Shakespeare Films
in the Making

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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 Oliver'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.

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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.

<div align="right">F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Love of the Last Tycoon, ed. Matthew
J. Bruccoli (New York: Scribner's, 2003), pp. 52; 56.</div>

'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.'

<div align="right">(William Shakespeare, The Tempest, IV.i.147–58)</div>

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Abbreviations

References to Shakespeare's plays are to Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, general eds., *The Complete Works*, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005). Unless otherwise credited, translations are my own.

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

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Introduction: 'Such stuff as dreams are made on'

This book is about the making of movie dreams from Shakespeare's plays, the processes by which filmmakers conduct the two-way traffic between dreaming and what we take for reality. It draws more extensively than previous studies of the films in question on draft scripts and other archival sources. It also assesses the significance of the works for their makers (both corporate and individual) and the audiences of their own time. Specific scenes and sequences are discussed in detail, together with particular aspects of the 'world' created in each film which help to define the vision it imparts of the play, of Shakespeare and of the cinema itself.

The organisation is partly chronological: the book begins with the 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, followed by Laurence Olivier's 1944 *Henry V*; then the final chapter brings together three *Romeo and Juliet* films, from 1936, 1954 and 1968, grouped together because they offer distinctive versions – and visions – of Renaissance Italy, and because on the basis of the same dramatic text they also articulate different notions of what constitutes a 'Shakespeare Film'. Three of the films – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry V* and Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 *Romeo and Juliet* – have influenced subsequent versions, inspiring either emulation or avoidance of their approaches and methods. Traces of Max Reinhardt's *Dream* can be found in Michael Hoffmann's 1999 version, and Kenneth Branagh's 1989 *Henry V* is in some ways a respectful dialogue with its predecessor. Alongside Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), with its frenetic MTV-style editing and flamboyant *mise-en-scène*, Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* now figures as a 'straight' version of the play – a paradoxical fate for a movie which addressed the youth culture of its own time and in some sequences mimicked the rapid cutting and *cinéma-verité* camerawork of the New Wave. (Nino Rota's song from the score has even become a clichéd cue signifying romantic wistfulness, employed for a long time by BBC Radio One to introduce listeners' love stories.) None of the films discussed uses the more aggressively innovative techniques of the avant-garde of its time, still less the 'intensified continuity' and faster

pace that characterise such recent works as Luhrmann's *Romeo* or Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) or the self-conscious references to the modern media in Luhrmann's film and the *Hamlet* of Michael Almereyda (1999).[1]

Influences sometimes flow in unexpected channels, quite apart from the small group of Shakespeare Films. As they reviewed dozens of older films and animations, Disney's animators may well have looked to Reinhardt for inspiration in the forest scenes of the studio's first feature-length anima-tion, *Snow White* (1937), and the 1935 film seems more akin to the sinister setting of Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* (1984) than to the relatively unthreatening woodland in Michael Hoffmann's 1999 version of the Shakespeare play. Angela Carter, on whose stories Jordan's film is based, pays her own homage to Reinhardt with the fictionalised Hollywood *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the novel *Wise Children* (1991), and the making of the 1935 *Dream* is the basis of Ken Ludwig's witty play, *Shakespeare in Hollywood* (2005). The battlefield in Olivier's *Henry V*, with its gay pavilions, fluttering pennants and green meadow, may be present in the climactic conflict of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2005), where the newly appointed general, Peter, sits like Olivier's Henry on horseback (in Peter's case, unicornback) in shining armour with his sword raised, waiting for the moment to signal the attack. Andrew Adamson's film begins with the gloom and danger of wartime London before bringing the children as evacuees to the mysterious old house where they will find refuge and, in due course, access to a brighter and more picturesque world. The same movement, I will suggest, occurred for audiences, if not for the play's characters, in Olivier's 1944 film. Even if there is no direct or conscious influence, the narrative structures of fantasy and the raw ingredients of its imagery are so potently articulated in these older films as to be at least shared if not emulated by their successors.

Only the 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* deals in the strict sense of the word with dreaming, and none of the other Shakespeare Films discussed here moves into the area of fantasy, making the viewer share the characters' disorientation or delusion in the manner of such expressionist classics as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) – a style whose legacy can be traced in many horror films, *film noir* thrillers of the 1940s, and (among Shakespearean subjects) Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), Orson Welles's *Macbeth* (1949) and *Othello* (1952), Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1980) and Julie Taymor's *Titus*. However, in more general terms all the films may be said to participate in the relationship between movies and dreams – or rather, between the experience of watching a film and that of dreaming – which has long been the subject of critical debate and the

source of theoretical speculation. Even though he does not refer specifically to dreams, Erwin Panofsky identifies two of the key elements of reorientation that films may be said to share with them in his seminal essay 'Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures' (1934): the 'dynamization of space' and 'spatialization of time'.[2] Even when films do not engage in the overt distortions of vision and time of stylised or professedly 'visionary' works, we can identify foreshortenings of time and space in even the most determinedly realist films. The compressions of time and space expressed by montage sequences in 'classical' Hollywood movies are often equivalent in technique and effect to those of experimental films. In his recent study *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact* (2005), Colin McGinn explores the dream/film analogy in terms of the ontology of moviegoing rather than as an argument rooted in psychoanalytic theory. Among other richly suggestive propositions, he argues that a film 'is really a dream as it aspires to be', a line of thought that coincides with a distinction made by Stanley Cavell in *The World Viewed*: 'Most dreams are boring narratives . . . their skimpy surface out of all proportion with their riddle interest and their effect on the dreamer. To speak of film adventures or glamours or comedies as dreams is a dream of dreams: it doesn't capture the wish behind the dream, but merely the wish to have interesting dreams.'[3] Citing *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946), McGinn develops his analysis of 'this dreamlike meshing of the visual and the emotional', but the proposition is held to be true of films in general rather than restricted to fantasy films: 'The right blend of realism and fantasy also maximizes the dreamlike character of a film, thus inducing that blissful state of dream immersion. A film must be rooted in reality, but it must also depart from reality and enter the realm of the imagination.'[4]

The nature or degree of an audience's assent to the world placed before them in a movie prompts Leo Braudy to argue that 'the mixture of meaning and matter' in films has an especial fascination for the 'religiously oriented director' – whether Bergman or Buñuel – because belief can only have a qualified part to play 'when everything is there', and consequently 'Coleridge's concept of the willing suspension of disbelief is irrelevant to film because the problem is not to believe in something that you normally do not. . . . If there is any problem, it is extricating yourself from the cinematic illusion that is so much more believable than your normal life – Coleridge in reverse.'[5] Of the films made from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* since Reinhardt's, that directed by Adrian Noble (1996) deals most directly in the ways and means of the dreamer. In it a little boy in striped pyjamas leaves the safety of a 'real' but in fact stylised bedroom (the

toys are all antiques, a nostalgic flea market of childhood) and follows a mysterious creature (Puck) along alarming corridors and through mysterious doors – but the shifts in point of view and manipulations of space and time seem devoid of content. At times an audience surrogate of a kind absent in Reinhardt's film and at others an object of their detached gaze, Noble's little interloper is himself too patently a nostalgic dream-figure to negotiate effectively between the mundane and the magical. Perhaps the audience needs less help than Noble, somewhat patronisingly, is offering it?

Whatever account we give of the audience's experience, whether we emphasise their psychic development or the formations of ideology or (as in theories of the 'gaze') the confluence of the two, the element of fantasy indulged and induced is brought into question.[6] Like 'magic' – a word often invoked colloquially and in academic discourse in relation to movies – as a metaphor for the experience of films, dreaming has a potency equivalent to that of the dream/theatre metaphor in Shakespeare's time and since, and is available to a comparable degree for reflections on life and illusion. From theoretical study to the output of the studios' publicity departments, the dream metaphor has been worked at relentlessly. It is the basis of one of the rueful epithets – half cynical, half admiring – attached to Hollywood, the 'Dream Factory'. It can be a proud boast of idealism, exemplified now by the company name 'Dream Works'. Among the disenchanted and hostile, it can be the basis for bitter reproach. One of the persistent paradoxes of the Hollywood phenomenon is the relationship between the seemingly contradictory elements of 'dream' and 'factory', not merely on the level of anxiety about the manipulation of the audience's consciousness, but in terms of the extent to which the industry's employees have been autonomous agents. Can an industry dream? Should we think in terms of the 'genius of the system' and locate the vision of pictures in the artistic sensibility of a producer or director supported by and responding to the facilities and imperatives of a studio?[7] In the case of the two Hollywood films discussed in the present work, I will argue that the 'vision' – attributable to different agents in each case – is as much a realisation of the studio's self-image as of the play's potential or the director's or producer's art – or, for that matter, the imaginings of an Elizabethan playwright.

A major element of the 'system' – whether in Hollywood or elsewhere – is stars, even when (as in the casting of Zeffirelli's young Romeo and Juliet) they are notable by their absence. Film stars share with familiar actors in any dramatic medium the paradox of being simultaneously themselves and the fictional characters they play, but they are also projections of otherwise inexpressible desires and ambitions harboured by their admirers. In arguments

concerning the 'gaze' (male or otherwise), a key element is the complex relationship between the audience's reception of them and the stars as representations of gender identity and fulfilment. Stars are a focus for pleasures and anxieties concerning public and private spheres, the real and the unreal and the concept of the individual.[8] Filmmakers have avoided the employment of stars for aesthetic reasons (as is the case with Italian neo-realist cinema) or in order to prevent the diversion of attention from more important matters. Stars can delight an audience by demonstrating their ability to disguise themselves, but can also give pleasure by being unmistakably themselves. 'Sean Connery,' the advertising insisted, '*is* James Bond.' Something significant and valuable about the confirmation of identity lurks in the spectator's enjoyment of such 'doubles', and several kinds of vicarious pleasure are being given and taken at once. Most of the films discussed in the following chapters have ceased to afford as much of this pleasure as they once did – the MGM stars are less potent than they were in 1936 – but in at least one case, that of Olivier, the actor's status as a signifier of cultural authenticity is arguably stronger now than it was when his performances in other movie roles (including Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* and Maxim de Winter in *Rebecca*, in 1939 and 1940 respectively, and Darcy in the 1940 MGM version of *Pride and Prejudice*) were more vivid than his Shakespearean work for cinemagoers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Shakespeare Films form a minor element of the total output of the movie industry, but attract attention not merely on account of their qualities as films, or their usefulness in opening up questions regarding the plays, but because of their ambiguous status as cultural objects. They are 'dreams' in a sense different from that we might attach (as McGinn and others have done) to the medium in general. As cultural products they exist on the borders between 'high' and 'low' culture; engender anxiety concerning their potential influence on impressionable audiences; and can seem to exemplify conflicts between commercialism and a less trammelled, more innocent realm of ideas and artistic expression. Shakespeare Films have been seen as representing an aspect of globalisation on the one hand and – though this argument is less likely to be heard nowadays – the shortcomings of popular culture on the other. In the contemporary critical responses from the 1930s to the 1960s analysed here, the discourses of gender, nationality and authenticity figure largely, together with those of movie stardom and achievement. Sometimes Shakespeare Films have been presented as the fulfilment of a dream, either of the medium's capabilities or even of the playwright's fancies, unfulfilled by his own inadequate theatres. Many Shakespeare Films have effectively returned to the staging

methods and ambitions of Victorian pictorial theatre, 'realising' the dramatist's dreams with a fullness of realistic detail he could not envisage in performance. Again, the line of influence is sinuous rather than direct: Reinhardt's and Hoffmann's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* films, some sixty years apart, have more in common with the lavish scenography of late Victorian theatre than the more radical versions of Peter Hall (1968) and Adrian Noble, but Hoffmann's fairies owe more than Reinhardt's to the work of such nineteenth-century artists as J. W. Waterhouse and Gustave Moreau and the illustrations of Arthur Rackham.[9] In this respect at least, Reinhardt's imaginings are more radical than the later director's.

There is also a connection between the terms of the films' reception and the element of dreaming *within* them. In addition to the visions as and when they occur in the films and ideal images of society and behaviour, these films articulate dreams (to speak more figuratively) of the theatre and of film itself. This is not simply nostalgia for a lost age of artistic excellence located in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Each film has generated a cluster of metanarratives, often carefully cultivated and publicised by its makers. One of this study's aims is to shed light on the ways in which these dreams intersect in and around the films.

Of prime importance in this undertaking is an understanding of the relationship between the processes of making these visions appear and the experiences of watching them: the progress from script ideas through production to exhibition and reception. Both 'process' and 'experience' are here in the plural, because I hope to capture the shifting nature of these entities, varied by the changing circumstances of the production itself and of the audiences for which the films were created. We who see them in the twenty-first century are not the cinemagoers of their own time (from the 1930s to the 1960s) and it is rare for us to be able to view these films by way of the exact medium (celluloid prints projected on a cinema screen) for which they were designed.[10] Even if we leave aside for the moment the issue of who 'we' may be, and beg important questions about the status of 'the film itself' as a joint product of the audience and what is put on the screen, we can identify major differences of experience, both of life in general and of the media in particular, that distinguish us from our equivalents in earlier decades.

Film production can be divided into four phases: development, preparation, principal photography and post-production. To these we can add promotion (also known as 'exploitation') and distribution. All produce paper trails more or less specific in kind to the activity in question: script drafts, internal memos, plans and budgets, conference notes, daily production reports, music scores, cutting notes, preview responses, publicity materials