

Shakespeare AT CINEMA

notes from Professor S. Socci's conference
and a little more....

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Shakespeare is undoubtedly the most famous playwright of all times, his plays have been performed on the stages worldwide for four centuries and there are countless adaptations of them for the screen.

First and foremost it is worth asking oneself: **IS DRAMA SUITABLE FOR MOVIES?**

The **language, style** and **technique** of **filmmaking** seem definitely more appropriate to works of fiction and the figurative arts rather than drama.

Unlike cinema drama is immediate, it happens 'live' before the audience in the restricted area of the stage; it relies on very little props, special effects, it rarely has a soundtrack, never has narrative; characters are limited; it is based on dialogues rather than narrative or description.

In Drama it matters **WHAT** is told

In FICTION it matters **HOW IT** is told

Then

ARE SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS SUITABLE FOR MOVIES?

Shakespeare's drama and dialogues, although dealing with themes of universal significance, were written for the 16th century audience and playhouses, a feature that while affecting most elements of a play (e.g. *contents, dialogue and stage directions*) as it is evident / bizarre to the contemporary public, does create a problem to film directors who wish to adapt Shakespeare for the silver screen.

The problem is caused by the distinctive features of the Elizabethan theatre and audience.

- Drama was a very common form of entertainment in Elizabethan times; plays were performed in inn yards first (which determined the typical shape of the Elizabethan playhouse), then in playhouses. All sorts of people would go to see a play, tickets would be reasonably priced.
- The performances would take place during the day to use natural light and would last for hours; the audience would eat or drink while watching them.
- Most of the audience was illiterate, nonetheless they would be able to understand and appreciate the language of the plays (that we now consider elaborate and elevated...). The reason for this is that anyone who could neither read nor write would be used to listening carefully and would remember accurately.
- Unlike today the Elizabethan audience would mostly and naturally rely on their **sense of hearing and memory**.
- In addition to that, since stage space and props were reduced to **bare essentials** the audience was used to relying on their **imagination**, which allowed them to **see**, to **believe** and **participate emotionally** in what was happening on the stage, all this created an effective **interaction** between playwrights/ characters and their public.

The awareness of **technical shortcomings** (a problem cinema does not have) led playwrights, and Shakespeare most notably, to resort to a technique that has been termed '**verbal scenery**' [**SCENOGRAFIA VERBALE**] that is to create in words what could not be physically reproduced on the stage, therefore

- a night setting would be rendered by frequent repetition of the words *night* or *moon*;
- sentences in the *prologue* or the *dialogue* were inserted to encourage the public to imagine a larger space than that which could be enclosed in the shape of the playhouse: '*this wooden O*'.

But while this device made sense to the theatre audience of those days, can it be logically and equally used for a film script?

e.g. L. Olivier's *Henry V* – 1944 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlhYxshDPLg>

Countless film directors have tried to solve this problem in different ways, so that films or material based on Shakespeare's plays are usually classified as **direct, indirect or allusive**.

- DIRECT ADAPTATIONS rewrite the plot/script without changing most details:

e.g. *Giulietta e Romeo* by R. Castellani 1954

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7o9faelbTQ>



- INDIRECT ADAPTATIONS keep the original story, but may give a different setting in time or place, change the name names, while the events are the same.

e.g. ***West Side Story*** - musical 1958 – film By R. Wise 1961

- ALLUSIVE ADAPTATIONS refer to Shakespeare plays or part of them and may be anything from comedies, cartoons, songs, posters, advertisements etc...

e.g. ***Forbidden Planet*** - 1956 : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxQ9GG6hUDM>

e.g. ***The Lion King***- Disney pictures – 1994

parallels with W. Shakesperare's Hamlet:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBC4lyX3glc>

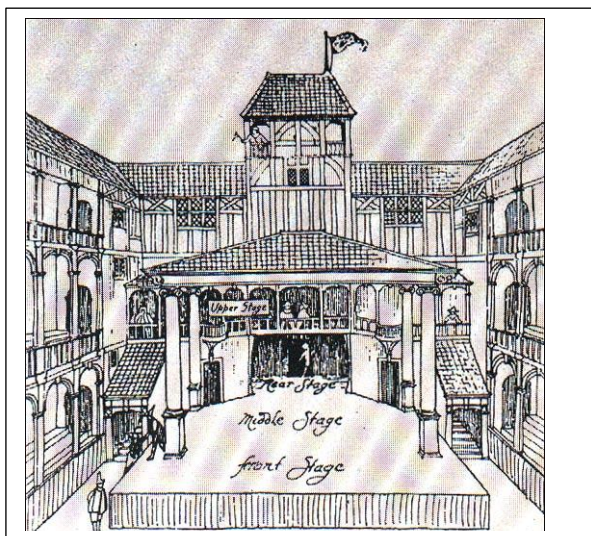
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=judjEmaTJAs>

Toto': *Chi si ferma è perduto* 1960:

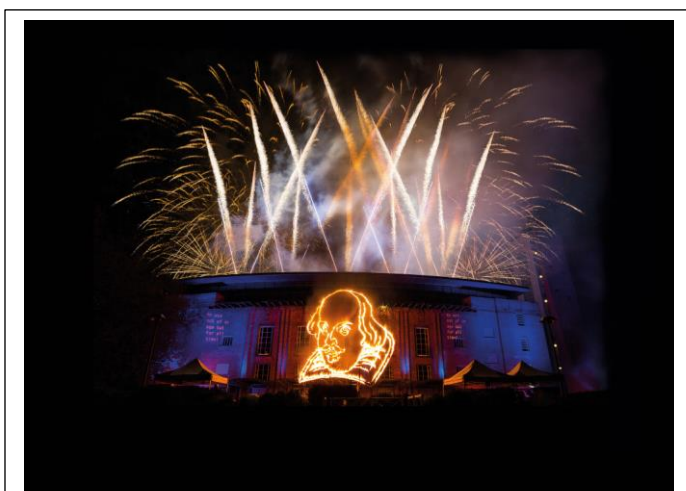
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POswss9XTog>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHFLu6ird_I

to name but a few.



In conclusion Shakespeare's insight into the human mind and personality is so profound that it keeps providing motivation and inspiration to artists all over the world.



TRIVIA:

Quotes by Shakespeare that you say without knowing they are by Shakespeare:

**ROMPERE IL GHIACCIO
NON HO CHIUSO OCCHIO
FUORI DI TESTA
MOLTO RUMORE PER NULLA
PURO COME LA NEVE
L'AMORE È CIECO
TUTTO È BENE QUEL CHE FINISCE BENE**

“La Bisbetica Domata”, 1590
“Cimbelino”, 1609
“Riccardo III”, 1633
“Molto rumore per nulla”, 1612
“Amleto”, 1603
“Il Mercante di Venezia”, 1605
“Tutto è bene quel che finisce bene”, 1603

Shakespeare's use of insults:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdCjKH5IKJ8>

if Shakespeare's insults were used today

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_Uej8LJ48Q