



Marketing Screen Shakespeares: Exploring the Acknowledgement Given to Source Material in Official Trailers

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Shakespeare's 'cultural authority' seems to possess an irresistible lure for adaptive film makers; screen interpretations of his works are numerous and extremely varied.¹ This appeal has only grown over the last two decades, a trend catalysed by the release of Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* in 1989, 'just when everyone was announcing [the] death' of Shakespearean films.² Branagh pursued his vision under the conviction that he 'could make a truly popular film', an insistence which has inevitably become the founding principle for producers of mainstream Screen Shakespeare.³ As a result, film makers often find themselves caught between 'authenticity and accessibility', 'Shakespeare purists and film purists' and sometimes even between artistic and market value.^{4,5} In an attempt to maximise their potential audience, many adaptations combine aspects of different genres, with Shakespeare's inclusion in that blend targeting spectators who are familiar with the supposed source. Thus, while 'branding a film with [Shakespeare's] name does not ensure its box office success', association can be used as a marketing strategy to extend interest to Shakespeare enthusiasts.⁶ This raises the risk of a Shakespearean source being advertised disproportionately for commercial gain. Unless a production fulfils the expectations that its marketing has excited, with advertisement and full film drawing on Shakespeare in equal measure, it becomes guilty of attaching a depth of cultural value to something that does not warrant the connection. By analysing a cross section of screen Shakespeare trailers, this essay will examine the extent to which that balance is kept, ultimately illustrating that Shakespeare's prominence as a marketing device is not always representative of the influence he has had over the film as a whole.

Big budget, mainstream films are the most relevant focus for the purpose of this investigation. Such productions are more likely to be profit orientated, increasing the risk of market driven 'genre games'.⁷ To this end, the following study will examine six clips, the official trailers for: *Henry V*,⁸ *Richard III*,⁹ *Titus*,¹⁰ *10 Things I Hate About You*,¹¹ *She's the Man*¹² and *Gnomeo and Juliet*.¹³ These particular adverts have been chosen in order to span from the start of the 'New Wave' up to the present day, as well as to afford equal consideration to both adaptations and appropriations.¹⁴ Julie Saunders explains that 'adaptations are obviously a re-reading or interpretation of a text, while appropriations are more

¹ Adam Hansen and Kevin J. Wetmore ed., *Shakespearean Echoes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), p. 80.

² Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 224.

³ Judy Rumbold, 'Kenny, Prince of Lightness', *The Guardian* (November 1992) <<http://www.branaghcompendium.com/artic-guard92.htm>> [accessed 28 December 2015].

⁴ Barbara Hodgdon, 'Wooing and Winning (Or Not): Film/Shakespeare/Comedy and the Syntax of Genre' in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works Volume Three: The Comedies*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003), p. 243.

⁵ Kenneth S. Rothwell, *History of Shakespeare*, p. 223.

⁶ Hodgdon, 'Wooing and Winning', p. 245.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.244.

⁸ *Henry V (Trailer)*, dir. by Kenneth Branagh (Renaissance Films and British Broadcasting Company, 1989) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tk5PrKi5wUg>> [accessed 18 December 2015]. All further references (HVT) taken from this source.

⁹ *Richard III (Trailer)*, dir. by Richard Loncraine (Mayfair Entertainment International, 1995) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXc0-EME0C8>> [accessed 18 December 2015]. All further references (RTT) taken from this source.

¹⁰ *Titus (Trailer)*, dir. by Julie Taymor (Clear Blue Sky Productions, 1999) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvZRvKf78yY>> [accessed 18 December 2015]: all further references (TT) taken from this source.

¹¹ *10 Things I Hate About You (Trailer)* dir. by Gil Junger (Touchstone Pictures, 1999) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0147800/?ref=mv_sr_1> [accessed 18 December 2015]. All further references (10TT) taken from this source.

¹² *She's the Man (Trailer)*, dir. by Andy Fickman (Dreamworks and Lakeshore Entertainment, 2006) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0454945/?ref=tf_fc_tt> [accessed 18 December 2015]. All further references (STMT) taken from this source.

¹³ *Gnomeo and Juliet (Trailer)*, dir. by Kelly Asbury (Touchstone Pictures, 2011). *IMDB Trailers* <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377981/?ref=mv_sr_2> [accessed 18 December 2015]. All further references (GJT) taken from this source.

¹⁴ Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe, *New Wave Shakespeare on Screen* (Cambridge: Polity Publishing Company, 2007), p. xi.

subtle'.¹⁵ As these qualifying qualities are subjective, a film's classification cannot be considered definitive. Assuming that an appropriation is likely to have less of a basis in Shakespeare, the division between these two classifications may prove crucial in determining whether a film's marketing has been representative. To allow for this, the trailers have also been selected in an attempt to provide a spectrum within the categories themselves.

Branagh's *Henry V* strongly qualifies as an adaptation; it incorporates many features which identify it soundly as Shakespearean. The trailer catalogues these features, showcasing the use of appropriate period dress and Shakespearean verse. By incorporating some of the play's most iconic lines, 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more...' (HVT: 0.37-0.42) and 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers...' (HVT: 1.48-1.57), the trailer implies that the preservation of Shakespeare is at the core of this production. Branagh's speech, 'this story shall the good man teach his son...' (HVT: 1.33-1.38), is non-synchronously edited, overlapping with a montage of slow motions shots. These appear as an indirect acknowledgement of Shakespeare's influence, incorporating elements of action, romance and politics that can all find their basis in the source play. Though the trailer's voice-over claims this to be a 'bold new film' (HVT: 1.58-2.01), some of its more ground-breaking elements are not included in the preview. No indication is given of the style of the film's opening, for example, which uses a nondiegetic insert to show the Chorus walking through a modern film set. This selectiveness was perhaps an attempt to diminish the risk of estranging Shakespeare Purists whilst the New Wave was in its infancy.

Simultaneously, however, the trailer seems to take pains to distance itself somewhat from its source play; the claim that the film recreates 'one of history's greatest adventures' (HVT: 0.31-0.35) refuses Shakespeare cultural credit and gives true events as an alternative founding inspiration. While Shakespeare is thus consigned, modern celebrity is fully endorsed; Branagh's name dominates the first shot of the trailer, celebrating his titles as 'best actor' and 'best director' (see appendix A). Also emphasised is the production's epic scale, distinguishing it from the comparatively limited stage productions for which the source was penned. This grandeur is made most apparent through the variations of setting, spanning from vast landscapes (see appendix B) to imposing frontiers (see appendix C). Together these features produce a trailer crafted to capitalise on genre blending's capacity for 'serv[ing] diverse groups diversely'.¹⁶ To a Shakespeare conscious viewer, recognition of his influence offers reassurance that the source play remains central. To a viewer holding 'Hollywood priorities', there is enough evidence of 'big-name stars and state-of-the-art sight and sound' to draw and hold attention.^{17,18} As 'a shrewd merger of art and commerce', this style of promotion therefore precisely represents the role Branagh's *Henry V* played within the New Wave, paving the way for 'myriad-minded Shakespeare'.^{19,20}

This is a concept which Richard Loncraine's *Richard III*, defined by its parodic elements, embraces with full force.²¹ Just as the *Henry V* trailer holds evidence of multiple subjective meanings, the implications of the *Richard III* clip are dependent on personal interpretation. Douglas Lanier suggests that 'nowhere does the question of popularization loom larger than in Shakespearean Parody on film'.²² For some, the interweaving of 'pop cultural genres and idioms' serves as commercially conscious entertainment.²³ For others, the genre's sometimes flippant treatment of source material will hold a stronger basis in criticism, acting as a self-commentary on the potential 'folly' of popularizing Shakespeare.²⁴ The trailer opens with a gas-masked Ian McKellen, whose rasping presentation draws strong parallels with popular culture's Darth Vader. He is seen kicking his way, action movie style, into a dark room; his entrance provides the shot with its primary source of light (see appendix D). This visual symbolism offers two simultaneous interpretations, representative of the views of parody outlined above. First, that the blending of popular culture with Shakespeare is the means by which a fresh light can be cast over his works. Secondly, that this method of popularizing Shakespeare is an unstoppable and barbaric force which pulls source plays out of their rightful context. Thus, from the outset, this trailer

¹⁵ Julie Saunders, 'What is adaptation?', *BU Global Shakespeare Seminar*, (November 2014)

<<http://globalshakespearesbu.blogspot.co.uk/2014/11/julie-sanders-what-is-adaptation.html>> [accessed 28 December 2015].

¹⁶ Hodgdon, 'Wooing and Winning', p. 245.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁸ Rothwell, *History of Shakespeare on Screen*, p. 219.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

²⁰ James N. Loehlin, "'Top of the World, Ma": Richard III and cinematic convention' in *Shakespeare the Movie: Popularizing the plays on film, TV and Video*, ed. by Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 77.

²¹ *Richard III*, dir. by Richard Loncraine (Mayfair Entertainment International, 1995) [on DVD].

²² Douglas Lanier, 'Will of the People: Recent Shakespeare Film Parody and the Politics of Popularization' in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. by Diana E. Henderson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), p. 177.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

warns that its full-length counterpart will be a more overtly controversial adaptation than Branagh's *Henry V*.

In fact, full confidence that this trailer even refers to an interpretation of Shakespeare is denied until approximately thirty-five seconds into the trailer. Ian McKellen's character is not named once he has unmasked himself; he is instead referred to as 'the greatest villain of all time' (RTT: 0.19-0.23). The use of Shakespearean verse is also delayed, emulating the full film's choice to go 'nearly ten minutes...before using a single word of Shakespeare'.²⁵ These decisions seem indicative of a hope that the viewer will form an initial response which precedes their awareness of the film's adaptation genre. Rather than over-advertising Shakespeare's involvement in the film, this trailer therefore makes deliberate moves to minimise that acknowledgement. This suggests that, as well the potential to extend audience, clear indication of Shakespeare's influence carries the risk of excluding those who feel alienated by his canonical works.

Clips with multiple meanings thus become crucial in maintaining the interest of both Shakespeare orientated and alternatively orientated audience members. For example, the presence of the infamous line 'Now is the winter of our discontent' (RTT: 0.36-0.40) uses a similar method as *Henry V* to appease those hoping for a faithful adaption. However, its delivery is shrouded in parodic elements which undercut the notion of Shakespearean artistry, instead illustrating a self-awareness of performance which serves to mock theatrical conventions. McKellen's speech is pre-empted by the voiceover's declaration, 'United Artist Pictures presents...' (RTT: 0.30-0.33); a dramatic pause and a close up of a microphone then build towards this recognisable quote acting as a pseudo title announcement. By approaching its Shakespearean source less reverently, the *Richard III* trailer takes steps away from the marketing style of *Henry V*. The trailer's title inserts can be compared to provide one representation of these varying levels of source play inclusion; the *Richard III* trailer rejects the possessive form of Shakespeare's name which appears alongside the title for *Henry V* (see appendixes E and F). These two trailers, particularly *Richard III*, seem conflicted in their acknowledgement of Shakespeare; the balance they create is an attempt to take commercial advantage of their Shakespearean roots while minimising the judgements and expectations that often accompany adaptations of his works.

For Julie Taymor's *Titus*, this risk is somewhat diminished by the status of the source play in question. Rather than being hounded by the presumption that a replication of Shakespeare's artistic supremacy is not attainable, Taymor's interpretation has instead been commended for 'play[ing] the role of making the disreputable *Titus Andronicus* reputable'.²⁶ Again the trailer's title insert (see appendix G) can be used as an illustration of this progression; going a step further than Loncraine, Taymor not only omits Shakespeare's name entirely from the trailer but also adapts the title of the play itself. The lesser known nature of this film's source play affects the formation of its trailer; the role of the voiceover is diminished to allow short shots of the film's action to give a more directly formed outline of the plot. The film's narrative progression is presented fairly accurately, creating a sense of linearity even through the quick succession of shots and perpetual fading in and out of very short extracts. Just as with the source play, the overriding impressions created by the trailer are of revenge and tragedy, particularly their tendency to create an inter-reliant and ever intensifying cycle. The trailer's form as a packed montage sequence supports this sense of escalation, the increasing speed of shot exchanges between 1.35 and 1.42 symbolising a loss of control which is also indicative of the film's presentation of madness. Crucially, the trailer showcases Taymor's filmic sensibilities; many of the excerpts included illustrate the New Wave technique of foregrounding pictorial impact, using words to 'reinforce or complicate a visual meaning that precedes them'.²⁷

This trailer's primary forms of source acknowledgement therefore seems to be thematic; inclusions of Shakespearean verse are devalued by their secondary placement to visual media. As these quotes are less culturally familiar than those appearing in the *Henry V* and *Richard III* trailers, it is also not possible to achieve an equivalent resonance with Shakespeare through their use. Despite the distinct lack of iconic verse available to edit in, the trailer does include hints of the most renowned scene of *Titus Andronicus*, in which Titus serves Tamara pies made from her own sons. The trailer exploits this potential recognisability, the pun 'for those who think revenge is sweet... taste this' (TT: 1.26-1.35) echoing that climactic scene. The trailer also closes with a clip which foreshadows those events, with Anthony Hopkins' 'most famous role, the psychopathic cannibal Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*', creating underlying associations in the mind of the viewer.²⁸ Despite these allusions, the trailer mirrors the full feature's filmic rather than Shakespearean priorities. The

²⁵ Loehlin, "'Top of the World, Ma'", p. 68.

²⁶ Rothwell, *History of Shakespeare*, p. 269.

²⁷ Loehlin, "'Top of the World, Ma'", p. 68.

²⁸ Lanier, 'Will of the People', p. 186.

prominence of cinematic effects, such as superimposition (see appendix H), flashes of light and image manipulation (see appendix I), far surpass the noticeability of Shakespeare's verse. The resulting under-acknowledgement of the source play is, however, somewhat fitting; it concurs with critics' views that the play perhaps owes more to Taymor than she owes to the play, helping to diminish its predominant scholarly dismissal as 'Shakespeare juvenilia'.²⁹

Although *Titus* exemplifies a tendency to be 'more concerned with visuals than verse', this does not alter the film's relationship with its source play to the extent that it can no longer be considered an adaptation.³⁰ Contrarily, the priorities of *10 Things I Hate About You* conflict so heavily with those of its Shakespearean counterpart that, according to Rothwell, it becomes a 'scandalous subordination of text to performance-centred values'.³¹ *She's the Man* has similarly been described as 'another gate-crasher at the let's-do-a-mediocre-update-of-Shakespeare party'.³² These productions appear to cross the border into appropriation; they involve such thorough reformulation that the relationship they bear to Shakespeare is no longer clear cut. As an appropriation should 'not clearly signal the source text', the *10 Things* and *She's the Man* trailers are forced to mark their relationship to Shakespeare only through 'floating signifiers' and echoes of the original plot.^{33,34} Similarities include the transference of character names and the recycling of source play settings, for example: Bianca, Kat for Katherina, Viola, Sebastian, Padua High and Illyria Academy. These 'throwaway' references do not appear to particularly enrich the trailers' meanings, accurately implying that Shakespeare's role within the full films is to run covertly as a point of curiosity, rather than a defining feature.³⁵ Thus the marketing of these 'Shakespeare teen-pics' creates a balance which allows them to profit from Shakespeare's eminence without needing to make concessions to the intentions of the films themselves.³⁶

Alongside names, character connections and relationships are also transferred across from *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*: 'her sister Kat' (10TT: 0.22-0.25), 'her twin brother Sebastian' (STMT: 0.22-0.25). This technique is particularly prominent in the *She's the Man* trailer; a sequence of shots between 1.13 and 1.43 are accompanied by an explanatory voice over which attempts to outline associations between the main characters. The trailer implies, however, that the source play's inter-character dynamics have been deliberately convoluted, the phrase 'and this is where it gets really complicated...' (STMT: 1.40-1.43) suggesting that the film goes beyond the parameters of its source to prompt plot progressions which have no basis in Shakespeare. A sense of divergence is also present in the *10 Things* trailer; the most secure plot correlation is the development of Kat, made evident by Patrick's line 'so you two are going to help me tame the wild beast' (10TT: 0.56-0.58). This approach highlights a conflict between buzzwords and deeper meaning; acknowledged plot deviancies do not equate to a lessened use of more superficial associations. Although the level of Shakespeare acknowledgement in each trailer is not particularly misleading, these films choose to 'reinterpret text through a...lens' which suspiciously promises 'impressive box office returns', calling into question the artistic integrity of such productions.³⁷

Gnomeo and Juliet's trailer exploits Shakespeare's authority more overtly. No restraint has been applied in advertising the source play, with allusions to Shakespeare being used throughout the promotion to disguise the full film's creation of a largely new plot. The pun on the title of Shakespeare's universally known *Romeo and Juliet* leaves no doubt as to the film's inspiration and, even from the outset, makes bolder connections to Shakespeare than either *10 things* or *She's the Man*. While all three appropriations dispense with the replication of verse, the *Gnomeo and Juliet* trailer does choose to include a source play quote: 'parting is such sweet sorrow' (GJT: 1.55-2.00). As the line is spoken out of context and by the wrong character, however, its gravity is lessened to comply with the comedic priorities of the film. A similar effect is created by the archaic pun 'get thee to a 3D theatre' (GJT: 1.48-1.53), the conflict of old and new mirroring Shakespeare's transferal into a world of modern animation and accompanying light-hearted expectations. Not only is Shakespeare acknowledged by name, 'experience Shakespeare's legendary tale... as you've never seen it before' (GJT: 1.53-2.03), but he also appears as a figure-head within the animation itself (see appendix J). Thus the trailer makes

²⁹ Rothwell, *History of Shakespeare*, p. 269.

³⁰ Ryan Gilbey, 'Bard Therapy', *The Independent*, (24 April 1996) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/bard-therapy-1306657.html>> [accessed 29 December 2015].

³¹ Rothwell, *History of Shakespeare*, p. 254.

³² Desson Thomson, 'Like, So Not the Bard', *The Washington Post*, (17 March 2006) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/16>> [accessed 12 December 2015].

³³ Saunders, 'What is adaptation?'.

³⁴ Hodgdon, 'Wooing and Winning', p. 259.

³⁵ Monique Pittman, 'Teen Shakespeare and the Trouble with Gender' in *Authorizing Shakespeare on Film and Television: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Adaptation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 98.

³⁶ Saunders, 'What is adaptation?'.

³⁷ Pittman, 'Teen Shakespeare', p. 97.

Gnomeo and Juliet's relationship to Shakespeare almost inescapable. It is this intensity that determines the trailer as unrepresentative; rather than the film justifying the level of Shakespeare acknowledgement, the trailer seems to prove itself illusory through an inverse reliance on Shakespeare to justify the film.

Two overarching patterns have become apparent from close analysis of the six clips singled out for study. First, that, regardless of the origins of the film, the voiceover used to narrate each trailer is unfailingly spoken in an American accent. Secondly that, no matter how prominently the Shakespearean source is advertised within a film's trailer, the role of modern actors and directors is always emphasised more strongly; all six clips contain a roll call section publicising the celebrities involved. These unswerving trends illustrate just how influential matters of marketing have become to modern screen Shakespeares, suggesting that the industry's growth will be subject to whatever direction commercialism demands. It is therefore unsurprising that the acknowledgement of Shakespeare in official trailers rests with the potential his inclusion has for heightening commercial gain, with the forms and depth of recognition shifting according to the needs of individual films.

Some pivotal themes within that subjectivity have become evident during the course of this study: a division between adaptation and appropriation and an awareness of audience expectations at the time of advertisement. Adaptations arising from the New Wave seem to have been less and less intent on advertising their debt to Shakespeare. Distancing the playwright allows the trailers to minimise highbrow assumptions and forestall criticism for lack of faithfulness. This trend suggests that, as epic film productions of Shakespeare have become a more established medium, the accompanying marketing campaigns have gained the freedom to take more risks in their attempts to appeal strongly to a mass audience. That pattern is inverted when applied to appropriations; the more established the genre has become, the more entitled distant interpretations have seemed to feel in claiming disproportionately strong links with Shakespeare. Relieved of the need to lessen highbrow assumptions or defend their faithfulness, appropriations are free to take full commercial advantage of Shakespeare's eminence. The opposing directions of these trends cause the acknowledgement of Shakespeare between adaptation and appropriation trailers to intersect. A problematic circumstance thus arises: trailer viewers may be more likely to discern Shakespeare's influence over *Gnomeo and Juliet* than they are his hand in *Titus*.

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Appendix A: A snapshot from *Henry V* (Trailer), dir. by Kenneth Branagh (Renaissance Films and British Broadcasting Company, 1989). <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tk5PrKi5wUg>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (0.08)



Appendix B: A snapshot from *Henry V* (Trailer), dir. by Kenneth Branagh (Renaissance Films and British Broadcasting Company, 1989) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tk5PrKi5wUg>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (1.19)



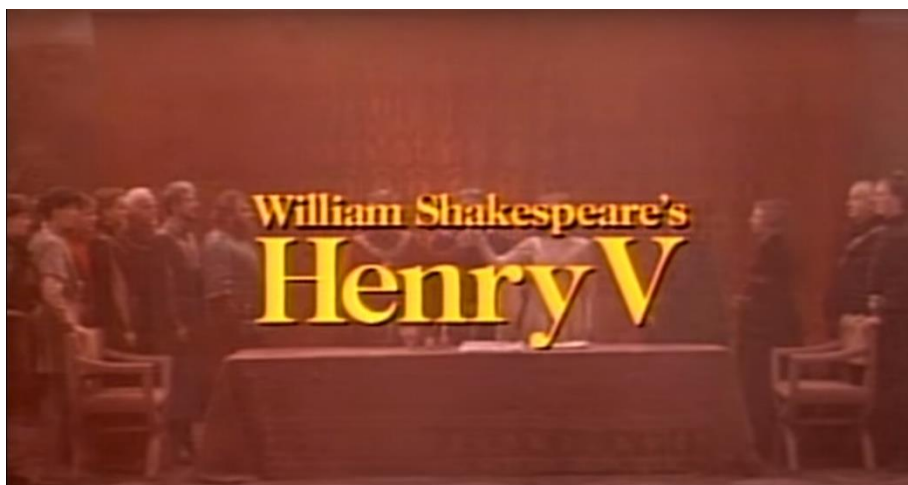
Appendix C: A snapshot from *Henry V* (Trailer), dir. by Kenneth Branagh (Renaissance Films and British Broadcasting Company, 1989) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tk5PrKi5wUg>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (0.30)



Appendix D: A snapshot from *Richard III* (Trailer), dir. by Richard Loncraine (Mayfair Entertainment International, 1995) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXc0-EME0C8>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (0.11)



Appendix E: A snapshot from *Henry V* (Trailer), dir. by Kenneth Branagh (Renaissance Films and British Broadcasting Company, 1989) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tk5PrKi5wUg>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (2.05)



Appendix F: A snapshot from *Richard III* (Trailer), dir. by Richard Loncraine (Mayfair Entertainment International, 1995) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXc0-EME0C8>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (2.44)



Appendix G: A snapshot from *Titus* (Trailer), dir. by Julie Taymor (Clear Blue Sky Productions, 1999) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvZRvKf78yY>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (2.14)



Appendix H: A snapshot from *Titus* (Trailer), dir. by Julie Taymor (Clear Blue Sky Productions, 1999) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvZRvKf78yY>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (2.12)



Appendix I: A snapshot from *Titus* (Trailer), dir. by Julie Taymor (Clear Blue Sky Productions, 1999) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvZRvKf78yY>> [accessed 18 December 2015] (1.08)



Appendix J: A snapshot from *Gnomeo and Juliet* (Trailer), dir. by Kelly Asbury (Touchstone Pictures, 2011) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377981/?ref_=nv_sr_2> [accessed 18 December 2015] (2.11)

