

Introduction

As the opening decade of the twenty-first century recedes, what might be termed a discipline of Shakespeare on film is firmly rooted in the educational curriculum. Shakespeare films are widely taught in schools, colleges and universities; indeed, they are increasingly the first port of call for a student encounter with the Bard. Most institutions will advertise a course or courses on Shakespeare and his film manifestations or Shakespeare and the history of adaptation. In terms of range and depth, criticism of Shakespeare films is entrenched: academic conferences boast dedicated sessions to the subject and feature premieres of works intended for commercial cinema release. There are conferences devoted to the fortunes of a single play on screen, journals that run special issues on Shakespeare on film, and essay collections that, to illustrate a larger theme, prioritize a contribution on a particular Shakespeare screen interpretation. Rapidly, but inexorably, Shakespeare films have assumed canonical positions, while commentary has developed in aspiration, volume and effect.

In part the popularity of Shakespeare on film is imbricated in the dramatist's status as a global icon. On both sides of the Atlantic, it is Shakespeare's ability to function as a collocation of meanings that resonate with the world that is repeatedly emphasized. For Suzanne Gossett, speaking in her capacity as President of the Shakespeare Association of America of how 'the Bard and his works . . . are transported and globalized', 'Shakespeare stimulates scholarly and artistic activity throughout the former empire and beyond'.¹ Her remarks are matched in the press release for the 'Shakespeare: Staging the World' exhibition at the British Museum that accompanied the 2012 Olympics. A 'celebration of Shakespeare as the world's playwright', the exhibition showcased how 'Londoners perceived the world when global exchange and other aspects of modernity originated'.² These are large claims for Shakespeare that testify to a broad ownership, a widespread importance and a universal imaginative spark. Yet, strikingly, in commentary on Shakespeare films, there has

been no equivalent attempt to detail how, where and with what results the plays are translated into the idiom of world cinema. The so-called ‘revival of the Shakespeare film genre’ in the period from the late 1980s onwards, the period on which this book concentrates, has excited a plethora of criticism, but, almost without exception, attention focuses on exclusively English-language or Anglophone productions.³

Emblematic here are Michael Greer and Toby Widdicombe’s remarks in a 2010 study of Shakespeare on film that their ‘filmography . . . does not include films . . . in languages other than English . . . If you are looking for foreign films . . . we recommend searching the *Internet Movie Database*’.⁴ More direct still is Michael Anderegg’s statement in his volume on the subject that ‘Shakespeare films should include Shakespeare’s words spoken in English’.⁵ This limiting imaginary has been borne out in a large number of accounts, including my own, in which a narrow sample of work, whose representational provenance accords with a US–UK axis, is foregrounded.⁶ In part, the networks of distribution and exhibition through which films are identified are to blame: as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan state, all too often a ‘cultural flow’ is unidirectional and travels only ‘from the “west” to the “rest”’.⁷ But, whatever the reasons, it is clear that an international sense of Shakespeare’s plays on film is lacking: the critical field has yet to take due account of worldwide depth and diversity.

There are, however, suggestions that things are starting to change. A small number of the examples discussed in this book have been either explored or alluded to in several recent studies.⁸ Particular sites of representation, especially Asia, have begun to be understood as playing a role in the revitalization of a cinematic Shakespeare.⁹ And the benefits that accrue from recognizing the individual contributions of non-Anglophone filmic adaptations are increasingly registered.¹⁰ Critic Greg Colón Semenza seems to summon the mood of the moment when he anticipates that ‘world cinema is likely to be the next, if not the final, frontier for Shakespeare on film scholarship’.¹¹ Certainly, as we enter an era in which the Bard is cementing his place as a global marker, a more ambitious awareness of Shakespeare’s international screen presence is called for. During the period that has been dominated by Kenneth Branagh and his ilk, there has been a corresponding glut of Shakespeare films outside English-language parameters. Shakespeare films have been produced in, among other locations, Africa, Brazil, France, Germany, India, Malaysia, Sweden, Tibet and Venezuela and, in their scope and inventiveness, these works constitute a revealing and distinctive body of material. What is

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required to support an intellectual appraisal of this material is an approach that takes us away from the separate bracketing of the 'foreign Shakespeare' and towards a new sensibility. For the seventy-three non-Anglophone films that are explored in this study to be accommodated and enjoyed requires an alteration in the canon of Shakespeare on film. In turn, this transformation necessitates a praxis of interpretation which would allow us to challenge the 'channels through which we have access to' Shakespearean production and to engage with plurality.¹² Only then might we be able to arrive at a responsible grasp of Shakespearean cinematic expressions that 'cannot be seen as "the other", for the simple reason that they are us'.¹³

It is an endeavour in which issues of definition are important. Quite what constitutes world cinema, for example, is worth pausing over for a moment. At its most essential, it is argued, world cinema represents a mode of filmmaking that takes place outside the Hollywood mainstream.¹⁴ For some film critics, this broad classification can be sophisticated: world cinema is, according to a more specific schema, non-English or non-European and, vitally, non-western in either origin or aesthetic achievement.¹⁵ Other definitions concentrate on world cinema's capacity to cross borders; others still understand the term as itself a methodology and a discipline.¹⁶ And then there are those discussions that aspire to see all cinemas as world cinema in the interests of polycentric understandings and an avoidance of artificial binary constraints.¹⁷ While sympathetic to this latter paradigm, *Shakespeare and World Cinema* subscribes to the first of the definitions outlined here, arguing that, in the context of the general relegation or bypassing of the non-Anglophone Shakespeare film, an account that eschews the domination of Hollywood – and the English language – is a political obligation. For the time being, at least, we are in the territory of the not now, not yet. And there are particular virtues to investigating Shakespeare and world cinema according to such rubrics. Prising the Bard away from Hollywood, as will be shown, allows for other kinds of interconnections – and transnational commerce – to come into view. It facilitates adjustments to enshrined visions and it means that a more generous remit for Shakespeare studies can be endorsed. Margaret Jane Kidnie writes that 'strongly motivated interventions in the politics of the canon' have the advantage of making 'alternative critical practices potentially available'.¹⁸ Certainly, a world cinema template, because it is concerned with the alternatively accented film product, invites us to be attentive to issues sometimes neglected in Shakespeare and film scholarship, which would include histories of reception and the types of cultural

literacy to which global audiences have access. Crucially, by addressing what has been deemed marginal to established interpretation, we may be impelled to acknowledge that ‘media images’, as Richard Kearney notes, carry an ‘ethical charge’ and that the business of Shakespearean criticism of this kind is, in some ways, an ethical undertaking, one that requires, as Geoffrey Galt Harpham notes, ‘a practice of judgement involving a nuanced assessment and negotiation of social norms, cultural habits, and community values’.¹⁹

In the same way that we are required to reflect on what world cinema is, so must we think rigorously about what kind of Shakespeare is being promulgated in these pages. Much ink has been spilled in recent years debating the most appropriate language to capture the relationship between the Shakespearean ‘original’ and its filmic reinvention. For Julie Sanders, ‘adaptation’ is a particularly useful term in that it signals an ‘attempt to make texts “relevant” . . . via . . . proximation and updating’ and a ‘transposition’ that ‘takes a text from one genre and delivers it to new audiences . . . in cultural, geographical and temporal terms’.²⁰ Other critics have suggested ‘appropriation’, noting, however, that this alternative might be questioned on the basis that it implies ‘a hostile takeover, a seizure of authority’.²¹ A final body of opinion holds that no one taxonomy can encompass the multifarious ways in which Shakespeare is recast in new forms: there is no all-purpose expression, the argument runs, not least because film itself frequently blurs the distinctions that we, as critics, seem so anxious to uphold.²² *Shakespeare and World Cinema* favours a terminology of adaptation, contrasting this, where necessary, with citation or quotation, while recognizing that any descriptor operates with a degree of flexibility. Is, for example, a Shakespeare film an adaptation when not explicitly billing itself in this fashion? In a sense, it is unimportant if this kind of identification is avoided, for, as I argue here, it is via the mode of reception – the field of circulation – that a particular film product takes on Shakespearean qualifications. There can, then, be no fixed hierarchy between a play and its surrogate language or languages. In the particular cases with which this book deals, where there is no English lexicon to attend to, we are invited to be responsive to other verbal registers, to narrative strategies and to emotional contours. These elements recall the plays, but not with any precise equivalence, meaning that we concentrate not so much on issues of nomenclature as on questions about how categories of the Shakespearean are mobilized. Or, to put the point in another way, the discussion elaborated here centres on the extent to which Shakespeare, variously explained and capaciously

imagined, functions in terms of cultural (and economic) capital. A further premise underlying this study is that the work of adaptation is creative. Art inheres in the act of translation and in its attendant multiplication of meanings. As Colin MacCabe states, an important principle is that through the ‘adaptation . . . process’ films accrue in ‘real value’.²³ When a film is generated from a play, a new text is fashioned out of an old one, and we are sensitized to how both interrelate. Fredric Jameson sees this as inherently competitive, proposing that ‘the individual works, either as external adaptations or as internal echo chambers of the various media, be grasped as allegories of the never-ending and unresolvable struggles for primacy’.²⁴ It is as a two-way struggle, with points of contestation and complementarity in between, that I seek to explain how plays and films reinforce and enlighten each other.

This book is divided into three sections. Part One, ‘Auteurs’, explores Shakespeare and world cinema from the perspective of auteur theory. If current thinking takes an auteur to be an individual craftsman possessed of a distinctive vision, ‘the singular and great author of the text’, world cinema throws up an abundant yield of potential candidates.²⁵ The astonishingly inventive and singularly ambitious work of a French-based director is discussed in Chapter 1, ‘Alexander Abela’; here, the creativity of *Makibefo* (1999), or *Macbeth*, and *Souli* (2004), or *Othello*, is appraised in the light of both films’ relocation of Shakespeare’s action to Madagascar and involvement of a non-professional cast in a communal and intercultural performative experiment. The prevailing idea was to secure, through this unique undertaking, a fresh appreciation of the transferability of Shakespeare’s archetypal stories. Notably, an auteorial presence is refracted in the films’ referencing of visual features, charms approximating the contents of the witches’ cauldron in *Macbeth*, a pen and paper pointing to *Othello*’s absorption in narrative, and a recurrent *zebu* or ox indicating a more general preoccupation with wealth and status. Distinctive to *Makibefo* and *Souli* is a combination of specific traditions and motifs and an overarching directorial conception: Shakespeare, in this particular manifestation, is richly revealing of the collaborative experience more recently recognized as lying behind auteorial definitions.

Chapter 2, ‘Vishal Bhardwaj and Jayaraaj Rajasekharan Nair’, addresses two directors from the northern and southern parts of India, who, in their contrasting styles, offer alternating responses to how the auteur may construct himself in relation to the subcontinent’s film industries. The strategies of adaptation adopted by Bhardwaj and Jayaraaj, I argue, are an index to the competing demands of their situations as regionally marked

Shakespearean interpreters. In the case of Jayaraaj, for example, adapting *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello* as *Kannaki* (2002) and *Kaliyattam* (1997) respectively, Malayalam is the language of choice, while, in the case of Bhardwaj, Hindi, Hindi dialects and Urdu are the default positions to occupy in adapting *Macbeth* and *Othello*, as his *Maqbool* (2004) and *Omkaara* (2006) indicate. Although these two figures are similarly compelled to traverse such themes as ritual, custom and identity, as is shown in a mutual attraction to *Othello*, they do so from diverse points on the local–global axis.²⁶ For, where Jayaraaj subscribes to an essentially rural and timeless ‘India’, Bhardwaj approves one that is urban, destabilized and multilocal. These readings are symptomatic of other kinds of uncertainty and of auteurs who entertain a range of myths of their country for different kinds of cultural consumption.

In taking an auteurial approach to Bhardwaj and Jayaraaj, this chapter is responsive to those commentators who have avoided the nation as a category of analysis and who argue for the demerits of its constructivist characteristics.²⁷ In a related development, film critics have contended that there is no such thing as a stable or autonomous ‘national cinema’, particularly given the cross-currents of funding and co-production ventures that are increasingly a filmmaking norm.²⁸ Conscious of the need to find an alternative paradigm that admits of the transnational, film critics and political interpreters alike have suggested the ‘regional’ as a formulation that helpfully straddles a number of requirements. Dudley Andrew’s suggestion, for example, is that the ‘intermediate concept’ of a ‘regional cinema’ nicely conjures the ways in which films inhabit local and global or ‘glocal’ spheres of interaction, and he is joined by Paul Bowles and Henry Veltmeyer, who note that ‘regions [are] . . . the units through which globalization’s effects and impacts are felt’.²⁹ It is within such a framework of the ‘regional’, I argue, that the national and cultural characteristics of cinema can be apprehended without succumbing to a unitary modality which would favour only the nation-state as an option for analysis.

Accordingly, the second section of this book – ‘Regional Configurations’ – is comprised of two chapters which, centring on Latin America and Asia, investigate world cinema representations in the light of contrasting regional criteria. Chapter 3, ‘Shakespeare, Cinema, Latin America’, discovers how, in films such as *Sangrador* (dir. Leonardo Henríquez, 2000) – a Venezuelan adaptation of *Macbeth* – *As Alegres Comadres* (dir. Leila Hipólito, 2003) – a Brazilian adaptation of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* – and *Huapango* (dir. Iván Lipkies, 2004) – a Mexican adaptation of *Othello* – responses to mediations of Shakespearean

metaphor are encouraged by the concentration on a localized *mise en scène*. Emerging from a purposeful utilization of distinctive environments (the Venezuelan Andes, the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil and the Huasteca region of northeastern Mexico), the plays' animal references are indigenized to illuminate changing structures of sexuality, power and prestige. Such reworking carries an ideological charge: *Sangrador*, *As Alegres Comadres* and *Huapango* reveal the affective qualities of particular milieux by exploiting recognizable typologies of character, such as the romanticized brigand (Max/Macbeth is a mountain bandit), the *malandro* (Fausto/Falstaff is a confidence trickster) and the *jefe* or chief (Otilio/Othello is a cattle rancher), identifying the political and postcolonial determinants of their acts of national self-expression. Where *Sangrador* uses *Macbeth's* alliance with political tragedy to contemplate Venezuelan militaristic authoritarianism, *As Alegres Comadres* aims, through carnival, at a vision of social organization characterized by festive accommodation and inclusivity. Cast in a less idealistic mould is *Huapango*, which pushes at the black–white racial dichotomies of *Othello* to test the ties that bind ethnicity and conquest. In all three films, *Macbeth*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Othello* are marshalled to expose the vexed ties that bind historical institutions and popular consciousness in modern Latin America.

'Shakespeare, Cinema, Asia', Chapter 4, shows that issues of homeland and belonging are vigorously aired in Asian Shakespeare films: this body of work reflects, variously, upon the global pressures that determine hybridized selves, the need for new ways of seeing, and the difficulties of taking political action in the social world. Not surprisingly, *Julius Caesar* (the Malaysian *Gedebe* [dir. Nam Ron, 2002]) and *Romeo and Juliet* (the Singaporean *Chicken Rice War* [dir. Chee Kong Cheah, 2000]) are prominent here, but so too is *Hamlet*, as is suggested in the chapter's discussion of *The Banquet* (dir. Xiaogang Feng, 2006), a visually sumptuous Chinese adaptation of the play, and *Prince of the Himalayas* (dir. Sherwood Hu, 2006), an extraordinarily resonant Tibet-based adaptation of the drama invigorated by its message of forgiveness, Buddhist ideas of reincarnation and epic aesthetics. Shakespeare, for all these filmmakers, becomes a resource through which some of the anxieties and preoccupations characterizing contemporary Asia can be freely ventilated.

Of course, the opportunity to practise what has been termed 'locality criticism', which is 'inflected or marked by specificities of a given cultural location or knowledge derived from a specific geocultural region', is not entirely straightforward.³⁰ As Walter D. Mignolo argues, "Latin"

America is not an objective' phenomenon, but a 'political project formed by Europeans'.³¹ By the same token, 'Asia' is hardly homogeneous; the various countries of Asia do not share, as Dennis Kennedy and Li Lan Yong note, a 'single market' or a common 'cultural economy'.³² Qualifications notwithstanding, regional labels are enabling devices in film criticism work on the market and, hence, possess a certain utility. If deployed in the sense of configurations rather than impositions, moreover, and applied with a due self-consciousness, these kinds of descriptor can precipitate questions about relations that run along East–West as well as north–south axial lines. As Marit Melhuus and Kristi Anne Stølen state in a study of Latin American gender imagery, 'a regional focus is important – not just because it concurs with indigenous views, but also because it sets an agenda'.³³

As will be clear, these four chapters deal with a variety of Shakespearean dramatic examples. Part Three, 'Plays', homes in on the playtext to consider, in an international arena, how and why particular Shakespearean dramas have proved resiliently popular as objects of filmic treatment. In attempting to ascertain the unique appeal of a single title, there would appear to be, at least at first sight, some leeway for choice. *Hamlet* is an obvious contender. Films such as the Finnish *Hamlet Goes Business* (dir. Aki Kaurismäki, 1987) – noted for its deadpan humour and moody mien – the Russian *Fat Stupid Rabbit* (dir. Slava Ross, 2006) – which finds a comparable comic cause in the *fabliau* of a children's performer who, to combat the boredom of playing a rabbit in a run-down theatre, experiments with the 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy – and the Serbian *Hamlet* (dir. Aleksandar Rajković, 2007) – whose stunning effect can be traced to its rendering of the 'rank and gross . . . garden' of Elsinore as a Belgrade rubbish tip – if nothing else, evidence how the play operates as a resource for quotation, revisionism and critique.³⁴ Similarly, the alternately romantic and anti-romantic potentialities of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provide another point of entry, not least as these are discovered in films including *The Midwinter Night's Dream* (dir. Goran Paskaljević, 2004) – an excoriating disquisition on the wars in the Balkans that, through an internal production of the play, exposes 'a venal brand of ethno-religious nationalism' – and *A Midsummer Okinawan Dream* (dir. Yuji Nakae, 2009) – which suggests a 'Japanese nostalgia for a utopian vision of its own pre-modernity'.³⁵ On the basis of the numbers of adaptations and patterns of narrative repetition, however, it is *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and not some other assembly, which represent the world cinema Shakespeare play examples *par excellence*.

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Chapter 5, ‘*Macbeth*’, juxtaposes three examples so as to illuminate the range of ways in which the play has been reconfigured by a series of ambitious arthouse directors. Discussion of *Yellamma* (dir. Mohan Koda, 1999) – a Telangana-language adaptation of the play set in the state of Hyderabad – *Someone is Sleeping in My Pain* (dir. Michael Roes, 2001) – which centres on a fictionalized attempt to film *Macbeth* in Yemen – and *Macbeth* (dir. Bo Landin and Alex Sherpf, 2004) – a Sámi-language adaptation made in the Arctic Circle – reveals that the drama represents a point of contact for emergent cultures negotiating minority rights, shifting frontiers and the legacies of imperialism. In their aesthetic felicities, political articulacy and complementary approaches to textual issues, these productions, I maintain, allow for reflections on hegemonic structures as defined in language, histories that have occluded indigenous traditions and ongoing tensions between global powers. At their most striking, and as instances of a recurring fascination, this cluster of films opens up for scrutiny a reification of *Throne of Blood*, Akira Kurosawa’s 1957 adaptation of *Macbeth*, as the canonically entrenched ‘foreign language’ world cinema reading of Shakespeare’s Scottish tragedy.

Chapter 6, ‘*Romeo and Juliet*’, investigates how, in twenty-eight recent film adaptations, Shakespeare’s play proves the spur to addressing concerns about demographic change and generational disputes in relation to gender and race. That familiar Shakespearean construction of the ‘star-crossed lovers’, I suggest, is deployed to point up both the contradictory ways in which the transgression of cultural and national borders is imagined and the place of mobility and diaspora in already mediated versions of romance.³⁶ This is a play, the chapter contends, that, in its adapted forms, exhibits a remarkable capacity for generic transformation. For, as a number of consistently conceived films reveals, cinema brings into visibility the prospects of a better social dispensation, and an acclimatized world order, notably through timely rewritings to the classic tragic denouement.

The structure of the book as a whole, then, makes available an interpretive system that tests the advantages and disadvantages of particular approaches. While each section is written from a particular perspective, all three approaches allow for the intersection of key concerns and enable comparison to be made between issues of setting, genre, periodization, cinematic technique and industrial context. Just as the book is conscious of alternative ways to address the chosen material, so is it possible to contemplate alternative case studies. The Chinese director, Xiaogang Feng, whose 2006 film, *The Banquet*, an adaptation of *Hamlet*, is

discussed elsewhere in this book, could well qualify, for example, as an auteur, particularly in the light of the ‘prestige’ with which his ‘celebration pictures’, directed at ‘a rising bourgeoisie of entrepreneurs and entertainers, aspirational opportunists in show business and the arts’, have been associated.³⁷ Other auteurs would include the nonagenarian Portuguese cinematic figurehead, Manoel de Oliveira, styled ‘the last of the great early filmmakers’, ‘profound’ and ‘paradigmatic’, who, in the French-language film, *Je rentre à la maison/ I’m Going Home* (dir. Manoel de Oliveira, 2003), something of a swansong, details the doomed efforts of character actor Gilbert Valence (Michel Piccoli) to find, in the part of Prospero, relief from family trauma.³⁸ Or the focus could alight on Juan Luis Iborra, the productive and pioneering Spanish film director who has been at the vanguard of the European queer cinema movement: his *Valentín* (2003), in which an all-male theatre troupe’s rehearsals of *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, among other plays, come to infiltrate ‘real life’, makes a striking impression in its delineation of inter-cast rivalry and sexual passions that run tragically awry. And, if we are looking for an authorial mandate, we might do no better than to turn to Chan-wook Park, Korean ‘auteur-director’ and ‘transnational ... celebrity’, and his viscerally extreme *Oldboy* (2003), with its heavy lacings of *Titus Andronicus*.³⁹ In that process whereby a filmmaker is credited with an auteurial designation, Shakespeare, it seems, very often performs a contributory role.

In the regional approach to Shakespeare and world cinema, similarly, Latin America and Asia are not the only constructs that might be summoned. Such is the depth and extent of the territory that any number of examples could be chosen from the various films discovered in this book and put together in an alternative constellation. For instance, works such as *Romani Kris: Cigánytörvény/Gypsy Lore* (dir. Bence Gyöngyössi, 1997) – a Hungarian adaptation of *King Lear* that trades upon saturated landscape shots, deep-focus photography and flashback narrative technique to elaborate a parable of retribution and atonement – *Le Grand Rôle* (dir. Steve Suissa, 2004) – a French film that figures an actor’s failure to secure the part of Shylock against a backdrop of anti-Semitism and personal catastrophe – and *Iago* (dir. Volfango de Biasi, 2009) – an Italian adaptation of *Othello* which, revolving around intrigues between architecture students at the University of Venice, makes the titular character a wronged hero so as to play up concerns of nepotism, meritocracy and social injustice – might be seen to belong to a pan-European cinematic trajectory. This is a book, then, about neglect and recovery but also about