



## **Film Adaptation of Shakespeare for Modern Audience**

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### **Abstract**

We know some writers through film, television or social media. The modern generation is more used to these mediums. Films are playing a major role to popularize the writers. Reading books is sometimes considered to be old fashioned. Film adaptation of Shakespeare has formed the contemporary consciousness of the audience around the world. William Shakespeare is considered to be a major source for film directors not in Hollywood but in Bollywood also. The modern film makers recreate Shakespeare through films for the modern audience. The modern directors reinvent Shakespeare in their films and the modern audience also wants the entertaining Shakespeare.

### **Keywords**

**Film, Television, Film Adaptation, Audience, Cinematic,**

Film, Television and Social Medias i.e. computer mediated technologies are the integral part of our life. We are less used to books since these mediums are getting more and more popularity. Most of us know writers or their works through these mediums. In 1979 Morris Beja estimated that 20 to 30 percent of American films released each year are adapted from novels and that 75 percent of the top Academy Awards have gone to adaptations. We find a strong relationship between literature and film. Films are playing a major role to popularize the writers. William Shakespeare is a major source for the film directors or he is considered as the most popular screenwriter for the film industry especially in Hollywood. Shakespeare's all works, except poetic works, have been adapted by the film makers. There are not only film adaptations of most of the works of Shakespeare but also we find the multiple versions of most of his tragedies and history plays. With the film adaptations we find number of television miniseries also. There are number of documentaries on Shakespeare's biography and the process of his adaptations. Shakespeare has directly

or indirectly inspired a huge number of films and an equally wide range of interpretations also. The timelessness of his themes continues to keep his plays fresh forever. He dramatized the themes like love, marriage, family relationships, gender role, humour, illness, deception, betrayal, revenge, murder, death etc. He created unforgettable characters from lofty kings to lowly thieves who have become archetypes of modern dramas and films.

Shakespeare Dramas are especially written for stage performance and he played a major role for the formation of English language. **“Shakespeare’s plays are in some ways ‘cinematic’. Unlike the modern dramatists, so the argument goes, Shakespeare, like other Elizabethan playwrights, builds up his actions in brief scenes and organizes both time and space in an extremely fluid fashion: Antony and Cleopatra, for one notable instance, has over forty scenes and its action covers some ten years. Shakespeare is thus naturally suited to the cinema”** (Naremore 157). Film adaptation of Shakespeare has formed the contemporary consciousness of the audience around the world. The history of film adaptation of Shakespeare goes back to 1888 when Sir Herbert B. Tree first filmed an imagery scene from a stage production of *King John*. **“Shakespeare was first adapted to the movie screen in 1888, when *King John* was filmed as a four minute movie. The first *Hamlet* on screen was played by Sarah Bernhardt (in a gender twist that perhaps Shakespeare himself would have enjoyed), with knives clacking behind the screen to create dueling sounds. A highly regarded 1920 *Hamlet*, by German director Svend Gade, presented the title character as a girl raised as a boy, one of the first complete reinterpretation of Shakespeare”** (Adapting Shakespeare Web) The film adaptations of Shakespeare have been molding the contemporary understanding of social justice, race, gender, politics, human psyche, cultural history etc. since the inception of film industry. Here is the data of the film adaptation history of Shakespeare’s works in America and England.

**Antony and Cleopatra:** 1908, 1972, 1974, 1981=4

**Coriolanus:** 1984, 2012=2

**Hamlet:** Total 8 Adaptations in Silent Film, 1921 (Germany), 1948, 1961 (Germany), 1962 (Russia), 1964, 1969, 1980, 1990, 1992 (Russia), 1996, 2000, 2007 (Australia), 1960 (Japan), 1983 (Canada), 1990, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2006 (China), 2008, 1987 (Finland)=29

**Julius Caesar:** 1950, 1953, 1970, 1979, 1994 (Russia), 2012=6

**King Lear:** 1953, 1971 (Denmark), 1971 (Russia), 1974, 1976, 1982, 1983, 1997, 1999, 1985 (Japan), 1997, 2002=12

**Macbeth:** 1948, 1954, 1955, 1957, 1960, 1965, 1971, 1978, 1981, 1982 (Hungary, 1983, 1991, 1997, 1998, 1992 (Russia), 2001, 2001 (Germany), 2006 (Australia), 2010, 2015=20

**Othello:** 1922 (Germany), 1946, 1947, 1952 (Italy), 1955 (Russia), 1962, 1965, 1974, 1980, 1990, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2009 Iago (Italy)=15

**Romeo and Juliet:** 1908, 1936, 1954, 1968, 1978, 1979 (Canada), 1982, 1992 (Russia), 1996, 1998, 2000, 2011=12

**Timon of Athens:** 1981, 1985, 1999, 1999=4

**Titus Andronicus:** 1981=1

Comedy

**All's Well That Ends Well:** 1968, 1978, 1981, 2009=4

**As You Like It:** 1912, 1915, 1936, 1963, 1978, 1983 (Canada), 2006, 2010 (Canada), 2010=9

**The Comedy of Errors:** 1940, 1967, 1975, 1978, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1989, 2000=9

**Cymbeline :** 1913, 1982, 2014=3

**Love's Labours Lost:** nil

**Measure for Measure:** 1979, 1995=2

**The Merry Wives of Windsor:** 1952, 1966 (Switzerland), 1970, 1982

**The Merchant of Venice:** 1916, 1922, 1947, 1955, 1972, 1973, 1976, 1980, 1996, 2001, 2002 (Newzeland), 2004=12

**A Midsummer Night's Dream:** 1909, 1935, 1968, 1999, 2005 (Spain and Portugal)=5

**Much Ado About Nothing:** 1973, 1984, 1993, 2005, 2012=5

**Pericles, Prince of Tyre:** 1984=1

**Taming of the Shrew:** 1929, 1967, 1980, 1990, 1994 (Russia) = 5

**The Tempest:** 1911, 1960, 1979, 1980, 1983, 1992 (Russia- Animated Shakespeare), 2010=7

**Troilus and Cressida:** nil

**Twelfth Night:** 1910, 1955 (Russia), 1980, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2003=7

**Two Gentlemen of Verona:** 1984=1

**Winter's Tale:** 1980, 1994 (Russia), 1999=3

History

**Henry IV, part 1:** 1960 (TV Miniseries), 1979, 1990, 2012=4

**Henry IV, part 2:** 1960 (TV Miniseries), 1965, 1979, 1990, 2012=4

**Henry V:** 1944, 1960 (TV Miniseries), 1979, 1989, 1990, 2012=6

**Henry VI, Part-1:** 1960 (TV Miniseries), 1965, 1983, 1990=4

**Henry VI, Part-2:** 1960 (TV Miniseries), 1965, 1983, 1990, 1990=5

**Henry VI, Part-3:** 1960 (TV Miniseries), 1965, 1983=3

**Henry VIII :** 1979= 1

**King John:** 1984, 2015 (Canada) =2

**Richard II:** 1960 (TV Miniseries), 1978, 1997, 1990, 2001, 2012 = 6

**Richard III:** 1955, 1960 (TV Miniseries), 1965, 1982, 1990, 1994 (Russia- Animated Shakespeare), 1995, 2008= 8

Here is the data of the film adaptation history of Shakespeare's works in India only.

**Antony and Cleopatra:** 2002 Kannaki (Malayam)

**Hamlet:** 1935 Khoon kaa Khoon

2011 Karm yogi, Directed by V. K. Prakash

2014 Haider

**Macbeth:** 2004 Maqbool, Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj

**Othello:** 1914 Hrid Majharey (Bangali)

1997 Kaliyattam (Malayalam)

2006 Omkara, Directed by Vishal Bharadwaj

**Romeo and Juliet:** 2013 Issaq (Hindi)

2014 Galiyan ki Raasleela – Ram Leela ( Hindi)

Quyamat se Qayamat Tal

Ishaqzaade

Comedy

**As You Like It:** 2012 (West Bangal, India) Directed by Suprio Chakrabarty

**The Comedy of Errors:** 1968 Do Dooni Chaar  
1982 Angoor, by Gulzar

**A Midsummer Night's Dream:**

10ml Love (India)

The virtual world has reinvented Shakespeare. But the limitation of film adaptation is that they tied to the idea of fidelity to the story and characters. It demands a new or different art, direction, acting and audience also.

The history of film making goes back to 1896 and “A Trip to the Moon” 1902 is considered to be the first film. In 1927 films with sound came with the making of “The Jazz Singer” and the colour films came around 1930s. The history of film adaptation of Shakespeare goes back to 1908. As Douglas Brode argues, **“Shakespearean drama is in any case inherently filmic”** (Shakespeare Web). Douglas Brode in his book *Shakespeare in the Movies*, writes, **“[Shakespeare’s plays] aren’t plays at all; rather, they are screenplays written, ironically, three centuries before the birth of cinema”**. With that then history Dramas of Shakespeare has become the vehicle for political statements. **“Change came again with the Second World War. Laurence Olivier in Britain and Orson Welles in America spearheaded a film Shakespeare movement, which, as part of the great post-war festival of the allied victory, also became an important vehicle for political statement”** (Shakespeare Web) Laurence Olivier in his Histories i. e. “Hamlet” (1948), Richard (1955) “Henry V” used popular genres such as horror films and stage dramas. The Royal Shakespeare Company of England has presented true-to-book Productions and with that they have made the productions of modern versions, including Romeo and Juliet of 1986 featuring sports cars, swimming pools etc. **“Al Pacino explored Richard III in his 1996 documentary “looking for Richard”. In 1998 “Shakespeare in Love” a comedy starring Gwyneth Paltrow, won seven Academy Awards, including best picture. The same year, Julia Stiles and Heath Ledger starred in “10 Things I Hate about You”, a modern teen version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Continuing that trend was “Get Over It” in 2001 on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The Upcoming “Othello”, a teen version of Othello, plays out its drama on the basketball court”** (Adapting Shakespeare Web) Adaptation often offers a commentary on the time in which they are produced.

Changes in language, setting, costumes help to place the production in a particular time. It is true that the variety of adaptations increase our ability to appreciate and understand Shakespeare. For example, the contemporary adaptation of Othello and its language and setting will certainly help us to understand the racial tension today. Director Trevor Nunn says in an interview about *The Merchant of Venice*, “The trick is to make a complete new piece of work while presenting the original piece of work”. **“In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century there seems to be a move back to the exposition of the raw text with such elements as stage sets, period setting, music, etc. providing the producers’ interpretations of the play. There is much more emphasis than there has been in the past on the integrity of Shakespeare’s texts, as far as we know what they are. Clearly, Shakespeare is what every generation ,makes of him.”** (Adapting Shakespeare Through web) The modern film makers recreate Shakespeare through films for the modern audience. For the modern audience Shakespeare may be slow and old-fashioned. **“In creating Romeo + Juliet, Luhrmann aimed to bring Shakespeare up to date and attempt to remove the stigma attached to Shakespearean films as being old fashioned, long and slow. He remarked that we were trying to make this movie sexy, violent and entertaining the way Shakespeare might have if he had been a filmmaker. To do this, he had to upgrade the setting and the weapons, but the characters: to make them believable and to fit into modern society.”** (Hammond web) The modern directors reinvent Shakespeare in their films and the modern audience also wants the entertaining Shakespeare.

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