

Cochran, Peter, *Small-Screen Shakespeare*, Newcastle upon Tyne :
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R e v i e w

Small-Screen Shakespeare by Peter Cochran is an overview of the myriad of filmed versions and adaptations of Shakespeare's works which have been released in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Small-Screen Shakespeare is divided into five sections, 'Directors', 'Plays', 'Shakespeare Adaptations', 'Films with Shakespearean References' and lastly 'Two Theatre Reviews'. The book's title is misleading as a variety of productions are discussed, not only those which were specifically filmed for television, but also those released at the cinema and are now available on DVD/BluRay (and thus viewable on a television), as well as unexpectedly two stage productions. Furthermore, the plays in section two would be better ordered alphabetically, or into genres (i.e. comedies, histories, and tragedies), rather than the chronological listing of composition.

The introduction to *Small-Screen Shakespeare* reads like a condescending anti-intellectual rant, as Peter Cochran clumsily attempts to wrest Shakespeare away from academics. Cochran rails against academics and their stranglehold on Shakespeare (3-4). In criticising the perceived snobbery in the study of Shakespeare in universities, he engages in the very behaviour he finds abhorrent. Cochran offers personal reflections on a variety of filmed productions of Shakespeare's works. Unfortunately these reflections are often un-even (at times very brief and lacking, others overly long-winded), offer analysis that is lacking in depth, and demonstrate Cochran's superficial grasp of the material. Cochran flippantly trashes productions he doesn't like, which seems at times to be the vast majority of works discussed,

using language which lacks critical finesse. The referencing throughout is appalling and seriously in need of editorial intervention. While reflecting on film and television productions, Cochran often refers to other films and productions and gives no further details such as year of release, names of directors (etc.), and at times quotes are stated but not referenced at all. As *Small-Screen Shakespeare* is focussed on television and film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, I was surprised by the addition of two reviews of stage productions (which to my knowledge have not been filmed and are not available on DVD/BluRay) at the end of Cochran's book. In an act which demonstrates his conceit, Cochran offers a review of a partial-viewing of Peter Hall's staging of *Antony and Cleopatra* (Cochran reveals he walked out after an hour and fifteen minutes (491) - an action he talks about with pride, 6-7).

One of the few strengths of *Small-Screen Shakespeare* is the scope of works discussed; Cochran has selected a wide range of works in a variety of mediums, and several up-to-date works (at the time of the book's printing) are discussed including the recent mini-series *The Hollow Crown* (BBC, 2012) and *The House of Cards* (both the British (BBC, 1990) and American versions (Netflix, 2013)). *Small-Screen Shakespeare* could have been such an interesting and informative book if only it had been written by someone with a thorough knowledge of Shakespeare and performance, specifically film and television adaptations of his work (see for example H. R. Coursen, Richard Burt, Russell Jackson, to name a few), and who writes in a more detailed and in-depth manner.

Small-Screen Shakespeare deals (almost) exclusively with the visual medium of film and television, and so the book would have benefited greatly from the inclusion of a number of well-chosen stills and images. A standard bibliography sorted first by chronology and then alphabetically is included, as are two appendices. The first is a list of last minute inclusions to *Small-Screen Shakespeare*, the second a list of film and television adaptations and versions not included (as Cochran had not viewed

them – had he partially viewed them as with Hall’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, I wonder if they would have made the cut).

It is unclear what market this book is primarily aimed at. Cochran confusingly offers in his introduction that his work is for the ‘tiny minority’ of people who ‘put Shakespeare’s plays on, or go to see his plays when they’re put on’ (p. 6). This tiny minority would be better suited to look at other similar but far superior works, such as Kenneth Rothwell’s *A History of Shakespeare on Film* (Cambridge UP, 1999, second ed. 2004), and more recently Diana E. Henderson’s edited collection *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen* (Blackwell, 2006), and Samuel Crowl’s *Shakespeare and Film* (Norton, 2008).

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