SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE: ROMEO AND JULIET

PURPOSE: One of the two major objectives of this course is to analyze Shakespeare’s plays as literary texts AND as scripts meant to be performed. Each private reading of a play is an interpretation (an understanding of the play); likewise, each performance of a play is an interpretation that is orchestrated by the director.

TASK: Compare and contrast at least three different productions of Romeo and Juliet in order to explain the different interpretations of the play that each director had. Since it would be difficult to do an analysis of the entire play, you are to choose one significant scene and compare and contrast your understanding of the dramatic action and meaning of that scene that emerges from your own reading of the text, with your growing understanding of its possibilities in Franco Zeffirelli’s 1968 film adaptation, Baz Luhrman’s 1996 modern adaptation, and the live performance we will see staged in Kansas City on July 6, 2007.

PREPARATION:
1. Read the play and construct a MAP of Romeo and Juliet. V. What are the main themes that emerge for you after your private reading?
2. View both productions. We will see Zeffirelli in class on July 3 and Luhrman in class on July 5. The live performance will be in Southmoreland Park, Kansas City on Friday evening, July 6.
   - Compare the two film adaptations to each other and to your own sense of the play while reading it.
   - You can do several briefer comparison/contrasts, but I recommend that you isolate one significant scene for a more detailed comparison/contrast.
3. Some ideas to get you thinking about the productions:
   - Who is cast in the principal roles? HOW do they play their parts? (Remember to be grateful for differences between the two productions because we can then see new possibilities).
   - Think of the complications in the plot and the forward movement of the action. Was reading the play privately or seeing the film more successful at creating a sustaining illusion for you?
   - How does the setting contribute to the overall effect? How did you imagine the scene unfolding as your read? What was done in the film adaptations that could not be done on stage? BUT what effects were possible on stage that made the experience vibrant or valuable for you?
   - What differences exist in costuming, the use of props or the music in both productions? And then in the live performance? What sounds added to or distracted from the live performance?
4. Characterize the difference in your understanding of the play that emerges. This will be your MAIN IDEA. It is important that you give your reader a sense of the whole, of what you are doing, of what you have discovered. Remember that detailed comparisons without some main point will be confusing to follow. Help us to immediately understand the cumulative effect of all those differences that you have observed.
5. If you prefer one production over the other, then you might indicate that in your opening paragraph and argue your point all through the paper. On the other hand, if both productions have merit, you could speak to their worthwhile but different interpretations.
6. Make sure that in your opening paragraph you correctly identify the two productions you are comparing. You can use the director’s name for both productions: Zeffirelli, Luhrman, and the director for the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival).

DUE DATE: Monday, July 9 at the beginning of class.
1. Suggested length: 3-4 pages. Give yourself enough space to get down to clear but specific writing.
2. Single-space within paragraphs; double-space between paragraphs
3. No cover sheet or folders are necessary, but do provide a title that gets at the heart of your insight.
4. Remember to cite specific acts, scenes and lines in this fashion: (I.iii.241)
   a. Acts are put in Roman numerals capitalized (I,II,III, IV, V)
   b. Scenes are put in small roman numerals (i, ii, iii, iv, v) and
   c. Line numbers are put in Arabic form: 32, 86-87, 110-15 (All these references need to be to our Riverside ed.)
5. Staple all sheets once in the upper left-hand corner.
6. Put page numbers in the bottom right-hand corner.
7. Provide a complete bibliographic reference to both productions, to our Riverside Anthology in your Works Cited AND to any articles you read and use (if you choose to do this). We use the MLA style. If you don’t know how to do this, check the Purdue Online Writing Site.
8. Identify yourself on the first page in the following manner:

First Name Second Name
ENG 341: Shakespeare
July 9, 2007