



Cinematic Hamlet: The Films of Olivier, Zeffirelli, Branagh, and Almereyda

By Patrick J. Cook



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Hamlet has inspired four outstanding film adaptations that continue to delight a wide and varied audience and to offer provocative new interpretations of Shakespeare's most popular play. *Cinematic Hamlet* contains the first scene-by-scene analysis of the methods used by Laurence Olivier, Franco Zeffirelli, Kenneth Branagh, and Michael Almereyda to translate *Hamlet* into highly distinctive and remarkably effective films.

Applying recent developments in neuroscience and psychology, Patrick J. Cook argues that film is a medium deploying an abundance of devices whose task it is to direct attention away from the film's viewing processes and toward the object represented. Through careful analysis of each film's devices, he explores the ways in which four brilliant directors rework the play into a radically different medium, engaging the viewer through powerful instinctive drives and creating audiovisual vehicles that support and complement Shakespeare's words and story.

Cinematic Hamlet will prove to be indispensable for anyone wishing to understand how these films rework Shakespeare into the powerful medium of film.

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Editorial Review

Review

Patrick Cook's *Cinematic Hamlet* combines the anthropologist's thick description with the latest in film theory from Bordwell, Carroll, McGinn, Sharff, Thompson and Thomson to produce challenging and provocative assessments of four major Hamlet films by Laurence Olivier, Franco Zeffirelli, Kenneth Branagh, and Michael Almereyda. Cook has new and interesting cinematic ideas to share about all of these films, especially Almereyda's *Hamlet*, where his chapter is impishly longer than his already exhaustive treatment of Branagh's four-hour film of the play. Cook provides a fresh new voice in the ever expanding field of Shakespeare on Film.

— Samuel Crowl, author of *Shakespeare at the Cineplex: The Kenneth Branagh Era*

“Cook gives us a book which deftly leads the reader through the labyrinths of cinematic art and craft and also provides foundational lessons on how to see a film as a film.”

— *Film-Philosophy Journal*

“A ramble through the notes (of *Cinematic Hamlet*) leaves one with the impression that Cook has read everything of relevance and can be trusted when correcting the wayward critic. His approach is generally thorough, fluent, and smart. Summing Up: Highly recommended.”

— *Choice*

“Patrick J. Cook's *Cinematic Hamlet: The Films of Olivier, Zeffirelli, Branagh, and Almereyda* will be invaluable both to those who want to teach Shakespeare on film and to those who simply want to understand these films, or film in general, better. His close readings are a model of how to pay attention, drawing on cognitive theories about how we respond and remember, and covering everything from the effect of 70 mm. film on Kenneth Branagh's version to Michael Almereyda's ambiguities.”

— *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*

About the Author

Patrick J. Cook is an associate professor of English at George Washington University. He is the author of *Milton, Spenser, and the Epic Tradition*.

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