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Comparing How Audiences Reacted to Luhrmann's and Radford's Film Adaptations and To Live Stage Performances

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Abstract

This paper examines how different kinds of audiences experience Shakespeare when the plays reach them through three separate channels: the film work of Baz Luhrmann, the film work of Michael Radford, and live theatre. The study draws on a purpose-designed survey administered to a mixed sample of university students and general public attendees, with responses collected across 24 questions. Because not all respondents answered every item, participation counts vary by section, ranging from 70 to 131 depending on the question.

These responses provided the empirical foundation for a comparative analysis of emotional response, perceived closeness to Shakespeare's source texts, visual preference, and the relative accessibility of each format. What emerged most clearly was a divide along generational and aesthetic lines. Younger respondents were drawn to the speed and visual saturation of Luhrmann's work, while participants who placed greater value on emotional depth and historical grounding tended to prefer Radford's more restrained approach.

Neither mode of adaptation is treated here as inherently superior; the argument, rather, is that each opens a different but equally legitimate path into Shakespeare — and that the coexistence of both kinds of adaptation is itself a good thing for educators working with student audiences at different stages of engagement. For teachers and programme designers, the practical implication is that the choice of adaptation is not merely aesthetic but pedagogical: Luhrmann offers a way in that requires no prior knowledge, while Radford rewards the patience and historical curiosity that more advanced study can develop.

The study situates these empirical findings within the theoretical frameworks supplied by Hutcheon (2006) and Hatchuel (2004), whose work on adaptation theory, fidelity, and medium-specific transformation informs the interpretation throughout.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Film Adaptation; Audience Reception; Baz Luhrmann; Michael Radford; Stage Performance; Comparative Analysis