

Shakespeare in the Restoration Theater

Paper #4: Guidelines for writing a movie review

As you get ready to complete the movie review assignment, here are some questions to keep in mind.

First, the basics should probably show up in your introduction:

Author and title of movie

Which Shakespeare play is being adapted, if not clear from title

Your evaluation (your decision on whether the movie is a good or bad adaptation amounts to your thesis – remember that it can be a good movie but a bad adaptation!)

Then, you work into more detail. There are many technical aspects to consider when looking at a film. The ones below are good places to start – you can probably add more to the list. Keep in mind that the real point for addressing all of these details is to talk about why you do or do not feel the movie is a good adaptation of Shakespeare. These are all questions you want to think about as you watch the movie – it might not be a bad idea to write them down as a list and take notes during the viewing.

- The movie's main issues (and extent to which it followed or deviated from original text, where appropriate)
- Actors (do they fit the parts? What do they add to the words on the page? Do they live up to your expectation? how convincingly can they play the role?)
- Setting (does it realistically or convincingly convey the mood? Help convey the message? if it is a big departure from the original, how well thought-out or successful is it?)
- Description of the action (is it easy to follow? Confusing? Accurate? Well-staged?)
- Soundtrack (does it add to or detract from the overall experience?)
- Costumes (do they help convey the movie's meaning? help distinguish between characters? reveal something about characters? set mood?)
- Lighting (is it used well to emphasize scenes? Is it distracting?)
- Camera angles/filming (how are characters or scenes framed by the shot? Does this add meaning or detract? do cuts follow scene endings in the original play, or has pacing been changed? Sped up or slowed down?)
- How do any of the above contribute to the performative effect of the film?
- What about the play does this movie have to capture for it to be a good adaptation in your opinion?

Remember: Don't summarize too much; focus on giving the audience enough detail to support your evaluation. You only have 5 pages, after all.

Organization can take a variety of shapes, including but not limited to:

- Devote a paragraph to each character addressing how you think they were presented and what that does to an understanding of the text
- OR organize the paper around strengths and weaknesses (end on the note you want the readers to take away with them)
- OR talk about the overall structure in order (this one is dangerous since it can lead to summary)
- OR decide on the technical aspects you think most important or most noteworthy and build your paper around those.

And another good way to get the hang of this kind of writing is to read reviews by others. The A.V. Club section of The Onion (www.theonion.com) has particularly well-written ones. An absolutely terrible idea would be to look at reviews of the movie you are discussing. Form your own opinions, based on your own reading of the play – don't let yourself be influenced by other authors on this.