernism, most if not all films can, on some level, be regarded as self-reflexive in terms of the ways in which they call attention to their artificiality.

Self-reflexivity, according to Robert Stam, can be referred to as “the other tradition in literature and cinema” (xi). In our attempt to define self-reflexivity and why it might be considered an othering of traditional notions of literature and
cinema, it might be useful to first turn towards Patricia Waugh’s statements on metafictional writing. Waugh defines metafiction as a term given to

Fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also examine the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary text…. [Such writings] tend to be constructed on the principal of a fundamental and sustained opposition; the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. (2-6)

Self-reflexive films can also be similarly described as films which call attention to their art and their artificiality in order to deliberately cross the lines between fiction and reality and in so doing raise questions about the films and their relationship towards the plays and contemporary society. This crossing of lines between fiction and reality and the foregrounding of artificiality is precisely what lends self-reflexivity its otherness. To most people, the attraction of visiting the cinema lies in their ability to succumb to escapism and suspend their disbelief in favour of the fantasy world of celluloid. For the most part, films readily cater to this desire for fantasy and escapism by passing themselves off as reality and presenting “[their] characters as real people, [their] sequence of words or images as real time and [their] representations as substantial fact” (Stam 1). In contrast, self-reflexivity can be considered other because it “points to its own mask and invites the public to examine its design and texture. Reflexive works break with art as enchantment and
call attention to their own factitiousness as textual constructs” (1). “Fully capable of charming their audience, they choose for a variety of reasons, to subvert and undermine their tale” (7) and because of this subversion, “we are torn away from the events and characters and made more aware of the pen, or brush, or camera that has created them” (130). Thus, “in artistic terms, reflexivity refers to the metaphorical capacity of cultural productions to ‘look at’ themselves as if they were capable of self-regard. It is this ‘self-regard’ that leads to the occasional condemnation of reflexivity as ‘narcissistic’ and ‘self-indulgent’”(xiii).

Stam’s definition and explanation of self-reflexivity as a narcissistic tool of subversion is a useful and interesting one. However, it negates other possibilities and implications that are raised as a result of self-reflexivity. As explained in Chapter One, otherness can be viewed from various angles and I would like to suggest that this multiplicity can be applied to self-reflexivity as well. Thus, in this chapter, otherness can be defined in relation to the duality and binary opposition that self-reflexivity raises. On the one hand, self-reflexive narratives are other or different from straightforward narratives that privilege realism because they provide a duality that exists within the films, a duality that is played out in the films which dramatize an account of a Shakespearean play, but also, at the same time, make a statement about the artistic and creative process through that dramatization. On the other hand, self-reflexive films also set up a binary opposition between Shakespeare and the films with Shakespeare occupying the position of self and the films occupying the position of other. In Chapter Three, the films were discussed in
their capacity to deal with the otherness of the Shakespearean past through contemporary themes and popular conventions so that Shakespeare who is our cultural other can be made more familiar to us. In this chapter, it is not Shakespeare but the films themselves which are examined in the context of being other to the authoritative Shakespearean self. This is because regardless of their mirroring or reflection of the texts, the films will always remain copies or imitations of the real thing due to the distortion and misrecognition that occurs as a result of the screen/mirror. Also, as Christian Metz points out, our cinematic experience is based on the premise of Lacan’s mirror stage where

Lacan considers the human subject with reference to three orders or phases – the mirror, the symbolic and the real…We are able to watch and understand films because we have passed through the mirror stage. Since as infants we identified with an imaginary image (in the mirror) and took it for reality, as older beings we are able to identify with a fiction on the screen and take it for reality (Eberwein 200).

Instead of encouraging us to “identify with a fiction on screen and take it for reality” self-reflexive films tend to break with this need for illusion by complicating and challenging the concept of fiction and reality. This chapter attempts to examine the implications of having the very apparatus of illusion and distortion exist within the films themselves as seen in films like Looking for Richard, Hamlet and Shakespeare in Love. Rather than present us with a purely fictional narrative that is loosely based on Shakespeare’s text, all three films employ the metaphorical tool of the mirror within the films through the use of parallel plots that mirror and reflect each other, thus encouraging us to question the
manner in which fiction is constructed. Moreover, in *Hamlet* and *Looking for Richard* the cinematic apparatus is foregrounded so that the distorting lens of the camera can be seen within the films themselves. And in *Shakespeare in Love*, the figure of the artist and the creative process is foregrounded when Shakespeare and Viola’s love story is used as inspiration for *Romeo and Juliet* so that art mirrors and imitates life. This foregrounding of artifice does not necessarily subvert and undermine the tale as Stam points out and as we shall see in the case of *Shakespeare in Love*, such metacinematic techniques can sometimes aid and enhance our understanding of Shakespeare’s texts. Likewise, although the mirroring that exists within the films does border on narcissism in films like *Hamlet* and *Looking for Richard*, this narcissism may have more purpose than mere self-indulgence. Self-reflexivity has also become an important tool in this postmodern era where there is “a sense of belatedness – a sense that originality is exhausted and that only parody, pastiche and intertextual echo remain” (Crowl 28).

Keeping in mind the various possibilities and implications of self-reflexivity which have been outlined above, this chapter will firstly begin by briefly exploring elements of self-reflexivity in *Ran*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *Titus* and considering how such uses of self-reflexivity differ from those of *Looking for Richard*, *Hamlet* and *Shakespeare in Love* which deliberately and explicitly use self-reflexivity as a main strategy. The remainder of this chapter goes on to contemplate the role and purpose of self-reflexivity as it is used in each of the three latter films.
Various methods are used in order to achieve self-reflexivity and some of these include intertextuality, allusions, multiple framing and direct address to the camera. At times, such stylistic devices are used even in films which privilege realism and straightforward narratives in order to make specific statements or raise specific points. Kurosawa, for example, is well-known for his signature cinematographic and editing style and examples of this are evident in *Ran* during the scene of the boar hunt and the battle scene. While the use of wipes and long drawn out static shots in these scenes can be considered reflexive in terms of the way they make us very aware of the camera and the director, they also serve the material of the text by heightening tension and provoking a response from the audience. Reflexivity is also evident in Branagh’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* which is a fairly straightforward adaptation of Shakespeare’s play set in a different time frame. Despite the straightforwardness, however, the use of the musical genre and its emphasis on nostalgia rather than currency, produces a highly self-conscious effect because the musical genre immediately conveys its artificiality through the interruptions of the characters who suddenly break into stunningly choreographed song and dance numbers. Like Kurosawa, however, Branagh’s foregrounding of artificiality does not specifically make a statement about the film medium or Shakespeare but instead is used to highlight the playfulness and frivolity of Shakespeare’s play and the subject matter involved. Finally, Julie Taymor’s *Titus* is also self-reflexive not only in terms of style where her postmodern pastiche highlights various filmic genres, but also in terms of the way she highlights
violence as spectacle and implicates the spectator in that violence by making us conscious of our viewership and having her characters directly address the camera. Again, however, as discussed in Chapter Three, this use of self-reflexivity is related to Taymor’s aim of connecting the violence in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* to the violence in contemporary society. Thus, although we can see that self-reflexivity is used in many films, this chapter is not so much interested in films whose self-conscious use of style reflects upon the act of adapting Shakespeare for film.

In contrast to the above mentioned films which use elements of self-reflexivity to bring out key themes or emotions in the play, Pacino, Madden and Almereyda’s use of self-reflexivity serves as a central conceit in their films in order to make a statement about art and the creation of art. *Looking for Richard*, for instance, is more memorable as a commentary on the acting tradition rather than the Shakespearean tradition while *Shakespeare in Love* provides a parodic representation of the figure of Shakespeare to make a statement on the figure of the artist in society. Similarly, Almereyda’s film foregrounds the art of filmmaking by re-characterizing his Hamlet as a young filmmaker in a media saturated world.

*Looking for Richard* is essentially a film that is entirely based on the making of a film and the adaptation of a text. Because of this, although it is based on Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, Pacino’s *Looking for Richard* does not chronologically take us through the plot of Shakespeare’s play. Instead, the film displays the art and process of filmmaking by letting us in on Pacino’s quest for
Richard which is less about understanding Shakespeare’s play and more about society’s obsession with understanding and appropriating Shakespeare and how this appropriation is best carried out by turning to our ‘own’ medium of expression and attempting to make sense of the play through our own methods and crafts.

The fact that Pacino’s film is not really about Shakespeare’s Richard III is evident from the very onset of the film which begins with a pan of The Cloisters Museum as a voiceover narrates the lines:

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Our revels now are ended. These our actors
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into 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 insubstantial pageant faded
Leave not a rack behind. (IV.i.148-156)
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The film thus begins with a passage not from Richard III but from The Tempest and as many critics have pointed out, this passage which signals Shakespeare’s interruption of the Masque, calls attention to the artifice of the theatre. As Stam explains, The Tempest itself “exemplifies a crucial procedure of reflexive art. It indulges in play and then pulls us out of the play world. It casts a spell and then just as quickly disenchants” (5). The use of the above lines from The Tempest therefore serves to highlight the self-reflexive status of Pacino’s film which frequently interrupts the temporal and narrative continuity of Shakespeare’s play by inserting moments of reality and realism that instantly call attention to the artificial and
contrived nature of the scenes enacted from the play. Rather than focus on Shakespeare’s play or his writing, the film foregrounds Pacino’s quest, his status as filmmaker, and especially his status as Hollywood star as we follow him through the streets of New York while he scouts for suitable locations and interviews scholars who provide expert advice and explanations on the lines of the play. Indeed, the most captivating and entertaining points of Pacino’s film are the truly original moments when we see the film crew and the camera itself, the very instrument of artifice, onscreen. This is especially evident in the shooting of the battle scenes when Pacino’s crew is loathe to tell him that they have leftover reels because “if he knew we had another ten rolls of film, he’d want to use it.” These images which are rich and multi-layered in terms of tone and style are definitely more entertaining and useful than the static images involving the play.

Pacino’s film enhances the entertainment factor because in many ways, his film uses self-reflexivity to do something truly different with Shakespeare. As mentioned above, self-reflexivity is a common element in the postmodern era which has witnessed a proliferation of remakes not only of Shakespearean texts but also of other classic texts, old TV shows and even adaptations of comic books. Pacino’s film deals with this problem of originality or the lack of originality through self-reflexivity and in this case, the emphasis on acting and actors. As explained in previous chapters, most if not all Shakespearean adaptations encourage and manipulate the audience’s recognition of the Shakespearean characters through Hollywood stars. Pacino essentially does the same thing but the
use of self-reflexivity allows him to be more open and honest about this. Thus, while realist, straightforward narratives concentrate on building enchantment and fantasy through the narrative, Pacino’s enchantment is created through the figure of the actor. The spell is thus cast by Pacino’s star quality and not by Shakespeare’s play. Moreover, although this emphasis on Pacino and his other actor buddies does open up the film to Stam’s condemnation of narcissism and self-indulgence, this indulgence seems rather harmless and at some points even rather useful since Pacino’s star status succeeds in bringing Shakespeare to the masses by introducing them to Shakespeare via his craft of acting.

The successful release and distribution of a Hollywood film has always depended on its ability to draw large audiences and as explained in Chapter Two, films often depend on the star system to attract crowds. Realizing this, Pacino permeates his documentary film style with a pseudo-Hollywood quality by capitalizing on the star system and littering his film with famous and recognizable Hollywood stars like Kevin Spacey, Alec Baldwin, Winona Ryder and of course Pacino himself. Pacino is indeed one actor who has been able to make the transition from mere actor to Hollywood star and this has been possible through audience’s fascination with his persona and his reputation as a method actor. The audience’s interest in Pacino’s method as well as his star status thus makes *Looking for Richard* and its use of self-reflexivity an ideal film for bringing Shakespeare to the masses since the foregrounding of Pacino’s quest in bringing Richard III to the screen enables the audience to see first-hand Pacino’s process of method acting and
his conceptualization of the Richard III character which ultimately does provide us with at least a basic understanding of Richard III and his motivations. Most, if not all, adaptations of Shakespeare aim to bring the work of art closer to an audience that is not familiar with Shakespeare’s text through the popular medium of cinema and film. Through self-reflexivity, however, Pacino succeeds in this aim by going one step further. His entire film is based on the premise of bringing Shakespeare to the masses, specifically to the man in the street and by choosing to present his film self-reflexively and reveal Shakespeare through his craft of acting, Pacino,

Holds one culture up to another until gradually an infinite regress develops…Watching an actor develop a character suddenly makes the character ‘real’ partly because the struggle of the actor is real. The character sweats too, more vicariously. We observe the actor’s craft creating character, as if a camera dissolving from one plane of being to another – from human face to werewolf, from Jekyll to Hyde, from Pacino to Richard…The effect is of a film looking in upon a play and also a play looking out upon the ways in which it has come into being. (Coursen 111)

Pacino thus allows his audience to experience Shakespeare with him as he takes them through each step of the process, from how he chooses to say his lines, to the rehearsals, to his choice of locations as well as his choice of actors (Winona Ryder as Lady Anne). And it is because of this that the film and the choice of self-reflexively presenting the film works, since we are not only given yet another version of Shakespeare’s plays but are sincerely allowed to take in the whole experience of Shakespeare with nothing less than the Godfather as our guide.

Like Pacino, Michael Almereyda, too, uses self-reflexivity in Hamlet. In Almereyda’s film, however, self-reflexivity takes on multiple layers and meanings
and provides us with an interesting insight into Shakespeare’s play. Firstly, Almereyda, like Pacino, fills his film with video cameras and other technical devices and techno gadgets that not only highlight the filming process but also serve as a reflection of our own millennial age. From the very beginning of the film, the mise-en-scene is saturated with high-tech devices like the Panasonic big screen TV, security surveillance cameras, mobile phones, laptops, fax machines and computers. What is more interesting is the character of Hamlet himself since Almereyda’s Hamlet is not only a reflection of contemporary society but his character of Hamlet is also presented as an image of the filmmaker himself. This is evident from the fact that Almereyda’s Hamlet lives in a media-saturated world where he is an amateur filmmaker who thrives on the moving image as seen from the way in which he carries around his video camera – “a $45 Fisher-Price PXL 2000 toy camera” (Stone, online) that creates real images referred to as Pixelvision. Indeed, before Hamlet, Almereyda, an experimental filmmaker, was probably best known for his black and white vampire film, Nadja (1994), which was shot entirely in Pixelvision. Taking this into account, it is hardly surprising that his Hamlet lugs around the PXL 2000 and provides us with black and white grainy shots of his father, Ophelia and even himself. Hamlet’s filmmaking also culminates in the ultimate self-reflexive point in the film which is the screening of The Mousetrap which is no longer Shakespeare’s play-within-the-play but Almereyda and Hamlet’s film-within-the-film. Filled with intertextuality and irony, Hamlet’s version of The Mousetrap does not only serve to self-reflexively mirror Claudius’s
and Gertrude’s guilt and the plot of the play, but also serves as a self-conscious mirroring of cinematic history itself. Completely assembled from shots taken from other sources, The Mousetrap takes us through the evolution of various film genres from silent movies to avant garde film to animation and even pornography. Almereyda’s use of the filmmaking motif does not only reflect cinematic art as well as his own status as a filmmaker and artist, but also points to the film’s multi-layered reflection of Shakespeare’s play. This reflection and mirroring is also emphasized through Almereyda’s mise-en-scene which is not only filled with modern gadgets but also with highly reflective surfaces. What we see of his New York City are the skyscrapers which have chrome glass surfaces and the limousines which have reflective tinted glass windows. Laertes’ home is also best described as a glass house made out of what appear to be transparent glass walls and floors. And throughout the film, Ophelia is associated with a water motif that not only foreshadows her drowning but also reinforces it by bringing to mind the myth of Narcissus who met a tragic end by drowning after vainly falling in love with his image in the water. Indeed, Almereyda’s Hamlet himself appears guilty of narcissism as he seems obsessed with watching himself as he repeatedly plays and replays shots of himself saying the various soliloquies which are somewhat distorted due to the fact that they are cut up and performed as voiceovers, a move that emphasizes the split between Hamlet’s private and public selves.

Almereyda’s use of mirrors, reflection and the whole concept of filmmaking, however, goes one step further in terms of signifying two of the
central conceits in the play, namely, self-examination and deception. Many of Hamlet’s soliloquies and moments of philosophizing represent his attempt to examine himself and his conscience. Thus, on one level, the mirror usefully symbolizes an attempt to look at ourselves while the various other reflective surfaces and glass buildings represent an openness and transparency that allow us to look in on everything that is happening. Any hope or possibility of openness and self-examination is, however, quickly undercut by Almereyda’s filmmaking motif and the closet scene where Polonius is shot through the mirrored doors of a closet in Gertrude’s room. Soon after this scene, Claudius looks at his image in the broken and fragmented glass of the mirror so that what we see is a distorted image of his face. The distortion that the mirror is capable of thus not only reflects the distortion of Shakespeare that takes place in most, if not all, Shakespearean adaptations, but in this case also highlights Hamlet’s confusion despite his attempts to examine his own psyche. In Hamlet’s case, the mirror serves little purpose and this failure is compounded by the deception and betrayal that surrounds him. This deception and betrayal is again reflexively highlighted by Almereyda’s filmmaking motif since the various video cameras, surveillance cameras and the Denmark Corporation logo that resembles an eye all point to the element of spying that pervades the play. Everyone is watching everyone else in Hamlet and by characterizing his Hamlet as a filmmaker, Almereyda further enhances the idea of deception since filmmaking inevitably raises the idea of playacting. Almost every character in Hamlet plays a part in order to deceive and as if he realizes this, Almereyda’s filmmaker Hamlet
goes around with a video camera trying to capture these performances until he himself is ready to put on an antic disposition.

The self-reflexivity of Almereyda’s film is thus most obvious through his filmmaking motif which not only serves as an extended metaphor for some of the key scenes in the play but also as a commentary of the evolution and history of film in the new millennium. As Lehmann and Starks point out,

Michael Almereyda’s state-of-the-art ‘indie’ film Hamlet (2000) appropriates Shakespeare to define the state of the art of film in the new millennium. Chronicling the history of cinema, the film covers the entire range of twentieth-century image production, from photography and recorded sound to the technological hyper reproduction of the image, tracing its migration and evolution from the dark room to the dark theatre and, finally, to the blinding glare of the computer screen. Taking on a look of the ‘real’ in 35 millimetres, the film self-consciously foregrounds the seeming ability of technology and its infinitely repeatable sounds and images to store the Real, even as it documents its failure to generate sincere connection and presence in the age of information and instant communication. In Almereyda’s film, Hamlet and Ophelia enact this postmodern crisis of communication and expression, confronting the perennial emptiness of the image amidst its proliferation in everyday life. For example, Ophelia (Julia Stiles), a young photographer, is obsessed with still images that serve as tokens of her memory and emotional life...The moments captured by the camera...serve only as reminders that life itself cannot be captured or revived through the image. Moving from the photograph to the videotaped image, Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) stares blankly at a video of his father and mother – a metaphor for his own experience of reality as ‘preprogrammed’. Despite his continual attempts to find some kind of spiritual fulfillment in this hyper reality, Hamlet encounters only the void of simulacra...Amidst the proliferation of mass-produced images, Hamlet is left with little room for ‘real’ action, taking his cues instead from reel images that he knows to be bankrupt. In this sense, Almereyda’s film both calls the bluff and signals the demise of the ‘cinema,’ dramatizing the effects of a century of image reproduction and the failure of the twentieth-century dream of technology to bring us any kind of true meaning or fulfillment. (Reel Shakespeare 13 -14)
I have quoted Lehmann and Starks at length because their statements can also be interestingly applied to the issue of narcissism and self-reflexivity. Apart from extending the central tropes of the play, such as Hamlet’s self-questioning and self-examination, Almereyda’s film also uses self-reflexivity and narcissism in a way that is different from Pacino since in Almereyda’s case, the narcissistic impulse is more bleak than self-indulgent. This is because the use of self-reflexivity and narcissism in the film can serve as a statement on all Shakespearean film adaptations throughout history. Like Ophelia’s photographs and Hamlet’s films which only superficially capture the ‘real’, film, too, is destined to churn out copy after copy which have no true or sincere connection to the original. Thus, while Pacino’s film tends to narcissistically equate his own creative process as equal to Shakespeare’s, Almereyda’s vision is more bleak since his film seems to suggest that like the myth of Narcissus and the image in Lacan’s ‘The Mirror Stage’, there is no way to bridge the gap between real Shakespeare and reel Shakespeare. The true Shakespeare is always unreachable and while we can admire the advent of new technologies that can make the films look bigger and better in the same way that Narcissus admired the perfection and beauty of his own reflected image, ultimately, this perfection and coherence is nothing but an empty illusion like the one which Narcissus himself faces.

Like Almereyda and Pacino’s films, John Madden’s Shakespeare in Love is also steeped in self-reflexivity as seen by the extensive use of intertextuality, framing and multiple endings and beginnings. Unlike the other two films, however,
self-reflexivity in *Shakespeare in Love* does not raise connotations of narcissism and this is largely due to the insertion of the author as the central figure which is in contrast to Almereyda and Pacino who substitute and subvert Shakespeare’s authorship by emphasizing their own. The main use of self-reflexivity in the film occurs through the romance of Shakespeare and Viola which mirrors the plot of the play-within-the-film so that what we get is not a straightforward adaptation of Shakespeare’s play but an interesting and intelligent fictionalization of Shakespeare’s creative and artistic process. In an example of its multiple endings and beginnings, *Shakespeare in Love* begins not with Shakespeare or *Romeo and Juliet* but with Hugh Fennyman and Philip Henslowe enacting *The Moneylender’s Revenge*. This opening scene sets the tone for the imitation and mirroring of art and life that is extensively played out in the film. *The Moneylender’s Revenge* thus serves as a teaser for the way in which Will Shakespeare will go on to use elements of his own life as inspiration for his *Romeo and Juliet* and as soon as Viola de Lesseps steps into the scene, the parallels between Shakespeare’s play and the content in the film become strikingly obvious. Our attention is thus consistently drawn to how the different textual elements in *Romeo and Juliet* are created and the motivations that lead to the production of that text. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Lord Wessex takes on the role of Paris and there is even a mirroring of the Capulet ball and the balcony scene. Intertextuality and self-reflexivity is also evident within the scene of the Capulet ball where Viola is shown replicating the movements of several screen Juliets before her like Olivia Hussey in Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet*.
and Claire Danes in Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*. While there are many parallels, however, the writers and directors play with our expectations of the well-known play because although the elements in the play are mirrored in the film, very often, they produce different results and effects. This is not only evident in the balcony scene but also in many of the tragic and potentially tragic scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* which are cleverly reversed into comic farce and parody in the romance of Shakespeare and Viola. The bloody fight scenes between the Capulets and Montagues which end with the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio are here played out as fights between Burbage and Shakespeare’s troupes or as fights between Wessex and Shakespeare. All fight scenes take place onstage during rehearsals so that their status as fiction rather than ‘reality’ is reinforced. The tone of the scenes is also comic rather than tragic since during the fights, the characters reveal all the artifice of the stage as they pop on and offstage through the hidden trapdoors very much like cartoon characters such as Bugs Bunny and the Road Runner. It is also during the fight with Burbage that Fennyman hits Burbage with a skull, an incident that immediately gets our attention as an intertextual reference to *Hamlet*. Even Marlowe’s death is given a comic twist since it leads to the mix-up in identity which results in the comic scene where Wessex sees Shakespeare and believes that he is looking at the ghost of Marlowe. Moreover, at the end of the film, we are slightly comforted by the fact that the tragedy has been muted such that although it is the end of their love, it is not the end of their lives and as seen by the ending which is actually the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, we at least have the
consolation of Shakespeare’s ongoing ability to inspire and create enduring and endearing works of art.

As with Almereyda’s film, self-reflexivity is used to several ends in Shakespeare in Love. Firstly, it provides the film with a double level of significance and a sense of duality. On the one hand, the film serves as an entertaining fictional narrative with two parallel plots that uniquely allow us to participate in the creative process so that we understand not just the plot of Romeo and Juliet but also the inspiration behind it. On the other hand, however, the film also has a subtext, an(other) level of signification where through intertextuality and witty allusions, competent readers of the play can pick up on Shakespearean elements and references to other plays and other films. Such references range from allusions to popular conventions in mass and popular culture through references to Mr. Bean and The Road Runner to allusions to elite, high culture through references to John Webster and Christopher Marlowe. With this subtext that is achieved through self-reflexivity, the film not only rewards competent readers but also naturalizes the play for those who are more familiar with popular culture rather than elite culture. Shakespeare in Love also uses self-reflexivity to poke fun at the central figure of the author by reversing Shakespeare’s status as cultural icon and portraying him as a struggling and desperate artist who has to jostle for profit and steal lines and plots from other writers and men on the street. This infusion of fun at the expense of the author is most evident in the scene where Fennyman asks who is Will and Henslowe dismissively replies, “Nobody, he’s the author.” Henslowe’s
line is indicative of the film’s sustained interest in poking fun at the figure of Shakespeare. At the same time, however, it is precisely this self-reflexive strategy of centralizing the figure of the author that prevents the film from being narcissistic since although we cannot help laughing at and with Shakespeare, we also cannot help admiring his genius and dedication to his art. This self-reflexive strategy does not only serve as a comment on Shakespeare but also as a statement on reality and contemporary society. This is because Henslowe’s dismissal of the author does not only provide comic effect but also brings us back to the plight of screenwriters all over the world, since especially in the medium of film, the glory almost always belongs to the actors and directors rather than the writers. In fact, Shakespeare in Love itself is ironically one of the few exceptions where writers Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard have achieved critical acclaim for their script although one cannot help but wonder if this is more due to Stoppard’s already established status as a playwright.

Judging from the analysis of self-reflexivity in the above three films, it is evident that many directors choose to deal with their subject matter self-consciously for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, self-reflexivity is becoming increasingly popular and Shakespeare himself used self-reflexivity as seen by his plays-within-the-plays and his soliloquies which break the illusion of the stage. As such, the directors who themselves use self-reflexivity may simply be trying to imitate, mirror or pay homage to Shakespeare by using his own techniques in order to provide us with a better understanding of the plays. More importantly, however,
the primary value of self-reflexivity is to re-insert and emphasize the figure of the
author so that the negotiation between the self and the other becomes explicit. Self-
reflexive films attempt to substitute Shakespeare’s author function with a symbolic
order or symbolic author/subject that serves as a re-creation of the original self.
Since Lacanian theory posits that there is no pristine self to begin with and since we
cannot capture the true self of Shakespeare through the reflected image, *Looking
for Richard*, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Hamlet* create an extension of that authentic
self by re-inserting the author figure within the films themselves.

This insertion of the author figure in self-reflexive films also displaces the
power of spectatorship. As Baudry explains, the cinematic signifier is imaginary
and because of this, film tends to give the viewer a “sense of primacy in terms of
the viewing situation, making the viewer think of himself or herself as in command
because of identification with the camera” (qtd in Eberwein 201). In self-reflexive
films, however, the spectator’s privileged position is displaced since we can no
longer identify with the camera since both the camera and the figure of the artist are
now located within the screen itself. For Pacino and Almereyda the creation of the
symbolic author results in narcissism since their symbolic subject is recreated in
their own image of actor (*Looking for Richard*) and filmmaker (*Hamlet*). And in
*Shakespeare in Love*, Madden recreates a symbolic authorship that may stand for
anyone since Will Shakespeare is recreated in our own present image. While some
critics may condemn films like *Hamlet* and *Looking for Richard* as narcissistic, this
form of narcissism provides an interesting insight into the issue of the problematic
self since especially in the case of Shakespeare our concept of selfhood is only possible through reproduction. Our need or desire for authenticity is achieved through the texts and the texts are only words until they are reproduced in performance. By recreating and reproducing the figure of the author, self-reflexive films thus offer a sense of originality and authenticity which in turn makes our own experience more real than illusory.

Like all other films, self-reflexive films also aim to tell a story and where Shakespearean film is concerned, the story is very often one that we already know and love. Rather than rehash the story with minute and sometimes ridiculous changes, self-reflexive films concentrate on producing a different way of telling the story. This attempt to tell the story differently is something that Shakespeare himself would be proud of since much has been made of the fact that Shakespeare did not invent the stories his plays tell. In almost every case…we know the source or sources of Shakespeare’s plays. But since Shakespeare always transformed his sources into something more ‘rich and strange’ (The Tempest, I.i.404), we clearly value the plays not for their stories, but for Shakespeare’s ability to tell their stories effectively, for the experience his way of telling the stories offers us as we read the plays or see them performed. (Cavanagh 205)

Thus, as seen by this chapter, holding the mirror up to art is just as useful if not more useful than holding the mirror up to reality or contemporary society. In this sense, by foregrounding style over substance, self-reflexive Shakespearean adaptations, more than any other, are perhaps more faithful to the creative force and energy of Shakespeare.
Chapter Five

The Lady Doth Protest Too Much Methinks:

Woman As Other

In

Shakespearean Film
The final chapter of this thesis moves from the wider scope of Shakespearean film as an ‘other’ sub genre to a more specific example of otherness, namely women. Defining otherness as something that is diametrically opposed to the superior and central figure of the (male) self, the main purpose of this chapter is to examine the conflict that exists between the representation of women in Shakespearean drama (self) and Shakespearean film (other). Beginning with an exploration of society’s attitudes towards women and common representations of women in literature, this chapter will first discuss why women are considered other before going on to examine how such attitudes and representations have been transferred onto the cinematic medium in light of the ways in which women characters, especially Shakespearean women characters, are portrayed on screen. This analysis of how women are viewed and represented will be carried out in relation to the arguments of feminist film critic Laura Mulvey who focuses mainly on the ways in which women are objectified by the male gaze both within and outside the screen.

The status of women has progressed significantly over the years and today, women are represented in almost every field from politics to business and even space travel. Interestingly enough, however, although women seem to have progressed rapidly in the real world, many of their celluloid counterparts still appear to lag a step behind them as seen from the stereotypical images of women that still dominate pages and screens all over the world. Serving as an indication of the kind of society we live in and the types of attitudes that prevail towards women
in that society, stereotypes may, for the most part, be traced back to male hostility and fear and suspicion of women. This fear and suspicion may have been further reinforced by popular writings and even religion, since both of these often offer polarized images of women such as Diana and Venus, Snow White and the wicked stepmother, Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason and the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. The Christian religion, for instance,

lent a new dimension to misogynous persecution. From St. Paul onwards, women were accused as the temptresses of men...Eve was shown to be fickle and weak-minded and these qualities were assumed to be handed down to women in general...Women not only attracted the devil; they also had his mark on their anatomy. Just as the ancients could imagine the shapes of the constellations when gazing at the heavens, so the dissected woman’s belly revealed two sweeping fallopian tubes - surely the horns of the devil. Woman, in short, was the source of all man’s evil - soiling his ‘reason’ with her ‘desire’...The great problem for the church was how to reconcile the perceived abomination of most women with the divine perfection of the Virgin Mary. It was solved by cutting out the middle ground; women were either fallen creatures with treacherous minds and lecherous bodies...or they were saint-like, obedient to the commands of man and exalted for their spiritual and bodily purity. Women, in other words, knew no moderation: they were either sacred beyond belief or whores from the pits of hell. (Leatherdale 33)

Along the way, the angel/monster, virgin/whore dialectic was further embellished leading to what Lyn Pykett calls the proper/improper feminine. The proper feminine is the “ideal of the domestic ideology” (12). She is the angelic Madonna figure who passively submits to her husband and is fully committed to sacrificing herself so as to ensure his physical and emotional needs. The improper feminine on the other hand, “denotes the domestic ideal’s dangerous other” (12). She is the whore whose aberrant sexuality has stripped her of her humanity so that she is
looked upon and described as a demonic wild animal, the madwoman in the attic. The above discussion shows that the concept of woman as other is a two-dimensional one. On the one hand, the woman stands in “patriarchal structure as a signifier for the male other” (Mulvey 116) since she is seen as physically, emotionally and intellectually weaker than man who occupies the position of self. This inferiority is similar to that of the colonized other in postcolonial theory who is conferred an inferior and other status in relation to the superior self of the colonizer. On the other hand, otherness also exists within our images of women thus causing a further split not just between men and women but also amongst women themselves, since women who do not conform to the stereotypical roles assigned to them are automatically labeled as other.

Unable to come to terms with woman’s difference and unwilling to confer on her the superior status of the self, men, as well as society as a whole have always attempted to confine women to their predetermined roles of wife, mother and sexual object. And regardless of how these roles may evolve and co-exist in reality, it would appear that society still prefers to polarize women into the two extremes of the angels who conform and the deviant others or monsters that cannot and will not be controlled or tamed. Such prevailing attitudes towards women are not only evident in patriarchal society’s continued celebration of some popular classics and fairy tales but are also evident in the cinema. Classical Hollywood Cinema (CHC), for example, still thrives on the trope of heterosexual romance where women are either oversexed deviants like Glenn Close in Fatal Attraction
or submissive damsels in distress like most of the women in the widely successful James Bond franchise. Most films still depict women as physically and emotionally dependent on men and when a strong and successful female character is shown, more often than not, by the end of the film, she will have to either sacrifice something in order to stay successful in the man’s world or give up her independence in order to find emotional happiness. Indeed, honest or accurate portrayals of women are mostly restricted to art films and biopics and although Hollywood may be quick to defend itself by pointing out that its recent trend is to emphasize women’s physical and intellectual abilities, very often, this comes in the form of Charlie’s Angels (dir McG 2000) where the women are not only blessed with martial arts skills but also possess good looks and sex appeal so that we are left with the impression that their physical assets far exceed their physical and intellectual strength. What is worse is that women are not only portrayed mostly as love interests to enhance the visual appeal of the films but also that they are often reduced to sex objects when the camera specifically focuses on certain body parts and facial features.

While the representation of women in mainstream Hollywood films has remained more or less stagnant over the years, the representation of women in Shakespearean film has seen quite a few changes. Contrary to some other male writers who practice female stereotyping, Shakespeare is one example of a canonical male author whose texts offer varied representations of women. Looking at the works in Shakespeare’s canon, the existence of strong female characters like
Rosalind (As You Like It), Katherina (Taming of the Shrew) and Beatrice (Much Ado About Nothing) is obvious. Some feminist critics, however, are quick to point out that there is “a fundamental difference and inequality in the way in which Shakespeare treats his male and female characters…The female characters are, in general, powerless to influence the outcome of events; and because they are powerless, they are presented more as types than characters” (qtd in Elsom 66).

Gender in Shakespeare is genre specific so that we are more likely to find strong, individuated women characters in the comedies rather than the tragedies or the history plays since the comedies are more lighthearted and can therefore afford to portray strong-minded female individuals who eventually enter into the accepted sphere of marriage and male companionship. Although it is true that many of the female characters in the comedies do appear stronger and more interesting than some of their tragic female counterparts like Ophelia and Gertrude who seem to exist only in relation to men who hold the reins of power, there are characters like Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra who do not quite fit so nicely into the categories of proto-feminist comedy and anti-feminist tragedy. Indeed, rather than pigeon-hole Shakespeare’s women according to genres, it is perhaps more apt to consider that “Shakespeare was the first to realize that in every woman there is some characteristically male behaviour” (qtd in Elsom 69) that allows her to take charge and act when necessary. In fact, as critic Caroline Alexander points out, Shakespeare’s trope of cross-dressing suggests an innate understanding of the
human psyche where character traits are not clearly split into male or female (qtd in Elsom, 69).

As the texts are adapted for the screen, however, many directors choose to highlight their own representations rather than Shakespeare’s. The speeches that give the characters their strength and spirit are almost always not transferred to the screen in pristine form and because of this, there is an inevitable and distinct gap existing between the characters that are conceived verbally and the characters that are represented visually. Also, commercialization and the cinema’s emphasis on visual appeal has brought about changes in the roles and representations of women in Shakespearean film and today, Shakespearean characters are more likely to be played by American movie stars like Gwyneth Paltrow rather than British stage actresses like Emma Thompson and this is evident in recent Shakespearean adaptations like Shakespeare in Love, Hamlet, Titus and 10 Things I Hate About You.

Judging from Hollywood tradition, male stars like Sean Connery and Al Pacino seem to be more respected as they get older as compared to female stars who have a very short shelf life. And with the ‘Hollywoodization’ of Shakespearean films, every new adaptation appears to further reinforce the need for conventional beauty over acting ability as younger and more popular and attractive female stars replace established and skilful actresses. After the success of his Henry V and Much Ado About Nothing, for example, Kenneth Branagh, too, has discarded Emma Thompson in favour of younger actresses like Kate Winslet in
Hamlet and more recently Alicia Silverstone in Love’s Labour’s Lost. Most recent productions also seem specially tailored to focus on male protagonists like Richard III or Hamlet. This is emphasized by the fact that the plays which do call for strong women characters like Antony and Cleopatra, As You Like It and Macbeth have not been adapted for a long time. Moreover, when a play does call for strong female representation, it is usually adapted in such a way as to reduce it to pulp fiction so that serious feminist issues are downplayed. This is evident in 10 Things I Hate About You, an adaptation of The Taming of the Shrew. Despite being based on arguably one of Shakespeare’s most pro-feminist plays, 10 Things is a teen adaptation of Shakespeare that surprises us with its mostly stereotypical and static images of women. While the play deals with serious issues like a woman’s place in a dominant patriarchal structure and her status as an object to be bartered, the film dilutes Shakespeare’s themes so as to fit the genre of the teenpic. The similarities between the two Kates are kept to superficial things like the first name and the unpopularity of the character and while one can admire the spirit with which Shakespeare’s Kate fights back against the men who want to own and tame her, it takes us a while to get to the heart of Gil Junger’s Kat who has a secret past that explains her transformation from popular cheerleader to anti-social high school bitch; a hidden secret that also puts her in direct contrast to Shakespeare’s Kate since the latter fights every step of the way to preserve her dignity and self-respect while Junger’s Kat has already lost her self-respect by succumbing to peer pressure and sleeping with Joey. Junger also rewrites Shakespeare to fit the mould of CHC
so that ultimately, we get a typical CHC romance where boy meets girl and falls in love but cannot live happily ever after until the obligatory CHC obstacle to true love is overcome. This then seems to be the film’s downfall because in its attempt to fit the CHC stereotype, it loses sight of the key themes of the play and the spirit of the characters. In the play, Katherina begins as a shrew, whose shrewishness is more a protective shell than a character flaw, before being ‘tamed’ into a woman who is willing to submit to her husband’s will out of love and/or necessity. Kate’s final development into an obedient wife has often been widely debated largely because of the ambiguity of the final speech which is quoted below:

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land,
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;
And craves no other tribute at thy hands
But love, fair looks, and true obedience –
Too little payment for so great a debt.
Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel,
And graceless traitor to her loving lord? (V.ii.145 - 160)

This final speech has been read in many ways and in one sense it can be considered ironic since it comes after the humiliation and torment that Kate suffers as a shrew. Because of such interpretations, actresses in some productions of the play have acted out the final speech with a covert wink or other such ironic traits as if to
stress that this complete submission to the domineering Petruchio is only superficial. The speech has also been delivered in a tone of bitter resignation as if to signify the defeat of Kate and the loss of her spirit and passion. On the other hand, critics like Hood point out that “there is not the slightest trace of embarrassment, humiliation or broken spirit in Katherina here and her language is alive, deeply felt and aggressive in an exciting, positive way” (24). Indeed, the strength of Katherina’s final speech and the play as a whole lie chiefly in Shakespeare’s rich language which presents the possibility of not one but several interpretations, thus leading to ambiguity and complexity. This complexity and ambiguity is completely lost in Junger’s film which privileges the CHC style. In keeping with this style, Kat is presented in simple and stereotypical terms as an alienated teenaged girl who essentially has to learn a lesson before she can be rewarded with true love.

Conversely, Bianca’s character is also stereotypically presented so that her role no longer serves as a comment on the objectification of woman as a prize to be won. To be fair, the film does try to keep the feminist angle but this more often than not comes across as an afterthought since apart from snapping at a few male members of the cast, Junger’s Kat shows none of the passion or fire that Shakespeare’s Kate does. Instead, her pro-feminist moments are usually distinctly passive rather than active since she is shown reeling off the names of a few feminist authors in class, or worse still, sitting at home reading Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar so that feminism becomes more a prop than an issue. The film does also have a parallel of Kate’s humbling and ambiguous final speech. Kat’s speech, which comes about as a result
of a self-reflexive moment in the film where the teacher sets the class an
assignment to rewrite Shakespeare’s Sonnet 141 on their own terms, is here
rewritten with Junger’s film title in mind as Kat confesses her love for Patrick
through these lines:

I hate the way you talk to me
And the way you cut your hair.
I hate the way you drive my car.
I hate it when you stare.
I hate your big dumb combat boots
And the way you read my mind.
I hate you so much it makes me sick.
It even makes me rhyme.
I hate the way you’re always right.
I hate it when you lie.
I hate it when you make me laugh,
Even worse when you make me cry.
I hate it when you’re not around
And the fact that you didn’t call.
But mostly I hate the way I don’t hate you,
Not even close, not even a little bit,
Not even at all. (qtd. in Burt, Spectacular Shakespeare 216)

Kate’s moment of submission in the play is thus replicated through the above poem
which has more overtones of Dr. Seuss’s ‘Cat in the Hat’ and ‘Green Eggs and
Ham’ than Shakespeare. The speech is also almost redundant and meaningless
since as with all CHC films, we are aware from the very beginning that Patrick is
the man for her so that their final resolution is fully expected and extremely
predictable. Moreover, as pointed out in Chapter Three, Patrick, despite his truancy
and shady background, is a gentleman who does not make any demands on Kat so
that the final moment of submission has none of the important inferences that
Shakespeare’s play has. Likewise, Kat also does not go through humiliation and
torture in the way Katherina does so that there is little ambiguity or debate about
her acceptance of Patrick and the implications of that acceptance.

In contrast to 10 Things, Shakespeare in Love appears to be one of the few
recent adaptations that feature strong female representation in a way that not only
does justice to Shakespeare but also to many of his female characters. This strong
representation is achieved through the character of Viola. Despite the fact that
Viola has to masculinize herself in order to do what she wants and ultimately has
little say in the decisions that affect her life such as her inability to fulfill her love
for Shakespeare, Viola does still come across as a strong individual who at least
attempts to control her own destiny. Shakespeare in Love can even be said to
embody the power of women since Viola, through her disguise and ability to
penetrate a man’s world, not only proves that gender is as inconsequential and
superficial as a bad wig or a pasted-on moustache, but also, as Shakespeare’s muse,
gives him the power and inspiration to write. Moreover, by using familiar tropes
like cross-dressing which is a staple feature in comedies like As You Like It and
Twelfth Night, Shakespeare in Love does call our attention back to Shakespeare’s
more memorable characters who succeed even though Viola de Lesseps does not.

Viola’s independence, however, is an illusion and in some ways,
Shakespeare in Love may even be criticized by feminists like Laura Mulvey as a
film that puts women on display. This is because Gwyneth Paltrow’s role as a
performer encourages the male viewer to align his gaze with that of the male
character in the film. This gaze which objectifies women and places them in the position of erotic spectacle is emphasized and intensified in scenes like the one which involves Shakespeare removing the cloth that binds Viola’s chest. The controlling and scopophilic male gaze is also heightened by the fact that Shakespeare as the playwright has full control over Viola’s destiny and this is evident in the final scene where Shakespeare rewrites Viola’s tragic end even though she is actually forced to leave with Wessex.

In addition to being an object to be looked at, Courtney Lehmann reads Viola as an object to be consumed. Lehmann suggests that Will’s writer’s block and symbolic impotence are simultaneously cured by the consumption of Viola’s body since the “film makes it very clear that Will’s authorship of Romeo and Juliet is based on his sexual enjoyment of Viola as foreplay to his creation of the play” (Lehmann 224). Apart from being consumed by Will, Viola is also set up as an object to be bartered and sold to the highest bidder, in this case Lord Wessex. This vulgar bargaining over the female body is revealed in a scene where Wessex and Viola’s father discuss the quality and worth of Viola as a saleable commodity:

Wessex: Is she fertile?
Sir Robert: She will breed. If she do not send her back.
Wessex: Is she obedient?
Sir Robert: As any mule in Christendom. But if you are the man to ride her, there are rubies in the saddlebag. (qtd. in Lehmann 226)

While Viola does initially subvert her status as commodity through masculinization, this freedom and independence is only possible when she is
disguised as Thomas Kent, the actor who plays Romeo. Her freedom is thus only possible in fiction and not in reality and by the time the actual performance of Romeo and Juliet is staged, Viola is no longer playing Romeo, but Juliet, a role that prepares her for the factual as well as fictional tragedy. Like Juliet who faces death after defying her parents’ authority and marrying Romeo instead of Paris, Viola has no other recourse. Enjoyment and pleasure are short-lived and like Juliet who cannot escape the tragedy that is written into the fate of the “star-crossed lovers” (Prologue, line 6), Viola, too, cannot escape the fictional death that is played out in the performance of Romeo and Juliet and the metaphorical death and loss of freedom that is symbolized by her marriage to Wessex.

Although the film ends with a vision of Viola’s rebirth through Twelfth Night as if suggesting that Shakespeare’s women are continually reborn with every end symbolizing a new beginning, this rebirth does not extend to the representation of women in the cinema where women are not so much reborn but recycled through stereotypical images. While 10 Things conforms to these stereotypes, however, Shakespeare in Love presents both sides of the coin by dramatizing Viola both as a strong woman willing to act on her own desires and as a sex object who has no control over her own destiny. Thus, the treatment and representation of women in Shakespeare in Love is an ambiguous one that is interestingly reminiscent of Shakespeare’s own style.

Like Shakespeare in Love, Almereyda’s Hamlet has a more interesting approach in terms of its representation of women. Shakespeare’s Hamlet is one
example of a text in which women characters are polarized into the virgin/whore
dialectic where Gertrude who marries her brother-in-law soon after her husband’s
death typifies the whore while Ophelia as the sweet, innocent young girl typifies
the virgin. In the course of the film, however, Almereyda uses extra-textual
elements to develop these two characters so that although both characters do not
say very much in the text, their silence speaks volumes in the film due to their
constant presence and the mise-en-scene that is used to frame them. In the press
conference scene, for instance, Ophelia is clearly set up as a victim of a dominant
patriarchal structure. As the conference ends, Ophelia stands in the centre with
Hamlet, Laertes and Polonius forming a triangle around her so that visually, it
looks like she is trapped between the three men. As she moves away from her
father and brother in order to talk to Hamlet, Laertes pulls her back only to have
Hamlet grab her arm and bring her back to his side. Noticing this, Polonius goes up
to the couple and grabs Ophelia yet again. Throughout this scene, as in most of the
film, Ophelia is completely silent and her silence only serves to compound her
status as an oppressed victim, an image that is reinforced in another scene where
Polonius, in a bid to spy on Hamlet, ‘wires’ Ophelia with surveillance equipment
which runs under her clothes. The betrayal and invasion of privacy thus does not
only occur when she is with Hamlet but even when she is alone since Polonius’s
manhandling of Ophelia and his lack of concern about her privacy suggests a
symbolic rape of sorts, an assault that is beyond Ophelia’s control. The only outlet
for Ophelia is death and before her actual death, there is another interesting scene
where she stares stonily at the pool while Polonius jabbers in the background. Following this, there is a shot of Ophelia jumping into the pool. This turns out to be a fantasy and we realize that if Denmark is a prison for Hamlet then life itself is a prison for Ophelia and death is the only way that she can get any peace as seen from the sudden welcome silence that cuts out Polonius’s voice once she is under water. Indeed, Almereyda frequently points towards Ophelia’s death not only by foreshadowing her drowning with various water motifs but also by characterizing her as a photographer whose obsession with lifeless stills is in direct contrast to Hamlet’s moving images.

Like Ophelia, Gertrude is also to some extent an oppressed woman trapped between her son and her husband, and like Ophelia, her way out is also through death which is used to not only save herself but her son as well since in this film, it appears that Gertrude knowingly drinks the poison that is meant for her son. Almereyda’s representations of women do not stop there, however, and in the filmlet of The Mousetrap, women again appear not only as virgin (domestic images of wife and mother) and whore (pornographic artist) but also as everything in between from bathing beauties doing synchronized swimming sequences to animated caricatures depicting King Hamlet’s death. All of Almereyda’s images, however, are ‘borrowed’ from other media texts as if to serve as a commentary on the way women are stereotypically represented in various media. Thus, while Almereyda does not explicitly address the feminist issue he acknowledges his awareness of the stereotypes and through his representation of Gertrude and
Ophelia, attempts to rethink these stereotypes so that even though the technology in the film seems to have evolved much more than the women themselves, Ophelia and Gertrude are at least sympathetically presented through extra-textual elements.

Like Almereyda, Kurosawa, too, adds extra-textual elements to his film and one of the more interesting characters in Ran is Lady Kaede who is not a Shakespearean creation. Despite the little screen time that she has, Lady Kaede, with her ghostly make-up and aggressive and vengeful nature, makes a huge visual impact in the two or three scenes in which she appears. Although her character represents another extreme stereotype of the monstrous whore, Kaede is still much more interesting and provocative than passive stereotypes like Michelle Pfeiffer who only serve a decorative purpose especially since Kurosawa develops her character such that we understand the motivation behind her anger.

A stronger representation of the split that exists within the images of women is evident in Titus which plays out the opposition between angelic virgin and monstrous other through the characters of Tamora and Lavinia. As Starks explains, Tamora is an:

> early modern conception of the monstrous feminine as ‘insatiable beast’ [who] resembles the consuming mother whose womb brings forth a ‘monstrous birth’, a blackamoor baby. First as the mother pleading for the life of her son, Tamora becomes the character linked to the ‘swallowing womb’ images of the play, the cave and the pit, which function as emblems of the abject maternal body. Finally, this fear becomes literal when Tamora unwittingly consumes her own sons and, when dead, she becomes ‘food’ herself for birds of prey. (125)
In direct contrast to Tamora who represents the monstrous other, Lavinia initially represents sweetness, purity and innocence. In her conception of Lavinia, Taymor draws on several idealized images of women. In the first part of the film, she is dressed like “Grace Kelly in the 1950s” (Burt, Shakespeare After Mass Media 316) and during the rape, Taymor conceptualizes her as a “Degas ballerina on a pedestal…[with] hair tangled, petticoats bloodstained, and hands severed, replaced with broken twigs. In this image, Taymor combines what would be the grotesque, mutilated female body with that of the beautiful, ideal form, the Degas dancer” (Starks 129). During the later P.A.N. sequence depicting a flashback of the rape, Taymor presents us with a pulsating MTV style montage sequence where scenes of the rape are intercut with the scene where Lavinia writes the names of her rapists in the sand. The sequence makes use of loud, pounding rock music that automatically reminds us of Demetrius and Chiron. In this sequence, Taymor frames Lavinia, with the head of a doe, standing between the two brothers who are characterized as snarling tigers.

Apart from giving us close-ups of Lavinia’s tormented and anguished face as she relives the rape in her mind, Taymor also presents us with an interesting image of her trying to hold down her petticoats. This shot is supposed to remind us of the iconographic image of Marilyn Monroe holding her dress down over the subway grating. This pose, like the earlier one of Lavinia on a tree stump comments on representations of the female form, this time extending the investigation to iconic images in film, pop culture and the media. The famous Marilyn pose suggests the woman as a visual icon and sexual
‘sacrifice’, the collision of vulnerability and sexuality, and the accumulated cultural meanings generated by Marilyn as icon – the ultimate image of woman as sexual commodity. This image, combined with the MTV style in which the nightmare is filmed, creates a chilling parody of representations in dominant media; Lavinia/ Marilyn becomes the fetishized object of the media gaze, once again bringing the spectator into a critical reflection of the exchange of such commodified images and the implications in the act of viewing itself. (Starks 130).

Thus, Taymor does not simply dramatize the horror of Lavinia’s rape but also goes beyond it by using the incident as a way to comment on the representations of women in society and the media. Lavinia’s rape scene is connected to fetishized images of Marilyn Monroe as if to suggest that the objectification of women in the media is similar to a symbolic rape since even though the female actresses are aware that they are being looked at, they have little control over the ways in which they are objectified or even the ways in which their characters are presented and represented. While Taymor’s stylistic representation of women does provide an interesting commentary on the issue of women, however, the film ultimately cannot escape from the confines of tragedy and both women are killed; Tamora because her monstrous feminine is a threat that must be quelled and Lavinia because her impurity and deformity no longer allow her to be accepted by a society that privileges idealized images of women.

While some directors like Almereyda and Taymor re-characterize their female characters through extra-textual elements that serve as a commentary on the representation of women in media and society, most other directors still subscribe
to the practice of objectifying women as sex objects. Explaining this predominance of objectification in Hollywood film, Laura Mulvey writes,

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire. (116)

Mulvey also goes on to explain her theory of the male gaze in light of Lacan’s ‘The Mirror Stage’:

Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence, the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man’s role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen. The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor co-ordination. (117-118)

By identifying with the male character in the film, the spectator can also not merely experience pleasure in looking at the female erotic object but also “by means of
identification with [the male star], through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too” (118). This emphasis on the male gaze and the possession of the female character is not really surprising in the context of Hollywood cinema. In the case of Shakespearean film, however, this emphasis on the male gaze points to a paradox that exists in the characterization of the Shakespearean characters who are subjects and the casting of conventionally attractive Hollywood stars who are objectified. In one sense, Shakespearean characters like Viola and Rosalind are also gazed at as spectacles of cross-dressed sexuality. The self-consciousness of the cross-dressing, however, allows the characters to retain control of their own sexuality and this control is further highlighted by the fact that cross-dressing usually signifies the female character’s attempt to take control of her life and destiny.

In contrast to the texts, cinema is premised on the notion of scopophilia (pleasure in looking) which involves “taking other people as objects [and] subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (Mulvey 114). This form of scopophilia is also often heightened because the women are not merely objectified but are also displayed as erotic objects who are controlled by the men. This is especially true in the case of Shakespeare in Love where Viola, as discussed earlier, is primarily looked upon as an object to be consumed or bought by men. Moreover, in Shakespeare in Love, the spectator identifies with Will Shakespeare thus confirming Mulvey’s statement on the spectator’s ability to participate in the male protagonist’s power and indirectly possess the female character. Viola’s role
as sexual object within the film is further compounded by the fact that the character is played by Gwyneth Paltrow whose visual and sex appeal are emphasized not only in this film but also in films like Great Expectations (dir Alfonso Cuaron 1998) where her most significant contribution to the film was in a scene where she poses nude for Ethan Hawke’s artist character. This exhibitionist role is not limited to the films but also extends beyond the screen as well since Paltrow’s visual and erotic impact is not only capitalized on in film but also in magazines and tabloids where she is used to sell objects. Indeed, before coming to film, Paltrow used to be a model, a profession which encourages female readers and spectators to aspire to the idealized images of usually anonymous models who are only valued for their external appearance.

While Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze is interesting and relevant, it does raise several questions in terms of the ways in which it generalizes the issues of objectification and identification. As seen from the earlier discussion, many of the films do indeed present objectified images of women displayed as erotic objects. To a large extent, however, the very idea of cinema is based on scopophilia and the pleasure of looking and very often, this pleasure and curiosity extends beyond the screen to the stars’ personal lives. The audience’s voyeuristic pleasure is thus not only restricted to female stars but to male stars as well and because of this, scopophilia in the cinema does not always involve an objectified female controlled by a dominant male gaze. Indeed, with Hollywood taking over Shakespeare and catering largely to a teen market filled with a majority of adolescent girls, male
actors can just as easily be objectified and this is especially true in the case of actors like Ben Affleck, Ethan Hawke, and more specifically, Leonardo Di Caprio whose role as Romeo earned him an instant ‘heartthrob’ status among teenage girls who were more than willing to pin up posters of him on their bedroom walls. Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze and possession through that gaze is also problematic since not all films align the audience’s gaze solely with the male protagonist. In Titus, for instance, Taymor mostly aligns us with Young Lucius who is more or less the only constant presence in the film. Young Lucius represents the viewpoint of a child and his innocence is thus not only used to counter the violence in the narrative but also possibly the objectification of women in society.

Having said that, however, it must be acknowledged that a majority of films do still place women in exhibitionist roles and this is even more true today due to the relaxing of censorship laws and the openness of society. This representation of women as erotic display has affected the representation of women in Shakespearean film so that even though Shakespeare may have written strong female characters, this representation is not necessarily transferred onto the screen thus leading to the conflict between subject/Shakespeare and object/Hollywood. At the same time, however, as seen from the analysis on Titus, Hamlet and Shakespeare in Love, film often has the ability to present both sides of the coin and ultimately this kind of presentation replicates the act of readership which provides different viewpoints that force us to make our own interpretations. Thus, the representation of women on film may stand in opposition to Shakespeare’s
traditional representation of meaning but as seen in Chapter Two, this conflict in representation need not necessarily lead to a shifting or obscuring of Shakespeare’s author function.
Conclusion:

*Our Revels Now Are Ended*
Throughout this paper, I have discussed Shakespearean film in relation to the concept of otherness which has been considered from different angles such as the otherness of the past and the otherness of the medium. The difference and alienation that otherness raises has also been discussed not only in relation to the way in which it re-evaluates Shakespeare but also in the way that Shakespeare is used as a platform to reassess the significance of issues like history, authorship and women in contemporary society. In this conclusion, I shall look back at some of the issues discussed and re-examine how the concept of otherness as a whole affects our understanding and consumption of Shakespeare.

The proliferation of Shakespearean film in the decade of 1989 to 2000 can probably be regarded as the golden age of Shakespearean film. Samuel Crowl calls this the Branagh era in his book Shakespeare at the Cineplex and Branagh has indeed earned the reputation of being the most prolific Shakespearean film director of the decade with five productions to his credit, namely, *Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, *In the Bleak Midwinter/A Midwinter’s Tale* (1995) and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Branagh’s contributions to Shakespearean film, which are marked by a deep respect for Shakespeare’s language and a desire to popularize his works, have been widely recognized because the commercial and critical success of films like *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing* can be said to herald the beginning of many interesting, and, more significantly, popular adaptations of Shakespearean film like Richard Loncraine’s *Richard III*, Julie Taymor’s *Titus* and Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, all of which share one
thing in common – the use of cinema and film’s full potential and capabilities in terms of marketing strategy, mass appeal and technological advancement. The cinematic medium is one that displays and acknowledges its difference from other mediums like the stage and television and many of the more successful adaptations in recent years are significant precisely because they have understood and embraced this otherness. As seen in Chapter Two, this otherness of the medium is firstly due to its status as a product of the culture industry which is readily and knowingly consumed by an eager public enamoured with the whole idea of glamourous stars and the idealized fantasy of a make-belief world where problems are solved within the mandatory two or three hours. Cinema is also different from other mediums in terms of its ability to make use of technology to significantly alter the tone of the films and our perception of Shakespeare. Thanks to increasing budget allowances and rapidly advancing technology, films can now go way beyond the signature wipes that Kurosawa uses or the head-spinning zooms that Luhrmann favours and opt for computer graphics and animation as in Almereyda’s Hamlet or time-splice technology which is used in the final scenes of Titus. The film medium thus has the power to create an(other) Shakespeare and very often, directors who are conscious of the cinema as an othering device come up with the more interesting adaptations of Shakespeare by privileging the visual over the verbal and catering to the audience’s demand for entertainment.

As Chapter Three has shown, the otherness of the medium can also help to cancel out the otherness of Shakespeare and in the process of co-opting the
otherness of Shakespeare and making him our contemporary, most Shakespearean directors embrace the othering capabilities of the cinema not only by making use of technological resources but also by approaching Shakespeare through cinematic conventions which have mass familiarity rather than elitist stage conventions. This is evident through Shakespearean reproductions that appear to stress the importance of adapting Shakespeare according to popular genre conventions rather than thematic development. Indeed, out of the eight films analyzed in detail in Chapter Three, only four (Ran, Hamlet, Titus and Love’s Labour’s Lost) make a concentrated effort to connect with Shakespeare thematically and stress thematic or character development. This trend of familiarizing Shakespeare through popular conventions and genres like the teenpic or the classic Hollywood musical significantly differs from past directors like Olivier or Zeffirelli who prefer to keep Shakespeare’s language and stress his familiarity by emphasizing the universality of his themes. The unfamiliar and possibly alienating past and culture of Shakespeare is thus given a sense of currency and recognition with the help of popular stars, popular genres and even intertextual borrowings from popular movies.

The other genre of Shakespearean film has thus repackaged and revitalized Shakespeare and provided him with a new identity that is distinct and separate from our normal perception of Shakespeare as an icon of high culture. This separate identity is even more evident in self-reflexive films which, as explored in Chapter Four, use the medium self-reflexively to create a substitute author function. This is
especially obvious in films like *Hamlet* and *Looking for Richard* which celebrate their own creative powers as actor and director. As pointed out throughout this thesis, this separation of identity between ‘reel’ and ‘real’ Shakespeare can also be read in relation to Lacan’s ‘The Mirror Stage’ and as Madan Sarup explains:

> The mirror phase is a period at which, despite its imperfect control over its own bodily activities, the child is first able to imagine itself as a coherent and self-governing entity…For this necessary stage to occur, the child must have been separated from the mother’s body (weaned) and must be able to assume the burden of an identity which is separate, discrete…The other warrants the existence of the child and certifies the difference between self and other. (64)

The otherness of the medium thus creates a distinct and separate identity for filmed Shakespeare and the recognition of this identity has several implications for textual Shakespeare. On the one hand, purists fear that Shakespeare on film will lead to the marginalization of the Shakespearean texts especially due to the pervasiveness of the media as well as the directors’ ability to symbolically rewrite Shakespeare according to their own present contexts as seen in films like *10 Things I Hate About You* and even *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* which literally drowns out Shakespeare through cinematic excess and visual overload. Such rewritings of the texts can drastically distort our perception of authentic Shakespeare and this is especially evident in the issue of the representation of women which was examined in Chapter Five.

Rather than attempt to privilege one form of Shakespeare over the other, however, this paper and its conclusion prefers to subscribe to the Lacanian view
that self and other are inextricably linked so that the other not only exists as an extension of the self but also “warrants the existence of the self” (Sarup 64). As stated in the introduction, the exploration of various forms of otherness in Shakespearean film inevitably leads to an overlapping of ideas where the different notions of otherness interrogate and intersect with one another. Thus, although the cinematic medium popularizes Shakespeare by providing us with a different, mass produced and distorted version of Shakespeare, this form of otherness is necessary if we want to rethink the concept of selfhood and authority and co-opt the otherness of the Shakespearean past. Hence, even though this otherness of the medium implies an inevitable rewriting of the Shakespearean text, it is still linked and connected to the Shakespearean self since separation reinforces identity. This is especially evident from the fact that although all the films embrace the otherness of the medium in one way or the other, many films also keep the Shakespearean language mostly intact. Indeed, of the eight films discussed, only Ran and 10 Things completely leave Shakespeare’s language behind. While Ran translates Shakespeare, however, this translation still draws heavily from the imagery and metaphors in the text and although 10 Things does offer a diluted and popularized version of Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s textual authority and status as high culture icon is still referred to in the film. Similarly, although purists may fear that ‘reel’ Shakespeare will marginalize and overwhelm ‘real’ Shakespeare, the very existence of ‘reel’ Shakespeare points to the popularity and demand for the authenticity and originality of true Shakespeare, a demand and need to look back at our past and
acknowledge it even if we have to approach that past through our own present contexts and conventions. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Shakespeare serves as a global signifier, a widely familiar and recognizable symbol of high culture, classicism and tradition that Hollywood can easily turn back to and draw from in the course of re-evaluating significant issues like history, art and the role of women in contemporary society, and although filmed Shakespeare may be automatically labeled as inferior by some it can at least ensure the continued existence of Shakespeare and the continued relevance of the plays to our lives.

Therefore, it would appear that Shakespeare needs Hollywood as much as Hollywood needs Shakespeare and instead of agonizing over the kind of Shakespeare that otherness and popularization creates, it would perhaps be more useful to move towards sharing Elsom’s view that “every modern Shakespearean production is a balance between old and new [and between self and other]; but to compromise in this way does not necessarily mean to reduce or to weaken. Sometimes recent experiences can add a new dimension, even a fresh urgency, to the original stories” (5). The variety of Shakespeares that otherness and othering creates thus allow for new interpretations and new meanings to come through the plays even as the plays are made more accessible for a contemporary audience. Admittedly, not all films may be successful in enabling us to engage fully with Shakespeare and some films may cause us to cringe at the ways in which they adapt and rewrite Shakespeare. But as George Steiner points out,
Unquestionably, there is the dimension of loss in translation; hence the fear of translation, the taboos which hedge sacred texts, ritual nomination….But the residue is also, and decisively, positive. The work translated is enhanced. This is so on a number of fairly obvious levels. Being methodical, penetrative, analytic, enumerative, the process of translation, like all modes of focused understanding, will detail, illumine and generally body forth its object….The motion of transfer and paraphrase enlarges the stature of the original. Historically, in terms of cultural context, of the public it can reach, the latter is left more prestigious….There can be no doubt that echo enriches, that it is more than shadow. The mirror not only reflects but also generates light. (qtd in Elsom 53)

As Shakespeare in Love suggests, each ending can perhaps be taken as a new beginning and rather than see Shakespearean film as an(other) entity that signifies the end of respectable Shakespeare, this thesis hopes that we can embrace this otherness and enjoy a richer and more diverse Shakespeare through it and also because of it. Thus, otherness as symbolized by the image in the mirror need not only lead to a distortion of and alienation from Shakespeare but can also serve as an instrument that generates and sheds light on the Shakespearean texts.
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