



Burnett, Mark Thornton. 2013. *Shakespeare and World Cinema*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 272 pages. ISBN: 978-1-107-00331-6.

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Mark Thornton Burnett's *Shakespeare and World Cinema* is a valuable, more-than-welcome addition to a growing field of criticism – Shakespeare film scholarship. It is a fascinating and groundbreaking book that explores the significance of non-English language Shakespearean adaptations, drawing on examples from Africa, Brazil, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, Tibet and elsewhere. Although collections and treatises devoted to the analysis of non-Anglophone Shakespearean adaptations are not new and were published before Burnett's volume, they focused on Shakespeare on stage rather than on screen. Poonam Trivedi and Ryuta Minami's *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia* (2009) or Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan's *Shakespeare in Asia: Contemporary Performance* (2010) are cases in point in the Asian territory. The topic of Shakespeare and world cinema was reduced to single articles within journals (Huang, 2009; Khoury, 2010; Modenessi, 2012; Modenessi, 2013) – or chapters within collections – such as the four articles included in *Latin American Shakespeares* (Kliman and Santos, 2005). Hence, Burnett's volume is a pioneering and innovative work since it explores in depth for the first time Shakespeare's international screen presence. Burnett takes readers to the unfamiliar territory of non-Anglophone film adaptations and opens the door to a new paradigm within Shakespeare studies to analyze the kind of Shakespeare that is promulgated.

The book is neatly structured into three thematic sections: "Auteurs", "Regional Configurations" (Latin America and Asia) and "Plays". Perhaps one of the book's greatest virtues is its wide film corpus. Seventy-three films – either instanced or examined – occupy Burnett's *Shakespeare and World Cinema*. With the exception of adaptations such as *The Banquet*, *Chicken Rice War* or *Maqbool* and *Omkara*, which have enjoyed some recognition among scholars, most of them are lesser-known or even unknown productions. In fact, as the author contends in the epilogue of the volume, he certainly struggled to obtain most of the titles explored in his work because some of them did not even appear in a DVD format.

After an introduction that offers a succinct summary of all the main sections comprised in this book, Burnett starts with “Auteurs” whose central purpose is to explore Shakespeare and world cinema from the perspective of auteur theory. Chapter one sheds light upon Alexander Abela’s adaptations of Shakespeare, such as *Makibefo* (1999), a Malagasy-language production based on *Macbeth* and *Souli* (2002), a Malagasy-and French-language production based on *Othello*. *Makibefo* and *Souli* alter and expand the Shakespearean narratives on which they are based. The cast in both movies differed considerably since, while *Makibefo* was performed by fishermen and herdsman, *Souli* was enacted by a professional, non-native cast. In both cases, Shakespeare is relocated in Madagascar. Via the films’ visual features – ethnographic elements, such as villagers dressed in loincloths – the auteurial presence is discovered. Abela clings to the Shakespearean *oeuvre* because he regards in it issues of transnationalism or border crossing that have defined the history of Madagascar and other colonially governed countries. One of Burnett’s premises in chapter two is that there is a world beyond Bollywood cinema in India, and it is the perfect place for ‘auterism’. This second chapter compares two directors from the northern and southern parts of India, the successful and well-known Vishal Bhardwaj and the lesser-known Jayaraaj Rajasekharan Nair. While Jayaraaj subscribes to a rural India, “Bhardwaj approves one that is urban, destabilized and multilocal” (6). Jayaraaj’s films *Kaliyattam* (1997) – an adaptation of *Othello* – and *Kannaki* (2002) – an adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* – centre around Kerala whereas Bhardwaj’s adaptations – *Maqbool* (2003) and *Omkara* (2006), based on *Macbeth* and *Othello* respectively – prioritize cities like Mumbai or the region of Uttar Pradesh. In Bhardwaj, there is a movement in the trajectory from the local to the global, but in Jayaraaj, this trajectory is reversed. One of the auteurial strategies instanced by Burnett is the use of Hollywood codes and conventions used by some of these films. This chapter is distinctive in its emphasis on auterism for further research in the relations between Indian film and Shakespeare.

The second section of the book entitled “Regional Configurations” examines non-Anglophone Shakespearean productions in the light of regional criteria. Burnett highlights the importance of the *milieu*. Chapter 3 is an engaging reading of three Latin American Shakespearean adaptations – *Sangrador*, a Venezuelan adaptation of *Macbeth*, *As Alegres Comadres*, a Brazilian adaptation of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Huapango*, a Mexican adaptation of *Othello*. All these films advertise a Shakespearean connection and point out how the localized *mise en scène* plays a crucial role in their understanding. While *Huapango* has received some critical attention, *As Alegres Comadres* and *Sangrador* are first examined by Burnett. The three adaptations comment on some of the political problems of Latin American modernity. For instance, *Sangrador* reflects upon militaristic authoritarianism in Venezuela with clear allusions to Hugo Chávez embodied in the main character and *As Alegres Comadres* shows a nostalgic vision of the Brazilian national past criticizing implicitly present-day Brazil. Characteristic of *Huapango*’s setting – Tamaulipas, a state in

the Huasteca region of northeastern Mexico – is its depiction of class divisions and social injustices through “militaristic signifiers in dance” (95). The three movies then touch upon a Shakespeare with a Latin American flavor re-inventing the plays locally. However, Burnett’s concluding remark is not homogeneity among the reinterpretations of the Shakespearean plays, but heterogeneity due to the impossibility to reach similarities among all the adaptations.

Of particular interest is chapter four, which focuses on four epitomes of Asian Shakespeares *Gedebe*, *Chicken Rice War*, *The Banquet* and *Prince of the Himalayas*. Both *The Banquet* and *Prince of the Himalayas* reconfigure Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* with Gertrude at the centre. *Chicken Rice War* reinterprets *Romeo and Juliet*, whereas *Gedebe* is a Malaysian adaptation of *Julius Caesar*. Like in chapter 3, Burnett promotes locality and the significance of the local. *Prince of the Himalayas* makes reference to Tibetan imagery and Buddhist elements and *Gedebe* makes a subtle criticism of Anwar Ibrahim, accused of corruption. More significantly, *Prince of the Himalayas* may hint at the conflict between China and Tibet. Gender offers an interesting discussion throughout the whole chapter. In spite of the fact that *Gedebe* shows an all-male world, eliminating women from the adaptation, *Chicken Rice War*, *Prince of the Himalayas* and *The Banquet* highlight gendered independence. It is important to ponder here that the main aim of this article is to show how Shakespeare “becomes a resource through which some of the anxieties and preoccupations characterizing contemporary Asia can be freely ventilated” (7). Burnett argues in this chapter that Shakespeare is essential to the internal organization of all these four films, to their final effects and even to the reassessment of Asia.

The chapters gathered within the last section of *Shakespeare and World Cinema* revolve around two Shakespeare’s plays: *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Chapter 5 deals with *Yellamma* – a Telangana-language adaptation set in the state of Hyderabad during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-59 – *Someone is Sleeping in my Pain*, which relocates *Macbeth* in Yemen in the Muslim tradition and a *Macbeth* set in the Arctic Circle in the Sámi minority tongue. All these films reify the idea that *Throne of Blood* by Akira Kurosawa continues being the foreign film *par excellence*. Chapter five not only suggests the regularity with which *Macbeth* is rewritten and reinterpreted in other contexts by experimental filmmakers and auteurs, but also shows how the story is easily applied to specific cultural and geographical settings. Burnett offers a strong conclusion to the section highlighting how *Macbeth* is embedded in local practices. In chapter six, Burnett takes up the challenge of investigating 28 films which reference Shakespeare or whose plot derives from *Romeo and Juliet*. Obviously, the number of movies examined emphasize the popularity of the Shakespearean work outside the mainstream area. The analysis of the feud in *Romeo and Juliet*, the preoccupation with certain characters and scenes, such as the meeting or the balcony scene, the plays within the plays in the majority of the productions and the transformations of the tragic *denouement* become the core of this chapter.

Placed at the end of the book, the epilogue aims to provide an explanation to the readers about how Burnett did the project, and how he began his endless research of non-Anglophone Shakespearean adaptations, a clearly arduous task. The filmography included at the end of the volume should not be overlooked by Shakespearean scholars since it provides information about the movies instanced and/or explored. It is a valuable asset that can be used for reference because it certainly paves the way for future research in the field of Shakespeare and world cinema thanks to the considerable number of movies discovered by Burnett.

The bold strategy of the book, focusing on seventy-three non-English language Shakespearean adaptations, has its weaknesses at points. With so many productions, readers sometimes lose track of the main objectives of the chapters trying to make sense of all the productions cited. This is clear for instance in chapter 4 where films from different locations such as China, Malaysia and Singapore and based on different plays – *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* – are analyzed, and the readers may wonder about the reasons for such a combination of plays and locations.

However, curiously enough, the volume's strength resides in this variety of film adaptations and productions and wide coverage of locations. Mark Thornton Burnett's *Shakespeare and World Cinema* is a bold and innovative work that constitutes an important and groundbreaking contribution to the field of Shakespeare on screen. Its captivating chapters argue that these adaptations are essential to understand the story of Shakespearean reception. With this work, Burnett paves the way for future research and highlights the necessity to understand the role Shakespeare plays in the international marketplace.

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