



Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse

Judith Buchanan

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Several hundred films based on Shakespearean material were made in cinema's 'silent' era. What economic and cultural ambitions combined in order to make Shakespeare such attractive source material for the film industry? What were the characteristic approaches of particular production companies and of particular national film industries? How were silent Shakespeare films marketed, distributed, exhibited and received? Through a series of close readings, and drawing upon a wealth of primary research, this engaging account tells an evolving story that both illuminates silent Shakespeare films already known, and brings into critical circulation other films not yet commercially available and therefore little known. Subjects covered include nineteenth-century precursors of silent Shakespeare films, the many Shakespeare films of the Vitagraph Company of America, the blockbuster Shakespeare films of the tercentenary year 1916, Asta Nielsen and Emil Jannings as the stars of German Shakespeare films of the 1920s, and silent films of Hamlet.

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