

DISNEY'S "WAR EFFORTS": *THE LION KING* AND  
*EDUCATION FOR DEATH*, OR SHAKESPEARE MADE EASY  
FOR YOUR APOCALYPTIC CONVENIENCE

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[...]circumstances are incalculable in the manner in which they come about, even if apocalyptically or politically foreseen, and the identity of the vital individuals and objects is hidden by their humble or frivolous role in an habitual set of circumstances.

Nadine Gordimer, *July's People*

**I. "Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman?"**

*"Peace, ho! Brutus speaks.' And speaks. And speaks. And except for a couple of fatal blows that he somewhat misplaces in the bodies of his "best lover[s]" (i.e. Caesar and himself), he hardly does anything but deliver speeches. Worse, he hardly ever listens—either to himself or to his "other-selves" Portia and Cassius (a.k.a. "your glass"). Or maybe he does a bit, when it's too late and the only course of action left is assisted self-slaughter, seasoned with a characteristically Shakespeare-ironic request to Caesar's equally narcissistic spirit: "now be still!" "With himself at war," the self-*

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*appointed hero of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar suffers from, and dies of, common symptoms of self-deception.*

*"Brutus' disease would remain self-contained and harmless were it not for his honorably gilt but politico-logical-faulty oratorical efforts at spreading it evenly among friends, flatterers, bondmen, disgruntled countrymen, and gullible audiences. However, to his disgrace (and to that of many an unlucky other) just as he seems to have talked the mass into sharing his grandiloquent sanitizing of political assassination as sacrifice, a shrewd counter-spin doctor by the name of Antony performs a self-serving damage-control operation, turns the Romans' attention away from Brutus' self-aggrandizing—and more importantly, circular—sophistry, and re-directs it to the visible outcome of his misconceived "lofty scene": a "savage spectacle" combining a "bleeding piece of earth" with promises to the angry populace of circus-like fun, mutiny and revenge, plus a mighty persuasive 75 dracmas apiece to boot. No need to ask who is the more politically able here."*

My notes above share little with Joseph Mankiewicz's film of *Julius Caesar* (1953). They are a partial translation of a very rough platform—"foul" papers, indeed—for a remotely possible stage production, and may actually be an oversimplification of the plight of "the noblest Roman of them all" as treated in that film, where, carefully close-up-ed from every angle, James Mason's Brutus looks permanently, deeply and sincerely concerned about the future of his beloved country.<sup>1</sup> Then again, why should a 1953 picture of a 1599 play that in 2006 retains an unshakable place in every American teenager's English textbook provide other than a black and white *Portrait of High-Minded Victim*? Never really wrong, committed to the "good of Rome"—although whatever he means by "Rome" is as unfathomable as his PIN—Mason's Brutus remains a "true Roman" to his last act of righteous self-offering: an undefiled idealist, clear of heart and clean of hands, caught in a shadowy net of villainy below his moral stature, yet spiritually above the resentful crew of butchers with the support of a "true and honorable wife" who, in this scenario, would never try anything too sharp on her thigh.

For all its good intentions, Mankiewicz's film can be considered "an antifascist production" (see Burt "Holocaust" 313 and notes) only by the grace of label. Signifying politics and history through a performing art demands dynamic tactics more than decorative skills. The 1953 *Julius Caesar* is insufficiently nuanced regarding social matters to address the issue of fascism. Instead, it offers a melodramatic take on the heroics of the individual. At its climax, Strato, sword in hand, faces the wind to the epic score of Miklos Rozsa, ready to defend the "poor remains" of his "sometime master" against what ravishing force may come—interestingly, from the right side of the frame. Should one note that the film never suggests that Strato will remain a "bondman," re-negotiated to Octavius, when his being one isn't even hinted at? Mankiewicz cut straight from close-reading to close-up, shunning a more *relational* approach to the material of *Julius Caesar*.<sup>2</sup> Then again, he probably didn't have in mind actualizing on film a more complex reading of the main part's political shortsightedness and shortcomings in combination with other characters' contributions to a play of *power*. Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* is *not* about Portia's putative husband, Cassius' brother-and-rider, Lucius' sleepless master, Caesar's echo, or Brutus' one-man dream-show of misapplied priesthood. It is about "Caesar's Angel" and Antony's (vilely defeated) market-rival. Who would *not* be "such a Roman"?

I wouldn't—although under the spell of Brutus' noble and inspiring (read sincerely motivational) speeches no one is expected to disagree. My dissension notwithstanding, I wouldn't even dream of asking the film to be anything but what it is, either. The 1953 *Julius Caesar* efficiently tells the story of a well-meaning man who wished everyone a world too good to imagine any other way than his, found himself wrong and wronged on every count, and "grievously answered" for it—howbeit that, unlike Brutus, most such people never sully their hands with "vile trash," nor die of self-deception. Fifty years later, in a world haunted by apocalyptic shadows that are less the outcome of "metaphysical aid" than of imperial arrogance and blindness, Mankiewicz's film remains self-explanatory about self-constructed

ethical, cultural, and manifestly desti-national ideals proving increasingly duplicitous. His version of *Julius Caesar* is about being a “true Roman” among barbarians who will not yield to what is best for them while vile “untrue” Romans exploit their needs and circumstances. More specifically, this 1953 film is a metaphor for the “American political anxieties about an internal enemy” (Taylor “National” 266) that Sam Crowl likewise neatly identifies (149). But the best thing about Mankiewicz’s film *now* is that, like *then*, it addresses its somewhat naive premises honestly—if simplistically—without trying to conceal its ideological flatness by means of artsy tricks or behind the mask of a fable of “timeless and universal values” purportedly meant to entertain children.

## II. “I will make thee think thy swan a crow”

Many citations and—at times remote—evidences of “inspiration” from Shakespeare in many stage-productions, films and filmic by-products have been extensively documented and discussed in recent years. Generally looking to surf the high tide of the bard’s “shrinking reputation” (cf. Taylor “Afterword”) some appropriations or re-organizations of Shakespeare could hardly deceive the good taste and judgement of critics and academics. Others do the exact opposite, however. At best, all of them usually have something to offer for cultural study, and at worst they are opportunistically conservative and corporate-friendly, following the path of deceit to the temples of ideological simplification that many movie-houses have become in these our “apocalyptic times”—usually so-called by the people who have worked very hard and successfully to show *Apocalypse Live* in a theatre near you or on your favorite channel.

The “Disneyfication” of Shakespeare should indeed be included among the things that ally him “with the interests of corporate media” (Lanier “Shakescorp” 166). For instance, the Disney executives and staff who chronicle the genesis of *The Lion King* (1994) in the “special features” of its 2004 DVD release pay due reverence to the bard and

acknowledge the input they (sought to?) find in his work. The authority of Shakespeare in *The Lion King*, fully exploited for prestige, is not the only one these executives invoke, however. Their list begins with "religious epic quality" and "Joseph and the Bible"—with talk of Mufasa, the title character's dead father, resembling "God speaking from a Burning Bush"—and eventually includes anything from Bambi to Bettleheim and Campbell. In short, its makers define the film as belonging in "the realm of archetypes," as an epic of self-redemption based on undying "human essentials." Still, their more famous and promptly acknowledged debt is, of course, to *Hamlet*, even if whatever *Hamlet* there is in *The Lion King* owes more to the *Reduced Shakespeare Company* than to *Cliffs Notes*. In fact, Scar wasn't originally designed to be a member of the family, but then, Disney people say, "you make him a brother, and all of a sudden you've got *Hamlet*!"

Also roughly inspired in Osamu Tezuka's series *Kimba the White Lion*, *The Lion King* revolves around a royal heir who, after his uncle murders his father, leaves his land, has a talk with his father's ghost, and returns to confront the usurper. That's about all the first-hand anecdotal resemblance between *The Lion King* and Shakespeare's play, and likely what made reviewers jump and shout "*Hamlet*!" like the Disney people—only backwards. But script materials at first glance so linked to an obvious source usually derive more from broad association than from choice or deliberate analogy. For instance, the Disney writers do not discuss the conversation between Simba and Mufasa's ghost as a parallel to Hamlet's talk with his dad's but as *their version* of the "to be or not" speech. That is, they view it as an instance of dramatic rather than strictly narrative borrowing, intended to help them solve a structural problem (namely, the inclusion of an epiphany in the plot) regardless of any thematic nuances stemming from the actual Shakespeare playtext. Disney writers, simple as they may be, do reason as writers.

All the additional bits of "shakes-piration" in the film—the Polonius-like verbosity of Zazu; an apparent combination of Ophelia, Katherine and Katherina in Nala; Pumbaa and Timon being a sort of split Falstaff to Simba's Hal-in-the-jungle; and the abundant traces of

Richard III and Macbeth in the villainous Scar—belong in the pile of snatch-and-paste dramatic materials that good poachers must always keep inside their drawers to be writing for the powerhouse of dreams. Such materials are in turn elevated to “Shakespearean” status by the “high-culture” legitimacy that the bard usually affords.<sup>3</sup> In other words, should one not take literally Disney’s staff’s declarations of dependence on Shakespeare (which often seem to derive from comments *post-facto*), all of the above would simply belong in a circular pattern where bits of dramatic plots, structures, and characters surely but not exclusively informing a Shakespeare text partake in the making of a serial product, are later recognized as *found* in Shakespeare as a matter of cultural course, and eventually re-inscribed as “Shakespearean,” mostly to provide simple yet effective industrial products with proven grounds for their legitimization and promotion as “high-minded and universal.” *The Lion King* shares a profile with all Disney adaptations before and since: conventional high-quality entertainment with ideologically conservative cleanliness and a whiff—never more than a whiff—of “Big Literature.”

To the DisneyMachine, then, “Shakespeare” means leftovers of bardolatry freely circulating in ready-to-use packages. But how far should Shakespeare artists and scholars participate? As far as spotting “shakesploitation,” Richard Finkelstein makes a good case. He examines Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *The Lion King*, arguing that both use Shakespeare to authorize “essentialist, puritan models of development” (183). His analysis of *The Little Mermaid* as *The Tempest*-in-counter-drag, however, sounds as if he were not trying to assess how much Shakespeare may have been sucked into the film, but rather how much Shakespeare can be pushed into a critique of it (like playing “Six degrees of William Shakespeare”), although his take on the film’s agenda would work well without that. On the other hand, his reading of *The Lion King* is undermined by a strange lapse of selectivity. After showing how the film relates to the *Henriad*, Finkelstein examines the carefree Timon not only as Simba’s “Falstaff” (and as a dubious derivative of *Timon of Athens*, given his “misanthropy;” cf.

187) but also as a character "signifying gayness" (188). He supports this with the fact that Nathan Lane, Timon's voice, is well known for playing campy gay roles. Without presently questioning the argument and the mediation it requires, and considering that Timon at times points that way in a conventionally homophobic manner, defining the role as "signifying gayness" on such grounds looks disproportionate and problematic where other categories might have served a similar and perhaps richer point.

Finkelstein notoriously leaves Pumbaa, Timon's inseparable partner in "Falstaff-ness," out of his *Henriad* equation—a fat, nothing campy warthog, whose own "misanthropy" (rather, "outcast state") derives from his being unbearably flatulent. Pumbaa's objective existence at the very least begs the question whether the category "homosocial" or some such couldn't have offered room for an ampler and at once sharper take on the presumably Shakespearean input to the Simba-Timon-Pumbaa triangle, with hints at repressing gayness included. Leaving the hog out of the picture suggests that this critic has adjusted the film to his point instead of making a point on the film. As suggested earlier, this methodological strain becomes more conspicuous when Finkelstein discusses *The Little Mermaid*. His otherwise persuasive illustrations of how Disney co-opts commonplaces of "high-culture" are weakened by the overspotting of issues presumably relating to Shakespeare where criticism would anyhow apply without resorting to "the Bard" for a counter-legitimization of items that often appear in Disney's conservatively biased agendas. Shakespeare scholarship would be better employed, perhaps, to *detach* the still solid and valuable playwright from facile appropriation as a marketing and merchandizing ploy. Disney's reactionary approaches to almost every subject nearly always owe more to Disney's own conservative tradition than to any external source, no matter how heavily manipulated.

Shakespearean bits (turns of phrase, allusions, rough quotations) directly informing the script of *The Lion King* can of course be pointed out, but most pertain to *Richard III* rather than to *Hamlet*. *The Lion King* resorts to *Hamlet*, then, overtly as a "plugging" tool, and covertly as a

highly manipulated “intertext” inasmuch as it epitomizes literature to be perceived as “highly respectable” and “truth-bearing.” As Arthur Little has recently reminded us, “*The Lion King* is very much a popular (a mass) treatise on the social and political philosophy of place—of existence—of self, and *Hamlet* emerges as the text which the proper Disney viewer both needs to remember and reinvent” (10-11). The question here is just what this film wants us to “remember and reinvent” as if it were truly connected with *Hamlet*—and thereby ultimately with Shakespeare. Little provides a good deal of the answer:

*The Lion King* is an indulgence in a nostalgic imperialism and colonialism right here at home. If the American [...] white heterosexual self has become so lost, so displaced—so forgotten—because his natural world has become so mired in multiculturalism, [...] then what Disney proposes to do is remember the invention of that deeply *rooted* cultural self [...] not the way multiculturalists are demanding [that] U.S. citizens re-remember, [...] but by simply holding a mirror up to [it]. (12)

There is plenty of Disney’s “home” prejudice in *The Lion King*, indeed. Its infamous reinforcement of racial and social stereotypes through formulaic voices and visuals is but an obvious instance. The notorious casting of Whoopi Goldberg as one of the hyenas and her use of “ghetto-speak” in contrast to the supposedly “racially unmarked” (Burt “Slamin’” 222) voice of James Earl Jones’ Mufasa was and still can be rightly called an instance of worn-out condescension and commonplaceness faintly concealed as “sheer fun” and “color-blind” casting—not to mention that the other speaking hyena-part was given to the Chicano Cheech Marín, who also played it with an “uneducated” ethnic inflection, in his case Mexican.<sup>4</sup> On the opposite side, the British-accented and Shakespeare-allusive Scar of *The Lion King* (Jeremy Irons) is consistent with Harriet Hawkins’s view that in popular entertainment interest in intellectual matters makes characters look



"as either a sissy (by implication homosexual), an ineffectual intellectual (a wishy-washy liberal), ... or a sinister, un-American villain" (13) and confirms what Douglas Lanier has recently noted: "The act of citing Shakespeare [has been] a conventional mark of the Other, the sign of a character's deviation from the bourgeois norm" (*Shakespeare* 66). Whether African, Mexican or British—and hence dangerously "educated"—these characters are paradigms of everything "un-Disney." What is "pro-Disney," then?

In *The Lion King* positive power is signified as raw, masculine strength. The first time the hyenas see Scar they are relieved that he isn't "somebody important, like Mufasa," whose name alone makes these "natural" idiots shudder—"now, that's power!" Conversely, to them Scar is an "old pal" who often brings them food—a big license regarding "the circle of (real) life" that confirms not only their abjection but also their awareness that lions, even like Scar, are to be regarded as "naturally" supreme. Irons' voice and inflections stand in sharp contrast to Jones' "heroic" rendering of Mufasa: the gaunt, sometime RSC player delivers a depraved, decadent Old World counterpart to the New World's robust character, who is just as deeply voiced but "noble" and physically imposing—as is his likewise muscular but distinctly white-and thin-voiced heir Simba (Matthew Broderick). This contrast is sufficiently meaningful to invite construction as a complex reversal of the multi-layered correlation between the Old Vic veteran James Mason as "clean" Brutus and the American Method-actor Marlon Brando as "dirty" Antony in Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar*. If we add to these the also well-noted simplistic equation of the Lion's rule in this Disney-Wonder-Land of an Africa-without-Africans to the rule of Natural Order in "The Circle of Life,"<sup>5</sup> as well as some fitting visuals—e.g., the black mane of the Usurper in contrast with the golden ones of the rightful King and Cub; or Scar's queer gestures and turns of phrase equally contrasting with the "masculine" depictions of Simba and Mufasa—a recognizably "white-heterosexual"-biased picture will be in need of nothing but the right décor.

"The readiness is all," however, for all these in-built ideological trappings can also serve more specific, timely ends. In view of the release of *The Lion King* on DVD ten years after its filmic premiere, not only the notorious features above demand to be stressed but, perhaps more importantly, nor should they or others of their kind be considered only in "home" terms when the notion that Apocalypse is approaching has been so efficiently spread not only as a source of mythical fear within the USA but also as a close threat or even a real experience anywhere American conflicts are re-located outside the borders of the USA. The release of *The Lion King* on DVD has taken place in our present scenario of military and "cultural" wars; furthermore, it has been just as interestingly followed by a DVD collection of significant Disney "War Effort" films—among them the infamous short feature *Education for Death* (1943). Comparing that short with the sequence for the key musical number "Be Prepared" in *The Lion King*—where in brilliantly apocalyptic fashion wicked Scar persuades the ill-bred hyenas to help him murder kingly Mufasa—may provide timely reminders of what Disney movies can often signify within and without their home limits. What do the warring brothers and despicable carrion-eaters may be perceived to represent in a tale of animals reportedly seeking to convey "timeless human essentials" through the worldwide power of distribution afforded by BuenaVista Inc?

### III. "On the silver screen he melts my foolish heart with every single scene"

*Education for Death* is an unusually grim animated short. According to legend, at some point in time it was even "banned" at Disney's studios, never again to be released. In it, Hans, a German boy, learns the hard way to be a "good" Nazi. At starting, didactic, documentary-style sequences show Nazism to be the opposite of Democracy. One is a parody of *Sleeping Beauty*—a "distortion of the tale," according to Art Smith's voice (a popular announcer in the 1940s who might as well have been referring to Disney's own version of that

story). The parody is underscored by an equally mocking arrangement of Wagner's ubiquitous "Ride of the Valkyries." Germany, the title princess, is an elephantine, beer-drinking opera singer; Democracy, a wicked witch straight from *Snow-White*; and the gallant prince to the rescue Hitler himself. Later, an imposing long shadow threatens to take Hans away from home if his health doesn't improve or his mother continues to pamper him. Finally, we see the boy at school, learning the hard way that the fox *must* eat the weak, cowardly, and hateful rabbit: "Germany will rule the world; all will be her slaves." The three sequences of *Education for Death* make points that are significantly made also in *The Lion King*, the more salient being a stress on the "natural" supremacy of the strong—a point expressly denounced as part of Nazi ideology in *Educaton for Death* but not exactly characterized as fascist in the latter film.

Yet the most relevant and powerful connections between *Education for Death* and the song "Be Prepared" from *The Lion King* belong in the closing sequence of the short. After his lesson, Hans begins a long and relentless march towards his "Aryan" destiny as one of Hitler's faithful. Through effectively paced dissolves, he seamlessly grows into a young Nazi, then a soldier in an apparently endless company of equally patriotic youngsters, and finally a tomb in a massive graveyard. Prior to this, however, we see a number of similarly disturbing images flash in tight keeping with the music against an ominous fire-red background: fanatical Nazis bearing torches; a pile of books ready to be burnt and burning (Shakespeare uninculcated); a Bible becoming a volume of *Mein Kampf*; a crucifix turning into a sword decorated with a swastika; the smashing of a stained-glass church window—all these explode before our eyes leading to an upsurge of martial music that continues to accompany Germany's best as they goose-step their way to the grave while the narrator's voice delivers the moral of the story: Hans and all the youth of Germany will die for the wrong cause.

Fittingly entitled after the Boy Scouts' motto, *The Lion King's* musical number "Be Prepared" resembles *Education for Death* mostly

through stylistic allusiveness. The design of the earlier picture expressly combines traditional Disney techniques with some of Leni Riefenstahl's characteristic framings, angles, high contrasts, deep fields, uses of architecture, symmetries, and so forth. "Be Prepared," in turn, seems to recycle takes of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1934), specially while combining goose-stepping troops and monumental sceneries. In both films, the marching also seems to bear traces of Oskar Fischinger's designs for the 1934 *Muratti* ads, intimating that his stint with Disney, howbeit brief, had lasting effects.<sup>6</sup> The background for the closing sequence of *Education for Death* is pervasively red from torches and other sources of fire, while "Be Prepared" displays suggestions of flames and lava about to break loose from under the ground of the already underground cave—both sequences seem to relish in hellish atmosphere. Timing is very similar: e.g. the break into the march in either case occurs on conspicuous musical cues that propel action in unflinching upscale towards climax. Although many details in common could be merely coincidental, one suggests that the correlation may not be entirely unwitting. In *Education for Death*, as Hans marches and becomes a soldier, a full side shot of his body zooms into a profile close-up as the announcer chronicles his transformation: he'll see, hear and do but what the party tells him. With each phrase a new element is added to Hans' head and headgear: eye-blinders, a muzzle, and a spiked collar and chain. He is visually transformed into an animal—a dog, to be precise. The resemblance is such that the now canine profile of Hans may legitimately be argued to have played a major part in the final design of the hyenas' faces for *The Lion King*.

The transfer of this 1943 image unto its 1994 twin, and then to a 2004 digital re-cycling on DVD, doesn't seem to want present significance. Literally on top of locating Scar and his *Wehrmacht* of hyenas in a Nazi scenario, at its end, instead of a swastika or another similarly fascist sign, "Be Prepared" features a conspicuous crescent moon, the unmistakable symbol of Islam, presiding over the fiery rise of Scar(e) to the top of his rocky throne of blood and iniquity. The slow but certain, and terrifying, elevation of Scar to the top of a night-clad

mountain with the half moon on top is effected as a transformation akin to those found in *Education for Death* when a crucifix becomes a sword decorated with a swastika, or a Bible turns into a copy of *Mein Kampf*. The disturbing and blatantly foul difference is that now the sign chosen to preside over images meant to bring about fear and repudiation is neither openly defined nor outspokenly identified by a voiceover in an avowedly propagandistic short as overtly inimical to a specific choice of lifestyle, but merely "casually" or "conventionally" displayed as part of a musical number in a film "apt for all ages" in association with the murderous plans of a "naturally evil," apocalypse-bringing character and its followers—a "subtle" move likely to have significant impact among unaware audiences.

Already "scary" ten years back, in 2004 this image re-fashions the evil and purportedly Shakespearean traitor Scar as relating directly to one of the sacred icons of a very identifiable and specific culture, and it pointedly effects an unfair, covert, and blanketing mis-definition of Islam as *Clear and Present Danger*, in unsurprising contradiction to Disney's outspoken aim of making a "timeless and universal" epic. Worse still, Scar may have been originally, and perhaps unwittingly, designed with images of the Ayatolla Khomeini in mind. The gaunt figure shot from an upward angle, often overlooking a cliff; the lean and stern face with graying or white beard surrounded by black turban and robe all around, whether in photographic or cartoon depictions; the yellowish evil eyes; the signs of death often surrounding him; even direct equations of the Iranian villain with Hitler, or hilarious depictions of him as a half-moon-shaped vampire—all these may be found among the thousand images of the Evil Ayatolla that pervaded the American imagination from the late 1970s through the administrations of Reagan and Bush<sup>1</sup>. And they may have re-emerged here to inspire the design of Scar. I would call a reminder that "Be Prepared" is more deplorably linked to Islam than to Shakespeare "timely" not only because both the 1994 theatrical release and the 2004 DVD of *The Lion King* coincide with times when the Bushes of the (south)West waged Holy War against "malignant and turban'd" people, but also because some

Shakespeareans—e.g. Burt (*Shakespeare*) and Lehmann—have rightly reflected that the reading of Shakespeare on film cannot be the same after 9/11—*nor*, if I may add, after *its causes and consequences*.

Similarly sharp overtones of “global” reach concerning social order may also be located in *The Lion King*’s “Be Prepared”. Apart from their representation as thick-headed African, Chicano, and/or Islamic minorities, the hyenas are marked as hunger-driven and good for nothing but to destroy each other. They are “danglin’ at the bottom of the food-chain [of being?],” capable of eating their own legs, little more than *lumpen* chow for the ambitions of the much smarter and refined Scar. This becomes more emphatic in *The Broadway Lion King* version of “Be Prepared”, which Scar introduces thus:

I never thought hyenas essential,  
they’re crude and unspeakably plain.  
But maybe they’ve a glimmer of potential,  
if allied to my vision and brain.

These new lyrics not only (counter)supplement Disney fantasies about the “Circle of Life” with blunt truths of well-known colonial strategies, but are also thoroughly consistent with other additional lyrics and music by Tim Rice and Elton John for the Broadway version. Therein, the hyenas are “fleshed out” by means of two new musical numbers that epitomize what Disney must perceive as the worst signs of irredeemable vileness. The first, “Chow Down,” is a (not really) “heavy metal” piece—the only one of its kind in the musical and the only one expressly written for *The Lumpenband* of hyenas—which inextricably links their bottomless hunger and abjectness to a likewise despicable enjoyment of that 2/4 electric guitar, bass and drum noise otherwise known as “rock music.” The second, “The Madness of King Scar”—a solid musical number highly allusive to Shakespeare and related materials—perfects their ignominy as they beg for “a fix of flesh” to ease their “needs.” Thus, as if to supplement their original (vocalized) anti-social

marginality, Scar's Broadway warriors of the crescent moon are tellingly scripted as rock-consuming junkies.

And just as one thinks the catalogue cannot go on, Sir Elton's original score for "Be Prepared" complicates prejudice further by expropriating specifically Latin-American rhythms to adorn Sir Tim's flawlessly clever lyrics for carnivalesque effects. In either its filmic or its Broadway version, *The Lion King's* "Be prepared" ends to the beat of a "very exotic"—typically reductive—mix of your basic "rumba" with bits of "son" and perhaps even "candomblé" so as to underline Scar's closing statements:

So prepare for the coup of a century,  
be prepared for the murkiest scam.  
Meticulous planning,  
tenacity spanning  
decades of denial,  
is simply why I'll  
be King undisputed,  
respected, saluted,  
and seen for the wonder I am.  
Yes, my teeth and ambitions are bared.  
Be prepared!

Thus, the villain and his maladjusted "un-American" horde—now, all things considered, made of hungry Nazi-Islamic rocker junkies with a zest for "salsa"—are finally shown to rejoice in the thought of a future "vida loca" of crescent moons against dark blue skies, red fire, black destruction, and death. Clearly, the final warning in the song is not so much directed to the hyenas as to all alert Scouts beholding the scene, regardless of their age but not of their ideological biases. Who could ask for anything more "timeless and universal"? Whether for the stage or the screen, musical numbers are designed to obtain definitive characterological and thematic effects. *The Lion King's* "Be Prepared" can be categorically highlighted for illustration.

Despite the potential dismissal of these things as just another sampler of useless complaints, to date I'm not aware that such casting, vocal, visual, and musical practices have effectively ceased to contribute to the dissemination of prejudicial stereotypes and commonplaces through theatre or film, especially among children.<sup>7</sup> Of particular significance to studies of Shakespeare appropriation, however, is the fact that the facile correlation of *The Lion King* with *Hamlet* has been firmly established and is often cited and positively regarded. These practices of Shakespeare appropriation, then, need to be specifically ear-marked as at best oversimplifying Shakespeare and, at worst, indeed inscribing his work in the list of texts "appropriate" for the *(re)Education of a Lion King for Death*—or something to that effect. The actually slight but effectively marketed and even glorified connection between *Hamlet* and *The Lion King* makes Shakespeare unfairly complicit with the patronizing, conservative, and prejudice-promoting fictions of Disney. If such fictions prove extremely efficient in their own terms and in all spheres it is because the DisneyMachine knows well how and when to mock certain things that *others* may think respectable—or at least *theirs* to mock. But the DisneyMachine can be made mock of as well. The recent DVD releases of these "war efforts", whether originally dated 1994 or 1943, may be a good place to start.

## Notes

1. I should also be faulted for echoing, twenty-plus years late, a couple of Catherine Belsey's better made points (1998, originally 1983).
2. Who cares, for instance, that Shakespeare's interest in master-servant relations, and the actions and exchanges that underlie them, were largely disregarded by Mankiewicz? Or that he kept blood to a minimum and entirely cut the last scene of act 3—a comedy of anonymous errors ending in delightful carnage—although he had carefully scripted it and even shot it, "including Antony's indifference as a 'strong curtain'" to close it? (Jorgens 103) Does it matter that nearly every role is flattened out by the reduction of almost all *contradictions* to mere *oppositions*? Why should one point out that while Mason's Brutus seems loving enough, if



usually patronizing, the play suggests that Brutus' "loved ones" are constructs of his "true mind" rather than the actual characters who surround and emphatically *do love him*?

3. Disney's *The Jungle Book* (1967), requiring little but its direct source for "high-culture legitimization," looks closer to the *Henriad*—in its characteristically simple use of a Mowgli/Hal-Baloo/Falstaff "boys-only" relationship ending in separation via a Katherine figure—than Kipling could be said to have expressly drawn from Shakespeare what is arguably a conventionally "human" situation often used in many stories. In this case, that is, the Disney writers seem to have "shakespearized" Kipling, perhaps as a "natural" result of their education, while seeking solutions to adapt the novel to the standards of the corporation, thereby simplifying *both* authors. Still, this apparent recourse to "Shakespeare" hasn't been particularly cited to merchandize *The Jungle Book* or its recently released sequel. Evidently, *Hamlet* is, not mistakenly, taken to ring a stronger note of "greatness" with the unaware consumer than a simple Harry or Jack ever could.
4. Can Jones' voice—or any other—ever be "unmarked"? It is *black*, and *mainstream prestigious* on top, though with a twist. Not only is he one of the foremost African-American actors, with a history of Shakespeare roles, but one of the most memorable *villain* voices ever: Darth Vader's.
5. The special features on *The Lion King* DVD actually close on a hilarious note of exaltation to the heaven where (employed)Self and Benign Corporation become One, as an Executive leaves us with the mystical thought that "The Circle of Life" is allegorized in "The Circle of [Teamwork]" that begat *The Lion King*.
6. Fischinger was censured by the nazis in 1935 as a "degenerate." His most famous contribution to Disney is found, of course, in the disturbing "Sorcerer's Apprentice" sequence in *Fantasia*.
7. Disney's *The Jungle Book*, to cite yet another good example, is almost incredibly more prejudiced than Kipling's book in its "funny" rendition of King Louie and his Band of Apes by means of black speech and jazz. A couple of curious notes along the same lines: in the Spanish dubbing of the film for Mexico—where the voice of Baloo was memorably played by the outstanding comedian "Tin-Tan" way above its source—Louie's voice went to an impersonator well-known for his impression of Louis Armstrong, which he put to use with an equally prejudiced "black Cuban" ring; and in an album re-covering the otherwise enjoyable, Oscar-winning, *Jungle Book* music, featuring big time pop artists like Sting, the song in question, "I wanna be [human] like you," was performed by the L.A. Chicano band *Los Lobos*.

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