

General Advice on How to Watch a Shakespearean Film

1. As in any performance of the plays, everything you see is a decision on the director's part. But this is heightened in a film, due to editing. There are fewer incidental mistakes or improvisations present, in that the director undoubtedly knows of these when they happen, but she or he can choose to edit them out. In a live performance, everyone lives with the inevitable mishaps that will occur on-stage. All this means that in a film when you notice anything that strikes you or stands out, you are probably noticing it because you are meant to. Keep a list of the things that particularly impressed you about the film. Do not overlook techniques unique to film--presentation of credits and title, for example, or sustained musical effects. Why did the director do these things? Are they united in some sense, pointing towards a larger effect overall?
2. On a second or third viewing of a film, it is often highly productive to keep a cheap copy of the play in your hands and loosely note which scenes the director has omitted or re-ordered. Even in a first viewing, you might want to have a list of scenes from the textual version of the play and a phrase as a title for each to remind you of the sequence of events in the text. Why have these scenes been dropped or re-ordered? What does this tell you about the differences between a film and a performance of a play?
3. Films can achieve many things that a performed play cannot: special camera angles, special effects, orchestral experimentation on a grand scale, more sets, realistic settings, etc. Look for the striking elements of this film that are unique to a film. What are they? How do they manipulate your feelings about the production? About individual characters?
4. Who are the actors used for the film? Are they used for their popular appeal? Are they appropriate to the story?
5. Where is the film set? How accurate is the costuming and landscaping for that era? How do these decisions add or detract from your understanding of the play? Does a play need to be set in a historically "accurate" setting--i.e. ancient Rome for *Julius Caesar* or Renaissance Italy for *The Taming of the Shrew*?
6. Describe the costume choices. Is it era specific or does it just imply the general feeling of an era without total accuracy? In other words, is it being used to convey a general impression or to set forth a historical era or both?

7. How intelligent does this director take his audience to be? How knowledgeable are we expected to be about the original text?

8. Has the genre of the film been changed? This certainly happens; consider the rendition of *Hamlet* in Disney's *The Lion King* or the transformation of *The Tempest* that is *Forbidden Planet*. What is the effect of this change on your perception of the play? Why might the director see the new genre as more appropriate?

9. How is the music being used in this film? Are there specific themes for specific characters? How does the score affect your perceptions of the dialogue? Is the music overdone or intrusive?

10. What did this film teach you about this play that you had not got from reading it or seeing it staged? What would you change?

- This has been adapted with permission from “The Shakespeare Classroom: How to Watch a Shakespearean Film”
(<http://www.jetlink.net/~massij/shakes/films/movilist.shtml>)
- With permission from Dr. J. M. Massi.