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978-0-521-81547-5 - Shakespeare Films in the Making: Vision, Production and Reception

Russell Jackson

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SHAKESPEARE FILMS IN THE MAKING

Shakespeare Films in the Making examines the production and reception of five feature-length Shakespeare films from the twentieth century, focusing on the ways in which they articulate visions of their Shakespearean originals, of the fictional worlds in which the films are set, and of the filmmakers' own society. Two of the films – Warner Bros.'s 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and MGM's 1936 *Romeo and Juliet* – were products of the Hollywood system and reflect the studios' desire to enhance their status with 'prestige pictures'. Laurence Olivier's 1944 *Henry V* was part of Britain's cultural war effort and embodies visions of the medieval past and ideal leadership. The story of its production and reception – on both sides of the Atlantic – shows that it was also a significant contribution to the campaign to assert the British film industry's response to the dominance of Hollywood. The *Romeo and Juliet* films of Renato Castellani (1954) and Franco Zeffirelli (1968) expressed visions of Renaissance Italy that contrast – in differing ways – with MGM's film. This book offers readings of these significant and influential films that are informed by an understanding of the processes of film production and are supported by extensive archival research, including studio documents, script revisions, publicity materials and reviews.

RUSSELL JACKSON is Allardyce Nicoll Professor of Drama at the University of Birmingham. He has published widely on subjects in theatre history and Shakespearean performance, and is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film* (second edition, 2007). Over the past twenty years he has worked as text adviser on many theatre, radio and film productions, including all of Kenneth Branagh's Shakespeare films.

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‘Mr Stahr’s Projection Room’ was a miniature picture theatre with four rows of overstuffed chairs. In front of the front row ran a long table with dim lamps, buzzers and telephones . . . Here Stahr sat at two-thirty and again at six-thirty watching the lengths of film taken during the day. There was often a savage intensity about the occasion – he was dealing with *faits accomplis* – the net result of months of buying, planning, writing and rewriting, casting, constructing, lighting, rehearsing and shooting – the fruit alike of brilliant hunches or counsels of despair, of lethargy, conspiracy and sweat. At this point the tortuous manoeuvre was staged and in suspension – these were reports from the battle-line . . . Dreams hung in fragments at the far end of the room, suffered analysis, passed – to be dreamed in crowds, or else discarded.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Scribner’s, 2003), pp. 52; 56.

‘Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a wrack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.’

(William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, IV.i.147–58)

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of the 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* published in *Shakespeare Bulletin*.

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R. J., March 2007

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Abbreviations

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The following abbreviations are used for archives and research collections:

AMPAS	Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles
BFI	British Film Institute
BSL	Birmingham Shakespeare Library
Folger	The Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC
NYPL	New York Public Library, Performing Arts Collection, Lincoln Center
USC	Department of Cinema and Television, University of Southern California, Los Angeles
WBA/USC	Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California, Los Angeles
WCFTR	Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin