



This Rough Magic

A Peer-Reviewed, Academic, Online Journal

Dedicated to the Teaching of Medieval and Renaissance Literature



Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace by Mark Thornton Burnett. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, reprint 2012. 227pp.

Reviewer(s): Edward Plough

Reviewed Work(s):

Source: *This Rough Magic*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (December 2012), pp. 123-127.

Published by: www.thisroughmagic.org

Stable URL: <http://www.thisroughmagic.org/plough%20review.html>

Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace
by Mark Thornton Burnett. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007,
reprint 2012. 227pp.

Reviewer: Edward Plough

Mark Thornton Burnett's monograph argues for globalization as a common thread throughout late twentieth and twenty-first century representations of Shakespeare on film. Sensitive to the tension caused by globalization's simultaneous privileging and obliterating of the local, Burnett calls over thirty Shakespeare films into service to show how auteurs from around the world have tapped into globalizing forces within Shakespeare's plays in order to create intellectually and financially successful cinematic adaptations. Highly aware of the ongoing conversation regarding Shakespeare on film, Burnett's book is a valuable study for those interested in understanding how cinematic Shakespeare interacts with and is propagated by a global culture that seeks commonality even as it prioritizes diversity.

Chapter 1 examines four relatively obscure films with a focused interest in the representational crisis of adapting Shakespearean drama to cinema. Just as late twentieth and twenty-first century Shakespeare films have adopted increasingly cinematic and less theatrical production approaches, Burnett argues that there has been

an “emergence of filmic representations whose narratives prioritize theatrical shows and stagings of Shakespearean texts” (7). As critics have argued for decades, cinematic usages of Shakespeare implicitly espouse Shakespeare’s continued relevance. In chapter 1, Burnett isolates a countercurrent in films such as Kenneth Branagh’s *In the Bleak Midwinter* (1995), finding that they “display vexed and unresolved attitudes towards the relations between cinema, theatre and the global scene” (8). Chapter 2 argues for Michael Hoffman’s *William Shakespeare’s ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’* (1999) as a postmodern ‘sequel’ to Kenneth Branagh’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993). Honing in on globalization as the catalyst for Hoffman’s ‘sequel,’ Burnett argues that Hoffman’s film takes its “energy from the charisma of its model,” and by so doing, “extends, expands and amplifies the interests of confronting and providing a Shakespeare that enjoys cross-cultural appeal” (29). Burnett assesses the varying degrees of success of Hoffman’s effort at sequelization and locates in the film’s shortcomings a tacit anxiety concerning Shakespeare’s cultural cachet in the global marketplace.

Chapter 3 sets the local against the global both in Shakespeare and in Shakespearean film adaptation. Whereas the contemporary trend in scholarship is to argue for a diversity of ‘Shakespeares,’ Shakespearean cinema would seem to take the opposite path, instead imagining Shakespeare as a universal (global) entity. *Hamlet*, Michael Almereyda’s 2000 film would seem to say, can take place in modern day New York City because Shakespeare was “not of an age, but for all time.” However, Burnett

employs several cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's highly localized plays, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, to argue that the truth is somewhere between the academic investment in the local, historical Shakespeare and filmmakers' predilection with global, trans-historical Shakespeare. Arguing that auteurs tend to metaphorize the local, as in the any-town Scotland of Billy Morrissette's *Scotland, PA* (2001), Burnett finds that "local concerns are always accommodated by, and in conversation with, global imperatives. Chapter 4 examines how Oliver Parker's *Othello* (1995) and Tim Blake Nelson's *'O'* (2001), set centuries apart, utilize similar strategies of representing *Othello* and the racial tensions that it stages. "The performance of the racial self in *'O'* and *Othello*, Burnett writes, "goes hand-in-hand with the films' reflections upon modern media and the effects and implications of powers of reproduction" (86). Just as *Othello* struggles with racial hybridity, these films depict the racial crisis of globalization wherein uniformity and diversity are at odds.

In chapter 5, Burnett focuses entirely on Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice* (2004), arguing that this erstwhile "impossible to film" play (5) attained palatability by being responsive to contemporary global demands regarding the representation of Shylock. Burnett writes, "After the horrors of the twentieth century, there can be no imaginative realization of [*The Merchant of Venice*] that is not shaped by the Holocaust" (105). As such, Radford's film distances itself from Shakespeare's anti-Semitic Venice in order to relocate itself in a Venice drawn with twentieth century anti-Semitism in mind.

Chapter 6 looks at two films, Greg Lombardo's *Macbeth in Manhattan* (1999), and Kristian Levring's *The King is Alive* (2000), with a focused interest in how these films refract Shakespearean spirituality through their apparent concern with globalization. In both films, Burnett explains, characters "inhabit Shakespeare in a process that allows for an access to spirituality or are led to spiritual points of contact through private experience" (128). Chapter 7 suggests that parodic Shakespearean film adaptations and globalization both operate under the same principles: "mobility, movement, repackaging and translation" (130). Taking this into account, Burnett posits that "these films are archetypically postmodern in recycling what has been so as to pass particular comment upon what is and what might be" (157).

The strength of *Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace* is its ability to unite such a diverse array of films under its central theme. Though Burnett might have spent more time charting the globalizing forces within Shakespeare's plays, his purpose in this monograph was to outline the cinematic usage of Shakespeare as it pertains to globalization. In contrast to many studies of Shakespearean films that focus solely on the most mainstream and successful outings, Burnett's book is likely to expose its readership to new and unfamiliar films. A helpful index and an indispensable bibliography will aid scholars wishing to pursue the matter of globalization in Shakespeare further. Along those lines, this book seems to be intended only for such scholars; undergraduate students and theatre artists will find little use for this

monograph. That said, *Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace* is a valuable contribution to the ever-growing body of scholarship dedicated to Shakespeare on film.