

THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

The 880th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 10 October 2013. In a departure from custom the Club's AGM was held immediately before the talk for which Sylvia Morris took the chair. She introduced Daniel Rosenthal, the author of *Shakespeare on Screen* and the *BFI Screen Guide 100 to Shakespeare Films* who spoke on genre adaptations on film of Shakespeare's plays.

Rosenthal traced the history of Shakespeare on film and pointed out that very few, from the first talking pictures to the present, were commercial successes. Exceptions were Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* and Kenneth Branagh's productions. By removing the perceived barrier of Shakespearean language and updating the context filmmakers aimed to attract wider audiences. Rosenthal explained that successful genre adaptations had to find the right parallels in time and space, but also exactly the right linguistic medium. He showed extracts from a number of films to demonstrate: *Joe Macbeth* places Macbeth into the mould of a gangster movie. Macbeth, a member of the Mafia, kills to get to the top, and traitors are executed without question. The problem of the appearance of a trio of witches on a heath is solved by Macbeth receiving supernatural warnings from a Tarot card reader in a night club.

Rosenthal suggested that each genre adaptation begins with a "What if" question. So for the film *All Night Long* the question is "What if Othello is the leader of a jazz band, Desdemona the singer, Cassio the manager and Iago the drummer who wants his own band?" And in *Ten Things I Hate About You* the question is "What if *The Taming of the Shrew* is set in a high school in Seattle in 1999? And in *My Kingdom* what if Lear is a Liverpool gangster with three daughters trying to divide his business between them to avoid prosecution.

More controversially Rosenthal showed a some scenes from TV and films which he argued showed how Shakespeare was in the DNA of modern storytellers and provided a covert texture and dynamic to archetypal situations: the war film, the political thriller.

Mr Rosenthal took questions from the audience and the meeting finished at 9pm.