



Shakespeare: A critical analysis

Shakespeare and popular culture

Speaker:

Shakespeare is one of the world's greatest playwrights – but what is his influence on popular culture?

Terence Hawkes:

There's a real question about whether Shakespeare's work should be performed at all, it seems to me. The one advantage Shakespeare has over a modern dramatist is that he doesn't have an albatross called Shakespeare hanging round his neck.

Russ McDonald:

You can't escape him. My nine year old child knows much more Shakespeare from television commercials than he knows from me.

Stephen Greenblatt:

Beavis and Butthead could say 'to be or not to be' and get a laugh, even though the people wouldn't know necessarily what the context of that illusion was.

John Drakakis:

There are many films now for example, many television programmes, which use Shakespeare in terms of particular quotations; isolate those quotations from their dramatic context. And by doing so of course they actually fragment and undermine that notion of an organic Shakespeare.

Reg Foakes:

The greatest department salesman in the world is Shakespeare according to an ad appeared recently in the New York in the New Yorker

Catherine Belsey:

The astonishing thing is that 400 years on we're still having a World Congress and people are producing new readings of Shakespeare's plays.

Ania Loomba:

Certainly in India Shakespeare was a token of culture, a token of education, of literary power, so the purpose of interpreting and re-interpreting Shakespeare is in a sense to intervene in power structures to make Shakespeare speak to other constituencies

Reg Foakes:

Plays like Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear, Romeo and Juliet and so on have been re-written many times reworked, because Shakespeare's imagination seems so powerful that we can never never let it go.

Stephen Regan:

Some critics would say that Shakespeare has been part of popular culture for the past 400 years, but what we're witnessing now is different from that surely we're seeing something on a global scale, huge international scale.

Jerry Brotton:

I think we are, I think that however that is a continuation of the popular culture elements that have always been there in Shakespeare. I mean you think of all the moments like, you think of the Porter scene in Macbeth, you think of the Fool in King Lear. You think of Stephena and Trinkella in The Tempest.

Actually what's happened is, all those popular cultural elements have always been there. The only difference is that where, we can't hear them any more, we're so historically distant from them. However I do think that there are popular cultural elements such as film, thinking of Baz Lurhman's Romeo and Juliet, which I think is getting us back to the immediacy, to the populism of Shakespeare, that has actually always been there.

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Stephen Greenblatt:

Academics can pronounce about connecting Shakespeare to popular culture but rather one of the happy facts is that Shakespeare in comic book versions, and in cartoon versions quite happily thank you very much, it doesn't need professors at universities to make it happen.

Stephen Regan:

Well here we are shopping with Shakespeare and we've got all sorts of things here Shakespeare chocolates, Shakespeare sweets, Shakespeare tea, and Shakespeare socks.

Jerry Brotton:

Shakespeare socks, actually I have several pairs of these already so, but the tie the Shakespeare tie I think is particularly fetching

John Drakakis:

Let's start from the pre-supposition that Shakespeare is if you like the bearer of what we might call cultural capital. He already exists as a significant cultural figure - even the name let's leave aside the texts now which are slightly more problematical. Now it seems to me that the questions that we have to ask ourselves is how Shakespeare achieves that iconic status, what is involved, what is invested in that particular process.