Modernizing Shakespeare’s *Richard III*

Observations on a Number of Recent Adaptations

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to explore the negative and positive effects resulting from various attempts to modernise Shakespeare’s Richard III. It attempts to show how the play has changed in the process of being transferred from the stage to television, radio and cinema and what reasons lies behind the action having been changed either spatially and temporally.

It begins with a brief account of the best-known adaptations of Richard III for stage and film, opening Cibber’s famous and popular version from 1699 and ending in 2011 with an adaptation by the theatre company, Less Than Rent. It then goes on to explores what types of changes have been made to Shakespeare’s language over the past four centuries. On most occasions, such changes mainly resided in modernizing the spelling, but occasionally adaptation of play’s language has included incorporating sentences from other works by Shakespeare or other changes to the text seemingly motivated by a desire to give a better idea of the historical context of the work. Most of the attempts to modernise and/or simplify the language have generally had a negative affect on the play. Especially, the desire to make Shakespearean’s English more understandable to contemporary audiences has tended to reduce, or at least undermine, the comic and festive elements of the play. The essay then discusses a selection of adaptations to stage and film and shows how they emphasize different aspects of the work. Finally, the discussion focuses on an analysis of various changes and how adaptations to the characters have affected the nature and meaning of the play.
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Introduction

As various media have grown and transformed through the decades, so have the works of famous writers, including those of William Shakespeare. With adaptations his works have changed through time and have become more available and perhaps more accessible to the general public. Media such as radio, television and the internet continue to play a major role in helping Shakespeare’s works reach an increasing number of people. A study of Richard III and some of its adaptations reveals the impact of and kind of modernisation it has undergone. Various characters have been changed or removed, the language has been changed, lines have been re-written and costumes and the time setting have been altered. Like so many other plays by Shakespeare, Richard III has been extensively modernised on stage and in the cinema. This essay will examine some of the effects of this modernisation and how much it has changed the subject matter and structure of the original work.

First I will give a brief introduction on each adaptation that will be used to trace the modernisation that has taken place with the play; then there will be an exploration of how it has affected the play’s language, characters and time setting. The adaptations used to show a growing change in Richard III will be both theatre stage productions and films from the 1700s to 2011.
1: Adaptations: a brief overview

The fact that Shakespeare is a big business has been widely recognised. “[…] Shakespeare was bound to be swept up in the ‘mass distribution and mass consumption of television programs for huge profits’” (Rothwell, 92). Yet the commercial side of producing Shakespeare is not new. The scale may have increased but generations of directors and producers have found ways of making Shakespeare pay well. His works can be found in various adaptations, which either present a whole play or individual episodes. His works are so deeply embedded in modern western culture that it seems that the supply and demand for new adaptations and productions of Shakespeare’s works will continue for some considerable time. Next to Hamlet, Richard III has the greatest number of lines in a Shakespeare play and therefore it is a challenge to adapt the play into film as well as making a stage production that lives up to expectations. In this chapter a number of recent adaptations will be explored and given a brief overview.

Colley Cibber, playwright and poet laureate in the late 17\textsuperscript{th} and early 18\textsuperscript{th} century, was the first director to substantially rewrite Richard III and his version continued to be used right into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Cibber’s version is around half the length of Shakespeare’s. He makes Richard an even more dominant character and adds to his soliloquies. Cibber also cuts out some characters, such as of Queen Margaret and Clarence and reduces the role of other characters, such as Buckingham as well as simplifying such characters as Stanley and Queen Elizabeth. Cibber used part of the murder scene (Act 5, scene 6) from Shakespeare’s Henry VI, in order for the audience to better understand the situation of the play in the first scenes and for it to be more comprehensible.

Supposing the audience to have a less intimate knowledge of English history and the identity of the various characters than the original Shakespearean playgoers,
[Cibber] invents scenes with Henry VI at the beginning to clarify the politics and history and to demonstrate Richard’s past evil-doings. Cibber relates how he was obliged to cut the first act in performance on the grounds that the plight of King Henry VI might remind people of the banished James II. (Bate & Rasmussen, 160)

In an attempt to make Richard III more accessible to a wider audience, Cibber made so many changes to the original work that it could hardly be considered to be the same play. With substantial cuts and additions, Cibber’s version has a different focus. He changes the setting and feeling of the play by cutting out crucial characters and by removing a number of scenes.

Even though Shakespeare’s Richard III is not entirely historical at times, adding material from Henry VI changes the historicity substantially. Cibber even changed the character of Richard by making him even more dominant than in Shakespeare’s version, and an even greater villain. Cibber does this by removing any possible sympathy we might have for Richard. In Cibber’s version, Richard truly owns the play. He has fewer opponents and even more lines, proportionally speaking, than in the original version.

The tradition for making adaptations of Shakespeare’s works goes a long way back. The first feature-length Shakespeare film of The Life and Death of Richard III was made in 1912 and is the oldest to come from the United States. It was produced by M.B. Dudley and directed by James Keane. The role of Richard himself was in the hands of Frederick B. Warde. William Buffen, a retired projectionist donated the film to The American Film Institute in 1996. Buffen had preserved the film for more than thirty years without actually realizing how truly valuable it was. The film shows that there were clearly difficulties with adapting the play into a film and that acting out Richard III posed serious problems, since it is a silent film it must have been quite difficult for the actors to act out the scenes. “Frederick Warde was at a severe
disadvantage in the title role, having to mime Shakespeare without the use of language.” (Burt & Boose, 182) The director had to tell the actors when to display happiness or sorrow, however Warde did not like that arrangement so he decided to use his own interpretations of the text. That turned out not to be a smart move since the other actors ended up looked much more convincing than Warde since he was acting out his performance for a theatre production, while Director James Keane was making a film. Despite a number of poor performances, the film is highly thought of and has received praise among scholars and Shakespeare enthusiasts. The film is a valuable and great asset for the industry and heritage of Shakespeare.

In 1955 director and actor Laurence Olivier, made a film adaptation of Richard III. Olivier himself made textual alterations and used both David Garrick’s and Colley Cibber’s text versions when adapting the play. While most of the dialogue is taken from the original text Olivier still follows Cibber’s example and leaves out Queen Margaret, she was cut out of the adaptation. With cutting out Queen Margaret there goes with her the speech that foreshadows what is yet to come and with her foretelling the tragic fate of Richard’s victims. Laurence Olivier himself plays the role of Richard. The scene with the opening speech is carried out in a convincing manner along with the rest of the film, excluding perhaps the death of Richard. With modernisation and a revolution in technology, the general public makes a demand that death scenes in films are believable and done in a convincing manner. Viewers have become desensitised to violence in films therefore since Olivier’s adaptation is an old film, the audience must understand that the death scene is done as realistically as they could perform it at the time. Olivier’s facial expressions contain a little too much emotion at times and also at certain parts of the film he acts out Richard’s borderline insanity with his eyes and makes it uncomfortable to watch when he speaks to the audience. In the seduction of Anne the corpse
of her husband replaces the corpse of her father-in-law making it even stranger that she could be wooed in that scene.

Director Richard Loncraine adapted Richard III into a film in 1995. The most striking change is the new temporal setting. Instead of taking place in the late fifteenth century, the setting is transferred to the 1930s. Although the time setting has been altered, the language has not been simplified or modernised to fit the setting better. This version stars Ian McKellen in the title role and portrays Richard as a true evil villain with no remorse, while still being able to bring up certain sympathy with the audience. McKellen’s Richard contains a certain element from Cibber’s version. He delivers his lines and speeches in a convincing manner and the scenes where Richard turns to the audience to tell them his intentions are done in such an intimate yet distant manner. He is able to both keep his distance with the audience as well as becoming intimate with the audience at the right moments. McKellen makes it easy for the audience to bond with him as the character of Richard in those scenes, while still maintaining to be a cruel villain. McKellen has extensive experience in playing the role of Richard, having performed the role around three hundred times before he started to write the script for the film. The adaptation is fairly true to Shakespeare’s version, however some lines have been cut and speeches shortened in order to adapt better to the film. The opening speech that begins so: “now is the winter of our discontent” is shortened by half and then transforms into a monologue that McKellen takes with him to the bathroom. Even though he changed some of the text his aim was not to disturb the feeling of the play. It is obvious that McKellen wanted to do Shakespeare as much justice as possible, using only material related to the text or of his understanding of it to write the screenplay. McKellen and Loncraine wanted the

1 Performed with the Brooklyn Academy of Music.
2 Act 1, scene 1.
audience to understand the action of the play, and did not any changes (for example, to costume) to affect the way the audience feels about the characters. The language was not made simplistic or modern for the audience; McKellen and Loncraine simply altered it in order for it to fit the film better. These alterations fit the original work of Shakespeare well and do not stand out as not belonging there. However, Loncraine stated that the key is to “forget you’re watching Shakespeare.” (Porter, 42) This begs the question of why the audience would want to forget they are watching Shakespeare. Does the film stray so far from the original work that the audience can simply close their minds and forget they are watching a film that is actually based on a classic play? Some critics are not content with having Richard III take place in the 1930s. A critic in the New Yorker called the film a “time-travel gone wrong” (Rafferty, 86). Shakespearean adaptations should not be about trying make his plays so much more modern that it becomes unrecognizable, they should rather emphasize the works best features and aim to sparkle an interest with the audience.

The 1996 documentary Looking for Richard is about Richard III and was directed by Al Pacino. It stars famous actors such as Kevin Spacey and Alec Baldwin, as well as a cast of other experienced actors. The documentary is both an exploration of the text and characters as well as Pacino and his cast performing scenes from the play. It is about the making of a film adaptation of Richard III, without there being an actual film made. We never get to see a full version since there were only selected scenes acted from the play. Looking for Richard is a documentary; therefore viewers are introduced to the play from the cast’s point of view. One of the tactics used by Pacino is to elicit sympathy for Richard. Pacino delivers the lines well and speaks with conviction and overall he and his cast portray the selected scenes from the play in a very satisfying manner. However, since Pacino simply has a part of the play performed in the film, it becomes easier to sympathise with his portrayal of Richard and his
deliverance of lines are limited. As a viewer you get to know Richard on a more intimate level than in the McKellen version and the text is explained to some extent. Estelle Parson plays the role of Queen Margaret and her performance of the scorned former queen is quite good, as is Penelope Allen’s portrayal of Queen Elizabeth. The set of the scenes done from *Richard III* are very fitting for the play and the costumes are extravagant, yet fit the part very well. The documentary educates its viewers with some basic information, which perhaps some did not have before hand. It is a good documentary for anyone who wants to study the play. Pacino goes over the text and scenes and along with the rest of the cast and other advisors, he analyses it. He asks questions that appeal to those who are studying *Richard III*; he puts himself in their shoes. They go step by step over why Richard says what he says in the play and they explain it in layman’s terms, bringing the audience closer to the text and giving them a chance to bond with it. The documentary is quite entertaining but there is still awkward feeling to it at times since Pacino and his crew display themselves as being on a spiritual quest of some sort, for example when Pacino travels to the house Shakespeare grew up in, waiting for an epiphany of some sort and ends up leaving unsatisfied. He uses this documentary to try to find a way to spark an interest in Shakespeare’s works with others, reaching out to the streets to the masses. Pacino interviews people he meets on the streets and asks them about their knowledge of *Richard III*, most of the time resulting in them admitting their lack of knowledge of the play.

The English Shakespeare Company put on a performance of *Richard III* in 1990 that was a part of a series called “*The War of The Roses.*” Michael Bogdanov directed the production and it stars Andrew Jarvis as Richard. It has a contemporary setting and focuses, unusually, on presenting the many of the scene as comic rather than as tragic. In a film recording of the stage production performed before a live audience at the Grand Theatre in Swansea, the
audience can be heard laughing and the actors are clearly enjoying themselves. Jarvis’s facial expressions and body language, his light attitude and quick movements make a very different kind of Richard to the traditional villain. Rather than serious and moody, he seems to be high-spirited, even though he remains an evil and a bloodthirsty villain. This adaptation is mostly faithful to the text, although at times some lines are simplified. The portrayal by June Watson of Queen Margaret is very powerful and it is easy to feel pity for her. By not performing the play with the usual highly dramatic aspect Jarvis, along with other members of the cast, shows the audience a different perspective on Shakespeare’s witty text. The scenes with the fight between Henry Tudor and Richard are well delivered considering that they are performed live on stage. A rather odd fact is that the other men have guns, while Henry and Richard wear armour and fight with swords and knives. The armour and swords is a reference to the original version and also them being the only two characters not modernised in the scene makes the battle and death scene more personal. It becomes more special and intimate to see them, only Henry and Richard, fighting each other until the fate of the crown is revealed. It is also quite remarkable that the last stab that Henry gave to Richard was in his hunch since it was his deformities that lead him down the path to the battle of his death. In other adaptations and productions Richard has dark hair but Jarvis is bald. He does not wear a crown at any point in the performance, which is most likely because of the time setting but could also be seen as there not being anyone truly royal in the play. Who is it that can decide who should rule a country, a kingdom? There is nothing heroic about Richard. He is simply a man who lusts for power and who wants nothing more than to be on top so he can prove to himself, to his family, and especially to his mother, that he is not the failure that she sees him as.

Most unforgettable, however, is Andrew Jarvis’ Richard duke of Gloucester. In a drape suit three sizes too big for him, showing a slight hump at the left shoulder, wearing a black glove and heavy orthopaedic shoe, his shirt collar unbuttoned, tie
askew, and stomping around with an exaggerated limp, Jarvis oozes pure, unadulterated evil. (Rothwell, 115)

Jarvis is the ultimate subtle villain and his portrayal of Richard is done exquisitely. Andrew Jarvis’ interpretation of Richard is influenced with the playfulness he emphasizes in the language. Jarvis’s comical approach to most of the text results in a lighter, less serious performance. He succeeds in making the audience laugh in scenes that are traditionally quite dramatic.

The 1983 BBC Shakespeare Collection includes a version of Richard III. It is a television film that stars Ron Cook as Richard. Cook does justice to the lines and delivers them well, he clearly understands what he is talking about and that knowledge projects itself in a positive way to the audience. Sometimes, actors who are not confident in their parts in Shakespearean plays tend to speak too loud and give their lines too much festivity. Cook speaks in a very confident way despite the fact that he often rushes through his lines and does not give his character the time to truly live the words he speaks. The production suffers in a way for that. Richard should get to take his time when speaking his lines. The monologue should be done with much more passion and feeling. Cook’s performance would also benefit from showing more emotions. The setting of the performance is not very extravagant since this is a television film. It does not appear that it is taking place in a palace or in a royal house. The set gives this television film a feeling of a cheap production in a small town. The costumes are also not well designed and all the characters look very similar and they certainly do not look like royalty (excluding their crowns). Such television films usually follow the original text and therefore Queen Margaret’s (played by Julia Foster) scenes are included in the production. It is refreshing to see act 1.3, the scene with Queen Margaret and Queen Elizabeth together, included since it has been cut out of so many adaptations done of Richard
III. Margaret’s pain that she feels from having her husband and son taken away from her, killed, is however not portrayed well enough in this version. Foster speaks her lines and delivers them, but not with enough feeling. In order to feel sympathy for Margaret for what she has had to endure and to feel more impact from her scene there has to be a visible pain or angst in her eyes.

Less Than Rent Productions is a theatre group that aims to make different, edgy adaptations of famous works. They have made an adaptation of *Richard III* and it was a success. James Presson is the director and also the one that wrote the transcript to adapt the play. The adaptation goes under the name of *Richard 3* and is different from most adaptations performed on stage. The play happens after a nuclear bombing in London; the city has become a wasteland. The production is a musical, which is highly unusual for such a dramatic and tragic play. Those who do not find it fitting for the play to have music in it can be satisfied by the compensation of a large amount of blood in the play, along with a lot of lying, betraying, seducing and murdering done by Richard and Buckingham. There are only young people around twenty years old left, the nuclear bombs vaporized most people, leaving only the beautiful and young to rule the kingdom. The adaptations description on the theatrical groups website states that it [...] is a future in which the young, vain, and beautiful have outlived the masses, and though all social norms have been eviscerated, they strive to develop their own makeshift hierarchy. (Less Than Rent) Richard, played by Jake Ahlquist, is made to be nineteen years old and he is the black sheep in the family, as Shakespeare’s portrayal of Richard was. Richard has no problem with killing those who stand in his way, or rather ordering others to kill them. The royal family is composed of haggard survivors whose world-views are drastically distorted by having lived only during wartime (Less Than Rent). The royal family in this adaptation is in a way very similar to the one in Shakespeare’s
version; Richard had completely lost any remorse and killing and giving orders for someone to be killed had become as natural as breathing. It is interesting to have the characters so young. Richard is only nineteen and one might even say that puberty is what drives him into his drastic evil actions. Some scenes in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* you can imagine that Richard was a teenager on a rampage, that his hormonal levels were up and down and that his actions are a part of a teenagers mood swings. When Richard is not in a “giving mood” and when he changes his opinion at the drop of a hat, it is interesting to imagine him as a moody teenager that has a distorted view on life because of the wartime, rather than thinking of him as a vicious murderous villain with a God complexity. In a way Less Than Rent’s production has a good point. The whole play can be seen as a power struggle between teenagers about who should be the leader of the group however; instead of bad-mouthing the others (as many teenagers do to gain the power, they lie and manipulate their way to become group leaders) to get to the top Richard kills them. Like in the McKellen/Loncraine version this adaptation has the war element that has been changed from the original War of the Roses into a much more military like war. This kind of adaptation has not been done before and its refreshing attitude and spirit might interest some people in Shakespeare’s original version of *Richard III* from different social groups than the usual Shakespeare fans. Even though the text has been cut and adapted in order to fit better into the form of the play, they still manage to make the language and setting fit well together.

2: Media Adaptations

“There remained until late in this century the unshakeable conviction of traditionalists that any Shakespeare on screen was bound to be a vulgarization” (Rothwell, 91). It has been long debated whether film adaptations enrich or impoverish our understanding of the works on which they are based. Film adaptations in modern times are a positive thing because with technology evolving and society changing, interests are also changing. A large proportion of
high school or college students (or other people in that age area) are more willing to watch a film than to go out for a theatre production. Film adaptations of Shakespeare’s works may result in sparking interest with the general public today, if they are done well enough. A bad film adaptation might even alienate its viewers from wanting to seek further information of the subject, while a good one is likely to stimulate them so they would want to know more of that particular work or the author’s other works. Seeing a play come to life on the screen can change the way one thinks of it. It becomes more vivid; it might even be easier to understand the language and the concept of the play (partly because of simplified or re-written material). The good thing about truly good film adaptations is that they spread great works around the world, even to those who had little comprehension of the material before. The younger generations tend to feel that it takes less effort to watch a film than reading, although they often do not realize that the films can often be more complex and harder to understand. Reading and understanding a play by Shakespeare without an instructor explaining the meaning behind the text can however be a handful. In the age of computers, films and Internet, the film adaptations and filmed stage productions can be spread to various groups of audience. They can be found on websites and are easily accessed. There are even websites such as YouTube that aim to share video clips from rare movies that are not easily accessible or not to be found in full length. All variables of adaptations have their part in educating and stimulating those who see them; stage, film, radio, dance, music, basically all types that can be thought of. In modern times radio has lost the advantage it used to have and has up to an extent been replaced by the Internet and films, therefore radio plays are not as popular as they were once.

It is interesting reading a Shakespearian play and afterwards watching a film adaptation of that play. It can be fascinating seeing the characters and how they differ from the way you had imagined them. Not all readers have a vivid enough imagination to visualise the characters of a story and therefore they perhaps do not enjoy the reading as well as they
should. For some readers seeing the work come to life in theatre brings them an enjoyable and fulfilling feeling. However in our times, theatre seems to be losing the appeal it used to have. Of course it is still popular, but people are increasingly choosing films over theatre, perhaps the reason is that modern day society has become lazy to some extent and a large part of the youth of today have little interest in things that can not be found on the Internet.

English professor Brian Walsh did an interview about adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays and he stated “If you’re sitting in a theatre, you’re just watching an actor pace around and deliver what could be a 20-line speech” (Ahmed) In films this is not done because that could distance the viewers from the subject. Dialogues are split up and when they are delivered it is easier to concentrate when seeing the facial expressions of the characters in close up. However losing so much of the language originally in the play may change the experience the audience has from the adaptation. Film adaptations pose a certain question about the art of theatre such as “What happens to the “work of art” when it is subject to mechanical and, therefore, infinite reproduction? What, exactly, gives art its value as “art” in the age of the image?” (Starks & Lehmann, 11) Are Shakespeare’s works still considered to be art after they have been twisted around and changed substantially in order to collide better to the form of a film or are they perhaps merely reflections of what once was art and now is simply a form of entertainment?³

It is difficult to understand how the chemistry between actors on stage and their audience watching them can be transported into a motion picture. Being able to capture the true spirit of the play is what separates acceptable adaptations from the truly great ones.

Films can be used as a teaching method; they are able to transfer the student away from the classroom and into the world of the film. Watching a power point show or listening to a lecture sometimes becomes tedious and students lose their attention. When educators use clips from movies to make a point about their lecture material it makes the lesson more

³ Although Shakespeare's plays are all entertainment, they were also more artistic than today's adaptations of his plays.
interesting because of the visual material. Students often become more aware of what he is speaking of and it can make them even more interested in the subject. Showing parts of films may even result in the student becoming much more enthusiastic and even start exploring on their own, watching the whole movie or searching online for more information about what the lecture was about. By showing a movie on a subject, instead of lecturing about it can have a positive effect and is likely to stimulate the students into discussions and inquiring about the work. Most students’ minds of today respond better to media than textbooks because media is such a large part of their world. Media also plays a large roll in distributing Shakespeare’s plays. The texts for his plays can be found on the Internet in full length, thus making them easily accessible. No longer is it necessary to visit a library or to spend money on a book to get closer to Shakespeare’s works. Those who are slow readers are even able to find readings of the plays online, thus making it easier for them to focus. There are websites that provide students and other readers a simplified version of Shakespeare’s works. These websites however play a large roll in depriving readers of the talent they attain by reading Shakespeare’s works in its original language form. It is necessary for them to be able to understand the word associations and learn to recognize the rhythm he uses in his works. It is a fact that Shakespearean English is hard for readers and audience of today to understand. English underwent some major changes during the sixteenth century. It was open and receptive to influences from various other European languages and especially from Latin. Shakespeare took full advantage of this new freedom and responded creatively to the challenge. The verse of his plays is sometimes so vibrant with new words and new ideas that it is difficult to understand what is being said.

Writers were consciously attempting to make the English language less “barbarous” and more fit for poetry: they borrowed words from Latin, as well as from other modern European languages, and invented new words to match the intellectual and global explorations that marked the age. Thus, the state of the English language at
that time offered Shakespeare unprecedented choice and freedom. (O’Brien, Anderson & Forbes, 24)

Shakespeare wrote in verse and therefore it is harder to understand than plays written today. What flaws the concept of film adaptations is the fact that texts are cut out and words and sentences may be changed substantially. According to Brian Walsh, English professor; around fifty per cent of Shakespeare’s text is cut in most film adaptations. Films that would include all the text would most likely be far too long for the audience to be able to keep their focus through the whole film. Cutting out text may distort the effect the play has on the audience; the way they experience the work. Some speeches and monologues are more powerful than others therefore it is crucial not to cut any vital material. Nonetheless, no two viewers or readers experience the play in the exact same way, thus it becomes even more difficult to decide which text can be taken out of the adaptation. Adaptations are not always a positive experience, some might even make its audience decide that Shakespeare is not interesting and that they have no desire to acquaint themselves with more of his works or watch further adaptations of his plays. A good adaptation is a work that makes the audience want to know more about what they have seen; it should be stimulating. Such an adaptation must be to a certain extent true to the original. It is not required of it to be completely true to text and plot, nevertheless it must capture the spirit of the work it is based on. It is far to common for example that when there are made film adaptations of novels, the film does not capture the true feeling of the text and those viewers that had read the original novel are left unsatisfied. Those who read the text of Richard III and are fans of the work will experience disappointment by some adaptations and swooned away by others.

For those who have read the text of Richard III and want to experience the magic of the dramatic tragedy performed live, on-stage productions are something they might enjoy. It is likely they will be left feeling invigorated from listening to the words come alive as the actors interpret their meanings. Even though theatre adaptations do not offer the same
technical effects and possibilities as the film adaptations they bring the audience closer to how it was originally and how Shakespeare meant for it to be performed at the time he wrote it. When educators have the possibility of taking their class to theatre productions of the work they are presenting to their students it usually gives a positive result. The students get to feel the cultural spirit that comes with going to the theatre and they have a chance of seeing the work without the technical aids given by films. Theatre productions tend to fertilize the student’s imagination on a much higher scale than films do. However the problem with theatre adaptations of Richard III is that even though it is good for the audience to experience seeing the play live and it being originally intended to be performed in such a manner, the scenes with the battle in the final scenes, especially act 5.5 can be done significantly better in films. There is the problem of space on the stage; it gives a much greater affect to see hundreds or even thousands of men fighting against each other rather than dozens. Seeing the men kill or injure each other can be done more realistically with the help from technology and special effects. On a stage it is also quite difficult to recreate the killing of Richard’s horse and when he falls off it. However there can be made a better connection with the audience in an on stage production than in a film adaptation. There is interaction between the audience and those who are performing.

3: Changing the setting

Adaptations that take place in different times later than the time of composition, such as the Loncraine film (1995), the English Shakespeare Company (2000) or the Less than Rent (2011) productions, discussed above may influence the way audience comprehend what is happening in the play. Some audience are conservative and want all productions of Shakespeare’s works to be Elizabethan and therefore dismiss and despise those adaptations that happen in another time setting. Shakespeare was the first moderniser of Richard III since he wrote the play to take place in the 1500s but did not write it until the 1600s. There is
therefore a long-standing tradition for modernising the play. The McKellen film is placed in the 1930s, but the text and Shakespearean English has not been changed; it has not been modernised or simplified, it has simply been adapted to better fit the film. This mixture of a more modern scenery with the same Shakespearean English has a good affect on the audience in the way that they are brought closer to something they are more comfortable with in one way (closer to time frames they are familiar with), and therefore they can keep their focus on the other thing, in this case the language and actions. When the audience do not have to keep focus on understanding the time frame and all the details that come with it, it becomes more comprehensible. Less than Rent’s adaptation changes the play substantially since it is taken so far into modernisation and by making all the characters in their twenty’s (the nuclear bomb having vaporized all adults). The theatrical group modernised *Richard III* and changed the time setting to the near future. The text was still Shakespearean though it was adapted and heavily cut and the play was still in its way Shakespearean even with many characters having been cut out. The punk music also brings a rebellious feeling to the adaptation, something not commonly seen in other adaptations of the play. These changes were all acceptable to most of the audience since the production became quite popular and is considered a success. The theatrical group was able to keep a good balance when creating the new from the old and the Shakespearean language brings the audience closer to the original source of *Richard III*.

Another good adaptation that takes place in a different time is by the English Shakespeare Company starring Andrew Jarvis. That adaptation has the original language even though it has different costumes and time era. The stage production works well with the modernised frame and original language. Even though these adaptations were able to keep the balance of old and new in good balance, the question rises of how far an adaptation can go until it can no longer be considered an adaptation and not merely a work based on *Richard III*. Whether it is still a play by Shakespeare when all these changes have been made with characters, language and time setting can be highly debated. When does a play seize to be an adaptation
and become a work based on another play? Has the work not lost its unique Shakespearean feeling when undergoing such drastic changes? Even though these adaptations were successful and still able to keep the Shakespearean feeling within, there is a limit and a line of alterations adapters can cross until they reach the point that they eventually will not be able to title the work as being by Shakespeare, merely based on his work.

4: Development of Characters

From the time Shakespeare wrote Richard III and until today, when the play has been frequently adapted and performed, some of the characters have gone through a change. Queen Margaret, Richard, Lady Anne have all undergone an alteration in various adaptations. Queen Margaret, the insane former queen that had to bury her son and husband as a result of Richard’s lust for power, has frequently been cut out of adaptations. Colley Cibber did not include Margaret in his adaption of the play and those who use Cibber’s text in their adaptations, or a part of it, often keep Margaret out of the production as well. The reason for this is not clear, but some adaptations would benefit from keeping her character and not cutting her out. Margaret brings a certain sadness to adaptations, for we feel for her after losing her husband and son, going from being a queen to becoming nothing, treated with contempt, living in lonesomeness. Although we feel for her, the speech she makes where she curses Richard and speaks her foreshadowing’s of what is yet to come, leaves us feeling invigorated. Queen Margaret brings a fresh breath of air to the play; her speech captures the audience’s attention and keeps them on their toes for the rest of the play. Even though Margaret has generally a good effect on the audience, she does not really seem to be missed in adaptations that cut her role, as in the Loncraine/McKellen film, it does not have a visible negative effect to cut her role out. Richard must be portrayed as a mixture of an evil genius, a charming flatterer and at the same time an unhappy man that has lived a miserable life and that we can sympathize with. In Cibber’s text Richard becomes more vicious and even more
of a villain than in Shakespeare’s version. He is given more soliloquies and is more dominant as a character. He does not win over the sympathy of the audience since there is no sympathetic element in his appearance. In the Loncraine/McKellen film the character interpreting of Richard is obviously under an influence by Cibber’s version. McKellen portrays Richard as a cold-hearted killer who cares for no one except himself and who’s aim is to seize the throne. In that same adaptation Lady Anne is won over by the charm of Richard while she is in the morgue mourning over her dead husband’s body. In adaptations such as Olivier’s and in the scenes we see from Looking for Richard it takes more time for Richard to woo Anne than in the Loncraine/McKellen version. He takes his time and he is subtle, yet direct with his mission. Anne takes her time to be convinced, but yet we can see in her eyes that she is partly acting. Anne does not want to marry Richard; she only does so to secure a position so she will not be murdered (even so, she eventually is). I feel that in the Loncraine/McKellen version Anne is portrayed as truly believing Richard and really falling for his charming manner. In the English Shakespeare Company’s production of Richard III Jarvis portrays Richard as an evil villain that cares for no one, except in the scene where Lady Anne spits in his face. In that scene Jarvis shows Richard as being truly hurt by that action. The baldness of Jarvis also somehow enhances the evilness of his character.
5. Conclusion

Modernisation and time have had their affects on Richard III and left their mark on many adaptations. It has become a certain tradition to cut out the role of Queen Margaret and her scenes in order to make the play more understandable and less confusing for the audience. This is also the case when part of Henry VI is used in adaptations. The adaptations that have had the setting changed and happen in another century than the original play are, obviously, influenced by more modern times and they brought with them a certain refreshing element to Richard III. With changing the time the play takes place and altering the costumes and set accordingly, there was a new standard set. It was now acceptable to change the play from its original time setting into more modern situations, while still keeping the language Shakespearean. People are always pushing themselves and other limits so it had to be that since such an adaptation is acceptable for most viewers, an even more modern adaptation would be accepted as well and could even shock a few people along the way. Adaptations such as Richard 3 done by the Less Than Rent Theatre where all the basics are changed; the language, the time era and the characters, pushes plays to their limits and out comes something new and different. Shakespeare’s works have given playwrights inspiration for century’s to write their own plays so evidently there must be many plays out there that bare the resemblance of his. There will always be conservative criticizing voices that rise against others changing Shakespeare’s works and adapting them into something much different than the original version. They can be argued that such classic masterpieces as his plays are considered to be, do not need changing and should not be turned into something different in order to make money out of it. The criticism at the time when the McKellen/Loncraine film came out, of the different time setting in the film speaks for itself but it is a fact that people can be too often afraid of change, afraid of how it may turn out. That film has proven itself to be a success as time has passed and hopefully some of those who criticized it have learned to enjoy it. Modernisation and film adaptations change many works by famous authors and
through the decades some have turned out great as well as some having been successfully forgotten by society for being a bad adaptation of a work. However, performers and producers must not let the fear of failure stop them from pursuing what they want to do with such famous works as Richard III. Without bold choices we would have nothing new and exciting and eventually these great works of Shakespeare would lose their place in the society of great poetry. Classic works by long gone authors are bound to change with time. Shakespeare’s works have been thoroughly read and some of his works are mandatory reading materials in schools in America and Britain. A work that has been so often read and analysed by readers, be they common or scholars, is bound to have its meaning of text examined, doubted and debated back and forth. Richard III has so often been adapted into theatrical performances that there are various different interpretations of Richard and the other characters. We live in an age that requires more than regularity; it requires our artists and performers to bring something fresh and exciting to their adaptations and performances. Not only does society expect something shocking or new, but also most performers and producers demand that of themselves. A good example of a product of these requirements is Richard 3 by the Less Than Rent Theatre. It has a fresh spirit, it has been modernised yet it is an adaptation of one of the best-known works of Shakespeare. Modernizing the play can make the audience see the original work in a different light. It is a fact that modernisation has changed Shakespeare’s Richard III substantially. However, the endless ways of performing the play has brought people of today’s society closer to the work and has overall made it more familiar. The audience requires stimulation and something new, even when dealing with such an old work. This modernisation is good because it draws new viewers in and gives the old viewers an opportunity to fall in love with Shakespeare’s works all over again.
Richard and Henry fight in battle scene, the only two in armour (out of character for the time setting)

Scene 1.3 with Queen Margaret in 1983 BBC TV film

Al Pacino in role as Richard. As seen here the costumes were extravagant and well designed
Ahmed, Akbar. "Walsh examines the Bard in Hollywood."*Yale Daily News*


[Interview with Richard Loncraine] Print.