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Introduction

Shakespeare has always had an audience. Up to the beginning of the twentieth century, that audience, whether elite or popular, experienced Shakespeare exclusively in a theatrical space, and was relatively small. The invention of moving pictures changed all that. Not so noticeably in the silent era or in the 1930s, it has to be admitted, since it is only with the success of Laurence Olivier's wartime production of *Henry V* (1944) that one can talk of a film adaptation having for the first time found favour with a mass moviegoing audience. Olivier's achievement and popular success also went beyond issues of patriotism and propaganda, with at least two of the finest adapters of the Shakespeare play to the big screen being inspired by Olivier's filmic example to produce Shakespeare movies of their own: Franco Zeffirelli and Ian McKellen. Enthused by Olivier's *Henry V*, Zeffirelli went on to take Shakespeare to the mainstream movie audiences of the 1960s with his Burton/Taylor vehicle *The Taming of the Shrew* (1966) before bringing a large youth audience to the hugely popular *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), a success partly repeated with his Mel Gibson/Glenn Close *Hamlet* (1990). For McKellen it was a viewing of Olivier's *Richard III* (1955) at the Bolton Odeon which inspired: 'A spell was cast as I watched the shadows of great actors and had confirmed my juvenile sense that Shakespeare was for everybody' (1995, 37). The experience of feeling that Shakespeare 'is for everybody' also drove Kenneth Branagh to produce a *Henry V* to rival in popularity Olivier's 1944 production, a move that reinvigorated the Shakespeare film adaptation genre in 1989. Although in terms of output it is the prolific and committed Branagh who still dominates the continuing post-1989 era of Shakespeare movies, I would like to focus here a little on Ian McKellen and Richard Loncraine's fine adaptation of *Richard III* (1995).

I do this not because their *Richard III* broke any box office records – far from it – but because its realisation reveals an imaginative understanding at work of what matters in the tricky business of translating Shakespeare to the big screen for a modern audience. I deliberately use the word 'translating' because, as Jack Jorgens has observed, 'in a sense *all* Shakespeare films are translations', creative attempts 'to

recast and reimage a work conceived in a different language and for a different culture' (1991, 14). Well aware that 'Translation is an inexact art, carrying responsibilities to respect the author's ends, even as you wilfully tamper with the means,' McKellen's strategy of extracting a screenplay from Shakespeare's *Richard III* play text was governed by the decision 'to shorten it but without losing any of the detailed development of plot or character'. As a great Shakespearean actor also familiar with the language of cinema, McKellen offers a useful insight into how Shakespeare's own changing language use, developing as it does in sophistication over time, can have implications for the way big screen adaptations are to be approached:

> Some reduction of the play's verbal impact was inevitable but much less damaging than in, say, *Macbeth*, where every poetical line is interdependent on the rest. The verse and language of *Richard III*, a much earlier play, are less dense than in the great tragedies. Although the young Shakespeare was writing almost entirely in verse, he frequently captured a conversational tone … It is a tone that is ideal for cinema (1995, 17).

Based on a theatrical production which had already 'updated' the play by relocating it to a 1930s Britain where a dictatorship like Richard's might plausibly have assumed power, *Richard III* was shaped and directed by Richard Loncraine to create a convincingly authentic 'period look'. Far from being an end in itself however, the film is 'just borrowing the period' (as McKellen pointedly says): 'We weren't pretending that Shakespeare had anticipated modern tyranny, but just saying that he would have understood it' (1998, 47). This approach to reimaging and translating has the film using its casting, costumes, locations and incidents such that throughout (in Peter Holland's words) 'authenticity is subordinate to argument'. One good example (which must suffice) of how the movie avoids what Holland calls the 'cheap paraphernalia of filmic naturalism' (Holland, 1996, 19) is by having the characters who smoke (everyone smoked in 1930s Britain) do so in ways that indicate and enhance character: Richard's own chain-smoking suggests the anxieties of the restless, haggard killer, ever on the watch; Buckingham's fat cigars stress the greasy grandee on the make; the Duchess of York and Queen Elizabeth convey upper-class female elegance by using cigarette holders; military subordinates like Ratcliffe and Tyrell smoke furtively while waiting upon or serving Richard, their master. Many more features of this film dramatisation of *Richard III* are considered in Part III and in the essay on it in Part IV.

The principal aim of this book is to help students of Shakespeare on film develop a critical approach to their studies by offering exploration, discussion and analysis of how film adaptations of the plays communicate as *film* texts, rather than as plays on the page or for the stage. These explorations are begun in Part I with a discussion of the different ways in which stage and film convey the performance of Shakespeare's plays to their audiences. The purpose of giving a history of Shakespeare on film in Part II is partly to demonstrate how the products of this genre have been conditioned by interlinked but shifting developments over time in film technology, directing, acting and shooting styles, and so on, and also by the changes in social, cultural and political domains of experience. The history also allows me to give a more extended account of some of the more significant films I could not find space to write essays on in Part IV. Part III explores the various modes, styles and genres which have been used to communicate Shakespeare on film to its audiences. Part IV offers a series of 'exemplary' essays on various film adaptations of Shakespeare comedies, histories and tragedies that build on the discussions of the first three parts. To conclude, Part V examines the way Shakespeare plays have been adapted for TV audiences, discussing various examples. Since all five parts are concerned to draw attention to the distinctive ways in which film's visual language and grammar are deployed to communicate meanings and effects to a Shakespeare on film audience, I have throughout emboldened many of the technical terms used in making or discussing filmed drama, and these are explained in the Glossary at the end of the book.

I should perhaps say something about my assumptions in writing and presenting what follows. I have not deemed it part of my task to introduce readers to Shakespeare's plays, but assume there will already be some familiarity with them. Quotations from or allusions to Shakespeare's play texts refer to *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997), based on the Oxford edition. With the special exceptions of silent films and Kurosawa's *Kumonosu-Jô* (his version of *Macbeth*), I have throughout confined my discussions to filmed adaptations of Shakespeare's plays that use the dialogue of the Shakespearean text. There are many other adaptations I should like to have discussed, such as Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* and Celestino Coronado's *Hamlet* (both 1979) or Jean-Luc Godard's *King Lear* (1987) – to mention only three. But space forbids me from including discussion on these as well as other productions, such as Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991) or Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* (1996). Beyond these, there are also

the many films for which Shakespeare's plays have provided plots, characters and ideas, such as Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), Fred Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* (1956, drawing on *The Tempest*) or Jocelyn Moorehouse's *A Thousand Acres* (1997 – borrowing from *King Lear*). These 'Shakespearean cinematic offshoots' have been intelligently and entertainingly discussed by Tony Howard (Jackson ed., 2000). I also need to point out that all of the Part IV essays are about films which at the time of writing are available on DVD or video; it would seem futile to write at length about film texts which cannot easily be obtained or seen.

Finally, it may be appropriate to say a word about what might be called the critical self-positioning of the various discussions that follow. Like other areas of critical study in literature and drama over the last 25 years, Shakespeare film studies as a discipline has become a contested domain, a site for debate, some of it quite wide-ranging and polemical. I am acutely aware that any performative representation or discussion of Shakespeare's drama may trigger questions concerning race, class and gender. But the book that follows is practical rather than polemical, the scope for debating the ideological contexts of Shakespeare on film being limited. The reader seeking a broader grasp of the range and reach of the discipline as a whole is therefore encouraged to look at some of the publications listed in the 'Suggested further reading'. I could not recommend a better place to start for accessible and lively essays on race and gender (and much else besides) than in the two *Shakespeare the Movie* collections edited by Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt.

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London, 2006
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