Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 film, *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, has attracted comparatively little critical attention even in the most recent collections of Shakespeare film criticism. Luhrmann’s film is mentioned but in passing in the 1997 essay collection *Shakespeare, The Movie: Popularizing the plays on film, TV, and video*. In the 1998 “New Casebooks” collection of Shakespeare film essays Luhrmann’s film is not mentioned at all, whereas Shakespeare films made after Luhrmann’s (such as Kenneth Branagh’s 1996 *Hamlet*) are already mentioned in the same breath as the aesthetically polemic films of Welles, Kozintsev, Olivier, and Kurosawa. The criticism of Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* to date (mostly in the form of magazine and film reviews) tends to dismiss the production as “MTV Shakespeare”: the kind of mindless visual candy we associate with rock videos. Implicit in this claim is the notion that Luhrmann’s film provokes nothing but a passive response. Like MTV videos, the film contains a bombardment of imagery and music; it is a postmodern assault of the senses. But the film demands more than a passive response. In the viewing process, the audience may shape the “raw material of the film.” And, as Lorne Buchman writes, this material is offered to us as an open structure to be “organized in the viewing process” (51). I will be concerned with the ways in which Luhrmann’s film, particularly in its intertextuality and choice of setting, provokes an active response, leading us to make certain connections perhaps hitherto unexplored. After briefly considering why the film has received so little critical attention, I shall argue that Luhrmann’s production should be embraced into the “canon” of revolutionary Shakespeare films.

Luhrmann exploits the narrative drive of mass-market movies, creating a highly energetic, primarily visual method of story-telling. Scenes and speeches are, as in Richard Loncraine’s film of *Richard III* (1996), broken down into digestible snippets and sequences; their impact is created/supported/off-set by visual paraphrases, music, and camerawork. Luhrmann’s method allows him some of the interpretive flexibility that Dennis Kennedy and Anthony Davies ascribe to foreign directors working on Shakespeare in translation. The preservation of Shakespeare’s dialogue loses preeminence. As James N. Loehlin writes (though in reference to Richard Loncraine’s *Richard III*), “The inventive insouciance with which the film treats individual characters, scenes, and images makes it a consistently engaging riff on Shakespeare’s dialogue, which it plays off against a number of other signify-
ing systems.” In Loehlin’s words, the film operates “not so much as a series of textual exchanges, but through a pattern of interwoven and overlapping visual codes” derived from popular culture including film intertextuality (68).

Due to the considerable cutting of the dialogue, characters like Mercutio, Lord and Lady Capulet, and Paris do not have much time to develop: the film creates visual and aural ripples of association for each character in cinematic shorthand. The languid movements, thick theatrical make-up, and slight southern drawl of Lady Capulet, for example, simultaneously evoke Madonna, Elizabeth Taylor, and Vivien Leigh as Blanche Dubois. Mercutio, who wears the sequined dress of a drag queen to the Capulet ball, is imaged as existing on the social fringe. This suggests the subversiveness of Mercutio’s character: the costume emblematically reflects his position as a kind of outcast, seen as outrageous, and seldom taken seriously. filmmaker Zeffirelli compares Mercutio to Hamlet in the way that he is set apart from his circle, giving an atmosphere of anguished Verona (245). In Luhrmann’s film we see him on the beach evoking Hamlet by literally taking arms against a sea of troubles, firing his gun into the sea. The Capulet ball of Luhrmann’s film is a costume party where each character’s costume serves as an analogue for their aspirations: Paris, being establishment-minded, wears the space-gear of an enthusiastic astronaut. His immaculate dress, pronounced jaw, and squeaky-clean smile make him seem like another JFK junior. Lady Capulet wears the gaudy get-up of a Cleopatra, which suggests her histrionic desire for tragic grandeur; Capulet wears the Caesaric robes of an august patriarch, suggesting his desire for tyrannical control over wife, family, and company; Romeo wears the romantic armor of a knight and Juliet wears the feathered wings of an earth-bound angel.

Luhrmann also creates much of his meaning through another form of cinematic shorthand—the explicit use of film intertextuality. The references to other films in his Romeo + Juliet create new frames of perspective through which to consider Shakespeare’s work, new contexts that in turn highlight the different paces, rhythms, and genres within the single play. In this way Luhrmann challenges Seymour Chatman’s claim that “The camera, poor thing, is powerless to invoke tone” (415).

Of course, no film (no “text”) exists in a vacuum and within every film there will be (consciously or not) references, “quotes,” elements or moments reminiscent of other films. Recent readings of Olivier’s Henry V and Richard Loncraine’s Richard III, for instance, show the way in which both directors draw on elements of the classic Western. John Collick’s commentary on Rhinehardt’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream examines the ways in which that film draws on nightmarish elements of contemporary animated cartoons. But Luhrmann’s postmodern film is set apart from other Shakespeare films in the highly self-conscious way in which he “quotes” various films of diverse genres.

Shakespeare’s writing shows self-consciousness about the creative activity of playwright, performer, and spectator. Olivier, in his Henry V (1944) and Richard III (1955), and Luhrmann, in his Romeo + Juliet show similar self-consciousness, especially in the play with quintessentially “filmic” and “theatrical” elements. As Buchman writes: “By defamiliarising their respective arts, playwright and filmmaker encourage and enrich the imaginative activities of the spectator. . . . Not only our imaginations but our expectations ‘eke out’ this text” (106). In watching a stage production the audience must, in Anthony Davies’s words, “play the game of theatre,” investing a specific and defined area with special significance: “Our entering into complicity with the stage director and the actors is a crucial element” (6). Luhrmann’s play with film intertextuality effects a similar response. Each shift in “genre” requires an imaginative shift on the part of the audience in complicity with the film director. The audience responds Luhrmann invites cover a wide spectrum between detachment and engagement. Often the self-conscious camp cheekiness of the film invites its viewers to be detached onlookers, sitting back and enjoying the way in which Luhrmann “makes sense” of Shakespeare’s verse in a “nineties popular culture context. But more often, especially after the scenes of Mercutio’s death, we are encouraged to sit forward and be caught up in the action.

Within the opening moments of the film a television screen frames a newscaster who
delivers the prologue in the same calm tone, the false friendly attitude in which we are accustomed to hearing the news of modern life tragedies. Right from the beginning then, by the use of the television frame within the cinematic frame, Luhrmann makes our role as screen audience very self-conscious. We are then “introduced” to the characters: each main character is shown in medium close-up facing the camera and their names and relationships to each other simultaneously appear in bold beside their faces (“Lady Capulet: Juliet’s mother,” “Mercutio: Romeo’s best friend” for example). They are introduced to us like the characters of a soap opera. Indeed the materialism and fierce glamour of Luhrmann’s Verona reminds us of *Dallas, Beverly Hills 90210* and countless other productions by Aaron Spelling. The evocation of soap operas effects a comic distancing from the action. This “tone” of comic distance is maintained in the next few scenes.

The brawl at the beginning of the play proper is filmed in a hysterical pitch. The audience is assaulted by various cinematic tricks: impossible point of view shots (an extreme close-up of Tybalt’s silver-heeled boots), quick cutting of pans, zooms, and wipes. The gas-station shoot-out is filmed like a Hong Kong spaghetti Western combined with *Terminator II*. The scene culminates in a characteristic contemporary action genre device: something potentially destructive moving at great speed is shown in slow motion to evoke the anticipation of the horror to come; here that moment is when Tybalt draws his weapon upon Benvolio (Arroyo 9). This film intertextuality, the self-conscious and amusing allusions to the Western and the action movie, distances the audience from the action somewhat. This evocation of the worlds of westerns and action movies is chiefly entertainment; we are at a “safe” distance in that what we see is hermetically sealed off from “reality.” Luhrmann places us in a privileged position, seeing the characters (as they cannot) locked within recognizable genre frames. At this point in the film the self-conscious aesthetic distancing makes us laugh at the action, at the exploits of the Montague and Capulet boy who allows us, along with the Prince, to temporarily “wink at [their] discords.” This cheeky consciousness is also manifest in the billboards which dominate certain early scenes: one billboard advertises “Prospero’s finest whiskey: the stuff dreams are made of.” Another billboard (shown above the Montague boys as they discuss going to the Capulet ball) displays the white words “Wherefore l’amour?” against a red background: the colors and script imitate an advertisement for *Coca-Cola*. The comedy in these billboards is in the meeting of “high” culture (allusions to Shakespeare) and “low” (pop) culture. Luhrmann is similarly, self-consciously cheeky in his representation of the weaponry: the rapiers, swords, and longsword of Shakespeare’s text become guns with the words “rapier,” “sword,” “longsword” recast as trademarks. Romeo and his mates hang out in a dilapidated pool hall called “the Globe.”

However, in the scenes focusing on the interaction between Romeo and Juliet, the barrage of noise, the cheeky metacinematic billboards and accessories, the noise and color, the explicit and amusing film intertextuality fade into the background. Close-ups are predominantly used whereas the use of medium- and long- shots is prevalent in the opening funny crowd scenes. Their scenes are suffused with white and blue, with gentleness, moments of silence, and the purity of water. The water imagery that Luhrmann uses in the lovers’ scenes obviously emphasizes the idealism of their relationship existing within a chaotic, corrupt, and frightening context. Romeo and Juliet believe that they are hermetically sealed off from the rest of Verona, able to guide their own destinies. (The balcony scene where they swim secretly together in a pool while one of the Capulets’ armed guards sits nearby epitomizes this.) We are, albeit temporarily, allowed to believe this too: the close-ups draw us into a highly personal, personalized sealed-off world. Both Zefferelli and Luhrmann in their films of *Romeo and Juliet* see the ability of a wide audience to “identify” with their protagonists as crucial. Both Luhrmann’s earlier film *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) and his *Romeo + Juliet* feature high-spirited individuals who win our admiration by the resilience they show in asserting themselves in stifling surroundings.

It is also worth considering the portrayal of Mercutio’s death in contrast with the opening brawl. The cheeky metacinematic nature of the first brawl is followed and displaced by a much more frightening duel. In contrast with the camerawork of precise zooms, wipes, and
pans featured in the first brawl, the hand-held camera circles and jumps unsteadily, chaotically with Romeo, Tybalt, and Mercutio as they fight. The duel takes place by the ruins of an outdoor stage. We were visually introduced to Romeo when he was sitting on this stage “as” rebel without a cause, smoking and writing poetry. We have seen Mercutio dance in drag with his friends (also in costume) on this stage before leaving for the Capulet party. In the second duel scene, after he is stabbed by Tybalt, Mercutio staggers towards the stage, slowly rises, and with a flourish of one hand proclaims “a scratch.” As in Zeffirelli’s film, Mercutio’s friends momentarily believe they are watching another “performance”; Luhmann’s use of the stage painfully underlines this. Mercutio stumbles from the stage and dies. The retreat into self-conscious pretence is no longer possible. Besides, the stage is literally crumbling. The “reality” of Mercutio’s death is the opposite of the hyper-reality, the fast cars and flash guns, of the opening brawl. Romeo clutches his friend in his arms, cries, stands, and runs to his car in the distance; we see Benvolio running after Romeo and trying, in vain, to stop his friend leaping into the car. Throughout this sequence the camera maintains a deep focus shot with Mercutio’s dead bloody body in the foreground.

Luhmann emphasizes the tonal shifts which we may find within Shakespeare’s text—Romeo and Juliet is set apart from the other Shakespeare tragedies in that the action and characters begin in familiar comic patterns and are then transformed to compose the pattern of tragedy. In the final moments the television newscaster delivers the epilogue and the lovers end as they began, the subjects of a rhyming epigram delivered in emotionless monotone. Their bodies, wrapped in white sheets, are shown being hoisted into an ambulance: the picture is slightly fuzzy, suggesting the footage of a documentary or a news broadcast. The kind of comic, self-conscious detachment invoked by the newscaster’s delivery of the prologue becomes a poignant reflection on the media’s ability to trivialize and, through glib sensationalism, to empty a tragic event of meaning. Shakespeare’s epilogue, in its rhythmic neatness, may seem to trivialize the tragic action but, in Luhmann’s film, the epilogue ironically heightens our sense of the story’s grandeur: the discrepancy between the newscaster’s summary and the passion we have witnessed is marked.

In a sense Luhmann has made two films in one: the metacinematic elements, the profusion of popular culture signifiers set ripples of association in motion, speaking to an audience not necessarily familiar with Shakespeare. Various elements of Luhmann’s film (the popular culture references, the symbolism, the setting, music, and camerawork) comprise a composite art of story-telling, by which he claims and rewards the attention of his viewers while ensuring that they will be alerted to everything they need to know. Like Zeffirelli and his version of Romeo and Juliet, Luhmann caters for a wide audience (both those familiar and unfamiliar with Shakespeare), mediating boldly between the original theatrical medium and film. Zeffirelli says: “cinema creates a different chemistry with the audience, a different taste, and the attention of the audience moves so fast . . . fantasy gallops in the audience in the movies . . . your mind flashes-flashes-flashes” (Happood 82). Luhmann’s film is seldom subtle in its effects and, like Zeffirelli before him (in Happood’s words) Luhmann felt justified in cutting parts of the original that slowed its rapidity in the interests of maintaining “rapport” with his predominantly young audience (82). It should be noted that much of Zeffirelli’s and Luhmann’s treatment of Shakespeare parallels Shakespeare’s treatment of his own sources. These artists are bold in their appropriation of their “origina:s,” uninhibited in fulfilling the demands of their mediums. As Happood points out, Shakespeare was not only a popular artist but also a popularizer, transferring “from page to stage and from narrative to drama some of the central writings of his time” (84). In this sense Luhmann, like Zeffirelli, is a self-professed “re-popularizer.” Further, Luhmann’s film is not simply an “easy,” “mindless” modernization but a re-contextualisation of the play which merits close analysis.

Luhmann has, for his own generation, “made new” Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet, and the film constitutes a remarkable chapter in what Jonathan Miller calls the “afterlife” of a play. As Barbara Hodgdon explains, a filmed adaptation of Shakespeare posits two auteurs, two kinds of textual authority, in the play and in the “so-called directorial signature.” How-
ever, she writes of “another textual authority operating here—what I call the expectation
text—[which] contains my private notions about the play and about performed Shakespeare,
notions that I might not even recognize until I find them denied” (Pilkington 17). I suggest
that the very audacity, the “irreverence,” the popularity and the immediacy, the accessibility
of Luhrmann’s film, taking considerable liberties with the “text” in the cuts and emendations
made, in the union of “high” (Shakespeare) and “low” (pop) culture has alienated
critics because it defies certain “expectational texts.”

Unlike the stage, the cinema frame does not encapsulate the action within a microcosm—
“the full extent of the action . . . must be credible beyond the constraints of the frame”
(Davies 6). Luhrmann achieves a kind of visual “magic suggestiveness,” to use Conrad’s
phrase from his preface to The Nigger of Narcissus, conveying a world of attitudes and
tendencies in the succinct accumulation of visual clues. For the filmmaker who adapts
Shakespeare for the screen there is also the challenge of “reconciling the heightened utter-
ance and . . . density of poetic dialogue with the convincing realism of cinematic space”
(Davies 15). This is not simply a matter of placing characters and the verse they speak in a
“believable,” “realistic” setting. (I am aware how problematic the notion of “realistic” space
is but for the purposes of this paper let us call attempts to create a cinematic, believable
world “realist” as opposed to productions which simply transfer stage productions onto
screen.) Filmmakers like Castellani in his Romeo and Juliet have attempted to create an
“authentic” cinematic space to the detriment of the poetic imagery. Shakespeare’s verse is
here overwhelmed by the visual splendor; the setting seems to exist for its own sake.

Tony Richardson’s Hamlet (1969) circumvents the problem of integrating cinematic spatial
realism with thematic substance by restricting camera movement and by rigid control of
the film’s spatial effects. The result is a sense of unalleviated claustrophobia in the “prison”
of Denmark. By contrast, for directors like Kurosawa, Kozintsev, and Luhrmann it is im-
perative to clearly establish, in Davies’s words, “the contest of the realism of space” (16).
Their films demonstrate that a Shakespearean film can incorporate cinematic realism that
contributes much of its dramatic impact. In Kurosawa’s Throne of Blood, for example, the
forest becomes a “multi-layered embodiment of the film’s thematic substance,” with a pres-
ence as strong as any character (Davies 16). (I hasten to add that this kind of effect can also
be achieved on the stage.) The forest of Kurosawa’s film and the Elsinore of Kozintsev’s
Hamlet function essentially as concepts rather than particular locations. And for Kozintsev
it is impossible to “translate” this concept “directly and completely into plastic form. . . .
The screen must show separate parts; the general plan can only be imagined. Otherwise,
everything seems small, reduced” (266). Here Kozintsev refers explicitly to the spatial
details in filmmaking but his comment could more broadly apply to his method of ap-
proaching Shakespeare. In watching Kozintsev’s films the spectator is “responsible for
assembling not merely a spatial whole, but a metaphysical whole which relates to the sig-
nificance of the action” (Davies 21). In a different way, Luhrmann’s film demands a similar
kind of imaginative positioning from its audience. Signifiers of the modern western world
(emblems of mafia gang-land hostility; guns, fast cars, tattoos; emblems of lurid wealth, of
consumer culture, excess and decay; gaudy colors, huge billboards, cheap ostentatious jew-
elry, a massive cityscape dominated by the skyscrapers of Montague and Capulet) set off a
string of associations which constitute a metaphysical whole. Verona is imaged as a cu-
ltural mirror through which Luhrmann asks urgent questions about the western world of the
nineties. His Verona is a place beset by urban violence, a media that assaults the senses with
a barrage of information, oppressive consumerism, depersonalization, the suffocation of
innocence, faithlessness and violence: patterns of oppression which may be seen in our
modern world. It is a world where a regular American girl of Juliet’s age can easily find a
gun to kill herself.

It is not a simple matter of Luhrmann having placed the action in a recognizable ’nineties
world. Like Kozintsev, Luhrmann is concerned that the landscape should not only say
certain things within the context of the drama but that it should actually be the natural world
in which characters must assert themselves and find their definition (Davies 22). One of the
most affecting aspects of Luhrmann’s film is that the idealism, purity, and sweetness of Romeo and Juliet’s love is offset, defined by the world around them.

Objects, the spatial detail can in film have an anthropomorphic dimension, can have (for Balázs) a “violent expressive power”, an “intense physiognomy” against which the “human characters pale into insignificance” (Davies 9). Luhrmann has carried this notion to a polemic extension. Indeed, the characters of his film are dwarfed by the profusion of meaningful objects around them. The objects may have particular symbolic meaning: for example, the numerous religious icons which ironically foreground the faithlessness of this Verona, or the guns which, sleekly designed and seductively photographed, seem almost omnipresent signaling a world driven by hostility. But they also indicate that this Verona is a world of gaudy, oppressive materialism. Even in the final scene the slim figures of Romeo and Juliet are small amidst the elaborately decorated Capulet tomb: large blue and gold neon crosses, a multitude of candles and flowers, rose petals strewn thick across the floor.

Luhrmann’s setting, the city itself, offers resistance to Romeo and Juliet who try to define a separate, personalized cinematic space for themselves. If, as Barthes insists, “the city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language” we should pay close attention to what Luhrmann’s city “says” (92). Luhrmann’s setting could be a prototype for imaging a postmodern city as described by the architecture specialist David Harvey. The urban world of this film is a “collage” of highly differentiated spaces and mixtures. This startling, eclectic “collage city” is comprised of the decrepit fairground, the ruined stage, the corporate cityscape flanking an immense statue of Christ, and the massive Capulet mansion which is comprised of Edwardian (a parquet floor, ionic columns, gardens structured into squares) and modern (Juliet’s pink bedroom décor, the massive pool and security guard booth) elements. The ruined stage, in particular, prompts a sense of spatial and metaphysical dislocation because it does not seem “real,” does not appear as an integral part of the city but rather as an old fragment inserted into a new context. At times, the use of Shakespeare’s verse invokes a similar sense of dislocation placed, as it is, in such a modern, eclectic context. In the collage mise en scène, in the quoting of various films of diverse genres and the portrayal of the characters themselves (of various nationalities and colors, from the camp black Mercutio, to the Blanche Dubois Lady Capulet, to the spaghetti Western Italian Tybalt), Luhrmann presents and alludes to many kinds of cultures, “realities” and “texts” which collide, which interpenetrate explosively. The coexistence of many styles does not convey a sense of freedom of expression but overwhelming oppressiveness. What Harvey calls the postmodern “themes” of destructive fragmentation, ephemerality, collage, rapid flux and chaotic change shape this film (44, 64). In the film’s playfulness, the self-ironizing references to other films, its eclectic quotation, its “brutal aesthetics” which, for much of the film, undermine metaphysical solemnities, Luhrmann’s work follows the archetypal description of postmodern art as suggested by Terry Eagleton (Harvey 7).

The personalized close-up space of Romeo and Juliet, the solemnity of their love is juxtaposed, and is incommensurable with the space of Luhrmann’s city. The city is an “antagonistic, voracious world of otherness,” where different cultures, texts, architectures, and personalities clash and jostle for supremacy (Harvey 49). Metaphysical absolutes, like the love Romeo and Juliet seek to create and preserve, have no place in this world. The close-ups on Romeo and Juliet sometimes “block-out” the setting, conveying some sense of a search for a fantasy world, the illusory “high” that takes them and us beyond immediate physical “realities” into pure imagination.

In a radio interview Luhrmann likened DiCaprio as Romeo to a kind of Rebel Without A Cause James Dean, or a young Marlon Brando in that the character is fighting against many things without exactly knowing what it is he is fighting against. Aspects of the story, as presented by Luhrmann, are linked to Rebel in that Romeo and Juliet are alienated from their elders and, in American teen movie fashion, battling against “society.” But there is a profound difference between the tone of Rebel and Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet because the former does implicitly suggest the possibility of a positive, alternative reality, the resolution of conflicts. In Luhrmann’s production the possibility of an ultimate positive, in the por-
trayal of the lovers, is only fleetingly held out. But DiCaprio’s Romeo “doesn’t know what he’s fighting against” perhaps because the forces opposing him and Juliet are too big and multi-faceted to be contained in being “named.” There is seemingly no possibility of an absolute enduring “positive” to counteract all the “negatives” Luhrmann presents in his collage city of gangs, drugs, violence, oppressive media, intergenerational conflict, warring corporate owners, faithlessness, destructive fragmentation, chaos and despair.

Luhrmann takes after Kozintsev who says “we must see in Shakespeare, not irrelevant struggles of a past, but the vivid realities of the present” (Buchman 8). The obvious disjunction between the verse and the setting in Luhrmann’s film throws the verse and its filmic context into a kind of defamiliarizing relief. This disjunction between verse and setting works to make “strange” the familiar, to make “new” the “text(s)” we know as Romeo and Juliet, inspiring the audience to ask new questions about the socioeconomic context of the drama. As Buchman writes, it is lamentable when a film world (mise en scène, camerawork, sound) undermines the force of Shakespeare’s poetry. However, “if the film . . . offers a new context in which one can perceive the action of the drama, if the filmmaker can exploit the potential of cinema to place the language in a new space, a space where it sounds a little different to the ear precisely because it appears so different to the eye, then it achieves its maximum creative potential” (Buchman 63). I suggest that Luhrmann’s film has achieved just that.

Elsie Walker
University of Sheffield

Notes

1 See for example Gary Taylor’s “Wherefore Art Thou, Will?” (in the Guardian, April 24 1999. “Saturday Review”: page 4) where he claims that Luhrmann’s film was a straightforward marketing enterprise and, along with CD-rom and internet Shakespeare sites, “does not really expand the Shakespearean domain” but provides another alternative popular way to satisfy existing markets (especially teenagers who must, apparently against their will, read Shakespeare in school). Taylor describes the film as a vehicle for ‘easy access’ to Shakespeare’s work and places the film in the context of an argument that Shakespeare’s status, and the scholarly level of attention given his work is falling dramatically. The film was given more serious attention in several papers at the Shakespeare on Screen Centenary Conference in Benalmádena, Spain, in September 1999. However, several commentators remained skeptical in referring to the conflict between “postmodern” form and “Romantic” sentiment in Luhrmann’s film as, at worst, a “weakness” and, at best, an unsatisfactory “contradiction.” Such arguments do, it seems to me, miss the point. The presentation of irreconcilable opposites shapes Luhrmann’s film. The central tension is between postmodern notions of destructive fragmentation represented by Luhrmann’s mise-en-scène and a Romantic yearning for the certainty of positive absolutes represented by Romeo and Juliet.

2 In claiming this I argue against James N. Loehlin’s who places Luhrmann’s film in the company of other recently released Shakespeare films like Trevor Nunn’s Twelfth Night or Olivier Parker’s Othello as employing “mainstream conventions in a straightforward, unselfconscious way” (67).

3 Harvey distinguishes between the “destructive fragmentation” of postmodernist works which may produce chaotic and/or violent effects and the “positive fragmentation” of modernism. T.S. Eliot’s “modernist” poem The Waste Land would be, using Harvey’s definitions, an example of “positive fragmentation” : the “heap of fragments” may, for the reader, collide, interact and eventually ‘cohere’ in a harmonious whole greater than the sum of its parts. Conversely, the fragments of a postmodernist work, such as Luhrmann’s eclectic setting for Romeo + Juliet, interact, collide, and remain in conflict rather than presenting the possibility of some final unification.

Works Cited


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


Collick, John. “Symbolism in Shakespeare Film” in *Shakespeare on Film* (Shaughnessy), 83-102.


Hapgood, Robert. “Popularizing Shakespeare: the Artistry of Franco Zeffirelli” in *Shakespeare on Film* (Shaughnessy), 80-94.


Loehlin, James M. “‘Top of the World, Ma’: Richard III and Cinematic Convention” in *Shakespeare the Movie*, 67-79.


