

SHAKESPEARE *and World Cinema*



MARK THORNTON BURNETT

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SHAKESPEARE AND WORLD CINEMA

Shakespeare and World Cinema radically reimagines the field of Shakespeare on film, drawing on a wealth of examples from Africa, the Arctic, Brazil, China, France, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, Tibet, Venezuela, Yemen and elsewhere. Mark Thornton Burnett explores the contemporary significance of Shakespeare cinema outside the Hollywood mainstream for the first time, arguing that these adaptations are an essential part of the story of Shakespearean performance and reception. The book reveals in unique detail the scope, inventiveness and vitality of over seventy films that have undeservedly slipped beneath the radar of critical attention and also discusses regional Shakespeare cinema in Latin America and Asia. Utilizing original interviews with filmmakers throughout, it introduces new auteurs, analyzes multiple adaptations of plays such as *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and pioneers fresh methodologies for understanding the role that Shakespeare continues to play in the international marketplace.

MARK THORNTON BURNETT is Professor of Renaissance Studies at Queen's University Belfast. He is the author of *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (1997), *Constructing 'Monsters' in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (2002) and *Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace* (2007; 2nd edn 2012) and the editor of *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (1999) and *The Complete Poems of Christopher Marlowe* (2000). His co-edited publications include *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century* (2006), *Filming and Performing Renaissance History* (2011) and *The Edinburgh Companion to Shakespeare and the Arts* (2011). He is Director of the Sir Kenneth Branagh Archive, has held fellowships at the Huntington Library and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, and has taught at the Folger Institute on the National Endowment for the Humanities programme 'From the Globe to the Global: Shakespearean Relocations'.

To Henry John Burnett

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A note on titles

How film titles are referred to is a notoriously inconsistent business. For first citations, I have used the non-English title followed by the English translation provided for international distribution. In subsequent references, I use the non-English title alone. There are some world cinema titles that go only by an English-language title; in these instances, there is no necessity for translation. Other films, possibly because they never received international distribution, are referred to by a title in the original language. There is inevitably a certain amount of titular variation in response to local contexts and conventions.

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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

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 though 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