

PART XXVIII

SHAKESPEARE AND MEDIA HISTORY

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Modern students, performers, and audiences have a rapidly growing archive of global adaptations, appropriations, and performances of Shakespeare to discover, filled with the rich variety of material created as his works have migrated across media. The excitement and the challenges of studying Shakespeare across media can be felt clearly when we consider how rapidly our understanding of any given medium can change over time – even over just a few decades. To aid that discovery and enhance that excitement, this chapter outlines key concepts in Shakespearean media studies. Its focus (and the focus of the chapters in this section) is recorded, “timed” media – media that unfold in time – from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. Drawing on current thinking in media history, it addresses how we understand adaptation as a cultural process and what questions we ask about it; what we mean by a “medium” and how we see the relations between visual, aural, and verbal media; and how we imagine reception and the work that audiences do. The chapter concludes with guidelines for further exploration and study, sketching a handful of approaches for students and scholars that have payoffs for understanding older media, newer media, and Shakespeare.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Media change
- Audiences
- Adaptation as a cultural process
- Revival and recycling
- What we mean by “medium”
- Media “convergence”
- Media “purity”
- Audience agency
- Transmission and message
- Four approaches to further discovery

267. SHAKESPEARE ON AIR I: EARLY BRITISH RADIO AND RADIO AUDIENCES

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From the birth of broadcast Shakespeare in Britain in the early 1920s to its “golden age” in the 1930s to 1950s, radio offered an important aural mass medium for the reception of Shakespearean performances. Radio relied on the expressiveness of the actor’s voice, simple sound effects, and the listener’s (and actor’s) mental powers of visualization to complete a scene. This reliance on the audience’s imagination became both its greatest weakness and its greatest strength. By the mid-1920s, the marvel of the wireless had caught the fancy of more than one million licensed listeners. Broadcasting expanded rapidly, allowing directors and actors to explore new techniques and forms specific to this emerging medium. By 1928, experiments were being conducted to test alternate ways of presenting radio adaptation. With the declaration of war, radio drama entered a phase of unprecedented popularity. Throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s, wireless listening was a robust social habit, even with the advent of television.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The birth of radio drama
- A national theater of the air
- Radiophonic experiments
- The early 1930s: intimate drama
- The 1930s to 1950s: the top ten of broadcast drama

268. SHAKESPEARE ON AIR II: THE GOLDEN AGE OF US RADIO

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From the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, commercial broadcasters in the United States found in Shakespeare both a tradition of popular adaptation from the vaudeville stage – well suited to a new lowbrow medium such as radio – and an opportunity to aspire to highbrow culture. Once radio established itself as a broadcast medium, it sought to both imitate the successes of conventional theater and rival them, causing the proliferation of a variety of new genres for Shakespeare. In this way, Shakespeare's works served as a vehicle for the newer medium to establish its niche in relation to the older one – a role those works still play in broadcast media today.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- “Quality” shows and early innovation
- The Battle of the Bard
- Elite drama for a popular medium: early perceptions
- Early radio genres: westerns, crime, variety shows
- Media competition: “the electronic nonsense that’s killed theater”

269. SHAKESPEARE AND AUDIO RECORDING

Wes Folkerth, McGill University, Canada

From the wax cylinder to the digital audiobook, the representation of Shakespeare's words and works has responded to the evolution of audio recording technology every step of the way. The earliest recordings archive for posterity the vocal cadences of actors trained in the nineteenth-century performance tradition. When the phonograph developed into a mass-media device a few decades later, it became possible for more people to hear the voice of a great actor than would ever have had the opportunity to see him act in the theater. As sound recording technology continued to mature, audio adaptations of entire plays were specifically tailored to the medium, and even productions of the entire Shakespearean canon became possible. More recently, as home recording and editing software makes audio sampling and dubbing techniques that had been the purview of music industry specialists more widely available, a broad array of recorded Shakespeares are becoming the raw material for new genres created by amateurs, fans, and students.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Early audio recordings of Shakespeare
- Vocal stylings at the turn of the twentieth century
- Recording Shakespeare in the age of radio
- Audio recordings of the complete works

270. TV AND EARLY TV AUDIENCES IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES

William Uricchio, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States, and University of Utrecht, Netherlands

Early television audiences raise compelling questions for our understanding of the Bard's place in mid-twentieth-century culture and of television as a new medium. The early performance of Shakespeare on television illustrates that medium's struggle for cultural identity, its emergent operating logics, the industry's perception of its audiences, and its ability to give them form. Indeed, from the medium's start until the present, the audience – its desires, needs, and vulnerabilities; its demographic spread and numbers; its level of attentiveness – has been a recurrent site of concern.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Beginnings
- Representing the audience
- What do we really know about early audiences?
- Audiences and their impact
- The medium and its audiences mature

271. FILM AND FILM AUDIENCES

Robert Shaughnessy, University of Kent, United Kingdom

Shakespeare films have always engaged and competed with the other media that surround them in Europe, North America, and globally. From the beginning of film, silent Shakespeare closely linked itself to theater and live performance; British films often reproduced scenes of stage productions. In the United States, Shakespeare was designed both to appeal to more “respectable” (middle-class, family) audiences and to retrieve the reputation of a film medium normally associated with profanity, immorality, and social disorder. The 1940s through 1960s saw waves of Shakespeare adaptation surge and wane. By the late 1980s, a newer wave of Anglophone Shakespearean cinema had been inaugurated by Kenneth Branagh. The viability of Shakespeare films has depended throughout their history on changing circumstances of film production, distribution, and consumption. These circumstances have shifted from the large-scale theatrical release toward niche marketing, video, and increasingly online screen releases.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The beginnings: silent films/popular spectacles
- Picture palaces/middle-class audiences
- Postwar Shakespeare: competing national cinemas
- 1950s–1960s: Auteurs, art-house cinema, populist cinema
- 1990s: Resurgent Anglophone adaptations, from the multiplex to DVD

272. WORLD CINEMA

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Screened in many non-English-speaking nations and cultures in varied ways, Shakespeare films remind us that the category of “world cinema” itself must be approached from multiple angles. Important kinds of cross-fertilization and exchange occur when Shakespeare’s works are translated across cultures, inviting us to attend to questions of auteurship, region, and period. For too long, the stories scholars have told about the history of Shakespeare film adaptation have been based exclusively on Western and English-language films. We gain a richer and more accurate sense of this history of Shakespeare adaptation on film when we tell that history in global rather than exclusively Western terms.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Auteurship: how Shakespeare scholars first began to think transnationally
- Interpreting adaptations in local contexts: the example of Asian cinemas
- Changing the stories we tell about the history of “Shakespeare on film”
- The 1970s
- Reading across the decades: A transnational history of Shakespeare on film
- Transnational traffic in the Bard

273. PLAYS-WITHIN-THE-FILM

Sarah Hatchuel, University of Le Havre, France

What do Shakespeare’s plays convey when they are encountered *within* a film – as playlets embedded in a medium for which they were not originally written? Shakespearean plays-within-a-film include plays-within-the-play featured in films. They also include extracts from plays being rehearsed, performed, or simply read within a film or film musical. Thus the answers to this intriguing question are as diverse as the filmic forms of remediation and appropriation themselves, from the western of *My Darling Clementine* (dir. John Ford, 1946) to Bollywood. These answers in turn raise issues of cultural authority, artistic recycling, and competition between the media.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Remediating Shakespeare: from play-within-the-play to play-within-the-film
- Appropriating Shakespeare in films: redemption, “universality,” and heritage
- Distorting and queering Shakespeare through plays-within-the-film
- “Glocalizing” Shakespeare: theatrical films or cinematal plays?

274. SHAKESPEARE DOCUMENTARIES

Rebecca Chapman, Vanderbilt University, United States

What is the relationship between art and the world around us? This question occupies a central place both in Shakespeare’s works and in the genre of film documentary. It is thus a pressing concern for any documentary media project that references Shakespeare. As Hamlet reminds us, performing arts can reflect an image of society back to itself, because “the purpose of playing ... was and is, to hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature” (*Ham.* 3.2.17–19). Documentary speaks to the desire to better understand the world and our place in it. Attending to the form’s long fascination with Shakespeare can enrich our understanding of how Shakespearean material both informs and is informed by changing concepts of what counts as real and revolutionary.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- A brief history of documentary film
- Defining documentary
- Twenty-first-century documentaries
- Coding reality and memory: Shakespeare’s place in history
- Six modes of documentary
- Rehabilitating social margins: prison Shakespeare
- Mediated realities and remediated national identities
- Shakespearean productions: intercultural encounters

275. THE SONNETS ONSCREEN

James Schiffer, State University of New York New Paltz, United States

As a collection of lyric poems, Shakespeare’s sonnets would not seem to offer great potential for film, television, or video adaptation. In fact, there have been no productions – except live stage shows and audio recordings – that present a single recitation or performance of all 154 sonnets, either in the order in which they were first published in 1609 or in some other arrangement. The collection as a whole was clearly never intended to be performed in its entirety in a single session. Indeed, even to read all the sonnets silently at a single sitting would be a challenge to readers if not a disservice to the poems. In view of this lack of dramatic potential for the collection as a whole, what is surprising is how many television shows, films, and videos either incorporate individual poems or groups of poems: from full-length films inspired by the entire collection, to films in which individual sonnets are quoted, to performances of individual poems and clusters of related poems, on television, VHS/DVD, or shared online.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Sonnets as “high art”
- Sonnets as the “key to Shakespeare’s heart”
- Dramatizing the sonnets
- Quoting sonnets
- Sonnets as acting exercises
- Educational performances
- Sonnets online: a rich variety of amateur performances

276. SHAKESPEARE AND ANIMATION

Laurie Osborne, Colby College, United States

The history of Shakespearean animation is long, rich, and global in scope. Beginning in the early twentieth century, Shakespeare's work and characters have appeared in animated films that use a wide range of techniques and styles, from cutout animation, to stop action and claymation, to anim  . Shakespearean animation is important partly because this has been a dominant medium for presenting Shakespeare's works to young audiences and representing the work of young filmmakers. Yet Shakespeare has also influenced animation and animation theory since early work on film. Ultimately, animated Shakespeares support Paul Wells's contention that "animation is the most appropriate language" for literary adaptation because it "incorporate[s] the hybridity, instability, and mutability of the perception of textual allusion."

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Short takes and educational entertainments
- Formal techniques: literal metamorphosis
- Featuring *Romeo and Juliet*
- Recent styles of animation

277. SHAKESPEARE AND ONLINE VIDEO

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Over the past few years, almost unnoticed by scholars, a new form of Shakespearean production has emerged. Where new media and new technologies appear, interpretations of Shakespeare tend to follow soon after. It is therefore no surprise to discover Shakespeare's presence in the rise of online video. As a means of creative production, distribution (including dedicated channels and embedded code enabling anyone to include a video on their own Web site), and interchange of ideas (through comments, likes, linkages, tags), YouTube and other video channels such as Vimeo, Daily Motion, and Blip.tv have radicalized the creative process. Shakespeare has been the beneficiary of this emerging area of creativity, explored in a variety of genres and practices prevalent online: mash-ups, animated typography, freshly imagined video soliloquies, parodies, school projects, and more.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Sharing Shakespeare
- New/old video genres
- An emergent video canon