



UGC Journal No. : 64674

ISSN : 2348-571X

EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Volume : 5

Issue : 1.3

January 2018



Vijaygarh Jyotish Ray College

In Collaboration With :

Kalyani Foundation For Media Science & Community Research

Kolkata, West Bengal, India

[ISSN : 2348-571X]

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An International Refereed Interdisciplinary Journal

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Adapting William Shakespeare and Cinema Literature

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Abstract: The hardest task for a film-maker is to take a classic or currently popular work and present it. Shakespeare on film and television creates analogues with original practices which have opened rather than closed questions in virtually every facet of contemporary critical enquiry. Adaptations are big business beyond Broadway and Hollywood, offering often the only way for artists around the globe to get their work noticed by producers, bookers, and festival organizers. Shakespeare has always been adapted and appropriated by other playwrights, just as he himself adapted and appropriated other writers. Shakespeare's works are both the products and the sources of adapting processes; consequently, his versions constitute one stage in an ongoing process of adaptation. Gender and family politics is a fast-changing area in the wake of the relative normalisation of feminism during the last few decades. On a darker note, child abuse and domestic violence are ever-present problems that have been receiving a great deal of attention in recent time.

Key Words : Adaptations, Gender, Child Abuse, Feminism

Introduction

The endurance of Shakespeare in theatre is mainly attributable to the magnificence of his language and the talent-defining roles offered to performers. But while the latter factor also applies to the cinematic versions – the desire of actors to record great stage roles is one reason that the shows have been filmed so often – the poetic speech can become problematic on screen, with the success of movie versions greatly depending on how they deal with the verse and soliloquies. Conversely, though, the playwright's structural decisions anticipated by three centuries many standard elements of film's visual grammar – such as cross-cutting and location-hopping – and the Stratford dramatist's frequent use of 17th-century special effects, such as ghosts and magic, has become progressively more appealing to a medium which, through digital technology, is ever more suited to illusion.

Film adaptation is the transfer of a written work to a feature film. This includes the use of fiction, non-fiction, journalism, autobiography, comic book, graphic novel, scripture or plays. In some cases, musical lyrics have been used as a template for a cinematic premise. The hardest task for a film-maker is to take a classic or currently popular work and present it in a way that avoids alienating those who have a loyalty to the original, while simultaneously producing something that works successfully in its own right. It could prove to be difficult for a short novel to be adapted word for word within the confines of the length of an average film. This process normally involves suppression of minor characters and subplots, though these may be among the aspects of the book loved most by fans and readers of the original novel.

Just as Shakespeare's dramatic words, written for stage performance in early modern England, have had a formative relation to the English language, so in these times, Shakespeare on screen has both reflected and formed the contemporary consciousness of audiences around the globe. Shakespeare's influence on film and television, the internet age, privileging images and interconnecting virtual audiences, guarantees the Bard a global ubiquity, whether or not such images are accompanied by his words. Shakespeare's plays owe much of their drive and theatricality to the split between action as representation and as performance, between locus and platea. Shakespeare on film and television creates analogues with original practices which have opened rather than closed questions in virtually every facet of contemporary critical enquiry.

In his magnificently wacky 1979 punk version, Derek Jarman applied casting (poet Heathcote Williams,