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Remembrance of Things Past: Shakespeare's Comedies on French Television

Sarah HATCHUEL and Nathalie VIENNE-GUERRIN

This essay explores how Shakespeare's comedies were adapted, appropriated and transformed by French television, with a focus on the early days of television. The first striking fact is that, if one is to except stage productions that were filmed and then broadcast, Shakespeare has not been adapted for French television since 1980. In other words, it has been twenty-eight years since a Shakespeare play was last translated, directed and performed for the exclusive benefit of TV viewers. Shakespeare on French television is *not* our contemporary¹. Through the documentary research for this essay, we went back to a time when the mingling of Shakespeare with television seemed to be less daunting and more economically viable than it is today. From the end of the fifties to the seventies, French television offered a substantial cycle: *Twelfth Night* was directed by Claude Loursais in 1957, then by Claude Barma in 1962; *Othello* (dir. Claude Barma) appeared on the TV screens in 1962, soon to be followed by *Much Ado About Nothing* (dir. Pierre Badel), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (dir. Roger Iglésis) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (dir. Pierre Badel) in 1964, by *King Lear* (dir. Jean Kerchbron) in 1965, and by *Antony and Cleopatra* (dir. Jean Prat) in 1967. The seventies saw the broadcast of *Measure for Measure* (dir. Marcel Bluwal, 1971), *As You Like It* (dir. Agnès Delarive, 1972) and *Romeo and Juliet* (dir. Claude Barma, 1973). This cycle of French TV Shakespeare stopped short in 1980

1. Since 1980, the only TV production adapted from Elizabethan drama has been Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. The production (directed by Frédéric Auburtin) was broadcast in 2003 and starred Gérard Depardieu and Daniel Prévost.

when director Josée Dayan adapted the story of Hamlet in a TV film entitled *L'Embrumé*. From the eighties onwards, Shakespeare seems to have lost his bankability and his power of attraction for French TV producers, in a televisual environment that came to rely more and more on audience rates and less expensive programming.

Since the space of one article would not do justice to a full exploration of all these TV versions, we chose to limit the present study to the comedies. (This essay is merely the start of a research process that we hope to carry on over the following years.) How have the comedies been appropriated by the French small screen and to what effects? How did the comedies insert themselves into French television culture? What changes were necessary to adapt them to French humour? What did these films reveal about the complex relations between theatre and television?

Excavating Television

A research striving to uncover French programmes of past decades first implies a discovery of the Inathèque, an independent collection inside the building of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France which holds the French Television Archive. A great part of the collection has already been digitalised in a lengthy and ongoing process that aims at preserving all the heritage of French television in lasting forms of storage. It was thus possible for us to watch the films directly on a computer and to take screen captures whenever we wanted to select and store key images from the film. We, therefore, used a high-tech computer to watch what was originally meant for broadcast in black and white during the first decades of television. The new digital technologies certainly serve the preservation of past programmes but also make for a totally different viewing experience, which demands some effort from the viewers if they want to try and recapture what the initial viewing conditions were. The archaeological nature of our research meant that we sometimes discovered only fragments of Shakespearean plays. We could only find a ten-minute excerpt from the 1957 *Twelfth Night* with famous actress Annie Girardot as Viola/Cesario (Plates 1, 2 and 3), while the last minutes of the 1962 *Twelfth Night* were missing² (thus making for a very frustrating

2. At the time of writing, the Inathèque has still not been able to find those missing minutes.

ending when we watched this production). In the 1964 *Merry Wives*, problems in the digitalisation process brought about the repetition of the same fifteen-minute reel inside the film, from the moment when the letters are read by the ladies until Brooke's monologue revealing his suspicions that he is being cheated by his wife. Surprises were always part of the show, and, since we apparently were the first viewers of those digital files, we collaborated with the Inathèque to reconstruct the totality of some versions. We thus had the joy of discovering a time when French television was not afraid of Shakespeare.

The 1957 *Twelfth Night* was the first French endeavour to adapt a Shakespeare play to the medium of television. It was broadcast on a Saturday (6 April) at 8:40 pm, and lasted 1 hour and 50 minutes. Shakespeare was clearly considered as material appropriate for prime-time entertainment during the weekend. The production used a translation by Thomas Lascaris, and starred a very young Annie Girardot (in one of her first screen roles)³, Françoise Spira, Pierre Van Eyck, Michel Vitold and Christian Duvalloix. *Télérama*, a weekly magazine covering culture in general and television in particular (and which is still published today), suggested that this televisual event was perhaps connected with an official visit that Queen Elisabeth II was about to pay to France in the days following the broadcast⁴.

1964 may undoubtedly be called the year of TV Shakespeare in France. To celebrate the fourth centenary of Shakespeare's birth, French television offered several adaptations to its viewers. *Much Ado About Nothing* was to be the first in a cycle of four plays⁵. The TV productions were introduced to the spectators in an almost scholarly way. Long articles were written about them in *Télérama*, and the broadcast was preceded by a lengthy presentation delivered by an anchorman. The aim was to provide the viewers with some analytical guidelines but it ultimately channelled their expectations. The introduction to the 1964 *Much Ado About Nothing* attempted to

3. Girardot started her film career in 1956 with her role as Véronique Chambon in André Hunebelle's *Treize à table*.

4. "C'est la première fois que la T.V. française présente une oeuvre de Shakespeare. Grâce en soient rendues à Sa Gracieuse Majesté la Reine Elisabeth si sa proche visite nous vaut cette première!", *Télérama*, 31 March-6 April 1957.

5. "1964 est l'année Shakespeare. C'est, en effet, le quatrième centenaire de la naissance de Shakespeare. La Télévision offrira un cycle dramatique de trois ou quatre oeuvres de Shakespeare", *Télérama*, 29 March-4 April 1964.

emphasize the complexity of Shakespearean drama. Hero and Claudio were presented as “two young lovers whose love is pure”, while Beatrice and Benedick were “two other heroes who love each other without admitting it” led “to happiness against their will”. In this introduction, the comedy became “the tragedy of Claudio and young Hero” whose name was turned into “Celia” for “euphonic reasons”, as the original first name did not sound harmoniously to a French ear. The anchorman thus raised the debate whether to perform the play as a comedy or as a tragedy and claimed that the performance had to show that ambiguity was, even more than originality, the “deep richness of a farcical drama” in which the characters and situations keep confounding the audience. Eventually, the comedies were said to be less simplistic than the tragedies: the “good guys” are not always spotless and the “bad guys” are capable of gentleness and tenderness. The introduction pointed to the complexity of life and of the human condition, defending the play and preventing the viewers’ possible irritation, but also conveying the questionable vision of a universal and eternal Shakespeare that everyone could understand.

Broadcast in the same year as *Much Ado*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was introduced and contextualized by a stern-looking anchorman who paradoxically presented the adaptation as both “free” and “faithful”, stating that this was the only play of its time that looked on everyday people directly. According to this introduction, Windsor resembled Stratford-upon-Avon, and the characters were based on real people that Shakespeare might have known. For instance, the character of the Judge could have been inspired by a justice who had perhaps threatened young William when he was out poaching and thus prompted the playwright’s revenge through caricature. This contextualization thus established sketchy links between Shakespeare’s life and works in an attempt to make the viewers smile even before the start of the programme. The introduction also dwelled on Shakespeare’s “major creation” – Sir John Falstaff who was said to be drawn out of Shakespeare’s “sole imagination”, which we know is probably wrong. The playwright’s creativity was thus highlighted to turn the broadcast into an event celebrating genius. In a very hasty and pseudo-psychological speech, Falstaff was depicted as “a crook meaning no harm”, as a good old man “having connections in every milieu”, and as a popular character who, “revived as he was on Queen Elisabeth I’s request”, “no longer fought in wars” but now tried to “conquer women” – a failed Casanova. Falstaff’s portrait ended with the obviously false claim that

Shakespeare loved the character so much that he did not let anyone play the part but him. Again, direct and emotional connections were suggested between Shakespeare and his creations. The character of Falstaff became even greater than the play itself since *Télérama* ran as a headline “The big-paunched knight will soon be invading the screen”⁶. The same kind of simplification could also be found in the TV film itself: director Roger Iglésis actually asked Charles Charras (who translated and adapted the text to the screen) to modify and trim the beginning of the first act. The production started with a made-up monologue delivered by Evans, the Welsh parson. Evans talked directly to the camera, taking the part of a Chorus or Prologue that presented each role in the play. The director thought that, with such a new start, the spectators could become better acquainted with the numerous characters⁷.

But as 2007 viewers watching productions from the fifties, sixties or seventies, we have also become better acquainted with the *actors* beneath the numerous parts. It was enjoyable to discover that Rosy Varte, who became well-known in France in popular TV series, had a Shakespearean past and played the Shrew. Similar surprises arose as we discovered a young Marie-Christine Barrault as Anne Page; Jean Le Poulain, a great comic theatre actor, as Falstaff (Plates 11 and 12); Jean Rochefort as Aguecheek and Jean-Pierre Marielle as Malvolio (Plate 4). In this paradoxical archaeological experience, we come to identify the actors in old productions from the parts they would play *next* in their careers. This retrospective nostalgia mingles “Remembrance of things past” with “Remembrance of things future”, recalling Michel Riffaterre’s definition of intertextuality as “the reader’s perception of relationships between a text and other texts that preceded or followed it”⁸. In this definition, the perception of an intertext appears as a reading or viewing effect and depends on the reader’s own memory of other texts/films – texts/films which may have been read/seen in an order that does not correspond at all to the chronological order of creation. A spectator may thus shed light on a film by using productions that were directed *before* but also *after* it. This definition

6. André Alter, “Le chevalier à la vaste panse va envahir l’écran,” *Télérama*, 3-19 September 1964. Falstaff had also started to invade the stage in the previous summer when Verdi’s opera was performed in July 1964.

7. “Roger Iglésis a demandé à l’adaptateur Charles Charras de modifier et d’alléger le début du premier acte pour en faire une présentation des personnages,” *ibid.*

8. Michel Riffaterre, *La Production du texte*, Paris, Seuil, 1979, p. 9. Our translation.

of intertextuality implies an anachronistic and retrospective dimension since films made well after this period of time may retrospectively encourage spectators to view the Shakespearean productions in a very different light, adding or qualifying meanings. Hearing Benedick speak with Dominique Paturol's voice – a voice that most French people now associate with the character of J. R. in the dubbed version of *Dallas* – may add threatening and deceiving traits to Benedick's personality. On the contrary, hearing Borachio speak with Serge Sauvion's voice – the voice that was to dub Columbo in France – may bring paradoxical gentleness and intelligence to a villain. Some voices purely contribute to the farcical aspects of the comedy: the character of Houille (standing for Verges) is thus played by the actor who has also lent his voice to Bugs Bunny. Many of these actors have remained famous comic actors on the French stage but also on screen. Performing Shakespearean comedies on French television necessarily implied using the potential of French comic actors already established either on screen or on stage.

Shakespeare, “thou art translated!”

The adaptation of Shakespeare to a French ear and eye also implied a process of translation, raising the question of what remained of Shakespeare's original tongue but also testifying to the creativity of the French writers. The text of the 1964 *Taming of the Shrew* was, for instance, adapted by novelist Albert Vidalie⁹ who composed a new text, with beautiful language, inspired by Shakespeare's original plot. Very few lines were actually translated directly. The induction and the final scene were absent, which suppressed a large part of the play's ambiguity. Vidalie attempted to explain the characters' behaviours psychologically in a very radical reading of the play. Honest, plain-spoken and idealistic Catarina accused her father of being a lecherous

9. Albert Vidalie was actually credited as the author of the film version: “*La Mégère apprivoisée*, d'Albert Vidalie, d'après William Shakespeare” (“*The Taming of the Shrew* by Albert Vidalie, inspired by William Shakespeare). Vidalie (1913-1971) is the author of several novels including *Les Bijoutiers du clair de lune* (1955), *Chandeleur l'artiste* (1958), *La Belle Française* (1959), *Cadet la Rose* (1960), *Le Pont des Arts* (1961), *Les Verdures de l'Ouest* (1963), *Les Hussards de la Sorgue* (1968). He wrote the screenplays of *Capitaine Fracasse* (1960) and *Mandrin* (1972). He is also known for adapting novels to the radio (such as John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*) and to the stage (such as Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*).

old man, always chasing the maids in the house. She was broken-hearted to see that her father's love went only to his younger daughter Bianca, who was played as a hypocritical, mincing girl, who tricked everyone into believing she was sweet and pure. Petrucchio married Catarina only for her dowry, brought her to his pigsty of a place, treated her very roughly (Plate 14), but truly fell for her in the end. The two main characters finally tamed each other (Plate 15). The film concluded on a romantic kiss (Plate 16), with Catarina saying "Tu as dressé la mégère de Padoue" ("You tamed the Shrew of Padua"), to which Petrucchio replied "C'est toi qui as dressé un chien sauvage" ("And you tamed a wild dog"). The war between the sexes ended in a very politically correct French romance, the rough guy being coaxed into the perfect husband.

The text of the 1964 *Much Ado* offered some amusing finds. The characters of Cornouille (standing for Dogberry) and Houille gave rise to many puns and comic situations around their names, which was invented for this production to include the sound "ouille", meaning "ouch" in French. When Cornouille, just before the wedding, came to Leonato and said that he had some major news, he also mentioned the name of his friend "Houille", thus prompting Leonato to ask if he had, by any chance, stepped on anybody's foot. Benedick's poem addressed to Beatrice (and read by Claudio at the end of the play) offered nice variations on the name of Béatrice, on what the syllables of her first name can mean in French: "je reste béat, béat, béatrice" (literally meaning "I am all blissful when I see Beatrice"). The production worked, therefore, on the French language, on its twists and sounds, finding engaging equivalents to Shakespeare's manipulation of the English tongue.

The text of the 1964 *Merry Wives* was adapted by Charles Charras. The translation was conceived as both faithful (in its respect of meaning, scenes and characters) and relatively free (in terms of vocabulary and performance). The anchorman introducing the production claimed that the translation was not done word-for-word but meaning-for-meaning. Caius, the French doctor, became a Spanish one to preserve the effect of strangeness. Much fun was made of Justice Shallow's name, which is close to the sound of "salaud" ("bastard" in French). Evans thus said: "Il est fou, ce Shallow", playing on both meanings "This Shallow is crazy" and "This bastard's crazy". Falstaff's bawdiness was regularly emphasized in many sexual puns. To boast about his perceptiveness, Falstaff said to Mrs Ford: "Je suis un homme de grande pénétration", obviously playing on the

double-entendre of the word. In a hilarious wooing scene, he wriggled his plump body about at the mention of the “music of the spheres” and asked Mrs Ford to come to his arms because she was his “beautiful ship” and he was her “haven”¹⁰ (Plate 11). Congratulating himself on his round shape, he claimed that “c’est des graines rondes que naissent les meilleures tiges” (“from the round seeds come the best stems”). Allusions to his male attribute were reintroduced even as he justified his day-dreaming: “je rêvais, j’étais parti sur une or... bite” (literally, “I was just drifting away, I was launched into orbit”, but which includes, in French, a very lewd word for phallus). English malapropisms were also given some French equivalents. As Falstaff told his misadventures to Brooke, he coined the term “corniféré”, blending the ideas of “pestiféré” (“plague-ridden”) and “cocufié” (“cuckold”). Mistress Quickly’s famously confusing language was granted a French shape when she said “il faut que je le fasse avec négligence, elle vous endommagera” (“I must do this without care; she will damage you for this”), mixing up “negligence” with “diligence” and “endommagera” with “dédommagera” (“pay damages”). The translating process even went as far as comically conjuring a French dramatic intertext when Falstaff used a very famous line from Corneille’s *Le Cid*, “Ah, n’ai-je donc tant vécu que pour cette infamie!” (“Have I lived simply to know this infamy!”). Shakespeare’s tongue became contaminated by French drama, which generated both distance and comedy, uniting the spectators in their recognition of the familiar lines.

French culture was injected through the regular inclusion of popular songs, rhymes, tunes or lyrics, within (as well as between) the scenes: Albert Vidalie composed lively songs for the 1964 *Taming of the Shrew*, while the 1964 *Much Ado* saw Benedick replace many lyrics by the very French phrase “tralalalalalère”. His metamorphosis after the deception scene found its musical expression when the recurrent refrain “Vive l’amour, vive la joie, et vive les célibataires” (“Long live love, long live joy and long live the bachelors”) turned into “Vive l’amour, vive la joie, et salut aux célibataires” (“Long live love, long live joy, farewell to the bachelors”)¹¹.

France’s emblematic coarse humour was also introduced in some visually bawdy sequences in which the men always attempted to grasp

10. “Viens dans mes bras, mon beau navire, je suis ton port”, probably with a pun on “port” (“haven”) and “porc” (“pig”).

11. Jacques Datin and Robert Vidalin composed many exclusive songs for the show.

the women's breasts (and often succeeded in doing so): Aguecheek took hold of Maria's in the 1962 *Twelfth Night*; Borachio seized Margaret's in the 1964 *Much Ado* (Plate 8); Touchstone grabbed Audrey's in the 1972 *As You Like It* (Plate 18); and, in the 1964 *Taming of the Shrew*, the tailor stroked Catarina's, while Hortensio felt up two big watermelons as he fantasized on Bianca.

The productions played on different genres that were very popular among the French audience at the time of broadcasting. The 1964 *Taming of the Shrew* was performed as a swashbuckling movie (Plate 13), reminiscent of André Hunebelle's films starring Jean Marais, such as *Le Bossu* (1960) and *Le Capitain* (dir. Hunebelle, 1960), with its sequences in taverns and at the market place. Outdoor sequences revealed Petrucchio riding in the countryside, singing out loud "Quand viendras-tu ma bien-aimée?" ("When will you come, my beloved?"), and followed by his faithful servant. Later in the film, the scene in which Petrucchio leaves Padua with Catarina after their wedding was turned into an exciting sword fight, as Hortensio and Gremio attempted to recover their money.

The 1972 *As You Like It*, featuring as it does companions of an exiled duke, kept recalling the 52-episode adventure series *Thierry La Fronde* (1963) in which Jean-Claude Drouot played the shrewd leader of a band of French rebels during the Hundred-Year War. The 1964 *Merry Wives* was turned into a French "comédie de boulevard", a bedroom farce where improvisation and broad comic turns prevailed: Falstaff looked at himself (and talked to himself) in a ridiculously tiny mirror, obviously inadapted to encompass his huge waistline; Brooke decided to accept the fact that he was a cuckold, as mournful music, comically in excess, could be heard in the background. One may sometimes wonder whether the comedy was voluntary or not. Comical exaggeration raises the question of original intention, especially since the comic aspects may have aged with the productions themselves. For instance, the 1972 *As You Like It* fight scene between Orlando and Charles the wrestler, with its clumsy, inflated moves and its location on a wooden platform in the middle of nowhere, was screamingly hilarious, but maybe not intentionally (Plate 17).

Generally, the productions suppressed or, at least, filtered the darker elements in the plays, favouring the comic aspects and ironing out the gloomy moments. In the 1964 *Much Ado*, Célia (Hero) was not rejected violently by Claudio, and no one laid a hand on her; Claudio and Don Pedro did not even joke about the aborted wedding afterwards, but kept sad faces. The scene showing the two old men

pathetically challenging the young was omitted from the production, and when Benedick came to challenge Claudio, this was again achieved without any brutality. At the end, the final scheme in which Claudio is threatened with marrying Hero's cousin (whom he has never met) was completely evaded: Hero unmasked herself immediately, moving forward the happy conclusion, but cancelling the effect of wonder that characterizes the end of Shakespeare's play.

From stage to television, between realism and artifice

In these transfers from the stage to the small screen, different televisual aesthetics were used, featuring various degrees of realism and artifice. Television techniques, notably visual editing and montage, made some very unusual performances possible. For instance, they allowed director Claude Loursais to cast Annie Girardot as both Viola and her twin brother Sebastian in the 1957 *Twelfth Night*. Viola and Sebastian exactly looked alike, thus reinforcing the plot's credibility (Plates 1, 2 and 3).

By contrast, Claude Barma's 1962 *Twelfth Night* shunned realism altogether. The single set (in a television studio) remained stylized and theatrical; even natural elements such as trees were merely suggested in artificial constructions. The original intention was to free the spectators' imagination¹². *Télérama* mentioned that two months of rehearsals had been necessary for the one-off show, turning the broadcast into a theatrical event¹³. Malvolio gazed directly at the camera during his monologues (Plate 4), recalling the stage convention of the aside. The eavesdropping scene (in which Maria, Aguecheek and Sir Toby spy upon Malvolio reading the forged letter) was also played as in a theatre, with the characters remaining unrealistically visible during the whole sequence. Aguecheek actually hid himself behind Toby who raised his arms and took the static position of a tree (Plate 5). Malvolio even went so far as to sit on one of the eavesdroppers' knees, comically transforming him into a prop.

The three 1964 productions (*Much Ado*, *The Merry Wives* and *The Shrew*) are thought-provoking in their combination of realism and

12. "Pour ne pas tricher, Claude Barma n'a pas voulu non plus du folklore, des costumes et des décors. Les costumes sont dépouillés, les décors presque inexistants, sans un seul meuble, afin de laisser parler l'imagination", *Télérama*, 23-9 December 1962.

13. *Télérama*, 23-9 December 62.

artifice. Pierre Badel's *Much Ado* was announced in *Télérama* in an article by André Alter, the headline of which could have been that of a short news item: "La calomnie fait s'évanouir la fille du gouverneur. Un moine l'a [sic] fait passer pour morte afin de révéler son innocence" ("The Governor's slandered daughter faints. A monk makes her pretend she is dead to prove her innocence")¹⁴. This very unfamiliar look at the play brought a realistic effect to the performed events. In this studio-filmed production, the characters moved about in a military camp. The sets made good use of transparent light fabrics for the tents, which created different playing areas for each group of characters, but also made the eavesdropping scenes very natural, since many actions showed through the cloth. This design thus delineated theatrical stages and backstages, while keeping the situations very plausible. The production conjured very realistic elements from one of the first scenes onwards, with Don Pedro arriving on a real horse, yet this did not erase the theatrical dimension of the show.

This production often alluded metafilmically to the medium of cinema. The first shot of *Much Ado* (*Beaucoup de bruit pour rien* in French) lingered on a trumpet bell, focusing on the opening into the trumpet itself, which could be seen as a visual and sonorous illustration of the French title ("bruit" meaning "noise"), but also as the eye of a camera. Intertitles recalled silent film and naively indicated the passing of time: "une journée se termine, l'autre commence" ("one day ends, another begins"). One may see another major allusion to cinema in the use of shadows projected onto the white cloth of the tents. The characters were like movie actors or movie spectators, either being watched by others without knowing so, or eavesdropping on figures who, they thought, could not see them. A totally unaware Benedick offered a very funny shadow show as he sang in the shower (Plate 6). The lyrics of the song, in which Benedick unashamedly praised the bachelors, actually replaced his first monologue in the play, making for an effective, plot-advancing short-cut¹⁵. His second monologue was also replaced by a musical number using the same tune. But, this time, the transformation achieved by love was reflected in the new lyrics: "Quittons cette froideur postiche et jetons-nous à ses genoux" ("Let's do away with this faked coolness and let's crawl at her feet"). While running

14. *Télérama*, 29 March-4 April 1964.

15. The production was quick-paced and managed to perform the story in one hour and fifteen minutes only.

joyfully towards the camera, an exuberant Benedick jumped around, met a kissing couple (Margaret and Borachio), sent them a kiss and concluded his song with “Vive l’amour, vive la joie et salut aux célibataires” (“Long live love, long live joy, farewell to the bachelors”) before the camera faded to black.

During his deception scene, Benedick remained in his tent while Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato talked outside. They had been able to spot him since his tent was lit from the inside, making for a perfect shadow show. But, thinking that he had not been discovered yet, Benedick blew his candle out. The whole action was utterly believable while conveying both the idea of backstage and of cinema. Beatrice’s deception scene made use of a similar shadow show. And so did the tomb scene in which Claudio paid homage to a Hero he believed to be dead: the characters were seen behind a screen, bringing a solemn and discreet touch to the sequence, while aesthetically combining the art of film and that of dumbshow (Plate 7).

Theatricality also arose in the musical transitions that included regular flourishes; in lines that were added to bring some meta-dramatic flavour, such as “the comedy will now start”, delivered by Don Pedro after the decision to trick both Benedick and Beatrice¹⁶; and in the final shot of the production, in which the characters raised their cloaks, in the way of curtains, to protect the intimacy of the two kissing couples from the spectators’ peeping eyes.

Roger Iglésis’s 1964 *Merry Wives* opened on a statue of Bacchus, placing the production under the signs of bacchanals, joviality and celebration, but also showing that props and design would be used to convey symbolic meaning. The sets represented a picturesque village in the French region of Alsace (some characters actually spoke with an Alsatian accent), but they revealed their artificiality. The walls were only suggested through a network of beams, revealing everything behind them and favouring the regular performances of dumbshows (Plate 9). The fields around the village, or even the forest, were suggested with few realistic props like some little straw scattered on the studio floor and some stylized trees in the background. The set was always the same for each outside location, but the changes in places were comically announced on a sign borne by a scarecrow that remained the same from one place to another (Plate 10): the sign “un

16. However, it is to be noted that Beatrice’s original metadramatic line “Speak, Count, ’tis your cue” (2.1.302) was removed from the script. See *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993.

champ près de Windsor” (“a field near Windsor”) soon changed into “Frogmore”. *The Merry Wives* thus disclosed the material conditions of its production and the conventions it relied on, loudly calling for the spectators’ suspension of disbelief while revealing this call in tongue-in-cheek humour. Metadrama was also emphasized during the sham duel between Evans and Caius: the fight was transformed into a small corrida with some audience around it, standing for the voyeuristic spectators in front of their TV sets.

Pierre Badel’s 1964 *The Taming of the Shrew* took full advantage of the medium of television. The production constructed two separate spaces – the town, artificially constructed in a TV studio, and the countryside (including Petrucchio’s lodging) filmed in outdoor, realistic locations. This aesthetic ambivalence was meaningful: Petrucchio brought nature to Catarina’s life and freed her from the pomp and conventions of her social status. The whole trajectory of the film moved from the town to nature, from artifice to realism, from Catarina’s anger and Petrucchio’s greed to true love. The first part of the film was, therefore, the most theatrical, and relied on many metadramatic devices creating many shows within the show. At the market place, Petrucchio, in the position of an indiscreet spectator, observed Grumio and Hortensio from a roof top, overhearing their plan to find a man who could marry Bianca’s older sister. As he arrived thunderously in front of Baptista’s house, Petrucchio was surrounded with artists from the circus, giving a show to Baptista and his daughters, but also to the TV spectators. Once inside the house, Petrucchio could observe the two sisters through a keyhole, creating a metadramatic transition to the next scene – that of the lesson given by Hortensio to the ladies. These metatheatrical elements became scarce in the second part of the film, which moved into the realism of the countryside, with its rough vegetation, farms and chickens. The Shrew was very silent during her “taming”, as many sequences were mostly visual and musical. The exile scene, only narrated in Shakespeare’s text, was shown extensively in an episode that can be found again in Franco Zeffirelli’s 1967 film with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. As in Zeffirelli’s film, Catarina’s journey left her muddy, cold and wet, at the mercy of Petrucchio’s good will (Plate 14).

This aesthetic ambivalence, between realism and artifice, theatre and cinema, was reflected in Albert Vidalie’s coinage of a love speech for Petrucchio and a voice-over monologue for Catarina, which disclosed their real inner selves. Catarina thus revealed in voice-over that she was disappointed by men but longed for true and passionate

love: “Ce sont donc là les hommes!”, “Ce que je veux c’est l’amour fou”. While giving psychological depth to the characters, thus making them more credible, the speeches paradoxically also re-injected traces of theatre into the film, turning a realistic farce into some more serious metadrama.

Agnès Delarive’s 1972 *As You Like It* attempted to be a “spectacular production of Shakespeare’s play” and to show that Shakespeare was “a popular and fashionable author”¹⁷. To try and achieve this goal, Delarive used exterior locations – the castle of Anet and the forest of Montfort-l’Amaury. This natural setting offered a very pastoral atmosphere: swans and sheep could be seen in the background; birds were chirping everywhere. However, Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* is based on the oppositions between the natural and the cultural, the bucolic and the urban, the real and the artificial. By focusing on high realism (Touchstone was, for instance, the only character who ever looked at the camera), Delarive removed all the edgy aspects of the play and merely managed to produce a very stagey and static show. One spark of compelling metadrama finally occurred at the end, when Rosalind was seen on a hilltop, towering above the others, as she distributed wives and husbands to everyone, pointing towards each character as a director casting the actors in a show.

If these TV productions of French Shakespeare proved more or less successful at their time of broadcast but also in the way they are received now, they, nevertheless, all testify to a period of French television when producers and directors dared to tackle Shakespeare – but also dared to adapt it to French culture, boldly changing the texts or including French references. This practice suddenly stopped at the end of the seventies. It may not be a coincidence that, at the very same time, the BBC series sent its Shakespearean flow every Sunday afternoon on FR3, the third French public channel (which became France 3 in the nineties)¹⁸. The BBC series may have conveyed the message that only the Brits could do Shakespeare “right” and respect the “true” spirit of his plays. In short, the BBC series may have

17. “Une Comédie en costumes d’époque dans des décors naturels: le château d’Anet et la forêt de Montfort-l’Amaury, le ‘doux Shakespeare à la langue de miel’, auteur populaire et à la mode y est plus que jamais lui-même”, *Télérama*, 29 July-5 August 1972.

18. It is this broadcast that motivated Michèle Willems’s seminal work *Shakespeare à la télévision*, ed. Michèle Willems, Rouen, Publications de l’Université de Rouen, 1987.

brought complexes to French directors and producers: Shakespeare could no longer be adapted in an audacious French way because his belonging to British culture had been asserted and his plays re-sacralized. We can only hope that, one day, in the not-too-distant future, a new cycle of French TV Shakespeare will dawn, in which an irreverential French eye will once more turn the plays into hybrid creatures – “half-French half-English”¹⁹ – prompting another fruitful dialogue between the two cultures.

CREDITS

La Nuit des rois (Twelfth Night)

Broadcast on 6 April 1957
 Directed by Claude Loursais
 Adapted by Thomas Lascaris
 Cast:

Viola/Sébastien	Annie Girardot
Feste	Christian Duvaleix
Maria	Micheline Luccioni
Olivia	François Spira
Orsino	Pierre Vaneck
Malvolio	Michel Vitold
Sir Toby	Georges Wilson

La Nuit des rois (Twelfth Night)

Broadcast on 25 December 1962
 Directed by Claude Barma
 Cinematography Maurice Barry
 Music A. Duhamel
 Costumes Christiane Coste
 Cast:

Malvolio	Jean-Pierre Marielle
Maria	Catherine Samie
Sir Andrew	Jean Rochefort
Fabien	Georges Riquier
Sir Toby	Jacques Fabbri
Feste	Robert Hirsch

19. *Henry V*, ed. Gary Taylor, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, 5.2.201.

Olivia	Martine Sarcey
Viola	Geneviève Page
Orsino	François Chaumette
Sébastien	Jean-François Poron
Antonio	Mario Pilar
Valentin	Paul Cambo
Le capitaine	Robert Bousquet

Beaucoup de bruit pour rien (Much Ado About Nothing)

Broadcast on 31 March 1964 on the first French channel

Directed by Pierre Badel

Music	Jacques Datin et Alain Goraguer
Lyrics	Maurice Vidalin
Choreography	Michel Rayne
Designer	Jean-Baptiste Hugues, Jean-Christophe Berquier
Costumes	Christiane Coste
Photography	Roger Dormoy
Cast:	
Léonato	Jean Martinelli
Le messenger	Henri Marteau,
Béatrice	Colette Castel
Célia	Christiane Desbois
Marguerite	Nadia Barentin
Don Pedro	Jacques François
Bénédict	Dominique Paturel
Claudio	Jean-François Poron
Borachio	Serge Sauvion
Don Juan	Guy Delorme
Conrad	Jean Roquelle
Cornouille	Jacques Hilling
Houille	Guy Pierauld

Les Joyeuses Commères de Windsor (The Merry Wives of Windsor)

Directed by Roger Iglésis

Broadcast on 19 September 1964

Adapted by Charles Charras

Music	Georges Delerue
Choreography	Nicole Dehayes
Designer	Gérard Dubois
Cast:	
Falstaff	Jean Le Poulain
Mme Ford	Mary Dalmes
M. Ford	Jean Bouise
Mme Page	Josette Harmina

M. Page	François Maistre
Anne Page	Marie-Christine Barrault
Sir Evans	Charles Charras
Dr Caius	Hubert de Lapparent
Mme Quickly	Arlette Gilbert,
Fenton	Bernard Garnier
Juge Shallow	Lucien Raimbourg
L'aubergiste	Pierre Mirat
Pistolet	Francis Joffo
Nym	Dominique Bernard
Bardolphe	Guy Saint Jean
Simple	Angelo Barbi
Rugby	André Chanal
Slender	Jacques Ciron
Le Page	Jacky Calatayud
Domestique	Claude Brosset
2 ^e domestique	Gérard Hérold

La Mégère apprivoisée (The Taming of the Shrew)

Broadcast on 27 December 1964

Directed by Pierre Badel

Adapted by Albert Vidalie

Cinematography René Mathelin

Music Jacques Datin, Alain Goraguer

Cast:

Petruccio	Bernard Noël
Catarina	Rosy Varte
Baptista	Lucien Baroux
Hortensio	Henri Virlojeux
Gremio	Christian Marin
Bianca	Caroline Cellier

Comme il vous plaira (As You Like It)

Broadcast on 4 August 1972.

Directed by Agnès Delarive

Adapted by Nicole and Jean Anouilh

Cast:

Le duc	Jean-Pierre Aumont
Orlando	Paul Barge
Sir Olivier	Pierre Bertin
Adam	François Vibert
Duc Frédéric	Jean-Roger Caussimon
Jacques	Sacha Pitoëff
Audrey	Catherine Ohotnikoff

Touchstone	Jean Paredes
Sylvius	Jacques Bleu
Le Beau	Hubert Deschamps
Olivier	Michel Subor
Charles, wrestler	Martin Trevières
Phébé	Cécile Vassort
Jacques de Boys	Philippe Gauget
Rosalind	Maureen Kerwin
Célia	Patricia Liesieur
Corin	Guy Pintat
D'Amiens	Jean-Claude Gérard

Twelfth Night (Claude Loursais, 1957)



1. Never filming Viola's and Sebastian's face together because...



2. ... Annie Girardot played Viola...



3. ... and her brother Sebastian

Twelfth Night (Claude Barma, 1962)



4. Jean-Pierre Marielle as Malvolio



5. Sir Toby pretending to be a tree during the eavesdropping scene

Much Ado About Nothing (Pierre Badel, 1964)



6. Benedick in the shower



7. Claudio paying homage to Celia (Hero)



8. Borachio's bawdy game with Margaret

The Merry Wives of Windsor (Roger Iglésis, 1964)



9. The walls revealing their artificiality



10. The scarecrow bearing a different sign to indicate each location ("Un champ près de Frogmore")



11. Jean Le Poulain as Falstaff wooing Mrs Ford



12. Falstaff disguised as the old woman of Brenford

The Taming of the Shrew (Pierre Badel, 1964)



13. Filming *The Shrew* in the tradition of the swashbuckling movie



14. Catarina's muddy journey to Petrucchio's house



15. Petrucchio tamed, kneeling before Catarina



16. The romantic kiss concluding the film

As You Like It (Agnès Delarive, 1972)



17. Orlando about to fight Charles the Wrestler



18. Touchstone and Audrey