Constructing Shakespeare On Screen

Edited by
Neil E Béchervaise

With feature chapters by
Neil Béchervaise, Joe Belanger, Bill Davison,
Jodie McFadden, Dennis Robinson
Sarah Tainton and Ken Watson

SAMPLE

Acknowledgements

The editor and authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of their students from primary and seconday classrooms and university lecture halls in Australia and Canada whose enthusiasm for reading and film viewing have made this book a reality.

For their assistance with additional research, development and class-room trialling of materials for this text, the authors wish to express their particular thanks to: Sehan Nas and Prue Greene from the University of Sydney, Australia and to Leanne Fukui, Peter Hill, Michael Lattimer, Michelle Porter and David L Young for their enthusiastic work in the summer of '97 at University of British Columbia, Canada.

ISBN 1 876757 21 3

St Clair Press

Constructing Shakespeare on Screen is published by St Clair Press
an imprint of PHOENIX EDUCATION PTY LTD

Sydney
PO Box 3141, Putney 2112
Tel: (02) 9809 3579 Fax: (02) 9808 1430

Melbourne
PO Box 197, Albert Park 3206
Tel: (03) 9699 8377 Fax: (03) 9699 9242

Email: service@phoenixeduc.com
Website: www.phoenixeduc.com

© 2003 Neil Béchervaise, Joe Belanger, Bill Davison,
Jodie McFadden, Dennis Robinson, Sarah Tainton and Ken Watson

Photographs Page

From Neil Armfield's production of *Twelfth Night* (photographs courtesy of Producer, Don Catchlove)
Laurence Olivier as Richard III and Ralph Richardson as Gloucester (London Films Productions, 1955)

Photocopying

The material in this book is copyright. The purchasing educational institution and its staff, and the individual teacher purchaser, are permitted to make copies of the pages of this book beyond their rights under the Australian Copyright Act 1968, provided that:

1. The number of copies does not exceed the number reasonably required by the educational institution to satisfy its teaching purposes;
2. Copies are made only by reprographic means (photocopying), not by electronic/digital means, and are not stored or transmitted;
3. Copies are not sold or lent.

Printing:

Printed in Australia by Five Senses Education, Seven Hills

SAMPLE

The Contributors

Dr Neil E Bèchervaise was a Senior Lecturer in English Education at the University of Sydney where he achieved an Award for Excellence in Teaching. He lectures regularly as a visiting professor at the University of British Columbia, is a published poet, and continues to publish accessible texts for teachers. Neil's work on reading response and the use of text in multicultural classrooms is incorporated into an increasing number of Australian texts. He is now a Professor in Management at Swinburne.

Professor Joe Belanger is Deputy Head of the Department of Language and literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. A former President of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English and editor of several prestigious education journals, he teaches English methods, technical communication, and curriculum studies.

Bill Davison lectures in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. Formerly an English teacher and Department Head in Vancouver schools, he has also served as President of the Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association.

Jodie McFadden trained as an English teacher at The University of Sydney and now teaches high school English with the Queensland Education Department.

Dr Dennis Robinson is Senior Lecturer in English Education at The University of Sydney. Author of a number of significant texts in literary criticism and former President of the English Association, he is a committed reader and teacher educator whose research explores the dynamic between author, text and reader development.

Sarah Tainton trained as an English teacher at The University of Sydney and now teaches high school English with the New South Wales Education Department.

Ken Watson has been a visiting professor at the University of British Columbia and is a former Senior Lecturer in English Education at the University of Sydney. As the mark of his commitment to English Education, Ken founded St Clair Press, an Australian publishing house specialising in quality resources for English Education.

SAMPLE

Foreword to Constructing Shakespeare on Screen

In brief response to feedback from teachers using the original edition, *Shakespeare on Celluloid*, we add the following as pointers for consideration and discussion between teachers, between students and between teachers and their students.

1. We are seeking engagement with the text as a fundamental educational objective.
2. *Constructing Shakespeare on Screen* is not a substitute for the playtext.
3. Shakespeare on film is often a compelling interpretation and may make it difficult to see the text apart from the interpretation the film presents – so we should always use comparative methods when possible.
4. While the texts are accepted as canonical, they should not be presented as iconic. To do so precludes debate over interpretation.
5. Interpretation is an open issue. Some responses are better than others. None is acceptable without textual support. Some are wrong because they are not sustainable by reference to the text.
6. The text is not reliable but it is all we have. If it is taken as a set of production notes then coherent performance decisions can be made.
7. The life and times of the Elizabethans is the period of the renaissance in England. It is a time of travel and of discovery. The movement of people and ideas provide effective argument for the character and machinery development in the plays.
8. The changes in form of Shakespearean (and other Elizabethan) plays suggest an emerging audience for the theatre, a group who were bringing increasing sophistication and education to the performances.
9. Secondary students are quite capable of interrogating a performance but, too often, are not presented with the play as performance – It is difficult to read a play as literature – it makes more sense to read a script as a blueprint for film or stage action.
10. Like every other medium, film relies heavily on intertextuality. Branagh's Henry draws on the 2nd World War propaganda film (Derek Jacobi as 'Commander on battleship' image) while also acknowledging the 'man on the spot' style of reporting (in the trenches at Hafleur) used in the Falklands War but brought to the limits of credibility in the Gulf War (read *The Gulf War Did Not Happen* by Jean Baudrillard, and then suborned in the Iraq war.
11. Some of the plays of the period have their origins in street theatre (ie, origins predate the Vagabond Act of 1572) and are meant to be seen as performance; others are clearly literary and meant to be read (eg, *Volpone* or *Dr Faustus*).

SAMPLE

12. Film should only be used to contextualise or problematise literature – unless it is being studied in its own right.

13. There is little value in showing the whole film when your purpose is to illustrate specific features of a text, to provide context or to problematise interpretation

14. Student response is reader response and the reading may be efferent or aesthetic (Louise Rosenblatt) but the Reading pauses (Wolfgang Iser) are crucial to development of a shared meaning between the author/auteur and the reader.

    [In these notes, a 'text' is 'read' by a 'reader', where text is defined as intentional communication between author and reader, ie the author expects the reader (the audience) to construct a reading which is coherent in the readers mind and which bears some relation to the authors intention. To this end, the author is creating for an 'implied reader' (Eco) and intends to position the reader so that the intended reading is close to the received reading. Clearly there are elements of post structuralism in this set of presumptions. 'Resistant reading' is an essential element of the construction of the text but it is not the *sine qua non.* An empathetic reading seems to be more important to development of a credible reconstruction of the authors intention]

15. It is common to use the Shakespearean play as a universal well-spring for the appreciation of Elizabethan literature, Elizabethan theatre, Elizabethan politics, social and personal life, and as an historical oeuvre. No single play will effectively sustain each of these readings and more. *Macbeth* is almost an abridgement, *Hamlet* is clearly in need of informed and substantial editing, *Much Ado about Nothing* is in need of an historical context, *Othello* needs to be seen in the context of the ensemble approach to play development in a commercial market-place, and *Titus* needs to be considered most carefully as a depiction of rampant imperialism gone awry.

16. There is much to be gained from a treatment of Shakespearean plays as ensemble pieces where the strengths and weaknesses and even the physical appearance of the players are taken to be a reflection of the ensemble itself. Historical exploration of the character description and role type across several-year spans provides insight into the value of this treatment; *Shakespeare in Love* provides a credible exemplar.

Above all, the text is not sacrosanct – any more than it was in Elizabethan times (the folio was printed at least a generation after the first performance on some of the plays [who remembered what, and how well?). If the cast changed, the balance of the production changed. The scenario and key speeches may have remained relatively constant but the balance between characters changed, of necessity. The same happens in the school play when a cast member changes.

It is most worthwhile to take the film as an entrée to the text and then to use the two contiguously to develop a performance dialectic. Again, the need for students to engage with, to interrogate the text with a view to acceptable staging is the major purpose behind any study of a play text. The play text is a recipe for performance action. All interpretation must lead to a stronger performance – to do less is to misinterpret the intention of the play, the intention of the writer and the value of the engagement between the reader and the text.

Neil E. Béchervaise, 2003

SAMPLE

Foreword to Shakespeare on Celluloid

This book uses and expands reader response theory as a theoretical base. Essentially, this means that we believe that film viewers/readers bring a unique set of experiences and understandings to their reading of a film and construct the 'text' by applying these understandings to the reading. To the extent that the readers' experience and knowledge are individual, each of their readings is unique. But that is too haphazard for us as teachers. We want students to feel confident in coming to grips with the text as informed and critically resistant readers who 'know the rules of the game' of reading film as well as we expect them to know the 'rules' for reading literature. Otherwise, what is the point of being an educator?

As writers, we bring our own research of the films and a range of experience which is far more extensive than that of the average reader of a film-as-text. We also bring the language, the grammar and the ability to contextualise which we model for students and beginning film readers. Without this modelling, they have no agreed framework upon which to build and against which to confirm their own developing facility as film readers

Shakespeare was a commercial playwright and a theatre owner. He was in business to get crowds through the doors. He developed a new tragedy and a new comedy each season. If things worked, he ran with them. He was commercial first. As such, we believe, he would have been a film producer/director in the 1990s – perhaps in the style of Kenneth Branagh with his ensemble approach to film-making (eg, *Peter and Friends*), perhaps in the manner of Speilberg with his wide range of interests and universal issues. Film is the late 20th century medium. How should we/can we read it? This, for us, is what the book is about.

In this book we are exploring the range of translations of Shakespearean play-texts which have been made on film. We have focused on the readily available films and refer in passing to others we know but which may not be readily accessible.

To some extent, the approaches to the films are individualistic. We have endeavoured to meld them into a stylistically coherent structure where each chapter is written as a discussion with activities, observations and asides which extend and help to fill, for some students, what may otherwise remain as silences.

Neil E. Béchervaise
January, 1999, Vancouver

SAMPLE

A Note to Readers

This book is divided into five sections.

Section 1 examines the relationship between audience and performance, leading to an exploration of the differences between reading literature, play-texts and films.

Sections 2-5 identify the elements most commonly underpinning effective story-telling for entertainment: narration, spatial relationships, sequentiality and closure.

It is presumed that our readers will find many examples of every story-telling element in each of the films. In consequence, there is neither need nor intention to follow the order of presentation of the book or to use only those films discussed in each section to substantiate the focus of that section. Keen film readers will wish to add films not mentioned, or to replace films mentioned with others which seem more appropriate or appealing. We encourage this approach and wish we had more space to add extra films that we have reluctantly omitted.

The headnotes for each section have been written to stand alone. Readers wishing to apply their film reading principles to films other than Shakespearean translations will find them a useful organising guide in the development of critical film readership.

Each chapter is organised into:

Establishing Shots – focusing activities or information directed towards the fundamental concepts involved in the chapter.

Key Shots – essential definitional information.

Cutaways – student activities – leading from lower order individually focused information retrieval dependent on the student's prior knowledge and establishing a shared knowledge base, that is, establishing an entry knowledge profile for each individual student.

Director's Cuts – higher order activities promoting sharing of knowledge and processes to ensure comprehension and to promote categorisation, analysis, synthesis and informed surmise.

The Play Text As A Recipe For Action

Wherever possible, the authors have avoided attention to the text of the plays by omitting annotated references to particular scenes or lines. We accept that this may annoy those who see the films as impure versions of literary works. Instead, the authors believe that the films should be considered as translations of the plays to screen, as dynamic performances. Nevertheless, there are times when the director's interpretation needs a point of reference. Similarly, there are times when it is faster to reference the play than to spend hours rerunning the films to pinpoint a word or a sequence. In these cases, we have applied the generally accepted mode of notation, using capitalised roman numerals to locate acts and lower case to identify scenes.

SAMPLE

Contents

			Page
The Contributors			i
Forword to *Constructing Shakespeare on Screen*			ii
Foreword to the *Shakespeare on Celluloid*			iv
A Note to Readers			v
Section 1: Audience and Performance			
Chapter 1	Reading Film as Text		2
Chapter 2	*Macbeth*	Neil Béchervaise	7
Section 2: Narration			
Chapter 3	Once Upon a Time		16
Chapter 4	*Julius Caesar*	Joe Belanger, Bill Davison	21
Chapter 5	*Twelfth Night*	Ken Watson	34
Section 3: Spatial Relationships			
Chapter 6	Where and When?		42
Chapter 7	*The Taming of the Shrew*	Neil Béchervaise	45
Chapter 8	*Othello*	Dennis Robinson	50
Section 4: Sequentiality			
Chapter 9	... And Then, And Then ...		62
Chapter 10	*Richard III*	Ken Watson	68
Chapter 11	*King Lear*	Joe Belanger	77
Section 5: Closure			
Chapter 12	But What Happened in the End?		92
Chapter 13	*Hamlet*	Dennis Robinson	94
Chapter 14	*Romeo and Juliet*	Neil Béchervaise	106
Section 6: Shakespeare in Question			
Chapter 15	The Canon in Context		118
Chapter 16	*Much Ado About Nothing*	Dennis Robinson, Neil Béchervaise	123
Chapter 17	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*	Dennis Robinson	143
Chapter 18	*Henry V*	Sarah Tainton, Jodie McFadden	159
Section 7: Chronology, Play-Text Dates, References			
A: Chronology			177
B: Play-Text Dates			179
References			180

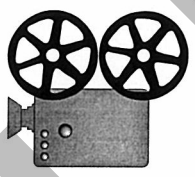
SAMPLE

Section 1
Audience and Performance

SAMPLE

Chapter 1: Reading Film as Text

Establishing Shot 1



The authors of this book have agreed that film viewing is a form of reading. To read effectively, we need to know the vocabulary, the grammar and the conventions used in constructing the text we are reading. We also need to understand the audience for whom the text is intended. Finally, we need to recognise the context in which the text is supposed to be read.

Film as a text differs from the literary text because it is written in movement, colour and sound. It is designed to be read at a single sitting at a set pace. The pace of the reading is supposed to allow all readers to feel comfortable that they are reading at their own pace. As film readers, we usually only become conscious of the complexity of what we are watching when the film has been poorly written.

This text is designed to explore the ways in which films are constructed and the problems faced by film-makers who translate plays into film. Some of the questions film-makers have to answer include:

- How can the intention of the play-text be translated to film?
- Who will be the audience?
- How will the play-text need to be changed to suit the grammar and vocabulary of film?
- How will the play-text need to be changed to suit the historical and social context in which the play will be read?

As a means of understanding the relation between the work of the playwright and of the film-maker, this text has also been designed to explore some of the central problems faced by playwrights:

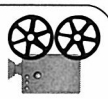
- Who will be performing the play?
- Who will be in the audience?
- How will the play be performed?

In addressing these questions, it starts to become clear that the film-maker's concerns are remarkably similar to those of the playwright.

SAMPLE

Translating Plays Into Film

Establishing Shot 2



The idea of translation is useful in discussing the shift from literature to play to film because it clearly suggests that different 'languages' are being used.

The 'language' of literature as we recognise it is the printed text. We are familiar with the complexities of grammar and vocabulary which characterise the effective use of this 'language'. For most of us, as a result, reading the text means reading the words printed onto a succession of pages – each of which must be read before it is turned to reveal the next. Our literature reading allows us to read single words, phrases and sections. We may pause, return and even skip to establish a meaningful reading.

The play-text, however, is another language. It is intended to be seen (or heard) as the action of live players (actors) who will present an aural and/or visual text for us to 'read'. The players will not pause, stop, repeat or skip sections of the play for us to reflect or clarify our understanding of their text. Instead, working with an expanded vocabulary and grammar, or 'language' of the play, they may add tonal variation, activity, colour, light, music and sound effects to support and extend the meaning of their spoken text. Each of these elements assists us to read the play in a single performance, but the fact remains that what we cannot read in the performance cannot be repeated. We have no opportunity to return to line 53 or re-view Act 2, scene 2 to be sure that we understood what was being set up as a motivation for later action by the protagonist.

Film represents yet another language. Recorded for later transmission to an audience in the darkness and intimacy of a cinema on a large screen, the film is several steps removed from the literary text. The characters, the angles from which they are seen, their emotional relation to each other, the physical circumstances of their performance, each represents an alternative vocabulary and grammar which are selected and collected to present a single and singular reading of the text they present.

Key Shot

The film text is easily recognised as a post-modern construction: a complex series and sequence of intentions translated to celluloid as if in a single reading.

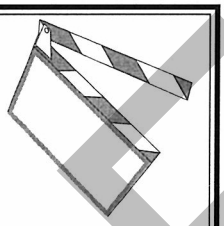
The apparent structures we translate from the screen cannot be the actual structures. We will not see the cameras, the lights, the director, the extras. We are not (at least we are not meant to be) conscious of the roles of the musicians, the editors, the colour matchers, the title designers and the hundreds of others who support the 'writing' of the film we read as a single text. The singularity of our reading of a film depends on the totality of its *constructedness.*

In the light of the cinema lobby, we recognise that we are about to see, or have just seen a complex visual and aural construction. Inside the cinema, with the lights down and our attention focused on the universe defined by the screen, we adopt a different set of semantic rules. We accept the 'reality' of the screen universe and the context in which we are being entertained. We read the film as a specialised text.

SAMPLE

The film-maker's intention is to devise a text for which there can only be one reading. The signs we recognise in literature or in a play performance may not signify the meanings we usually provide them with. Our literary training may be consciously turned against us to create new and more complex readings. Music may suggest impending disaster. Colour may create a sense of the romantic. Camera angles may confuse our reading of power relationships.

Cutaway 1
Take 1



Remember when you were in another room and you could hear a movie on television. How did you tell what was happening or about to happen?

Was it possible to create a reasonably accurate image of what the scenery and even the actors' costumes looked like without seeing the screen?

The basic intention of the commercial film-maker is to create an entertainment which will totally engage the interests and emotions of the audience. The elements of the film are woven together to create a seamless production in which music, dialogue and images appear to have been created together. To develop a discriminating response as film readers, it becomes essential to understand the elements involved in the construction of the text. If we are to appreciate how the film is achieving its purpose, we must teach ourselves to *read against the intention* of the film-maker. In doing so, we learn to create a critical framework from within which we translate the text into a meaningful and conscious reading.

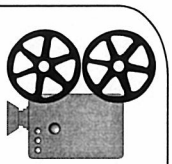
Translating Shakespeare's Plays

Translating Shakespeare's plays into film presents particular problems:

- many people have strong feelings about Shakespeare because they once studied his plays at school;
- many ideas about how Shakespeare should be presented make it difficult to translate a Shakespearean play to film so that it satisfies both critics and more forgiving audiences;
- some people believe that because Shakespeare wrote in Elizabethan times, his plays must be presented historically.

The film translator of Shakespeare has to be both brave and talented to meet all the demands which will be made of the film.

Establishing Shot 3



Whether people speak or write or show pictures, they make choices about what to put in their message and what to leave out. The way they decide their choice seems to be very simple. But every choice makes some things important and leaves other things out. Each choice includes some readers or viewers and excludes others.

SAMPLE

The Intended Audience

When a text is written to be read as a piece of literature, the characters, settings and events which fill the reader's mind must appear to present a reality according to the rules of reading for the reader. Some reading rules are related to the structure of written speech rather than spoken speech. Others are related to the way readers create a reality in their minds as they read.

Play-texts, however, are not usually written to be read as literature. They are more often written to be performed by actors on a stage. Readers expect to move from their home to an agreed performance area to watch the performance as audience members. *Audience expectations* may differ between individuals but the shared experience demands an interaction between players and audience. With words and action, staging, sets, lighting, costume and make-up, the actors will create a performance for readers to share in. Readers will be expected to make adjustments between the reality of what they are seeing and the reality the actors are performing.

Film demands a more distanced reading. The film audience may move to a performance space but the actors, the settings and the film-makers will not be there. Film must be read *as if* the performance space is shared between actors and audience. The reality of the film reader involves stepping through the screen into a world which has been created at another time and place.

Director's Cut 1

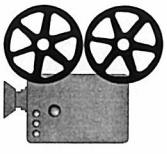


In Woody Allen's film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, the hero of the film gets bored with playing the same role in every screening of the film and steps out of the screen while the film is being projected. Immediately, the film narrative is stopped as the characters on the screen, confused and then angry, try to decide what they can do without a hero. The audience for the film is equally confused and then angry.

Discuss the restrictions we place on ourselves when we read a film and then decide whether the concept explored in Woody Allen's film is a way to consider our own role as audience.

Films are made according to *rules of communication* which are as strict as the spelling and grammar rules we use to write a story, an essay or even a diary entry.

Establishing Shot 4



The choice to read a novel, a play-text or a film involves accepting a reality which is shared between the text and the reader but which only exists in the reader's mind.

SAMPLE

Cutaway 1
Take 2

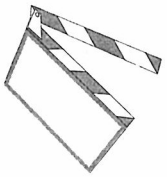


Working in small groups, list some of the different things you have to believe when you watch a film, television series or serial. Use this list to decide whether the news on television is more believable than a film which used realistic characters in real settings.

When we go to see a film in a cinema, we expect comfortable seats and the lights to be turned out; we expect the film to be in focus and we expect to be able to hear the sound track. More importantly, we expect the film to make sense to us. If things happen which confuse us or which seem unreal within the story, we may argue that the film is of poor quality. If the style of the film does not follow the usual rules for film editing and composition then, again, we may argue that the film is of poor quality. We generally *expect* to see a film which follows rules that we are already familiar with.

We *expect* characters to disappear from the screen so that we can see and hear other characters at different times and places or from different angles. We *expect* to hear music which heightens our understanding of the action and we *expect* to see colour or light and shade which match our previous understanding of how film is supposed to be. In fact, we already have a well developed understanding of the language of film.

Cutaway 1
Take 3



Have you ever watched the list of credits which come at the end of a film? Who are all of the people who are involved in making a film? List some of the tasks which are credited in every film and group them according to whether they are most directly connected with the actors, the filming, the planning, the support of the film crew and actors or the financing of the film.

SAMPLE