

Cambridge University Press

0521835372 - A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television,  
Second Edition

Kenneth S. Rothwell

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## A HISTORY OF SHAKESPEARE ON SCREEN

*A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* chronicles how film-makers have re-imagined Shakespeare's plays from the earliest exhibitions in music halls and nickelodeons to today's multi-million dollar productions shown in megaplexes. Topics include the silent era, Hollywood in the Golden Age, the films of Laurence Olivier and Orson Welles, the television scene to include the BBC plays, the avant-garde cinema of Jarman and Greenaway, and non-Anglophone contributions from Japan and elsewhere. This second edition updates the chronology to the year 2003 and includes a new chapter on such recent films as John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*, Kenneth Branagh's *Love's Labour's Lost*, Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*, and Billy Morrisette's *Scotland, Pa.* An up-to-date filmography, bibliography, and index of names make it invaluable as a one-volume reference work for specialists, while the accessible style will ensure that it also appeals to a wider audience of Shakespeareans and cinephiles.

KENNETH S. ROTHWELL is Professor of English Emeritus at the University of Vermont, Burlington. He was the co-founder and co-editor with Bernice W. Kliman of the *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter*. He co-chaired the Shakespeare on Film Seminar at the Tokyo 1991 World Shakespeare Congress, and he produced the Shakespeare on Film Festival at the Los Angeles 1996 World Shakespeare Congress. He compiled with Annabelle Henkin Melzer *Shakespeare on Screen: An International Filmography and Videography* (1990), and 'Occasional Paper no.8', a monograph on Shakespeare silent films for the International Shakespeare Association (2000) series.

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# A History of Shakespeare on Screen

A CENTURY OF FILM AND TELEVISION

*Kenneth S. Rothwell*

Second Edition



**CAMBRIDGE**  
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*For my grandchildren,  
Rosalind Springs Rothwell  
Sara Mei-Ping Davis  
James Waddell Rothwell  
Charlotte Zhong-Xue Rothwell Davis  
Phoebe Ming-Ming Davis*

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- PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS  
TO SECOND EDITION -

The need for a second edition of *A History of Shakespeare on Screen* goes beyond the obvious requirement of updating the chronology. As thousands of classroom teachers through readily available VHS and DVD recordings have refocused student attention from text to performance, a minor revolution has occurred in academic attitudes toward Shakespeare on screen. Once universally scorned as “dumbing down,” Shakespeare films are now often credited with both preserving and redefining a cultural heritage. The latest pedagogy has been accompanied by theoretical contributions from new wave academics, whose enthusiasm for both Shakespeare and mass culture has persuaded them to expand the limits of the Shakespeare movie from text to “paratext.” In the beginning filmmakers deferred to Shakespeareans; nowadays Shakespeareans defer to filmmakers. Subservience has yielded to subversion.

This shift in the center of gravity has toppled the sovereignty of text over performance to the point that the term, “transgressive,” which I used in the first edition of this book as a label for bizarre adaptations, has become meaningless. Post-modernism collapses the distinctions between high and low culture so that Will Shakespeare becomes just another working screen writer subject to “the spurns That patient merit of th’ unworthy takes.” The ancient cry of protest “But is it Shakespeare?” is heard now only from diehard Luddites, who have in the sweep of events ironically themselves been made over into the counter-revolutionary transgressors. This volume’s cover illustration from Billy Morrissette’s *Scotland, PA* illustrates how Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* has been reincarnated in the context of that most American of mass cultural institutions, the MacDonald’s hamburger.

Actually there is nothing new about any of this tug of war between text and performance. The grudge in Jacobean times between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones over whether in the court masque the text (*Lexis*) or the scenery (*Opsis*) should be given priority has been displaced forward into the struggle between author and *auteur*. This “dismemberment” of Shakespeare, as explicated by theorists like Richard Burt, Linda Charnes, Barbara Hodgdon, Douglas Lanier, Courtney Lehmann, Laurie Osborne, Lisa S. Starks, W. B. Worthen, and others, has not yet destroyed the powerful force of Shakespeare’s work as a theogony,



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a kind of creation epic for western civilization. It has instead infused the parts like a sacramental wafer into the body and blood of the masses who partake of the feast. The old fashioned textual scholar remains on the high altar guarding the holy relics of folio and quarto. Never mind that only a faithful few still attend Mass.

In the newly drafted chapter 11, I have more or less erased the sharp distinction between film and video in order to solve a difficult organizational problem as well as to acknowledge the way that technology has increasingly blurred the distinction between them. I have also corrected and amended errors and misjudgments in the first edition. For their detailed and exhaustive criticism, I am especially grateful to José Ramón Díaz Fernández, Thomas A. Pendleton, Stanley Wells, and my editor Sarah Stanton. I would also like to thank Peter Balderstone, Peter Donaldson, Juana Green, Nicholas Jones, and Elsie Walker, for allowing me to draw on their unpublished papers, all but Walker's having been presented to the "Shakespeare and the Movies" seminar at the 2003 Shakespeare Association meeting in Victoria, BC. I am indebted to the staffs of the Butler/Howe Library at the University of Vermont, the Library of Performing Arts of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, and the Museum of Modern Art Film Library. Gary Crowdus has allowed me to draw on my reviews of *Elizabeth* and *Much Ado about Something in Cineaste*; Jim Welsh authorized me to echo things I have already said in his journal, *Literature/Film Quarterly*; the editors of *Shakespeare Bulletin* have not objected to my incorporating traces of work published in its pages; Lot 47 Films granted permission to use the cover photo from *Scotland, PA*; for some production data about recent film releases I have used by permission <http://pro.imdb.com>, © 1990–2001 Internet Movie Database Limited. Individual Web sites for specific films have occasionally been drawn on as well. "Photofest" has been indispensable in locating stills.

Throughout all these perturbations, my faithful wife, Lyn, has never hesitated to take time out to help me, even in the midst of her own heroic struggle to bring a single payer universal health system to Vermont and the United States.

K.S.R.

*September 2, 2003  
Burlington, Vermont*

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– PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION –

This book has been at least a quarter of the century in the making and along the way I have accumulated staggering debts from many generous and wonderful people. At the top of the list are the veteran members of the Shakespeare on Film Seminar at the meetings of the Shakespeare Association of America and the International Shakespeare Association who from Tokyo to Cleveland and Los Angeles to Stratford-upon-Avon have patiently read and critiqued my annual contributions. They include H. R. Coursen, Samuel Crowl, Anthony Davies, Peter S. Donaldson, Lawrence Guntner, Russell Jackson, Jack J. Jorgens, James H. Lake, R. Thomas Simone, Robert F. Willson, Jr., and many others whose friendship and collegiality have become especially meaningful to me.

To Dr. Bernice W. Kliman I owe a special debt for having co-founded and co-edited with me from 1976 to 1992 the *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter*. Dr. Nancy Hodge, formerly executive director of the Shakespeare Association of America, underwrote my three-day Shakespeare Film Festival at the 1996 World Shakespeare Congress in Los Angeles, which became the launching pad for this long-delayed book. Sarah Stanton of the Cambridge University Press added another incentive when in Los Angeles she encouraged me to submit an outline for evaluation. An anonymous reader for the Cambridge University Press did me an enormous favor by ferreting out errors of fact and judgment in an earlier draft and his/her industry has been matched by Jocelyn Pye's meticulous copy editing.

The Research Committee of the University of Vermont Graduate College generously contributed toward underwriting the book's movie stills, and other permissions fees. Many on the staff of the University of Vermont Library aided me, among them James T. Barickman, Nancy Crane, Martha T. Day, Barbara T. Lambert, and Roger F. Wiberg. I also have debts to the staff of the British Film Institute Library and National Film and Television Archive, especially Luke McKernan and Olwen Terris. Helpful persons like Rosemary Hanes at the Library of Congress Motion Picture Division, and Terry Geesken of the Museum of Modern Art went out of their way for me. In the pre-videocassette era, Barry M. Parker, Joseph G. Empsucha, and Candace Bothwell initiated me into the mysteries of the Steenbeck at the Folger Shakespeare Library film

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archive. Ken Wlaschin of the American Film Institute made some rare silent film materials available. I'm grateful to the lively film department at Burlington College, Chairman Ken Peck, and my Orson Welles teacher, Susan Henry, for helping me to make the crossover from Shakespeare to movies.

Among others who either advertently or inadvertently have helped along the way are the late Robert Hamilton Ball, Thomas Berger, Lynda E. Boose, Richard Burt, Mary Courtney, José Ramón Díaz-Fernández, Christina Egloff, Barbara Freedman, Kathy Grant, Kirk Hendershott-Kraetzer, Kathy Howlett, Michael Klossner, Patricia J. Lennox, Andrew M. McLean, Frank Manchel, Michael Manheim, the late Roger Manvell, Marjorie Meyer, Michael Mullin, Laurie Osborne, the late Ed Ruhe, Lisa S. Starks, Steve Toth, the late Sam Wanamaker, Stanley Wells, and Sara Woods. If I have overlooked anyone, I am truly sorry. Any errors in the pages that follow are of course entirely my responsibility.

Not least, I am grateful to my faithful and loving wife, Lyn, who put up with my becoming a grouchy recluse for two years.

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On behalf of Neal-Schuman Publishers, Michelle Rivera Rodriguez has granted permission to quote from, and/or paraphrase and rework sections (particularly in chapter five, on television) of my previously published commentaries in *Shakespeare on Screen: An International Filmography and Videography* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1990). I owe thanks to James Welsh, editor of *Literature/Film Quarterly* for permission to draw on my "Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*: Words into Picture and Music," *LFQ* 5.4. (Fall 1977), 326–32; Bege K. Bowers, co-editor of CEA Publications, for use of excerpts from my "Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*: the 'Privileging' of Ross," *CEA Critic* 46, 1&2 (1983–84), 50–55; Luis Gmaz for permitting some use of my review essay, "Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*," in *Comparative Drama* 24.2 (1990), 173–78; and Jason Arthur of Routledge for authorizing borrowings from my "In Search of Nothing: Mapping *King Lear*," in Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt (eds.), *Shakespeare, The Movie* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 135–47. Frequently I have also relied on the *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter* for relevant data. Jacqueline Kavanagh of the BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park, Reading, allowed access to materials stored there and has given me helpful advice.

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## - ABBREVIATIONS -

BBC	British Broadcasting Company
BFI	British Film Institute
BUFVC	British Universities Film & Video Council
CD	<i>Comparative Drama</i>
CSM	<i>Christian Science Monitor</i>
ETJ	<i>Educational Theatre Journal</i>
FM	<i>Film Music</i>
FQ	<i>Film Quarterly</i>
FR	<i>Films in Review</i>
LFQ	<i>Literature/Film Quarterly</i>
MFB	<i>Monthly Film Bulletin</i>
MG	<i>Manchester Guardian</i>
MPW	<i>Moving Picture World and View Photographer</i>
NFTVA	<i>National Film and Television Archive</i>
NYHT	<i>New York Herald Tribune</i>
NYO	<i>The New York Observer</i>
NYRB	<i>New York Review of Books</i>
NYT	<i>The New York Times</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
QFRT	<i>The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television</i>
RSC	Royal Shakespeare Company
SB	<i>Shakespeare Bulletin</i>
SFNL	<i>Shakespeare on Film Newsletter</i>
SN	<i>Shakespeare Newsletter</i>
SQ	<i>Shakespeare Quarterly</i>
SS	<i>Shakespeare Survey</i>
S&S	<i>Sight and Sound</i>
TA	<i>Theatre Arts</i> (previously <i>Theatre Arts Monthly</i> )
TN	<i>The Nation</i>
TNY	<i>The New Yorker</i>

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*Abbreviations*

TRS	<i>The Riverside Shakespeare</i>
TS	<i>Theatre Survey</i>
VV	<i>Village Voice</i>
WAC	BBC Written Archives Centre
WP	<i>Washington Post</i>