
Analysis Of Adaptations Of William Shakespeare's Plays Romeo And Juliet And The Taming Of The Shrew

The adaptation, modernisation, and appropriation of the plays of William Shakespeare has been a widely discussed topic for many years, through various forms. This essay will attempt to look at this subject in a particular way, with a focus on late 1990s Hollywood movie adaptations. The focus of this essay will be on a comparison of *Romeo and Juliet* with Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* with Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You*. The way in which the writers and directors of these two Hollywood adaptations appropriated the original text to each create an interpretation that appeals more to a younger and more modern audience will be a key theme of analysis throughout this essay. There will be a concentration on how and why these appropriations have been made, and how exactly these appropriations could impact an audience's perception of the original Shakespearean literature in both the original and a modern context. This research project will attempt to compare these two very famous Hollywood adaptations, as well as to discuss the lengths, at times extreme, that the writers and directors have gone to, to change various aspects of the original plays. It will also discuss why the directors felt these interpretations needed to be so different or somewhat similar to their original Shakespearean counterparts.

A secondary theme that will be examined in this essay is why many modern adaptations choose to change a vital aspect for the interpretation to attract a different audience than would usually visit a Shakespearean production. Within the two key texts, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, the main change for their adaptations was to modernise the setting of each, with Baz Luhrmann's interpretation keeping the original script, and Gil Junger choosing to use the original text as a mere story guide. The extent to which these changes are made within the adaptations are often seen as extreme and, therefore, remove the authenticity of the original text. This essay will explore the reasoning behind these changes and the way in which they affect Shakespeare's original text and intentions. The idea of 'True Shakespeare' will also be investigated, firstly, by determining what exactly is meant by that term, and secondly, by examining the effects on the public perception of this idealised image of Shakespearean theatre.

One key reason for modernising a Shakespearean play into a Hollywood movie adaptation - apart from the obvious financial cost-benefits of borrowing proven crowd-pleasing plot elements from an out of copyright piece of work - is to attract a much wider, even if relatively younger, audience than those you would usually see making the effort of patronising an original Shakespeare production. With these specific primary examples, the casting of specific actors was used as a useful tool to draw in the attention of a younger audience. This was as effective as any other aspect of the interpretations, by casting young, famous, attractive stars this brings a young fanbase with each actor. In Baz Luhrmann's adaptation the cast was led by well-known actors Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio, before William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* was released, Claire Danes had previously been nominated for an Emmy and had also won a Golden Globe award, while likewise Leonardo DiCaprio had been nominated for an Academy Award and a Golden Globe award, recognition which shot both of them into the public eye. In Gil Junger's adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the cast was led by Julia Stiles and Heath Ledger, before *10 Things I Hate About You* Julia Stiles and Heath Ledger were relatively

unknown actors, this movie shot the pair into stardom and made them both household names. The casting of these pairs and the commercial advertisement of these adaptations was aimed at a young, teenage audience, the opposite of those who would regularly be seen at a 'traditional' Shakespearean performance. By creating these adaptations with a key target audience of the younger generation, this opens the Shakespearean genre up to a much wider audience than would generally be expected, this also helps to boost sales on the specific movie's revenue and related merchandise, as well as introducing these young people to Shakespeare as a whole to encourage them to pursue their interest further.

The modernisation of Shakespeare's plays into multi-million-dollar Hollywood movies has become increasingly popular, with the 1990s being the epicentre of this adaptation revolution. In the 1990s there were seven traditional style Shakespeare Hollywood cinema adaptations, and twenty modernised interpretations, proving just how popular this style of modernisation had become during this time. This phase proved popular and successful with young cinema goers; however they were not as popular with a more refined audience that preferred to see a 'traditional' Shakespeare on stage. This radical modernisation of Shakespearean texts was often perceived as being too far removed from the original productions, an aspect that many disapproved of when changing key aspects of the text for a movie. Some of these 1990s modernised adaptations only change a single aspect such as the time setting and retain the original script and characterisation, while some chose to change nearly everything until only a shell of the original play remains. William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* and *10 Things I Hate About You* are prime examples of the opposite ends of this adaptation scale, with William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* changing the time and setting from Verona in Italy to Verona Beach in California but still using the original script, while *10 Things I Hate About You* changes the time, setting, script and the majority of the storyline, just keeping a brief shell of the original story to structure the film.

This popular style of modernisation has also been a frequent aspect in theatrical adaptations, The Royal Shakespeare Company itself has performed a modernised production of nearly every Shakespeare play to date. A highly acclaimed production of *Hamlet* was recently performed by The Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-Upon-Avon, taken on tour around the United Kingdom and then taken to New York to be performed on Broadway. This production featured the first black actor, Paapa Essiedu to play Hamlet within The Royal Shakespeare Company, accompanied by a majority black cast and setting of modern-day Africa, making this production highly radical. The African setting within this modernised production also created a link to Disney's *The Lion King* which is famously also modelled around *Hamlet*. The praise and recognition that this play received was unexpected due to the amount of changes made between the original Shakespearean production and this modern-day adaptation. As with every revolutionary interpretation of a Shakespeare play there are always people who will only look for the negative aspects of modernising productions and do not believe in anything but 'traditional' Shakespearean productions, yet it can also have the opposite effect of those open and willing to accept something more radical.

Due to the many modernisations of different Shakespeare texts and the critical praise that they receive, these adaptations have become more frequent and more accepted in a modern world. While the 1990s were the focal point of Hollywood movie Shakespearean adaptations, today is filled with modernised stage adaptations, by The Royal Shakespeare Company and other theatre companies across the world. The adaptations that are produced today vary widely in their modernisations, some simply update the time setting while some prefer to change all

aspects until they just retain the original title, some around the world even change the original script into a new language for their own interpretation. These adaptations receive varying reviews depending on many aspects including the culture of the country displaying the production, for example there are many modernised and surreal Chinese productions that received a wide range of reviews because of the culture itself. The culture in which these adaptations are produced can be just as important to the production as any other aspect of the modernising of the Shakespearean play. This essay will investigate the many outlying aspects that could have a significant effect on how an adaptation is received in the world and within the local culture, for example a Hollywood movie has the opportunity to reach much further in the world and be seen by a much wider audience than a local production ever could.

This essay will discuss all of the above topics while having a particular focus on the 1996 Hollywood adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet*, and the 1999 Hollywood adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *10 Things I Hate About You*. These will be investigated thoroughly and will be laid out in a separate chapter for each adaptation. The specific changes made in each adaptation will be discussed in detail, the exact reasons for these changes and the effect that each individual change has on the original Shakespeare text and its integrity as 'traditional' Shakespeare will also be analysed throughout the two chapters. This study will look at some other secondary texts as a basis for some of the points related to the original primary texts, these will all be modernised adaptations in various forms including plays, films and 'spin-offs' that are loosely based on their original Shakespearean texts. Throughout this essay many topics regarding the modernisation of Shakespeare productions will be discussed in depth and the large themes covered as a whole.