
A Midsummer Night's Dream: Analysis Of Adaptations For The Big And Small Screen

A Midsummer Night's Dream has had more than 30 adaptations for the big and small screen, and it has also been appropriated by several films for different purposes.

In the silent era, Shakespearean plays have been used by early filmmakers in order to bring prestige to the new medium. Charles Kent and J. Stuart Blackton directed one of the writer's first silent adaptations: A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1909, which was a complete success.

The directors managed to compact the play in 11 minutes maintaining the coherence of the narration despite some omissions from the original work and they also knew how to maximize the magic of the work through simple stop-motion sequences.

By the time Austrian director Max Reinhardt made his version of A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1935, he had already produced the play more than 15 times between 1905 and 1934, with prominent success since its first production.

In 1935, Reinhart caught the attention of Jack Warner, boss of Warner Brothers Studios, through an impressive production in the Hollywood Bowl.

The studio decided to put the Austrian director in charge of a new version of A Midsummer Night's Dream with William Dieterle as co-director. In addition, the film had a budget of \$ 1,500,000, besides a portentous sound stage and a cast of famous actors such as James Cagney, Joe E. Brown, Victor Jory and Dick Powell, as well as rising stars Olivia de Havilland and a young Mickey Rooney.

The film has spectacular elements such as the fairy world, the dance scenes (with hints of previous stage productions), the music, and the presentation of the magic creatures.

Just as the film draws inspiration from the past, it has also influenced later adaptations by showing a darker side in some scenes.

For American critics, the film was a success and it marked a clear evolution since the first Shakespeare sound film in 1929. However, the adaptation did not reach the audience and it failed at the box office, which was decisive for Reinhardt to not direct any more films.

50 years later, the next film version of the play was delivered by the Spanish director Celestino Colorado. In this 84-minute version where sexual desire reigns with hints of homosexual sensibility and a non-conformist attitude. Besides, the filmmaker provides some different visions of the characters.

In 1999, the adaptation of Michael Hoffman takes place in a fictional Italian village called Villa Athena in the late Victorian era. Among the differences between Shakespeare's work and the film, apart from the setting, are, for instance, the lack of tension between Hippolyta and Theseus, or Bottom's unhappy marital life.

The film also has features from the ambit of art, for example, the magical world is inspired by the Etruscans, Oberon in a painting by Gustave Moreau and Titania in a figure from a pre-Raphaelite painting.

Regarding Bottom, Hoffman shows his transformation from human to ass unlike other adaptations, and bring us an erotic approach of the encounter between him and Titania. Also noteworthy is the moment when Bottom returns to his home and he looks melancholily through the window holding the ring that Titania gave him as a remnant of the fairy world.

The adaptation directed by Catherine Edzard in 2001, had a cast made up of children of different ethnicities from 8 to 12 years old. This version explores the meta-theatrical dynamics of the play.

The film begins with an audience of schoolchildren in a theatre watching the puppet version of A Midsummer Night's Dream. The Puppets have voice of actors like Derek Jacobi or Samantha Bon. This adaptation shows how the children are gradually absorbed by the fictional world of the play.

A Midsummer Night's Dream has also had a place on television. The first adaptation for the small screen was in 1964 with Benny Hill at the peak of his career. Then, in 1981 it was adapted into a season of BBC Television Shakespeare with a more realistic-romantic approach provided by Elijah Moijnsky (director) and David Myerscough-Jones (designer) but despite a good cast, it lacked emotion.

Peter Bowker's radical vision had a contemporary aspect, but he manages to respect the narrative of the original work and the relationships between the characters.

In conclusion, we can see how the work has been adapted on numerous occasions in different ways and visions, but what never changes are the magic it possesses and the ability to carry us to a world where dreams reign supreme and make us forget the reality for a moment. Because, at the end of the day, that's what fiction is about.