

their own lives are still somehow so new, but Liebman's play reached both the hearts and minds of his spectators. I much admired this play.

Both these plays show what complex and engaging dramatic material there is available for young audiences in Canada as well as the enthusiasm of those audiences in responding to much more than "kids' entertainment."

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Shakespeare — The Animated Tales

Videos: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 1992. ISBN 0-679-83902-X. *The Tempest*. 1992. ISBN 0-679-83905-4. *Hamlet*. 1992. ISBN 0-679-83921-6. *Macbeth*. 1992. ISBN 0-679-83917-8. All screenplays and abridgments by Leon Garfield. Random House Home Video. Each approx. 30 min. Each \$18.95.

Books: (Sold separately.) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. ISBN 0-679-83870-8. *The Tempest*. ISBN 0-679-83873-2. *Hamlet*. ISBN 0-679-83871-6. *Macbeth*. ISBN 0-679-83875-9. All abridgments by Leon Garfield. All published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1992-93. Each \$6.99 paper; library bindings available.

The Random House Home Video versions of six plays are perhaps the most useful introductions to Shakespeare educators at all levels are likely to find; the books,

however, are less satisfactory. Each play utilizes different graphics: some are drawn, others use animated puppets or dolls. The books illustrate their abridgments of the texts with the videos' graphics. My dissatisfaction with the books is that their texts do not match the abridgments in the videos nor are they complete texts: they would be much more useful if they did either one thing or the other. Each video uses a narrator for introductory and other materials which are not "acted." All six abridgments are well done and for the most part give accurate overviews of the plays. And, happily, the abridgments tend to stimulate students of various ages to want to learn more about the plays. My six-year grandson is fascinated by *Tempest* and after a dozen viewings asks questions raised but not answered in the video and clamours to



The Tempest

see it "live." Gillian Huffmon, (a former university student of mine) had her Grade 9 students write "reviews" of the *Dream* video after having studied the full text of the play; many in class had also seen it performed at Stratford. Their major criticisms were that too much of the story was narrated rather than acted, that the Titania/Oberon feud over possession the orphan child was omitted; none noticed that Titania's "dotting" on the transformed Bottom was technically bestial sexual lust. The class, however, agreed that the video was a fine introduction of the play to pre-teens, but that it was too abbreviated for older students like themselves. Finally, I found the *Macbeth* an excellent stimulus for discussion of the effect the video's omissions had on interpretation of the play in a senior university class.



A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream is the only pure fantasy in the Shakespeare canon, but *The Tempest* runs such a close second that comparing the two would be an excellent learning experience for students at any level. *Dream* appears (in the rational Theseus' words) to "give a local habitation and name to things imagined" but, in fact, the play itself illustrates that there are more mysteries in the universe than ever Theseus' cool reason could comprehend: after all, we — the audience — see the fairies and what they can accomplish. In *Tempest*, by contrast, everything that appears magical and fantastic to all except Prospero is, in fact, rationally explained: he has learned to create illusions from the books he brought with him to the island. Even the "monster" Caliban has a rational genesis: Shakespeare and his audience believed in the reality of witches and the likelihood of their producing grotesque offspring. On the negative side, I think the graphic rendering of Oberon makes him appear more demonic than the play suggests; Caliban, by contrast, although he scowls a lot, looks more like an overgrown armadillo than the subhuman monster Shakespeare's lines describe. Teachers might also find it useful to ask students if they would respond differently to the two non-human characters in *Tempest* if the video included Ariel's speech expressing pity for Prospero's suffering captives which motivates Prospero to forgive them all for past wrongs (V,1,11-32), and if Caliban were permitted to voice the full version of surely the most beautiful speech in the play — "Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises [music] / that give delight and hurt not" (III,2,144-152) which reveals a side of him unsuspected by Prospero.

Both tragedies are excellent introductions to the plays. My university class rightly agreed that nothing substantial was omitted from *Macbeth* and that the animation was more effective than live or filmed actors could ever be. It opens

with a narrator telling us that "There was war in Scotland. The land was torn and bleeding. But the deepest wounds of all were made by friends turned traitor to fight against Duncan their king. Nothing was as it seemed," surely an ideal thematic introduction. Then we see the witches: each in turn is transformed from a little old lady into a floating, grotesque head, a whirling devilish, a monster as they speak their famous opening lines. This is followed by the first of a series of scenes of violence to which educators of younger students may well object: in a 30-second battle sequence as Macbeth and Banquo fight to save Duncan's throne heads are severed, swords thrust into bodies, a horse slaughtered, until finally the two victors stand victorious amid a field of corpses. There are a few more violent moments later — the murder of Banquo, Banquo's ghost bleeding profusely at the Banquet scene, and McDuff's final slaughter of Macbeth — but none are any worse than much Saturday morning children's TV and the play is unthinkable without it. The scenes, however, are so striking that they make much more of an impact than possible for human actors fumbling with swords on a stage.

The video follows the play scene by scene: most, of course, are abbreviated, but just about every memorable line from the play is included. Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" speech is included (but her lines about having given suck, and being willing to bash her children's brains out is missing). The slaughter of Lady Macduff and her children is bloodless: we see the family group as a madonna and children stained glass window which the killers shatter. The same image makes the ending of the video more effective than most live productions: here, as Macbeth battles McDuff although knowing his situation is hopeless, the iconic vision of McDuff's family blinds him to McDuff's killing blow.

The *Hamlet* video is an ideal introduction to Shakespeare's most complex tragedy. It begins with a narrator paraphrasing Marcellus's line that "Something was rotten in Denmark" and then sketching in the background of the plot. Adults familiar with the original may well object to its major omission — the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern characters and sub-plots are totally excluded — but every other major character, scene and event is present, and we hear all the famous lines. The deletion may at first appear sacrilegious, but, clearly, something had to be sacrificed to reduce the four hour original to 30 minutes. And without these scenes the structure of the play as well as the characterizations of the other key figures is more comprehensible to novices. Except for Hamlet's climactic (but bloodless) stabbing of Claudius, there is no violence in the video. The visual aspects of the video are by far the most effective of the six: the expressions on the faces of the drawn characters seem to shift frequently and it appears that a camera is continually roaming throughout Elsinore Castle, pausing to view a scene and then following a winding stone staircase past gothic arches to the next scene.

Note: Reviews of Romeo and Juliet and Twelfth Night appeared in CCL No. 72 (1993), pp. 91-95.

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