

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-39913-5 - Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier,  
Orson Welles, Peter Brook and Akira Kurosawa

Anthony Davies

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To Professor Winifred Maxwell and Professor Guy Butler,  
consummate sharers of enthusiasm,

and to my mother and friends,  
whose generosity and encouragement  
kept this endeavour alive through three winters.

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## Preface

The films of Olivier, Welles, Brook and Kurosawa constitute the most important material upon which this study has been based. It is only right, therefore, to point out that certain variations were noticed in the prints available for viewing. Not only were there omissions which reduced the duration of most prints from the advertised time lengths, but in some cases sections of film had been replaced in the wrong sequence. Only once was it possible to see a print of Kurosawa's *THRONE OF BLOOD* which included the prolonged and very significant sequence of Washizu and Miki (the respective Macbeth and Banquo figures) as they ride into and out of the forest mist early in the film's action. One print of Olivier's *RICHARD III* was 18 minutes short of its advertised length. These variations had to be accepted as inevitable disparities.

Welles's *MACBETH* and *OTHELLO* present special difficulties because Welles does not seem to have declared one particular version of either film to be definitive. The original version of *MACBETH* is believed, according to the Folger Shakespeare Filmography, to have had a running time of 105 minutes. That original 1948 version was withdrawn because of its faulty sound-track and re-released in 1949 and 1950 with a recorded sound-track and a shortened running time. Copies of the film available on current distribution have a running time of about 86 minutes, but the BBC screened what was termed a 'newly restored' version of *MACBETH* in May 1982, which ran for 108 minutes.

There are no fewer than six versions of *OTHELLO* catalogued in the British National Film Archives, and the version screened by the BBC (also in May 1982) varies significantly from the version available from the British Film Institute Library. The print of the version screened by the BBC (NFA Catalogue no. 900112 E) is dated 1953, the year after the film's copyright was registered with the Library of Congress in Washington. The version currently in distribution is dated 1955, and it is clearly this latter version which is referred to in all extant critical literature. It has not been possible to trace a review of the film which is dated before 1955. The version televised by the BBC differs from the more widely known version of 1955 in having no printed credits (all credits being spoken as 'voice over' by Orson Welles), in omitting the narrative introduction which establishes the dramatic situation, in curtailing the closing sequence of the funeral procession and Iago's imprisonment, and in placing the montage of ship-rigging and water-reflection shots among the opening sequences of the film. As well as being 216 feet shorter than the 1953 version, it is described in the NFA catalogue as 'having footage unique to itself'.



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The available film scripts have been examined, but for two reasons the scripts have been of only limited use for this study. Firstly, a shooting script does not describe in detail the composite image framed in a shot, nor does it take into account the editing of the shots and their ultimate duration. Secondly, two distinctly different kinds of film script emerge, one a proposed shooting script whose details are often changed in the process of shooting, and the other a release script composed only after the film has reached its final form. The latter document is therefore little more than a written record of what can be observed in the film.

In order to distinguish reference to a play from a reference to a film, all film titles will be printed in capitals. OTHELLO will therefore refer to the film; *Othello* to the play.

While this study does not set out to compare the dialogue of the films with that of the plays, it has been considered helpful to indicate the placing in the play texts of important sections of film dialogue quoted in the chapters below.

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Plates 1–4, stills from the films *HENRY V* and *HAMLET* by courtesy of the Rank Organization Plc, the diagram of the set for *RICHARD III* by courtesy of the National Film Archive Stills Library. Plates 5–6 (London Films), 8–13, 14–15 (Columbia Pictures), and 16–17 (Toho International) supplied by courtesy of the National Film Archive Stills Department.