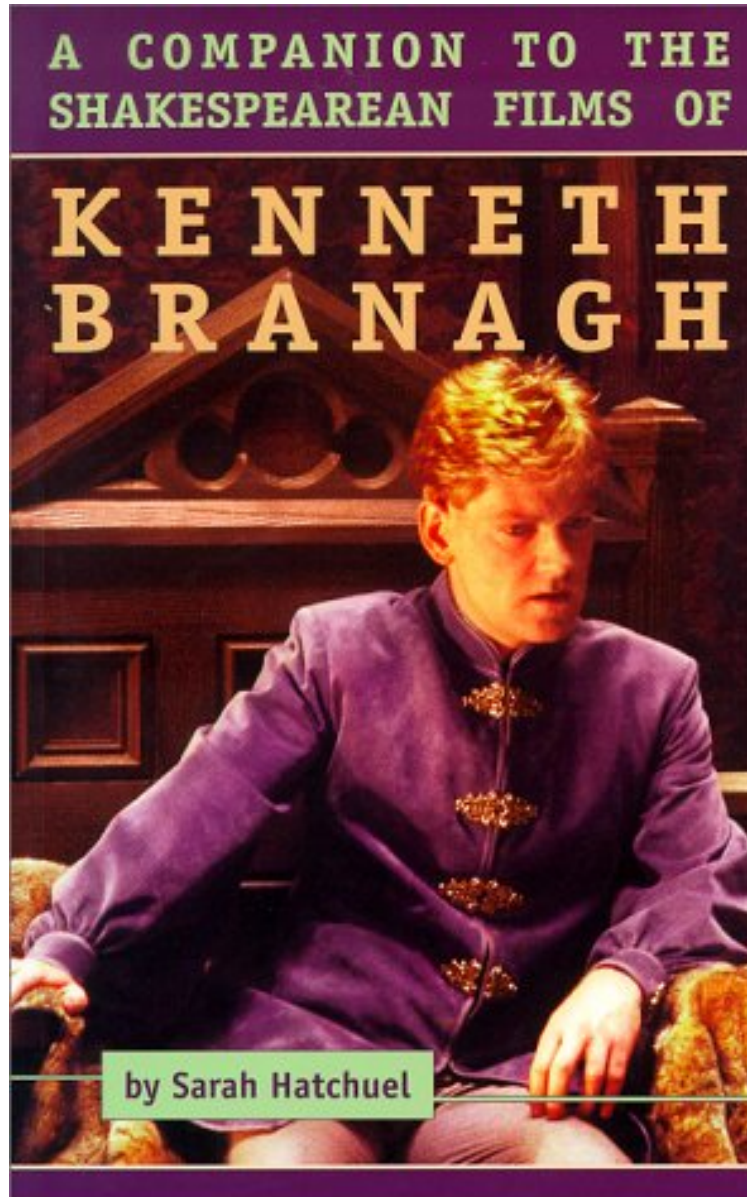


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## A Companion to the Shakespearean Films of Kenneth Branagh

*Sarah Hatchuel*

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**Sarah Hatchuel : A Companion to the Shakespearean Films of Kenneth Branagh** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Companion to the Shakespearean Films of Kenneth Branagh:

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but RepetitiveBy Richard RHatchuel is a fan of Shakespeare, but even more, she is a fan of Kenneth Branagh. So she brings a devotee's spirit of enthusiasm to her

study of Branagh's treatment of Shakespeare in three movie adaptations: *Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Hamlet*. Like a good fan, she's obviously watched these movies a dozen times, as well as every other film Branagh has done. Like a good academic, she lists in the bibliography every review, book, and snippet ever written about the movies from either side of the Atlantic. The book is a light read, never profound or deeply analytical, it probes Branagh's choices of imagery and camera angle and text, much of which are related to his mission to make the plays accessible to the public. This is a fun read, and even useful if you've just seen the movies or are about to see them again. But it's also a bit repetitive. Hatchuel explains the book's outline and choice of themes in the Introduction, but the chapters read like a series of somewhat disconnected observations, so that it's difficult to discern the functional difference between the last chapter and the first. The absence of any conclusion leaves the reader hanging a bit. The conclusions are in the Introduction, so the book's squishy organization is felt most acutely on the last page when the expected concluding remarks never materialize. This is an interesting and quick little book for those who enjoy Shakespeare and Branagh, but it's a lot of trees without much forest.<sup>53</sup> of 55 people found the following review helpful. The Play's the Thing By Theresa Marzullo Sarah Hatchuel's Companion is an insightful tribute to Kenneth Branagh's work. In the Forward, Hatchuel states "Kenneth Branagh's Shakespearean movies occupy a very peculiar cultural position. As Shakespearean works, they participate in an 'elite' culture, often rejected by the young. Yet by their well-paced and sensuous cinematic treatment, they participate in the world of Hollywood movies, often scorned by scholars." If you agree with Hatchuel's statement, you will love this book. Hatchuel covers Branagh's first three Shakespeare films: *Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet*. In Hatchuel's first chapter, "Branagh's Mission of Accessibility," she draws a relationship between Branagh's report of his emotional response to Derek Jacobi's *Hamlet* in Oxford and Branagh's screen style. Hatchuel describes this experience as "an emotional shock, a sensory experience, almost a musical sensation, and not an intellectual or literary discovery." Hatchuel ably make her case that it is this reaction that inspires and informs Branagh's work. In the second chapter, "Theatrical Influences," Hatchuel argues that Branagh's source of inspiration for many of the elements in these films can be traced directly to theater productions in which he participated. Hatchuel makes an excellent defense and since the productions are fairly recent, the reader will be familiar with most of the names in this chapter. The second chapter has 60 reference notes, giving you an idea of how carefully Hatchuel documents and supports her statements. In Chapter Three, "Hamlet: A Long Way," Hatchuel documents the roughly twenty year odyssey that culminated in Branagh's masterpiece. According to Hatchuel, Branagh's journey began with the Derek Jacobi *Hamlet* mentioned above and traveled through a variety of stage productions. Hatchuel presents Branagh's *Hamlets* in chronological order and shows how each of the productions influenced his decisions in the film. She includes the BBC audio production as well as the stage plays. The fourth chapter, "From Shakespeare's Text to Branagh's Script," explains Branagh's text arrangement and deletion decisions in *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. The fifth and sixth chapters cover cinematic elements, including Patrick Doyle's film scores. It is interesting to read Doyle's objectives for his themes and his inspirations. These chapters also discuss sets, perspective, pacing, lighting and Branagh's choices of cutaway shots. Not only does Hatchuel raise interesting points, she supports her arguments with a variety of interesting sources, all carefully documented and including helpful endnotes for each chapter. As delightful as the book is, it would have benefited from some still photographs. On the other hand, you get a 23 page Bibliography which is probably as at least as beneficial as photos from movies you've already seen. Due to the price tag, I recommend purchasing this book only to readers who already know they love Branagh's Shakespeare films. You'll find reading this book as interesting as discussing these films with like-minded friends.

No-one does William Shakespeare on film better than world-famous actor and director Kenneth Branagh. This book examines the rich alchemy that has contributed to Branagh's body of work: his acting and directing; his development of a contemporary diction for Shakespeare's poetry; his recycling of traditional Hollywood genres and filmic techniques; and more.