

Old story, new words

Alongside Oscar-winning classics by Olivier and Branagh, there's a more mainstream side to Shakespeare on screen – films that retain his plots and characters but jettison his language. Daniel Rosenthal presents 12 of the best Shakespeare genre adaptations from 50 years of world cinema.

10 Things I Hate About You

This season showcases a prolific and eclectic branch of 'What if...?' cinema. What if Macbeth were a New York gangster? What if Othello played jazz piano in London or high-school basketball in the Deep South? These 12 features answer such questions in different languages and styles, while highlighting a fundamental problem.

With rare exceptions, films using Shakespeare's language struggle at the box-office because, for too many people, it's a reminder of dull hours in the classroom, not an entertaining night out. One alternative, adopted for decades and increasingly prevalent today, is to translate Shakespeare's verse into straightforward prose dialogue, retain the storylines and characters that have captivated theatre audiences for 400 years, and use

them to make a popular genre film that must function – and be marketed – on its own merits, not as Shakespeare.

Thus, from Britain, Hollywood and beyond, we present Shakespeare as thriller (Joe Macbeth, Omkara and The Bad Sleep Well), period Japanese drama (Throne of Blood and Ran), sci-fi adventure (Forbidden Planet), high-school movie (10 Things I Hate About You and O), showbiz melodrama (All Night Long) and musical (West Side Story). Only Hamlet Goes Business and Makibefo are less obviously mainstream.

All 12 adaptations involve surgery – abandoning a sub-plot, perhaps, or conflating two characters into one – but it's remarkable how comfortably the plays can fit 20th-century moulds, often with comparatively impressive financial results. Tim

Blake Nelson's O, for example, grossed five times as much in America as Oliver Parker's original-text Othello (1995).

Though there may be strong commercial motivation for this form of adaptation, the artistic dividends can be immense, not least when film-makers customise Shakespeare to hold a mirror to their own society, just as the playwright reflected his. The Bad Sleep Well highlighted Japanese corporate corruption; O comments on US high-school massacres, and so on.

If you aren't familiar with the relevant Shakespeare play, these movies still offer great rewards. If you are, and notice what's been cut, changed or added, it's like watching two films for the price of one.



◀ Hamlet Goes Business Hamlet Liikemaimmassa

Finland 1987. Dir Aki Kaurismäki. With Pirka-Pekka Petelius, Elina Salo, Esko Salminen. 86 mins. PG
Old Hamlet, president of a Helsinki conglomerate, is poisoned by the MD, Klaus, who marries widow Gertrud, and tries to sell the business to gain control of Swedish Rubber Ducks. Hamlet, a horny slob, sets out to block the sell-off and get into Ophelia's bed. Filmed in noir-ish black-and-white, Aki Kaurismäki spoofs Shakespeare and satirises capitalism with hilarious deadpan results.
Wed 14 Mar 18:10*, Sun 18 Mar 20:50*
Introduced by Daniel Rosenthal

▶ Throne of Blood Kumonosu-jo

Japan 1957. Dir Akira Kurosawa. 109 mins, 12A
Macbeth is a wild-eyed samurai in this Kurosawa masterpiece. There's no poetry in Throne of Blood's sparse dialogue, and little subtlety in its characterisation, but the atmosphere and imagery are utterly Shakespearean. Filled with the bestial omens and foul weather of Macbeth, and drawing heavily on Noh theatre, it charts the 15thC rise and fall of Washizu (Toshiro Mifune at his fiercest) and his pitiless wife, Asaji (the mesmerising Isuzu Yamada).
Thu 15 Mar 20:40, Fri 16 Mar 20:35,
Wed 21 Mar 17:50, Thu 5 Apr 18:30

The Bad Sleep Well

Warui Yatsu Hodo Yoku Nemuru
Japan 1960. Dir Akira Kurosawa. With Toshiro Mifune, Masayuki Mori, Kyoko Kagawa. 151 mins. PG
Opening with a magnificent 20-minute wedding sequence, this absorbing thriller freely adapts Hamlet to denounce real-life public-sector corruption. Tokyo company secretary Nishi sets out to avenge his father's death and expose his corrupt father-in-law, Iwabuchi. But the hero's love for Iwabuchi's daughter (Ophelia) and lack of killer instinct hinder his plans.
Wed 14 Mar 20:10, Tue 20 Mar 17:50



“One caught one's breath at the greatness of Shakespeare and at the same time the greatness of cinema.”
—Russian director Grigori Kozintsev on Throne of Blood

In Joe Macbeth, Shakespeare's three witches become a flower-selling tarot-reader named Rosie.



◀ **Makibefo**

UK 2000. Dir Alexander Abela. With Martin, Noeliny, Randria Arthur. 73 mins. The villagers of Faux Cap, Madagascar, had never seen a film, nor heard of Shakespeare, when they agreed to take part in this affecting adaptation of Macbeth. Dramatic scenes (in Malagasy dialect) of Makibefo's bloody pursuit of power alternate with a Storyteller reading Shakespeare in English. It's a film of intense contrasts: black skin against white sand; soothing waves juxtaposed against blades tearing flesh. Fri 16 Mar 18:10, Sun 18 Mar 18:20



◀ **Joe Macbeth**

UK 1955. Dir Ken Hughes. With Paul Douglas, Ruth Roman. 90 mins. PG Screenwriter Philip Jordan mines the common ground between thanes and mobsters, including loyalty to King/Godfather and summary execution of traitors. In 50s New York, burly Joe Macbeth and new wife Lily, sick of being 'stooges playing big-shots', rub out the boss. Sid James plays Joe's doomed pal, Banky, as the violent plot sticks close to Macbeth, with some inventive twists. Thu 15 Mar 18:20, Tue 20 Mar 20:50

Kyoami: "Man is born crying. When he has cried enough, he dies." —Ran



▲ **10 Things I Hate About You**

USA 1999. Dir Gil Unger. With Joseph Gordon-Levitt, David Krumholtz. 97 mins. 12A Fine ensemble acting and a witty script made this one of the 90s' best teen movies. At Padua High, Seattle, new boy Cameron falls for the vapid Bianca, whose father won't let her date until her 'heinous bitch' older sister, Kat (Julia Stiles), does too. Hired to woo Kat, the wild Patrick (Heath Ledger) finds that to tame the shrew he must tame himself. Mon 9 Apr 16:10, Sat 28 Apr 16:00

Ran

Japan-France 1985. Dir Akira Kurosawa. With Tatsuya Nakadai. 161 mins. 12A Featuring two astonishing and moving battle sequences, Oscar-winning costumes and a haunting, Noh-influenced score, Kurosawa's last great work re-imagines Lear as a 70-year-old warlord, Hidetora, destroyed by two of his three sons and a vengeful daughter-in-law. It tailors Shakespeare perfectly to Japanese history, culture and social codes, staying true to the play while introducing new characters and ideas. Mon 19 Mar 20:00, Wed 21 Mar 20:00



▶ **Forbidden Planet**

USA 1956. Dir Fred M Wilcox. With Anne Francis. 98 mins. U In 2257AD, a space cruiser lands on planet Altair-4 and Commander Adams (Leslie Nielsen) and his officers encounter Dr Morbius, his daughter Altaira and Robby the Robot (Prospero, Miranda and Ariel). As they battle a deadly 'monster from the Id', we enjoy cheesy dialogue, Oscar-nominated special effects, a soundtrack of "electronic tonalities" and a thoughtful re-interpretation of The Tempest's themes of exile and revenge. Sun 15 Apr 15:50, Tue 17 Apr 18:10



The title of the film *Omkara* was decided by a contest. Three shortlisted names were offered up for a public vote by SMS.

All Night Long

UK 1961. Dir Basil Dearden. With Patrick McGeehan, Paul Harris, Marti Stevens. 95 mins. 15

This claustrophobic, tersely scripted tale of sex, lies and audiotape unfolds almost in real time at a Thames-side warehouse, during a first wedding anniversary bash for black jazz pianist and band leader Aurelius Rex and white singer Delia Lane. Jealous drummer Johnny Cousin spins an Iago-esque web around the couple and their friends, with a live soundtrack from the likes of Dave Brubeck and Charlie Mingus. Sat 21 Apr 18:20, Mon 23 Apr 20:40



West Side Story

USA 1961. Dir Robert Wise & Jerome Robbins. With Natalie Wood, Richard Beymer, Rita Moreno. 151 mins. PG

As white American Jets (Montagues) fight Puerto Rican Sharks (Capulets) on the streets of New York, Tony (Romeo) falls tragically in love with Maria (Juliet). Shakespeare's dramatic momentum and rich verse are magically transmuted into the energy, wit and longing of Stephen Sondheim's lyrics and Leonard Bernstein's music, while Jerome Robbins' choreography is poetry in motion. Fri 20 Apr 20:10, Sun 22 Apr 15:20

O

USA 2000. Dir Tim Blake Nelson. With Mekhi Phifer, Julia Stiles. 95 mins. 15
 Odin 'O' James, sole black pupil at elite Palmetto Grove, is leading his team towards basketball glory, cheered on by his girlfriend Desi, the Dean's daughter. Then team-mate Hugo (Josh Hartnett), sets out to destroy them. Exploring hip-hop culture, inter-racial sex and real-life school shootings, O is among the most sombre and thoughtful of all Shakespeare adaptations, convincingly acted by a strong ensemble cast. Sun 22 Apr 20:40, Thu 26 Apr 18:10



Omkara

India 2006. Dir Vishal Bhardwaj. With Ajay Devgan, Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor. 150 mins, Hindi. 12A
 With skilfully integrated song-and-dance numbers and Western-style shoot-outs, *Omkara* reflects Bollywood, Hollywood and bloody contemporary politics in Uttar Pradesh. The low-caste hero, Omkara (Othello), a violent enforcer for the Brahmin party, is about to marry Dolly (Desdemona). Langda (Iago) is married to Omkara's sister, and Roderigo becomes the vengeful Raju. Thu 26 Apr 20:10, Sun 29 Apr 15:00

