

Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance
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Additional Dialogue by...¹ Versions of Shakespeare in the World's Multiplexes

Abstract: William Shakespeare has been part of the cinema since 1899. In the twentieth century almost a thousand films in some way based upon his plays were made, but the vast majority of those which sought to faithfully present his plays to the cinema audience failed at the box office. Since the start of the twenty-first century only one English language film using Shakespeare's text has made a profit, yet at the same time Shakespeare has become a popular source for adaptations into other genres. This essay examines the reception of a number of adaptations as gangster films, teen comedies, musicals and thrillers, as well as trans-cultural assimilations. But this very proliferation throws up other questions, as to what can legitimately be called an adaptation of Shakespeare. Not every story of divided love is an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Different adaptations and assimilations have enjoyed differing degrees of success, and the essay interrogates those aspects which make the popular cinema audience flock to see Shakespeare in such disguised form, when films which are more faithfully based upon the original plays are so much less appealing to the audience in the Multiplexes.

Keywords: Shakespeare in film, cinema adaptation, genre adaptation, Shakespeare in multiplexes

In the course of the last one hundred and fourteen years, many of Shakespeare's plays have been made into films. These films have been made all over the world,

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¹ The title refers to the apocryphal story that the original credits for the 1929 film of *Taming of the Shrew* include the hubristic "By William Shakespeare...additional dialogue by Samuel L Taylor." Neither Ball (1968) nor Rothwell (2004), who have looked into this in detail, found any evidence that the credit ever existed, but it reflects the opinion held in some quarters of the arrogance of those who adapt Shakespeare's plays for the screen.

in commercial cinema or as independent or art films. The contexts in which they have been made are many and various, and the purposes for which they are made are equally different. One of the ways in which these differences manifest themselves is the distance from the original play, the degree of translation, the extent of the adaptation in transferring the play to film, in each case requiring the script writers and directors to make difficult choices.

Films based upon Shakespeare's plays have been classified by Jorgens as of three types, at different removes from the original: presentations, interpretations and adaptations (12-14). Sometimes the definitions can blur, but if all of these are taken together, the number of over 1,000 such films as are claimed as derivatives of Shakespeare's plays, with the number expanding every year. While filmmakers have often sought to use the plays as the basis for their movies, Shakespeare wrote for the theatre, so there is a tenable viewpoint that every film based upon one of his plays is an adaptation, no matter how faithfully it seeks to replicate the original. Even so, Jorgens' definitions have been useful to commentators for some time now and are in wide enough circulation to form a convenient reference point. Where the first attempts to put Shakespeare on screen would primarily fall within the category of presentations, the largest category consists of those films which Jorgens would call adaptations, and these have been more successful in the terms that the film industry respects, above all else, the popularity of the film as demonstrated by the box office returns.

In the cinemas of non-Anglophone countries the most basic reason for adaptation is that the plays, when translated from their original language, are placed within a culturally appropriate milieu which is also translated. In the Anglophone world, particularly in America, although the medium is English, the language of Shakespeare is foreign in a different way in that it comes from a past from which contemporary cinema audiences feel considerable distance. In the Anglophone world, therefore, most adaptation relates to a re-contextualisation of the play which seeks to place the story into a setting which is perceived to be less remote from viewers' own lives.

There are many reasons for adapting Shakespeare's plays for the cinema. Some are pragmatic choices, some are artistic, but some are taken for economic reasons. While those things, to which audiences usually respond, are usually the creative decisions, what they have the opportunity to see in the first place is determined by economics. As Deborah Allison says, the choice of films which audiences have opportunities to see "lies less in the range of films that are produced than in the business practices of the distribution and exhibition sectors" and "[t]hese practices have received far less public scrutiny than those of the production sector, yet they are critical in shaping the choice of films available for public consumption" (81).

Shakespeare in the World's Early Cinemas

From the very beginnings of cinema, the plays of William Shakespeare have been used as a source for films, whether directly or indirectly, whether acknowledged or not. The first version of a play by Shakespeare to be seen on the screen was in 1899, when Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree was recorded in presenting scenes from his current stage success, *King John*. For the next thirty years any version of a Shakespearean play on the screen was seen without Shakespeare's language, other than as title cards. To many purists this immediately invalidated them as presentations of Shakespeare, but the films, which grew in scope and complexity during those three decades, were in many cases, if not all, serious attempts to show Shakespeare's best known stories in the context of the new medium. These films were clearly recognisable as Shakespeare, drawing upon the many well-known representations of Shakespeare's characters and situations in popular art. Shakespeare was widely represented in paintings, as illustrations in popular books, as collector's cards given away with cigarettes and packets of tea, as ashtrays, drinking vessels and flower vases, and used in popular advertising. The filmmakers drew upon this everyday iconography and used the most recognisable scenes from the plays, such as the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* or the Murder of Julius Caesar, as their basis. They had very good reason for doing so. The films were heavily cut to ten or so minutes which could be shown on a single reel of film. These single reels were the only way in which films could originally be seen in the early cinema.

As the art form in the cinema develops, filmic adaptations of Shakespeare grow with it. Shakespeare began to appear in sound films in 1929, when the first surviving film using Shakespeare's words, an extract from *Romeo and Juliet*, was included in the *Hollywood Revue* of that year. In the film Norma Shearer and John Gilbert performed the Balcony Scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, and then instantly parodied it, playing it again with such lines as "Julie baby, I'm gaga for you" and "you're the cookies for me, boyfriend." Shakespeare now became possible in feature length sound versions. The first of these was Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1929). This film, made by Pickford's production company, was adapted as a vehicle for the star couple, Hollywood's favourite husband and wife team. The film came in at just over 50 minutes, and the publicity materials encouraged the audience to view the film in the light of the couple's real life relationship.² While a large amount of excision is involved, and a certain amount of traditional silent film comic business is interpolated, the film is close enough to the parts of the original play

² The couple were pictured above the title, and between their images was the headline "Together!" in red.

that it uses to rank as the first attempt at a genuine realisation of a Shakespeare play in the sound era. A few years later the studios competed in making large-scale, lavish productions of Shakespeare's plays, with major stars and large budgets. These films were marketed as major event movies, with Max Reinhardt's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935), being made for Warner's, George Cukor's *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) at MGM, and in England Paul Czinner's *As You Like It* (1936) all competing at the box office. It is only possible to make unfavourable comparisons in terms of the box office returns with contemporary rivals like *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936) or *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1936). The main thing that these large scale Shakespearean event movies had in common was that they all lost a lot of money.

These films were made in the hope that the public would want to pay to see Shakespeare in the cinema. The public did not respond in the way that the studios had hoped. The box office response to these films, which lost millions of dollars between them, left as a legacy in Hollywood the belief that Shakespeare was box-office poison. The response to Warner's 1935 *Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, failed the producer's expectations when cinemas opted out of taking it. The cinema exhibitor's publication, *Harrison's Reports*, opined that Shakespeare was "not entertainment for the masses," and suggested that in future "it would be wise if the producers refrained from making films out of the plays of Shakespeare" (qtd in Jackson, 67). The filmmakers did indeed refrain for a short time. It was difficult to raise the money to make films of Shakespeare's plays when the largest studios in Hollywood had lost so much money on their projects. This did not stop artists wanting to make such films, however. Their desire to film Shakespeare went far beyond any inclination the public had so far shown to see them.

Shakespeare's plays have always been popular with artists and are the yardstick against which actors, directors and designers have been measuring themselves for four hundred years. However, a perfectly understandable and pragmatic reason why artists want to make films based upon Shakespeare's plays can be seen in the number of nominations for the most prestigious awards in the industry, which such films receive even when they fail spectacularly at the box office. To give but two examples, Julie Taymor's *Tempest* (2010), which made an insignificant return against its twenty million dollar investment, was nominated for one Academy Award; Reinhardt's *Dream* (1935), the failure of which at the box office has already been referred to, was nominated for four Oscars and won two. These awards are not just the recognition of one's peers. It has been estimated (Briggs, 2010) that an Oscar nomination can bring in an additional \$6.6m dollars in box office revenue. Critical acclaim from the learned is undoubtedly pleasant, but the kind of critical acclaim which has an impact on ticket sales is the kind which Hollywood is really interested in. While the studios have from time to time been prepared to make films which are likely to do less

well at the box office if they are considered likely contenders for major awards, this is always a chancy proposition, and one big loss can stop the flow altogether.

The industry thus contains two conflicting imperatives: the desire of the artists to make films based upon Shakespeare, and the reluctance of studios to produce films which are likely to fail at the box office. This is understandable as filling a thousand-seat cinema requires films of a certain scale. Shakespeare's stories often require a degree of spectacle because they are usually part of a notoriously expensive genre, the "costume movie." Thus, to make a film involving such a scale of expenditure would require a large potential audience to justify it. History had shown that the large popular audience for Shakespeare was not yet there. Audiences would rather see films like musicals in the first half of the 20th century.

In the 1930s, while the popular audience was largely staying away from the cinemas showing Shakespeare, on Broadway Shakespeare was starting to appear adapted as a musical, and in that context, was proving a success at the box office. *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938) by Rogers and Hart, was a contemporary musical adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*. It ran for seven months in 1938-9, making it at least a reasonable success. It was certainly successful enough to lead to a film version in 1940, and although the film too was only a moderate performer at the box office, it was nominated for two Academy Awards.

In 1948 Cole Porter created *Kiss Me Kate*, which was in turn filmed in 1953. This film was also nominated for an Oscar and did reasonably well at the box office. There was clearly a larger audience for musical adaptations of Shakespeare than there was for films of the plays themselves. In 1957 *West Side Story* opened in New York. To this day it is the most successful of all musical adaptations of Shakespeare. When it was filmed four years later, it was a success all over the world. Better yet, in addition to its box office success, it was nominated for eleven Oscars and won ten.

West Side Story attracted audiences of all ages, but it was of particular interest to the producers in that it was attractive to the younger demographic, which was just, in the early 1960s, starting to become recognised as crucial in the success of many of the most profitable films. Big musicals were firmly in the event movie tradition, designed for filling large theatres, and *West Side Story* delivered those audiences beyond the original expectations of the producers. At the same time, between 1944 and 1953, three other films, more faithful presentations in Jorgens' terms, had proved profitable. Laurence Olivier's films of *Henry V* (1944) and *Hamlet* (1948) were both profitable, as was Joseph Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* (1953). All of these films made money and all were nominated for major awards. The success of these films encouraged others to believe that they could make successful films of Shakespeare's plays too. Orson

Welles and Renato Castellani made *Macbeth* (1948) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1955) respectively, and Olivier made a third film, *Richard III* (1955). All of these, however, failed at the box office, and the financiers lost interest in funding more of such films for a number of years afterwards.

The success of the musical adaptations encouraged filmmakers to experiment with adaptations of Shakespeare for other movie genres. *Joe Macbeth* (1955) was a British film with an American gangster setting. *Forbidden Planet* (1956) was a science fiction film based upon *The Tempest*. The idea of genre adaptations of Shakespeare's plays had taken root to such an extent that these adaptations were becoming far more common than straight presentations or interpretations and were doing much better at the box office.

It was at this point that Western audiences began to become aware of the impact of Asian cinema. The cinemas of Asian countries had been serving their own audiences ever since the 1890s, but during the 1950s a number of Asian films had a major impact through successes at international film festivals, and were released more widely in the West. Films such as Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) and *Seven Samurai* (1954), Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953) and Satyajit Ray's *Apu* trilogy (1955-59), began to have a strong influence on Western directors. While these films were not major successes with the popular audience, their impact on the industry was far greater. In 1957 Kurosawa made the film known in English as *Throne of Blood*, in which he set the basic plot of *Macbeth* in a Japanese context in the *Sengoku Jidai*, the Age of the Country at War.

Kurosawa made a number of films adapted from Western sources, three of which can claim Shakespearean roots, but of these three the most influential has been *Throne of Blood*. The critical response to the film was far warmer in the West than in Japan itself. Harold Bloom described it as "the most successful film version of *Macbeth*" (Bloom 519). Peter Brook, in his time arguably the world's leading director of Shakespeare's plays in the theatre, and himself the director of a film of *King Lear* calls it "perhaps the only true masterpiece inspired by Shakespeare" (Brook 117). The distance between Shakespeare's play and Kurosawa's film has always provoked controversy, as to whether indeed it can be counted as a "Shakespeare film," but the film is certainly closer to the play than many other adaptations which loudly proclaim that their antecedents are from Shakespearean sources.

The response to *Throne of Blood* had a profound effect on Kurosawa's reputation in the West. He had taken one of the icons of western culture, adapted it to an entirely alien tradition, and made a masterpiece. From then on Kurosawa was acclaimed in Europe, America and beyond so that articles, books and invitations to film festivals followed. Although the response in Japan was not as warm, although the "Japaneseness" of the film, so praised in the West, was largely denied by critics in his own country, and although the film never drew

large audiences in the popular cinema, it is revered by film lecturers and film students throughout the rest of the world. He had previously won a Golden Lion at Venice for *Rashomon* (1950), and this film too was nominated. Kurosawa went on to be nominated a number of times. By taking on a Shakespearean subject, Kurosawa had won a coveted place in the esteem of Anglophone critics. Rather than just a maker of Samurai action films, he was now seen as a serious artist who could tackle subjects from the classical traditions of the whole world. This use of Shakespeare as an international calling card was later built upon by artists such as Vishal Bhardwaj, who achieved a similar result some decades later.

Shakespeare Movies in the Age of Multiplexes

Cinema going itself was beginning to change quite radically in the 1960s when cinemas began showing movies on multiple screens. Having a number of screens at its disposal, a multiplex can operate in a variety of different ways. The cinema can show the same film on several screens at once. By doing so it is possible to allow a great many more customers to see the film in the course of a day. As an alternative, with a range of available screens, the multiplex can show different films in different spaces. This is on one level as simple as showing a range of films to appeal to different segments of the audience, but it also offers more nuanced possibilities. If the cinema has a film of which might be expected to appeal to a smaller segment of the potential audience, it can run that in a cinema with a smaller screen, with fewer seats to fill, wait for favourable reviews and word of mouth to develop, and allow audiences build slowly. This theoretically offers opportunities to more films of interest to a minority or niche audience and has tended to be the way in which less commercial films such as those based upon plays by Shakespeare have been released.

A useful example is Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* (1989). The strategy adopted by Branagh's distributors was to open the film on a few screens, find an audience of cultural opinion formers, let word of mouth develop the audience, and as the audience built roll the film out onto an increasing numbers of screens. This did happen, but even at its peak *Henry V* was never on more than 134 screens. One of the drawbacks inherent in this method is that it can take a very long time to recoup the production costs, if indeed they are ever recouped. In the film industry there is only one sin, losing money. It is possible to take a risk in making a film, but if a filmmaker loses money a couple of times, he or she does not, as a rule, get to make another film. This strategy worked well in the case of *Henry V*, and the film made a profit. The fact that his film had made a profit gave Branagh the opportunity to make *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993). The same strategy worked for *Much Ado*, which made a bigger profit. This in turn meant that Branagh had the opportunity to make *Hamlet* (1996). He made it on a

far more lavish scale than his previous films, filming the four hour text uncut. This made it difficult to programme into cinemas, since it restricted the number of showings possible in a day. He also shot it in 70mm, the format used by the cinema's largest epics.

This gave another factor to take into consideration. Branagh's first two Shakespeare films had been released in smaller cinemas or the so-called "art house" theatres. Very few of those theatres have the equipment to show 70mm prints. Cinemas which had enthusiastically promoted Branagh's *Henry V* and *Much Ado* could not even show his *Hamlet*, according to art-house exhibitor Mike Kirkup. One may applaud Branagh for having the ambition to make a Shakespeare movie on such a scale, but releasing a film which really needed to succeed as an event movie in the same manner, which had succeeded for two smaller movies, did not work. The film recovered less than half its production costs. Branagh had undoubtedly overestimated the desire of the public to see a four hour, uncut, epic treatment of a play by Shakespeare. The mainstream cinemas, which had the equipment to show prints of *Hamlet*, attracted a different sort of audience, an audience which in that year was more interested in *Independence Day*, *Mission Impossible*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (all 1996) and other movies starring Tom Cruise, Sean Connery, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Mel Gibson.

As discussed earlier, in the days before the multiplex, some Shakespeare adaptations had been successful at the box office, notably including *West Side Story* (1961), Franco Zeffirelli's *Taming of the Shrew* (1967) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1968). Others, such as *Catch My Soul* (1974), the rock musical version of *Othello*, directed by Patrick McGoochan and Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971), had lost money. As the multiplexes came to dominate the industry Shakespeare films generally lost money, until Branagh garnered his success in the early 1990s. Branagh's early success led, as Olivier's had in the 1950s, to an upsurge in Shakespeare derived projects, but in the main his successors failed, with the exception of Zeffirelli, whose third adaptation, *Hamlet* (1990) starring Mel Gibson, succeeded at the box office. What was unfortunate was that Branagh's own touch seemed to desert him. *Hamlet* (1996), as mentioned above, lost money, and his next two Shakespeare-derived films also, in industry parlance, *tanked*. He tried a musical adaptation with *Love's Labours Lost* (2000), where he melded Shakespeare with 1930s classic songs, but this was not successful, and the response to his latest Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (2006), was even worse.

This failure indicates that presentations and interpretations of Shakespeare were struggling to find audiences in the new marketplace. Some adaptations were, however, starting to appear, specifically designed for the multiplexes. The largest audience segment in the cinema is the 18-25 age group. Filmmakers aiming at this target market found ways of using Shakespeare's plays as a basis. Two different approaches succeeded in box-office terms. 10

Things I Hate About You (1999) was released at the end of the 1990s and took \$55m. The film disguises Shakespeare, who is not mentioned in the marketing materials or the trailers, but for those who know what to look for the film is littered with Shakespearean in-jokes and allusions. In a fairly loose adaptation, *The Taming of the Shrew* is put into a high school context with which the youthful audience in the multiplex is familiar. The story is played out within the genre conventions of high school comedy movies, but it has enough points of connection with Shakespeare's story structure to be able to claim to be a version, however distant, of the *Shrew*.

The response to it was favourable. It succeeded with its target audience. \$55m is more than almost any presentation or interpretation of Shakespeare's plays has ever taken. *She's the Man* (2006), another high school adaptation, this time of *Twelfth Night*, took \$59m, better than *Ten Things*. Both of these films took more money than *West Side Story* (1961), because they understood the particular requirements of the multiplex. They were carefully targeted at the demographic who most commonly frequent the multiplexes, featured stars who appeal to that audience, and played on the conventions of a genre, with which the audience were familiar. In other words, they were teen comedies first and Shakespeare second.

The success of these films was, however, surpassed by that of one of the most successful Shakespeare-derived films ever to engage the audience of the multiplexes. Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) may be the centre of debate in some circles as to whether it is a presentation or an interpretation, but it uses Shakespeare's language, characters and plot, and it took \$147m dollars, making it the most successful film using Shakespeare's language ever made.

Luhrmann made a film in which he puts Shakespeare's name in the title, and succeeded in reaching that multiplex audience by including all of the elements which other successful multiplex films use. He cast a major Hollywood star with a particular appeal to the multiplex audience, in Leonardo di Caprio. Luhrmann filmed the story in a contemporary American setting, using a powerful soundtrack comprising contemporary music. His visual and editing techniques were drawn from a style with which his target audience was familiar, and of which they indeed felt a degree of ownership, coming as they did from the style of MTV. The film was marketed specifically to young audiences, and as French has demonstrated, the marketing campaign was very effective (107-116). The film was successful in the cinemas, and subsequently sold extremely well as a video and DVD. *Romeo + Juliet* has enjoyed a prolonged afterlife in educational settings, vying with Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) as the standard version for use in classrooms. Luhrmann hides Shakespeare in plain view, and it has paid off for him.

The teen comedies disguise Shakespeare. *She's the Man* (2006) mentions, tucked away amidst the small print in the credits that the film is "inspired by" William Shakespeare's play, but it is hard to notice in casual perusal. Neither this film nor *Ten Things* (1999) uses the character's names, the language or the detail of the story, but both are full of references to their originals, and indeed to other Shakespeare plays. In the additional materials on the DVD, Andy Fickman the director of *She's the Man* spends some time pointing out the number of Shakespearean allusions he has hidden within the film. Shakespeare is not mentioned in the publicity materials, so it requires some explanation as to what Fickman is using Shakespeare for.

There is a belief amongst producers that direct reference to Shakespeare can be off-putting for the key 18-25 demographic. Nothing in the publicity materials or trailers for these teen comedies will scare off a member of the audience who dislikes Shakespeare. Additionally, the producers bank on two other factors. In the first instance, those who are still within education are more likely to have some knowledge of Shakespeare than other segments of the audience. For them the Shakespearean in-jokes in the movies are there to be seen, and the ability to notice those references imparts a feeling of superiority over the rest of the audience who might well miss them. In the second instance, schools will often use such versions, however loosely based upon the plays, as a way of making the study of Shakespeare more palatable to resistant students.

These teen comedies are successful in comparison with presentations or interpretations of Shakespeare's plays, but in industry terms they are merely moderately successful, in the fifties of millions at the box office, doing well within the target demographic but unlikely to achieve major crossover audiences. They do, however, offer the potential for a long afterlife, with ongoing DVD sales for many years afterwards. These are the factors which make such films attractive to producers although the attraction for the directors is somewhat different.

Within the industry it has always been considered prestigious to work on a Shakespeare project. Although anyone working in the commercial cinema is usually quite realistic about the parameters within which he or she is working, it can give a certain status amongst one's peers to be seen to be trying to smuggle cultural values into some of the most blatantly commercial sectors of the movie business. Few people working in the industry would necessarily say that there is anything wrong with making a teen exploitation film, but as an in-joke it can deliver extra kudos for a filmmaker to be able to say amongst his or her peers that the film is actually a teen comedy version of *Twelfth Night*, rather than just a teen comedy.

It is interesting to note that this kind of adaptation works best with the comedies. A version of *Othello* set in a high school, *O* (2001), did less well, although still making a small profit. Other genre adaptations of Shakespeare did

insignificant business at the box office. *Men of Respect* (1990), a gangster version of *Macbeth*, or *Scotland PA* (2001), a black comedy version of the same play set in a Pennsylvania diner, adaptations of Shakespeare aimed at more adult audiences, did not succeed at the box office. Despite a number of successes in the theatre, the many filmed musical adaptations of Shakespeare's plays since *West Side Story* have generally failed at the box office. Whether jazz musicals like *All Night Long* (1962) rock musicals like *Catch My Soul* (1974) or Branagh's 1930s-set *Love's Labours Lost* (2000), the performance of such films at the box office has generally been unfortunate. The gangster versions, already referred to, and occasional oddities like the Italian western *Johnny Hamlet* (1968) have performed similarly. Of the various genre borrowings only the teen comedies have made significant returns.

Shakespeare's *Other* Versions in Multiplexes

Outside the Anglophone world another movie making community was adapting Shakespeare. The parallels, both stylistically and in commonalities of theme between Parsi drama and Shakespeare, and the similar degree of thematic commonality between Bollywood movies and Shakespeare, have been frequently highlighted. Nasseerudin Shah, an actor with considerable Shakespearean stage experience, who has also appeared in two acclaimed Bollywood Shakespeare adaptations has said "[t]he roots may look lost but every big story in the Hindi film industry is from Shakespeare" (Shah, qtd. Khanna, par. 12). Khanna goes so far as to describe this as "decades of no recognition and blatant plagiarism" (Khanna, par. 1).

It is possible to read many and complex reasons into this lack of recognition, but the truth is in many cases likely to be much more mundane. There may be elements of post-colonial rejection of Anglophone cultural imperialism, but there are also questions of the degree of actual assimilation of Shakespeare's influence in many cases. Not every story of divided lovers is a conscious reference to *Romeo and Juliet*. Furthermore, where elements have indeed been taken from Shakespeare, there is no practical necessity to acknowledge him as a source. He is long out of copyright, and in most cases he took the story from someone else in the first place. In any event it is hard to suggest that acknowledging Shakespeare would positively influence potential audiences. As Suddhaseel Sen says, "in the Indian context, cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare have fared better when their relationship with Shakespeare has gone unannounced" (Sen, 5). Khanna argues that this is changing. Nowadays "in the bid to find a foothold in global cinema, . . . , avant garde filmmakers are now going to town declaring their films as inspired by his creations" (Khanna, par. 2). Looking back to the experiences of Kurosawa, it is possible for us to conjecture why this might be the case.

The highly regarded Bollywood adaptation of *Macbeth, Maqbool* (2003) failed to set the Indian box-office alight. What it did do, however, was to attract the attention of film festivals outside India in a way that other Bollywood offerings did not. The use of Shakespeare as a source conferred an aura of “universality” on a form which has sometimes struggled in the West to escape cultural specificity in attracting audiences. This is something the director Vishal Bhardwaj specifically intended: “I wanted to touch a chord with international audiences, so there were many commercial considerations... [in adapting the plays of Shakespeare]” (Bhardwaj, interviewed by Sen, R, qtd. Sen, S). His second venture, *Omkara*, (2006) based upon *Othello*, fared better, but the quotes from Khanna and Suddhaseel Sen show the opposing forces at work. As both Khanna and Raja Sen show above, Bhardwaj’s films were specific offerings intended to attract international attention in a way that other Bollywood films do not.

The assumption is that international audiences, or at least the more sophisticated members of them, such as those who programme or attend international film festivals, will find in Shakespeare a way of coming to terms with other, less familiar, performance traditions. This would be due at least in part to their previous knowledge of the stories. On the other hand, in the same way that Japanese audiences responded to *Throne of Blood* (1954), the domestic Indian audience does not necessarily have the same interest, lamenting the departures from the mainstream of their genre. Bhardwaj is not the first Bollywood director to adapt Shakespeare, but he is one of the first to acknowledge that he is doing so, and it has propelled him to global recognition. Although Gulzar had enjoyed a domestic success with *Angoor* (1982), a contemporary Bollywood adaptation of *Comedy of Errors*, Bhardwaj has achieved the international recognition which Gulzar did not.

While in Asia the adaptations are aimed at adult audiences, the versions which have proved most successful in the West, with the exception of Luhrmann’s presentation, are the teen comedies. If one looks at those teen films more closely, to identify the elements borrowed from Shakespeare, which are retained in these adaptations, these are far from consistent. In interviews both directors and writers talk about the way that they borrow Shakespeare’s stories and characters, but they generally only take those elements of the story which fit most readily into the high school context and cut anything which does not, and alter the characters to fit existing character types associated with the genre. When they speak of taking stories from Shakespeare, these are, as already stated above, seldom Shakespeare’s in the first place, although the stories are often known to most of us primarily through Shakespeare’s use of them.

In his plays Shakespeare constantly borrowed archetypal elements from traditional stories. Many films borrow from the same sources. In Bollywood there are hundreds of films which tell stories of divided love which do not

acknowledge Shakespearean influence, as noted by Khan (qtd. Khanna, par. 14). There is another factor to take into account. The iconic stature which Shakespeare enjoys in the modern world has given a shorthand language for describing archetypal situations. Stories of divided love are far older than Shakespeare, but nowadays the way divided love is frequently referred to is by calling it a "Romeo and Juliet" situation. *The Twilight Saga*, particularly *New Moon* (2009) the second part, explicitly references *Romeo and Juliet*. For anyone with a familiarity with Shakespeare's play, the allusions are there all the way through. It is a moot point as to whether this really makes it an adaptation of Shakespeare, as some have claimed, or whether the film makers are borrowing the references as a shorthand.

The degrees of distance are legion. Some films allude, some films unconsciously absorb, some films reference, some films parody, some films adapt. There is considerable variety in the degree to which those films do or do not acknowledge their connections to Shakespeare. Some of them, such as the teen comedies, may have fairly tenuous links to Shakespeare's original, but they seek to underline the connections that they have. These links may not be highlighted on the poster or in the trailer, but they are drawn to the attention of those who may appreciate them. The thing which all of these films have in common is the idea that they are a version of Shakespeare.

The "idea" is important. It requires someone involved in the process to actually acknowledge the connection. If one leaves aside this factor by far the most successful version of a Shakespeare play is an animated film. *Lion King* (1994) was a phenomenal success, taking \$952m worldwide, and still continuing to generate income. It was some time after its release that the film began to be discussed as a version of *Hamlet*. Certainly the basic situation, where a young prince's father is killed by a usurping brother, appears to his son as a ghost and is then avenged by the prince, can be seen as being a version of *Hamlet*, if one is prepared to stretch definitions. *Lion King II: Simba's Pride* (1998), a straight-to-DVD release, is similarly said to be based on *Romeo and Juliet*. It takes a degree of wishful thinking to really claim these as Shakespeare adaptations. Hamlet is not the only character in history to be called upon to take revenge by a ghost, and Disney has never advanced any particular claim that Simba is Hamlet in disguise; it is other people who have identified him as such. If one does accept that Simba is Hamlet, *Lion King* (1994) is the most successful Shakespeare film in history.

If *Lion King* actually is accepted as an adaptation of *Hamlet*, it is difficult to know quite where to draw the line. In order to achieve a workable definition, it is a tenable position to say that a Shakespeare film is a Shakespeare film in this context if the makers wish it to be so regarded. If the filmmakers acknowledge Shakespeare as a source, the film can be examined in that light. If they do not, it is hard, in a case where the language, characters, plot and context

differ radically from the original play, to point to a film and claim that it is based upon Shakespeare. If the acknowledgement of Shakespearean influence is a necessary criterion, there is another film which really can claim to be the greatest triumph at the box office that Shakespeare has ever had.

This film fulfils all of the criteria for a successful Shakespeare film amongst the demographic who make up the bulk of the audience in the multiplexes. The film is happy to be associated with Shakespeare, but will not put off audiences who resist him. It took \$191m, making it almost as popular as Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* and *10 Things I Hate About You* put together. It has a cast of stars who attract the crucial demographic; its soundtrack offers award winning contemporary popular music; it sits securely within a genre which makes it extremely attractive to young audiences; it contains sufficient parallels with the original to offer numerous in-jokes for the student to spot; and it uses a number of direct quotes from Shakespeare within the film, although not all of them are from the film's acknowledged source. The connections are close enough to give it the potential for a viable afterlife in educational contexts. Thus it satisfies all of the requirements for commercial success as an adaptation of Shakespeare in the age of the multiplex. Therefore the most popular film in history to acknowledge itself as a version of a play by Shakespeare, the perfect Shakespeare film for the age of the multiplex, is *Gnomeo and Juliet* (2011).

This may be the case judged by the industry's criteria, but it is unlikely to satisfy the urge that large numbers of artists have to create film versions of Shakespeare's plays for the small but vociferous constituency of cinema-going Shakespeare lovers to see. An examination of the phenomenon of commercially successful Shakespeare-inspired films makes it possible to isolate certain characteristics, which the majority of them display. The expectation of Shakespeare lovers may be that Shakespeare is a special case in the industry, but in practice films based upon Shakespeare's plays perform similarly at the box office to other films which are released and marketed in the same way. Those who are surprised by this may be looking at such films with false expectations. Shakespeare-derived films are subject to the same commercial forces that most other films are. Films based upon Shakespeare's plays, which offer bankable stars, which are made with sufficient production values, and which are targeted carefully at the audience with a realistic appreciation of both the psychology and economics of cinema going, and most importantly with a proper marketing campaign, a realistic marketing budget, and a release schedule to match, can be just as successful as any other films. The problem lies in the fact that very few Shakespeare films are made in this way. The most successful films, those made by Zeffirelli, or Luhrmann, or Mankiewicz, have often been questioned by critics for their casting decisions. They have been vindicated by the commercial success of their films. The teen comedies have been criticised for their "dumbing down" of Shakespeare, but again the public have responded favourably.

The importance of commercial success is twofold. It is the success at the box office of one film that enables a filmmaker to make the next film. Every time a Shakespeare film fails commercially, it makes it unlikely that the filmmaker responsible will be given the opportunity to make another, and it is equally unlikely that the next filmmaker proposing a Shakespearean project will be given the money to make one. The potential for attracting the popular audience determines the desirability or otherwise of multiplex cinemas, which make up the vast majority of cinemas across the world. Not only does the commercial failure of a Shakespeare film affect the making of future Shakespeare films, it affects the opportunity for audiences who wish to see such Shakespeare films as are made from doing so. Every Shakespeare film which succeeds potentially offers the possibility of another being made.

Shakespeare himself was alive to such considerations. In his own day Shakespeare was able to compete at the most commercial end of the spectrum in the London theatre, with three thousand places to fill at each performance. He did so by casting the most bankable star of his own time in the leading roles, by controlling the dissemination of his work by part-owning the playhouse, and by refusing to publish. In his own time his plays were adapted, as well as being presented. Some would argue, for example, that the scenes featuring Hecate in *Macbeth* represent such an adaptation. For the next three hundred years many of his plays were seen in adaptations or interpretations, such as those of Tate or Cibber, rather than in their original form. The world's cinema offers audiences beyond Shakespeare's wildest dreams. Most of those audiences are to be found in the world's multiplexes. The hope for Shakespeare films to continue to be made and seen in the future is to make them in the same way that one would make any other film, bearing in mind the economic realities of both production and distribution, and to make Shakespeare films which can hold their own in the multiplex.

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