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By

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HAMLET IN THE CINEMA: A PALIMPSEST OF PERFORMANCE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

HAMLET IN THE CINEMA: A PALIMPSEST OF PERFORMANCE

As a natural palimpsest, the mind sorts through images and retains some while it overwrites others. From Laurence Olivier's adaptation in 1948 to Michael Almereyda's in 2000, the English-language Hamlets of the twentieth century attempt to overwrite those that preceded them like a textual palimpsest. But some images refuse to die, just like a parchment palimpsest, and vestiges of prior performances seep into new productions. This dissertation examines five Hamlet films produced during the twentieth century and discusses how each film influenced those that followed, beginning with Olivier's iconic performance of a Freudian reading. Even with Olivier's influence, however, each film provides a unique reading of Shakespeare's play that reflects the attitudes and critical developments of its cultural moment.

Realizing that films are a different medium than stage productions, this examination of the films of Laurence Olivier (1948), Tony Richardson (1969), Franco Zeffirelli(1990), Kenneth Branagh (1996), and Michael Almereyda (2000) discusses how each director opened up Shakespeare's play in adaptation and how his techniques created meaning that is unique to his particular film. Furthermore, this dissertation examines the cultural context of each film and how the directors adapted their Hamlet to transmit cultural relevance to their audiences.

Introduction

This investigation into the subject of cinematic Hamlet performances began with an inquiry into what makes a good adaptation from page and stage to screen. While recognizing the importance of studying Shakespeare's texts, I discovered that reading is no substitute for watching a performance, and that both contribute to each other. Like Orson Welles, however, I quickly realized the limited availability of live performances. But instead of setting out to create my own series of Shakespeare films as he did, I started an investigation into cinematic adaptation. My overwhelming fascination with Hamlet and its development in twentieth-century cinema led me to this close examination of five different filmic representations over approximately a fifty-year period as I focused on the works of Laurence Olivier, Tony Richardson, Franco Zeffirelli, Kenneth Branagh, and Michael Almereyda. Fortunately I did not have to create theories or initiate a new field of study since there was already a trend in Shakespearian scholarship in recent years toward expanding into the related field of developing film and live performance studies.

While cinematic Shakespeare adaptation began as readily available material for a nascent medium, the technology and artistic development of the industry exploded, creating a new performing art that struggled for

cultural acceptance. As the medium of film gained scholarly recognition as an art form in the later half of the twentieth century, the academic discipline of film studies developed an interest in the intersection between literature and film. With a plethora of cinematic adaptations available to study, while theories were yet to be articulated, the practice of adaptation study began. "Shakespeare's dramatic structure and continuity, his characterization and his poetry," as Roger Manvell pointed out, "[is] most effectively . . . served by the screen" (Shakespeare 9). John Desmond and Peter Hawkes qualify Manvell's observation by crediting Shakespeare's adaptability to screen as plays that "offer a variety of settings, a wide range of characters, and plots full of action" (177). But while Desmond and Hawkes see the adaptation from stage to film as difficult due to transposition from a verbal medium to one that "stress[es] visual images and spatial and temporal mobility" (163), thirty years earlier Manvell was of the opinion that because Shakespeare worked with an open stage, minimal props and backdrops, his plays "closely resemble . . . the structure of a screenplay" (9). Indeed, in the years prior to film studies as an academic discipline, Shakespeare's plays were prime material for filmmakers, with the first cinematic Shakespeare adaptation being a three-minute advertisement of King John in 1899 (Tibbetts and Welsh 346). Although this first filming of Shakespeare was merely a promotion for the play, the adaptability of Shakespearian drama to film provided material to many early filmmakers, with numerous silent adaptations following, including the first Hamlet (1900), which is believed to

be the second Shakespeare film (Buhler 126), directed by Clément Maurice and starring Sarah Bernhardt as a cross-gendered Prince. Film pioneer Georges Méliès created the second silent Hamlet in 1907, and although two more adaptations followed, including Svend Gade and Heinz Schall's Hamlet: The Drama of Vengeance (1920) with Asta Nielsen as a female Hamlet, "by the middle 1920s filmmakers realized that only a few years stood between them and the sound film. It was better to wait until Shakespeare could be filmed with speech" (Manvell Shakespeare 21). The first sound adaptation was Sam Taylor's The Taming of the Shrew (1929) with Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, which shocked purists because Taylor added dialogue to Shakespeare's text, and there were no further adaptations for five years (Manvell Shakespeare 23, 25).

While adapting Shakespeare's plays to the cinema helped lend credibility and cultural status to the pursuits of filmmakers, they also served to make Shakespeare available to people who might not otherwise have opportunities to attend live performances. Orson Welles, among others, promoted this effort. Enamored with Shakespeare at a young age, Welles wanted to create a visualization of the plays that would be accessible to all Americans (Anderegg 31), completing five films over three decades, ranging from Macbeth (1948) to The Merchant of Venice (1969). By making Shakespeare easily available to the English-speaking public, this benchmark of cultural literacy became more attainable for people not in cultural centers of England and North America. As the late twentieth century progressed,

other filmmakers made adaptations relevant to their period by incorporating cultural conditions and anxieties into their films. In addition to the prevalent cultural influences, the actors who performed the roles carried with them their star personae as well as previous character associations, thereby coloring audience reception and interpretation with the glamour of the performers, as in the case of Glenn Close's performance of Gertrude in Zeffirelli's 1990 adaptation of Hamlet.

In 1936 Allardyce Nicoll articulated the major differences between stage and screen performances and noted that audience expectation was different for the two art forms. One of the demands of successful cinematic productions is an illusion of reality, which requires an adaptation that hides the mechanics of the creation (191-93). Although purists object to most cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare, Manvell suggests the failure of the films in the 1930s is because "none of them displayed any realization that an imaginative adaptation of normal film technique would be necessary to allow Shakespeare's greatness as a dramatist to reach its proper fulfilment [sic] through the screen" (Shakespeare 34). Laurence Olivier was the "first person to profit by [Shakespeare films]" because of his efforts "to make a good film out of a Shakespeare play" (35), by making imaginative adaptations and providing a foundation upon which future adapters would build. In 1977 Jack J. Jorgens challenged teachers and critics to consider that Shakespeare's "plays were conceived and written for performance, that the script is not the work, but the score for the work" (3, emphasis in

original). He went on to explain the differences of the film media and suggested, as I will develop throughout this dissertation, that successful adaptation study should consider how the filmmaker images the play and how restructuring the play into film helps us interpret both (19, 34). As with many literary theories, film adaptation theory followed successful practice by years, with Desmond and Hawkes providing a helpful outline by which to compare adaptations, which I have utilized in this dissertation.

The primary difference between stage and screen productions lies in what critics refer to as “opening up,” which refers to the changes in the two conventions that includes the “spatial mobility” afforded by the film medium, and can be articulated by seven different strategies (Desmond and Hawkes 163-64). The first strategy involves filming settings only suggested in the drama. Because stage space is limited and sets are time-consuming and costly to change, dramas often use devices such as lighting to indicate changes in setting. The film medium, however, allows for location shooting that creates a realistic cinema space with cuts between location shots, eliminating time for scenery change (165-66). Furthermore, due to the difficulty of staging some action, dramas often only mention or imply the scene whereas films are able to use special effects and locations as well as flash-backs/-forwards to demonstrate action that was indicated by dialogue in the play (166). In addition to opening up a play through scenery, films allow for larger casts, while plays are limited by the amount of space a stage has to accommodate actors (166-67). This type of opening up is especially

useful when the action calls for groups of characters. Desmond and Hawke's fourth strategy is the visualization of literary symbols or motifs (167-68). By creating a recurring symbol or motif, filmmakers are able to create meaning that adds depth to the action portrayed on the screen, either elucidating the story or adding a culturally-significant subtext to an existing story (168-70). The use of cameras and editing provides another strategy by which a film can open up a drama (169-70). Editing may include the integration of slow motion for effect and camera angles and close-ups provide a focus not available in stage productions. Furthermore, films allow for continuity in action that is otherwise broken into acts (170-71), which removes some of the artifice from the viewer's point of view. Finally, by adding music, the filmmaker is able to create specific moods, cause viewers to anticipate events, and form recurring expectations in the form of leitmotifs (171-72).

In addition to the consideration of opening up a stage production for successful film adaptation, "intertextuality," introduced by theorist Roland Barthes, provides another dimension by which to examine the English-language Hamlet films of the twentieth century.[1] Film scholar Robert Stam points out that the idea of "intertextuality" helps us "transcend the aporias of 'fidelity'" that informed early adaptation theory and prevents helpful analysis

[1] In "From Work to Text," Barthes argues the plurality of text, which includes the interpreter of the text as a coauthor (159-61). This plurality multiplies as time and cultural influences change the way in which the reader receives the signifiers that the author represents in the work. Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe further argue that the plurality of text "may include print editions, textbooks, children's versions, and graphic novels as well as non-print 'texts' such as stage performances, opera, ballet, screen versions, multi-media installations, [and] hypertext" (27).

of the film in question (27). Realizing that artistic works function together with conceptions of previous works, interpretations of those works, and cultural signification, Brian McFarlane posits that adaptations of privileged works of literature can reveal cultural aspects of the audience and, therefore, can act as types of cultural snapshots (21). Utilizing this approach produces a comparative analysis in which one can examine alterations of the original text in order to determine created meaning in regard to themes and motifs.

This intertexual approach, inspired by Barthes, also helps to elucidate my underlying argument, that the viewer's mind is a natural palimpsest, with memories of what one has heard, seen and read being written on the "tables of our memories," as Hamlet would say (1.5.96). These writings, however, are imperfect because they are erased when we deem them unimportant, and are overwritten or emphasized, depending on many different factors, to include personal associations and tastes. The Hamlet tradition is palimpsestic in nature as well; the different versions of the story, including Shakespeare's play (extant in multiple versions), have merged and informed one another. Even these versions of plays or mixes of plays and sources, however, do not exist in a literary vacuum, but carry along the added baggage of interpretation and criticism that has accompanied the text and its myriad performances throughout the centuries. Scholars have written volumes of works on Hamlet, in part because this play persistently niggles at our brains as an enigma. This "'Mona Lisa' of literature," as T.S. Eliot

labeled it (24), is the Shakespeare play most often discussed and performed.

In the chapters that follow I combine an analysis of Desmond and Hawkes's strategies of "opening up" a play for the cinema together with an intertextual approach that considers ways by which directors and actors have created substantive contributions to the Hamlet tradition in their English-language cinematic adaptations of Hamlet in the last fifty years. None of these films exists in a vacuum, but they are products of their times and locations. Olivier's English post-WWII black-and-white Hamlet reflects the nostalgia of the times, while Zeffirelli's Hollywood film displays beautiful scenery and opulent sets that provide a banquet of color to satisfy his popular consumer audience. Furthermore, biographies of the directors often affect how they interpret the source material. The themes and motifs often reflect the contemporary culture, even when reproducing an iconic work of literature such as Hamlet. I also include a close reading of pertinent scenes to demonstrate how cinematic elements such as musical score, lighting, framing and blocking create meanings. Sometimes scene selection and rearrangement of scenes can alter an audience's interpretation of characters and events. Finally, I examine the influences of these films upon those created subsequently. Exploring a subcategory of intertextuality, I find that not only do these films influence later films, but they imprint images on audiences. Like a palimpsest that attempts to totally overwrite the previous text, each of these films was created to elucidate Hamlet in a unique

fashion. But as often happens with a textual palimpsest, the overwriting fails to completely blot out the underlying text, which bleeds through and influences the new text. These images, as a cinematic palimpsest, eventually blend to reshape the Hamlet tradition for a modern audience.

The following pages examine five different cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's Hamlet. The first chapter examines the thematic elements of Laurence Olivier's 1948 adaptation as a seminal cinematic representation in its cultural context, the film's use of Freudian theories, and the impact of those theories in twentieth-century critical perception. This chapter illustrates how Olivier characterized Hamlet as "a man who could not make up his mind" due to a repressed sexual desire for his mother. This film effectively transmits Hamlet's internal turmoil through visual elements such as shots of pounding waves, a suggestive musical score, and directional lighting. As the first full-length movie adaptation with synchronized sound, Olivier's Hamlet establishes the benchmark for later adaptations to follow, and incorporates themes that influence the way students and audiences perceive the character of Hamlet into the twenty-first century.

Chapter Two discusses Tony Richardson's 1969 adaptation that, while seeming to reject much of Olivier's method and thematic elements, builds on his use of Freudian psychoanalysis to explain the title character. Richardson, known for his "angry young men" films, portrays Hamlet as a neurotic character, but with none of the brooding melancholy exhibited by Olivier. This film, I argue, uses the claustrophobic setting of an old railway

roundhouse to visualize Elsinore as a prison, which effectively demonstrates Hamlet's feeling of entrapment in a courtly world from which he is alienated. As a product of the 1960s, Richardson's film provides a contemporary commentary on the chasm between the status quo consumer culture of the older generation and the more philosophical position of the young academic.

In Chapter Three I demonstrate how Zeffirelli opened up Hamlet in 1990 by integrating a visual opulence worthy of an opera in its sets and scenery that reveals the director's background. Rather than portraying Hamlet as suffering from repressed sexuality, however, Zeffirelli brought sex to the fore in the star personae of Mel Gibson and Glenn Close. Discarding the hesitation of Hamlet's character in prior films, Zeffirelli instead presents Hamlet as a man full of action who is prevented from his desired course because he is trapped in an atmosphere of surveillance. In addition to casting headline actors, Zeffirelli crafted the film to make it more accessible to a popular audience. He rearranged scenes to create an even flow of action and simplify the plot, and in doing so Zeffirelli was able to repopularize Shakespeare for a new generation of film viewers.

In the fourth chapter I examine the first major English language Hamlet that demonstrates a departure from Shakespeare's Elizabethan setting to Victorian England. Kenneth Branagh's 1996 epic-length Hamlet holds the distinction of being the only adaptation that contains every word of Shakespeare's longest play. This discussion will address some of the effects of including the complete text as well as the new meanings that

Branagh created with visual elements, to include his portrayal of Hamlet that provides an interpretation of Hamlet's fatal flaw as narcissism and explains several of Shakespeare's ambiguities, including the reason for Hamlet's change during his absence from Denmark. I will also discuss how Branagh's effort to return Shakespearian drama to the populace is dramatically illustrated in the violent destruction of the icons of the ruling class.

The final chapter demonstrates a shift of theme in the latest Hamlet film directed by Michael Almereyda (2000). This film exemplifies the postmodern concept of pastiche that blurs the palimpsest of performance by providing numerous metatheatrical references in its shift of setting to turn-of-the-century New York City. While Almereyda acknowledges previous adaptations of Hamlet, he reduces them to flashes of trivia that question their relevance in a contemporary culture. Playing off of the work of the New Historicists and extending them into postmodern complexities and conflicts, Almereyda illustrates an anxiety of changing literacy modes. Furthermore, as a postmodern American perspective, Almereyda's Hamlet incorporates a theme of alienation from increasing technological advances that reflects concerns of his own time.

Representations of themes, character interpretations, and contemporary scholarship all weave through these adaptations which range in date from 1948 to 2000. These films leave traces of themselves in the table of our memories, and we sometimes can see these traces embedded

within a more recent film. Just as one often cannot always separate a particular version of a tale from another, the memory having meshed them together in an aggregate, the images that Hamlet conjures up in our minds can be an amalgam of scenes from a variety of productions, often overwriting or simultaneously existing in memory. Thus, the performances that one has seen do, in effect, become a palimpsest; just as the interpretations, scholarship and thematic infusions may attempt to replace others, the latter never quite wipe out the traces of the former. The following pages draw distinctions between five separate films of Hamlet by analyzing the way they are "opened up," but this study also examines the influences these films have on one another. Sometimes they perpetuate earlier work as in the continuation of a psychoanalytic approach from Olivier to Richardson; other times these films express a reaction to a previous work or idea like Zeffirelli did regarding sexuality in his film. Still other influences can be grasped only by close readings, such as in the case of Almereyda's chosen mise-en-scène, which reflects the Hamlet tradition it perpetuates. In an intertextual approach I argue that none of these films exists alone, but all work together to add depth and meaning to the tradition of Hamlet. While they never quite erase the previous iteration, they add interpretive nuances that influence the palimpsest an audience mentally retains as Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Chapter One:

Tragedy of Character: Olivier's Hamlet

Film scholar Douglas Brode refers to Shakespeare's Hamlet as "the first true tragedy of character," as opposed to prior tragedies which hinged on the major role of fate in the outcome (114). Laurence Olivier's 1948 film portrays Hamlet as a character with an Oedipal complex. Ironically, Oedipus Rex is possibly the most fate-driven play of all time, whereas the tragedy of Hamlet hinges upon free will and the effect of wrong decisions. The film begins with a quotation transposed from later in the play in which Hamlet muses:

> So, oft it chance in particular men,
>
> That [through] some vicious mole of nature in them,
>
> . . . .
>
> By their o'ergrowth of some complexion
>
> Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
>
> Or by some habit, [grown] too much . . . that these men,
>
> Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
>
> . . . .
>
> [Their] virtues else, be they as pure as grace,
>
> . . . .

Shall in the general censure take corruption

From that particular fault . . . (1.4.23-38)

The words that appear on the screen with the accompaniment of a voiceover declare Olivier's interpretation of the cause of the tragedy—that the trouble to come ensues from a fault. "This is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind," prefaces the unfolding drama and declares that Hamlet's character flaw will lead to his tragedy.[1] The theme of Hamlet's indecision as a fatal flaw has been widely commented on since Samuel Taylor Coleridge stated that Hamlet had a "proportionate aversion to real action . . . [and that] he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve" (203). Olivier's preface, however, prompts the audience to notice particularly the scenes that illustrate Hamlet's indecision even while it overtly focuses, not on this inability to make up his mind that the introduction suggests, but on the psychological condition that causes this indecision.

The matter of Hamlet's insanity has been one of the key debates regarding the play since the beginning of Shakespeare scholarship. Although Shakespeare's dramatic sources relate that the prince feigns madness, T. S. Eliot saw the question of Hamlet's insanity as not only a problem with the play, but one that is closely linked to Hamlet's inaction.

[1] Olivier stated in an interview that he "subtitled" this play after viewing Souls at Sea (1937), a film in which Gary Cooper's character was reading Hamlet and referred to it as such (Smith 135-6). Although Hamlet is often portrayed as a man of indecision, I will point out representations of his decisiveness in chapters three and five.

> The “madness” of Hamlet lay to Shakespeare’s hand; in the earlier play [by Kyd], a simple ruse, and to the end, we may presume, understood as a ruse by the audience. For Shakespeare it is less than madness and more than feigned. The levity of Hamlet, his repetition of phrase, his puns, are not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation, but a form of emotional relief. In the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action. . . (Eliot 26)

Olivier’s film creates a causal relationship between Hamlet’s indecision and his madness that has its roots in the repression of Oedipal feelings toward his mother. This type of connection can be traced to a shift in literary studies in the first decade of the twentieth century. Prior to the more modern demand for realism in the twentieth century, audiences considered characters in fiction as just that, characters. But realism demanded that readers probe fictional characters for their relationship to real people, and that art imitate life in a realistic manner. Having studied classic theater from a performance aspect, pre-eminent Shakespeare scholar and Oxford professor A. C. Bradley became intrigued about motivations that drive characters to act in a particular manner (Brown xxiii-xxiv), and Harold Jenkins interpreted T. S. Eliot’s comments about Hamlet in The Sacred Wood to mean that “Shakespeare had convincingly presented a

psychopathological case" (Jenkins 41), leading to further interrogation of the text in order to discover possible reasons for Hamlet's actions.

Bradley's questioning of Hamlet's cause for delay of action against Claudius had great critical impact. Using textual support from the play, Bradley argued that the protagonist did not take action immediately after learning of his father's murder due to internal restraints (77-80). This approach led him to examine the "unintelligibility" of the character of Hamlet and arrive at three possible explanations (77). Bradley rejected the first two: that the historical and cultural distance from the playwright might explain Hamlet's character; or that Shakespeare, himself, may have accidentally written inconsistencies in the character over the years it took to complete the project. He concluded that Hamlet's "unintelligibility" rests on the "illegibility of human nature" (Armstrong 16). Indeed, "Bradley concludes his reading of the play at the very point at which psychoanalysis will take it up" (Armstrong 17). This link between Hamlet's indecipherable internal restraint and human nature in general opened the door to the psychoanalytic literary criticism of Sigmund Freud and his ardent disciple, Ernest Jones, that would influence the Hamlet tradition throughout the twentieth century.[2] Freud's efforts developed into psychoanalysis of Shakespeare himself, initially drawing a connection between Anne Hathaway as the mother figure in Shakespeare's

[2] While Freud is credited with the initial psychoanalytic reading of Hamlet, he never performed a full written analysis of the character, but rather made occasional exemplary comments about the character of Hamlet in his detailed descriptions of melancholy and the Oedipal complex as he sought to normalize his clinical observations (c.f. Thirteenth Lecture in A General Introduction to Psycho-analysis, The Interpretation of Dreams, and "Mourning and Melancholia"). Jones, however, carried on an extensive correspondence with Freud and published some of his papers in book form.

own Oedipal crisis. He determined that Hamlet was the Bard's manner of working through the emotional crisis of the deaths of his father and his only son, Hamnet, reviving "his childhood feelings about his father" (Freud Interpretation 266). Freud later recanted his psychological analysis of the historical Shakespeare via Hamlet, deciding that the true author of Shakespearian drama was not the glove-maker's son from Stratford, but was rather the Earl of Oxford, whose mother remarried shortly after the death of Oxford's father (Armstrong 25).

While there is no evidence to suggest that Olivier was familiar with Bradley's critical work that provided the bridge between traditional literary criticism and the newer, psychoanalytical approach, at the same time that the latter's Shakespearean Tragedy was published (1904), Freud was publishing his theories of psychoanalysis. In the 1930s, rejection of the New Critics led F. R. Leavis and I. A. Richards back to psychoanalytic criticism in their goal to demonstrate that literary studies existed in order to perform a moral mission: to illustrate and promote humane behavior (Wofford 188-89, Richter 599-600). During this same period, Ernest Jones published his Freudian psychoanalytic reading of the play to demonstrate that Hamlet suffers from an Oedipus complex: an internal mental conflict arising from Hamlet's unconscious desire to kill his father and have sexual relations with his mother. Complicating the issue is the realization that Claudius has actualized Hamlet's own desires (Jones 102). Seeking a way by which to differentiate his performance from that of his rival, John Gielgud,

Olivier, along with Tony Guthrie and Peggy Ashcroft, made a personal visit to Jones. The psychoanalyst convinced the actor that

> Hamlet was a prime sufferer from the Oedipus complex—quite unconsciously, of course, as the professor was anxious to stress. He offered an impressive array of symptoms: spectacular mood-swings, cruel treatment of his love, and above all a hopeless inability to pursue the course required of him. The Oedipus complex, therefore, can claim responsibility for a formidable share of all that is wrong with him.
>
> (Olivier Confessions 102)

Fully convinced by Jones's argument, Olivier, with the assistance of text editor Alan Dent,[3] later adapted this psychoanalytic reading of Hamlet to his screen version, which capitalizes on the cinematic convention of voiceovers to amplify the psychological emphasis of the adaptation. Ironically, Olivier's choice to develop Jones's theories in order to differentiate his production from his rival's capitalized on Gielgud's innovative idea of including a bed in the closet scene (Gilder 64).[4] Freud's legacy of psychoanalyzing the author was realized in 1990 when Peter S. Donaldson used the same techniques to perform a psychoanalytic reading of Olivier's Hamlet. Donaldson arrived at the conclusion that this seminal film Hamlet, considering Olivier's

[3] While Olivier's film credits Dent as text editor, Olivier does not mention Dent in reference to "our script" ("An Essay" 15). Cross's record of Olivier's production, however, reveals that Olivier brought Dent in to "advise" on the script and that the scholar traveled to Italy with the cast and crew (75).

[4] James Simmons notes that Gielgud's inclusion of the bed when he presented Hamlet in New York and London made it a "staple of stage productions the world over" from that time on (113).

autobiography, prompted him to read Hamlet through Jones's interpretation because the process of playing the part allowed him to work through the lingering trauma of nearly being raped in his youth by some older students (Shakespearean 34-35, 43).[5] Donaldson further points out the passive nature of Hamlet as being a manifestation of abuse—Olivier's abuse, that, according to Freud, often turns into grandiose behavior. Ironically, Freud himself is described by Jones in these terms, and Donaldson sees Olivier's inability to find another actor capable of playing his Hamlet, doubling his billing as the ghost of King Hamlet as evidence of Olivier's own grandiosity (Shakespearian n. 66).

In the middle of the twentieth century, when Olivier was seeking a new approach for interpreting Hamlet, he was not only working within the context of a shift in literary criticism, but he was also performing within a new cultural climate. London in 1947 and 1948 was still very much in post-war recovery. While the Olympics were held there in 1948, food rationing remained a fact of life for British subjects, and electricity was available only in the city of London ("Ration"). Given this atmosphere of bleak economy and desperation, Olivier's timely reading of Hamlet, combined with his use of black and white film that recalls simpler times, provided a much-needed reaffirmation of cultural foundations for Londoners who had survived the Blitz. While Technicolor was available, Olivier chose to film in black and

[5] Although Donaldson submits several points to support his claim that Olivier used Hamlet to resolve the trauma of near rape, the majority of his argument rests on the observation that Olivier prominently utilizes staircases in the sets, echoing his traumatic experience in a stairwell (39-51).

white, in part to achieve "a more majestic, more poetic image" (Olivier Confessions 151). In addition to Olivier's stated objective, however, his choice of film also creates a sense of nostalgia, harkening back to the old standard of black and white cinematography, and Anthony Davies argues that "there is about the camera's elegiac journey into and through the loneliness of the Prince a nostalgia which arguably reflects the mood of post-war Europe" (182). And working within a post-war environment, Olivier's sets reveal a stark backdrop of unembellished castle walls and none of the opulent banqueting and swilling of wine that later films will include.

Like many early cinematic Shakespeare adaptations, Olivier's film deletes the subplot and characters that serve as functionaries by which to further the main plot. The dialogue includes only two references to Fortinbras, one early in the film when Claudius mentions that he has quelled all threats of the Prince of Norway, and the other when the gravedigger states that he has been at his profession since King Hamlet defeated Fortinbras. These choices not only simplify the plot, but also remove the element of warfare for a viewing audience that recently faced their own threat of foreign conquest. Furthermore, the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who serve as two-dimensional devices to further the plot, are completely absent from this film.[6] Having reduced the film to a single plot, Olivier's adaptation concentrates on two major themes: that of Hamlet's

[6] Alan Dent comments on the deletion of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Hamlet: The Film and the Play that "the two, who seemed hardly worth the killing, have been killed before their first appearance . . . the puppets enter not upon the scene." (5).

indecision and his Oedipal relationship with his mother. This film serves as the first level of engraving in the palimpsest of cinematic adaptations, and is the foundation for major adaptations that have followed up to the present time. As a product of its time and environment, Olivier's film visually interprets Shakespeare's drama for a British mid-twentieth-century audience. While this film lays the foundation for modern reading and critical debate, it also reflects the academic influences of previous scholarly work.

Much of the twentieth-century scholarship on cinematic adaptations is based upon early adaptation theory, i.e. that which emphasizes the faithfulness to the text, even while pointing out that films often follow the academic trends of the times in their focus on the themes and character motivations. For example, R. W. Babcock compared Olivier's film to the academic scholarship of George Lyman Kittredge, pointing out that Olivier echoed the scholar's 1916 views regarding the indecisiveness of Hamlet and his transformation into a revenger-hero, as well as the unreliability of the ghost. In fact, Babcock argues that "the development of Hamlet by Kittredge in 1916 has been almost completely . . . followed by Olivier in 1948" (256-57). Kittredge's reasoning behind Hamlet's delay in action revolves around the doubt regarding the ghost, which causes Hamlet to wait until the play within the play provides proof of Claudius's guilt, and the fact that he is practically under guard from the time of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's arrival at Elsinore. Olivier deletes the friends of Hamlet from his film, but follows Kittredge's premise that Hamlet will not act until he has proof of

Claudius's guilt. But because Hamlet departs for England shortly after the performance of the play, he cannot take action against his uncle until his return—which coincides with the news of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths in the original play.

As late as Brian McFarlane's 1996 Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation, the focus in this area of film studies remained on the narrative elements of adaptive films.[7] In addition to perpetuating themes and motifs previously identified by scholarly texts, such as Hamlet's indecisiveness and the unreliability of his father's ghost, which have become part of the Hamlet tradition, the cinematic adaptations have served to fix the visual representations in the minds of Shakespeare's audiences. Whether or not the spectator is aware of the seeds that are planted by visual representation, such transmitted meanings create images with lasting impact. While academics quickly rejected Jones's Freudian reading of Hamlet, Olivier's cinematic adaptation imprinted the Oedipal issues into the traditional story in a way that influenced the perception of the play throughout the twentieth century. Although this adaptation followed several silent film versions and the groundbreaking "Le Duel d' Hamlet" in 1900, it is the first feature-length sound adaptation of the play.[8] This chapter will discuss Olivier's creation of meaning in his translation of this text to screen

[7] One example of practice preceding theory is Peter S. Donaldson's 1990 Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors, which performs an autobiographical reading of Olivier's Hamlet in terms of formal cinematic elements. Only later in the decade is the practice articulated as theory by scholars such as Timothy Corrigan.

[8] "Le Duel d' Hamlet," while only two minutes in length was the first film to be screened with a synchronized soundtrack ("Le Duel').

by utilizing formalistic evaluation of adaptations via technical cinematic elements such as settings, mise-en-scène, symbol, framing, lighting and editing techniques.

Oedipus Complex

Philip Weller notes that Olivier's utilization of an Oedipal relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude provided a means by which to differentiate his production from that of John Gielgud (120).[9] Indeed, Olivier indicates his rivalry with Gielgud in his autobiography (97) and adds that Dover Wilson's What Happens in Hamlet and Ernest Jones's psychoanalytic work on Hamlet provided an opportunity to interpret the title character uniquely for his own performance (Confessions 102). By adding something new, he followed in the ancient tradition of creative artists such as Sophocles and Shakespeare himself by telling an age-old story in a fresh manner. As an embellishment to Hamlet, the Oedipal theme has been repeatedly noted as a divergence from Shakespeare's written play, even while scholars and

[9] Gielgud's iconic connection with the Hamlet tradition includes his acclaimed 1936 stage performance as Hamlet that was never recorded. However, he recorded an audio version of the play for the BBC in 1941. Although Gielgud's performance as the title character was never filmed, in keeping with his "early ambivalence toward acting in motion pictures" (Owen), in 1964 he directed Richard Burton in the role of Hamlet, providing the voice of the ghost for a stage production that was filmed for a limited release with the stipulation that it would be played in theaters for only one week and then all copies were to be destroyed. The film survives in DVD due to one print that was found in Richard Burton's garage after his death, which his widow allowed to be distributed ("Hamlet" IMDb.com). Gielgud's connection with adaptations of Hamlet also includes a cameo performance as the King of Priam in Branagh's 1996 film and a clip in Almereyda's 2000 adaptation from Humphrey Jennings's documentary film, A Diary for Timothy (1945) in which Gielgud reprised the "Alas, poor Yorick" speech. According to Gielgud biographer Jonathan Croall, this fragment is the "only visual record of [Gielgud's] Hamlet" (316).

critics accepted it as an adaptation that is faithful to Shakespeare's play.[10] But after Olivier's commercially and critically successful interpretation earned him both Best Actor and Best Picture Academy Awards, Hamlet as a deeply disturbed, even neurotic, character became part of the tradition that would permeate the adaptations to follow.

The first sequence of the film, even before the textual preface, is a montage of waves crashing on the rocky shores of what appears to be an island or peninsula and aerial shots of a stone fortress, accompanied by William Walton's soundtrack of booming drums and bombastic brass. While this establishing shot sets up the "sea of troubles" that is life at Elsinore (Rothwell 58), the montage also aptly illustrates the theme of excessive emotion that continues throughout the film and suggests this passion as the rationale for Hamlet's behavior. This stormy image reflects the neurosis of repressed sexuality that Olivier portrays in Hamlet, and indicates Hamlet's devotion to mourning, "which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests [sic]," distinguishing his melancholia in Freudian terms (Freud "Mourning" 165). Indeed, Olivier's Hamlet is consumed with the matter of mourning his father to the exclusion of anything else.

Olivier introduces the sexual theme within the first few minutes of the film as the scene of the ghost's appearance, shrouded in a fog that symbolizes

[10] The critics and scholars that have noted the Oedipal theme variation are numerous. Neil Taylor notes in "The Films of Hamlet" that both scholar Graham Holderness and critic Peter S. Donaldson have commented on the psychoanalytic nature of Olivier's Hamlet in pointing to its originality, which Donaldson interprets as Olivier's desire to sort out his own Oedipal experience (Taylor 183). Olivier states in his autobiography that he worshiped his "Mummy" and that on her deathbed she begged his father to be kind to Laurence, her twelve-year-old "baby" (18).

Elsinore's ambiguous state, becomes a traveling montage of crane shots that traverse the architecture of the castle via the many winding staircases. The camera pauses periodically on key sets such as Ophelia's chamber, with its corresponding theme music, and ends by focusing through a window on a large bed, while the orchestrated soundtrack accentuates the set with the addition of brassy horns.[11] While the shot of the bed is not shocking in itself, the appearance of the bed prior to the marriage celebration serves to confirm Hamlet's suspicions of an adulterous relationship between his uncle and mother and suggests a motive for his father's death. Because this adaptation centers around a sexual theme and Hamlet's neurosis caused by sexual desire for his mother, this shot becomes not only memorable, but provides a frame by which to view all of the events that unfold throughout the film. That shot dissolves to Claudius drinking in celebration of his marriage to Gertrude, which creates an association between the bed and the new king, and suggestively, consummation preceding the marriage. The first shocking Oedipal revelation is later in this scene when Gertrude tries to draw Hamlet out of his moodiness by embracing him. The full-mouthed kiss establishes the Oedipal association between Hamlet and his mother (Figure 1.1).

[11] Weller notes that Olivier ends the ghostly scene with a transposition of the line, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," which effectively sets up the theme of incestuous sex as the source of whatever ails Hamlet and the state. By terminating the traveling shots with a prolonged focus on the queen's huge bed, Olivier suggests that the sexual relationship between Gertrude and Claudius encapsulates the rottenness of Denmark (121).



Figure 1.1 – Gertrude kisses Hamlet

Claudius reacts with embarrassment to the prolonged and passionate kiss between Gertrude and Hamlet. In a contrast, Hamlet himself seemingly takes his mother's kiss in stride, suggesting that such overt passion was commonplace between them, not being sufficiently unusual to sway the sullen, even petulant behavior with which Olivier portrays him. This brooding image dominates as a characterization up to the point when he first sees the ghost of his father. This scene creates a change in Hamlet, in that at the end of the scene he determines to "put an antic disposition on" (2.1.172). But Olivier's Hamlet seems to be on the verge of insanity upon the arrival of the ghost. As Hamlet, Horatio and the guards wait upon the

roof, the sound of a heartbeat grows loud while the shot of Hamlet fades in and out of focus, creating the sense of him being dizzy or disoriented. This effect establishes a doubt, not in the ghost, but in the reliability of Hamlet as a witness of the ghost. Furthermore, it also raises the question of the heartbeat's origin, which didn't accompany the ghost's appearance to the guards earlier—is Hamlet hearing his own heart pounding?[12] The heartbeat is accompanied by brass horns as the directional lighting on Hamlet's face seems to come from the ghost, reflecting in the prince's eyes. Upon the departure of the ghost Hamlet is unable to rise at first, but this scene establishes the onset of his insanity, feigned or real. Although the urging of his father's ghost should prompt him to action, he still persists in his funereal disposition throughout the majority of the film.

Olivier's portrayal of Hamlet's melancholy and madness, however, confirms an Oedipal relationship according to Freud's theories. According to the psychoanalyst, suppressed Oedipal urges would inhibit Hamlet from having a sexually-charged relationship with Ophelia, since he is so immersed in melancholy that he is incapable of "adopt[ing] any new object of love" ("Mourning" 165). In the scene where Hamlet denies having a romantic interest in Ophelia, Olivier's film portrays Hamlet's tender affection for the young woman. Notably absent from this film is Polonius's reading of Hamlet's love note to Ophelia (from 2.2). Indeed, Hamlet's relationship with her is more like a brother than that of a lover, and he voices the "get thee to

[12] Although the film does not make the source of the heartbeat apparent, Roger Manvell explains that the "effect was first used by Jean-Louis Barrault in his stage production of Hamlet (1946), and was reproduced by arrangement with him in the film" (n. 53).

a nunnery" scene (3.1) in tenderness, complete with a kiss planted on Ophelia's hair. Olivier's adaptation contains no suggestion of Hamlet wishing to punish Ophelia for being a woman and, as such, susceptible to sexual weakness. In keeping with Oliver's use of fragments from Freudian theory, as a man suffering from melancholy, he could become ambivalent to love (Lupton and Reinhard 20) as a result of his "extraordinary fall in self esteem" (Freud, "Mourning" 167). And these traits are what Olivier portrays as Hamlet disregards Ophelia as if she is a mere child even while he berates himself for being a "rogue and peasant slave" (2.2.550). In fact, Olivier omits Hamlet's most cutting lines of this scene, retaining the following:

> . . . for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. (3.1.110-4)

At this point in Shakespeare's play, Hamlet for the first time insists that he does not love Ophelia. By deleting the lines that follow in the play text, which include Hamlet's continued denial of his love as well as his unreliable character, Olivier effectively removes Hamlet's personal attack on Ophelia, and so emphasizes the direct relationship between the prince's crisis and his mother. He continues his speech:

> . . . for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it: I loved you not.

. . . .

> If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunn'ry, farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them . . . and [you] make your wantonness your ignorance. (3.1.116-8, 134-46)[13]

Conspicuously absent in Hamlet's speech to Ophelia is his catalog of faults, for which he blames his mother, and the lines referring to Polonius's whereabouts, which are usually interpreted as his discovery of the elder men's spying.[14] Without Hamlet's most derogatory comments about women in general in his speech to Ophelia, and her subsequent woeful reply, Shakespeare's scene of a bitter young man rejecting all things feminine translates into a tender farewell to the girl with whom Hamlet might have shared some innocent flirtation.[15] Donaldson interprets Olivier's deletion of Hamlet's disdain of women as a further indication of a psychoanalytic move of a slightly different nature, however. Donaldson claims that by watering down Hamlet's attack on women, Olivier

[13] Ellipses denote lines from Shakespeare's text that were deleted in the film. The bracketed word is an emendation made in Olivier's and Dent's screenplay.

[14] Later adapters justify Hamlet's vicious verbal attack on Ophelia by showing Hamlet catching a glimpse of Claudius and Polonius eavesdropping. Even though Olivier's adaptation includes Hamlet overhearing Claudius's and Polonius's plot to spy, he still deletes the most brutal of Shakespeare's words.

[15] Kliman's comparison between the film and the original screenplay notes that gestures such as "the slight lifting of Hamlet's hands in supplication when he sees Ophelia near the end of I.iii and his kissing a lock of her hair in the nunnery scene," were not in the script, but might have been "inherent" in the script (Kliman "A Palimpsest" 245). These gestures, together with Olivier's deletion of some of Hamlet's harshest words spoken to Ophelia, create a gentler relationship between Hamlet and the girl than is normally presented in performance.

demonstrates “elements of passivity” related to the director’s own repressed anxiety over a near-rape experience from his youth in which a large boy took him up a flight of stairs at All Saints Church in London and began abusing him (Shakespearian 42-43).[16] Because Olivier felt victimized, Donaldson argues, he shows his empathy with Ophelia by not acting out Hamlet’s roughest treatment of the girl. But the scene ends with Hamlet’s exit while Ophelia weeps uncontrollably on the stony steps, this visual portrayal being another point that Donaldson uses to illustrate the frequently-repeated motif of staircases that support his claim that Olivier was working out his own traumatic issues related to his victimization on the stairs at All Saints.

In connection to the movie’s many Oedipal allusions, Polonius’s line interpreting Hamlet’s problem, “. . .yet do I believe / The origin and commencement of his grief / Sprung from neglected love” (3.1.176-8), takes on a deeper meaning, i.e. that because Hamlet has failed to outgrow his “natural” Oedipus complex, he has developed a neurosis and is unable to detach himself from his parents and become a part of the social community (Freud Introduction 295). And in this adaptation there is no indication that Hamlet has slept with Ophelia, as there will be in later films, but rather he maintains a brotherly affection for her. This fraternal relationship reinforces Olivier’s Freudian reading of the play in its insistence that Hamlet is unable to detach himself from his mother and form a typical romantic relationship.

[16] In his autobiography, Olivier recounts the incident, which was interrupted when the boy thought he heard someone coming and he pushed Olivier down the stairs (31-32).

Olivier again vividly develops the Oedipal relationship between Hamlet and his mother in the “closet” scene (3.4). After Polonius is killed, Hamlet holds Gertrude close in order to force her to compare the miniature portraits they both wear around their necks. As she clutches the raging Hamlet, the shot/reverse shot of their faces portrays shocked expressions, not brought on by the murder, but by their extreme passion, even as the booming heartbeat and discordant brass musical accompaniment announce the return of the late king’s ghost, adding to the emotional turmoil the two characters experience (Figure 1.2).

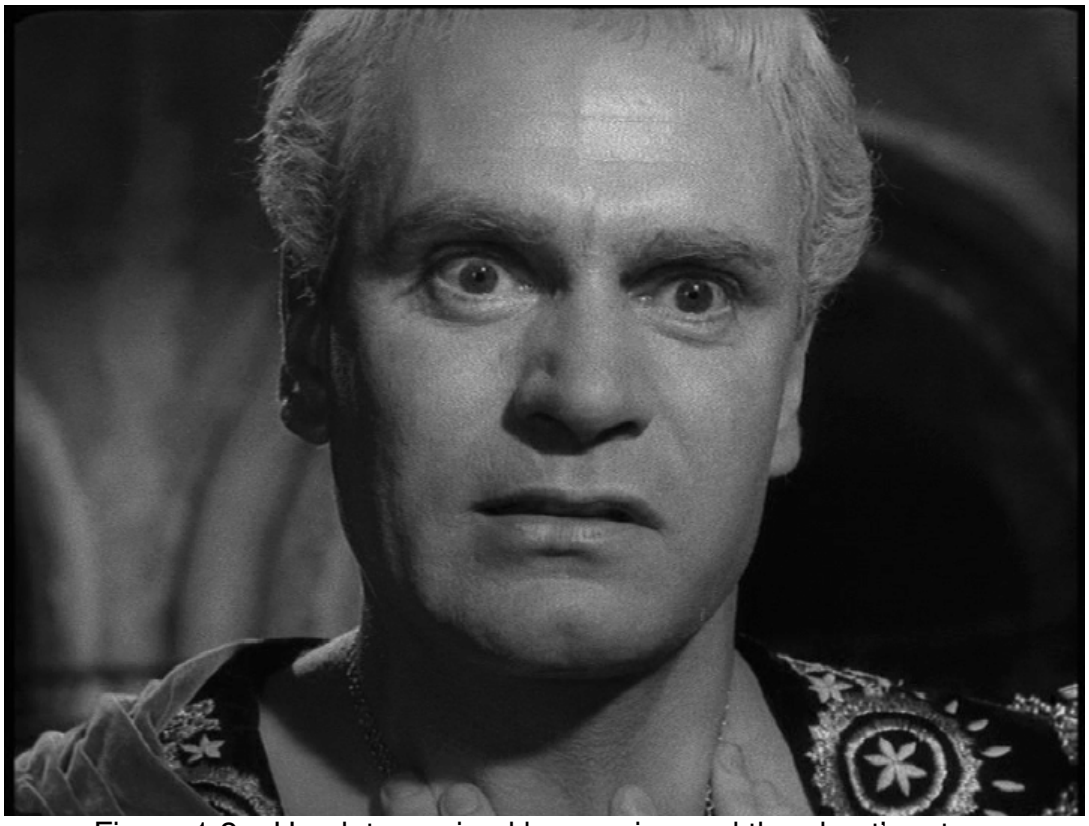

Figure 1.2 – Hamlet surprised by passion and the ghost’s return

As before, presumably, only Hamlet can hear the sound. But the recurrence of this heartbeat motif as the presence of the ghost is reminiscent of the horror genre, complete with discordant brass in the soundtrack, and the generic association suggests that Hamlet is a victim. As he sees his father's ghost he slithers across the floor, and so appears on the edge of insanity, an isolated instance of realistic madness in Olivier's film.

After the ghost of Hamlet's father appears again to him, he embraces Gertrude and rubs his lips on her forehead and then places his head against her breast as he begs her not to go to Claudius's bed. A few minutes later, after Claudius has entered and questioned Hamlet about Polonius, Hamlet bids his uncle, "Farewell, mother" (4.3.49). As Hamlet follows his unusual statement with an explanation that Claudius is one with his mother, the camera focuses on Hamlet's hands, which clench, followed by a reverse shot of Claudius observing Hamlet's hands, revealing not only the depth of Hamlet's disturbance over his mother's sexual relationship with Claudius, but also the fact that the new king is fully aware of the intensity of Hamlet's supposed hate for him as a sexual rival.

While Olivier does not show any progression of Gertrude's development, she apparently distances herself emotionally from Hamlet during his absence, because when she kisses him prior to the duel with Laertes, she does so with a chaste kiss on his cheeks, showing her pleasure for his apology, and demonstrating a demeanor more palatable for a mid-twentieth-century audience. But during the duel, the camera focuses on

Gertrude's face as she stares at the cup two separate times before she takes action and drinks the poison (Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.3 – Gertrude contemplates her action

In this moment, as Donaldson observes, she "affirms her union with Hamlet" (Shakespearian 61). Olivier portrays Gertrude's poisoning as deliberate on her part, a conscious decision to thwart Claudius's plans in solidarity with Hamlet. Although Almereyda will duplicate this action in his adaptation at the close of the century, the interpretation is original to Olivier, and within the context of his Oedipal theme, appears to be the action of a sacrificial

lover.[17] Having established a fracture in her relationship with Claudius by avoiding his embraces as her willful and Oedipal son requested, Gertrude's action of intentional ingestion of Claudius's poison reaffirms Olivier's focus on the Oedipal relationship between mother and son. Realizing that Claudius is determined to kill Hamlet, Gertrude chooses to die along with her son, as if she is a tragic lover.

Hamlet, however, does not die passively like Gertrude. Olivier's outrageous leap onto the stunt Claudius provides a graphic example of grandiosity, which according to Donaldson is Hamlet's tragic flaw that results from Olivier's own psychological issues of passivity that developed into grandiose behavior. Olivier's sense of grandiosity, however, is not limited to his risky stunt, but can also be deduced by the casting of himself as Hamlet as well as the ghost. Legend holds that Shakespeare performed as the ghost in Hamlet, and while, metatheatrically, Hamlet is often seen as the director because of the instructions he gives to the players, Oliver's double billing as Hamlet as well as the ghost places him at center stage as well as in the position of Shakespeare himself. Donaldson's psychoanalysis of Olivier includes further validation based on the fact that the actor changed his hair color for the film in order to distance himself from the psychoanalytic reading (Shakespearian 37). Olivier claimed that "one reason why [he] dyed [his] hair was so as to avoid the possibility of Hamlet later being identified with [him]" ("An Essay" 15). He further explains, however, that the reason

[17] While Olivier provides few clues by which to interpret Gertrude's change of attitude, Almereyda's film includes several indications that Gertrude performs a thorough self-analysis and development of character between the "closet" scene and her death.

for this disconnection was so that people would see Hamlet, the character, not Olivier, the actor (15), which along with the fact that Danes are naturally blonde, calls Donaldson's interpretation into question. But given Olivier's status as an instantly-recognizable stage and screen star, there really was no way to keep him from being viewed as himself, even with bleached-blonde hair. Furthermore, Olivier's decision to perform a psychoanalytic reading of Hamlet led to such readings of his own cinematic adaptation of the story.

Representations of the Oedipus complex do not stop with the relationship between Gertrude and Hamlet, however. According to Freud, this phenomenon "expands and becomes a family complex . . . a little girl takes an older brother as a substitute for the father who no longer treats her with the same tenderness as in her earliest years" (Introduction 293). Olivier portrays this expansion in Ophelia's relationship with Laertes when upon his departure, she physically hangs on him, reaching around him to fondle his dagger, then puts her hand into his purse which hangs over his genital area (Figure 1.4).



Figure 1.4 – Ophelia with Laertes

Throughout the scene Ophelia acts playfully toward Laertes, flirtingly hanging on to him and plucking at his clothing while he tolerantly puts up with her attentions as he listens to Polonius's numerous proverbs. Ophelia, however, does not part from Laertes with a full-mouthed kiss as did Hamlet and Gertrude, but with a chaste kiss on the cheek, suggesting that although the relationship is flirtatious, it is not as physically demonstrative as the relationship between Hamlet and his mother. Olivier's portrayal of the relationship between Laertes and Ophelia capitalizes on Freudian psychology again to demonstrate another manifestation of an Oedipal relationship. Freud thought that in families with siblings, "a boy may take his

sister as love-object" (Introduction 583). In the case of Laertes and Ophelia, where there was no mother present, Olivier portrays the shift of Oedipal desires from son/mother to brother/sister.[18]

Since Polonius claims that Hamlet's problem is neglected love, ironically, after Ophelia is used to provide an opportunity to spy on Hamlet, both of the father figures, Polonius and Claudius, exit the scene dismissing the tender Ophelia in a manner that reeks of neglect. As she weeps uncontrollably on the floor, flutes trilling frenetically in the background, the camera dollies back up the stairs, followed by a montage of staircases, creating a dizzying effect. Rather than learning a definitive cause of Hamlet's madness, it is easy to see how Polonius's and Claudius's actions contribute to a situation where the young woman might develop the same type of symptoms, if, indeed, Polonius is correct in his assumption that madness can be caused by neglected love. As Ophelia's only parental figure, Polonius's disregard for his daughter's fragile emotions contributes to her instability. Laertes's absence compounds Ophelia's emotional condition since Olivier portrays her as completely isolated from any source of comfort.

Ophelia's next scene shows her descending a staircase into the hall in which the play will be performed. As Hamlet prefers to sit with her instead of with his mother, he brusquely pushes Ophelia into a chair and adds his roughness to the neglect she has already suffered at the hands of her

[18] Kliman states that in addition to Ophelia's playfulness with Laertes, which she perceives as "possibly for Freudian effect," there was a deleted scene in which Ophelia behaves likewise with Horatio when he is supposed to look after the young woman ("A Palimpsest" 246).

father. If viewed from a psychoanalytical approach, as Olivier takes, Hamlet's brusque behavior helps to push Ophelia down the road toward neurosis, and eventually, her suicidal behavior. Indeed, the next time the viewer sees Ophelia, she screams at her own watery reflection, not only foreshadowing her death, but revealing her growing madness, as she runs toward the castle. In this film, however, Olivier creates doubt for the viewer regarding Ophelia's insanity. The deletion of Ophelia's first two stanzas of the Valentine's Day song serves to maintain the chaste, innocent character (Kliman "A Palimpsest" 246), but it also removes the first indication of her insanity. Upon her distribution of flowers and herbs in the midst of her madness,[19] she sinks to the floor and crosses herself. She speaks her final words of the film, "God be wi' ye" (4.5.201), quite lucidly before exiting in a determined manner, no longer the mad, wandering woman, but one who acts with purpose, even as her face is shown half shadowed in contemplation. A tracking shot through the passageways to the room where Ophelia was first seen follows her exit. The accompanying soundtrack's heavy bass line transitions up the scale via a dynamic string melody into a smoothly flowing tune, while the visual element of the film consists of a fade to a shot of water that pans to the woman floating and singing as her demise is reported by Gertrude's voiceover. Although this film portrays Ophelia's

[19] Kliman points out that the deletion of Horatio from this scene reinforces the connection between Hamlet and Ophelia as the young woman puts the flowers that should have been bestowed on Horatio onto Hamlet's chair as she lucidly says, "pray you, love, remember." She further observes that Ophelia's "there's rosemary, that's for remembrance," is spoken musingly to herself, which also begs the question of Ophelia's insanity (247). Indeed, the English-language cinematic Hamlets that follow will portray Ophelia with unquestionable madness with screeching rants and wildly lascivious behavior in contrast to Olivier's more steady, moderate Ophelia.

death as an act of insanity, the flash of lucidity plants the suggestion that she wavered between sanity and madness and adds a further poignancy to her tragic demise. In the end the audience is left wondering whether Ophelia intentionally committed suicide or killed herself unwittingly in her madness by floating in the river fully dressed as ". . . her garments, heavy with their drink, / Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay / to muddy death" (4.7.181-83).

In the end, Ophelia's madness is connected to Oedipal desire that has been transferred to a sibling. Olivier visually emphasizes the incestuous relationship between Ophelia and her brother at the cemetery when Laertes insists on embracing his sister one last time. The stage directions for Laertes to leap into Ophelia's grave are present in the First Folio play text,[20] which may have planted the seeds of an unnatural relationship between the siblings. But in light of the obvious Freudian implications evident in Olivier's film, this scene reinforces those suggestions and Laertes's actions become his belated response to Ophelia's earlier amorous advances. In the last few moments of the film Olivier provides one other implication regarding Laertes's previous response to his sister. After Hamlet poisons Laertes with his own sword, the obviously effeminate and affectionate Osric cradles him as he slowly dies (Figure 1.5).

[20] The Riverside Shakespeare marks this stage direction in brackets to show that it is not present in all early editions. Textual notes report that it is in the First Folio, but substituted in the First (bad) Quarto. Significantly, I believe, the 1947 printing by Vision Press, for which Ernest Jones wrote the introduction, includes the stage direction without brackets.



Figure 1.5 – Roger Furse's costume sketch of Osric.[21]

Although the mortally-wounded Laertes has no alternative than to die in Osric's arms, he appears to accept this position passively, delivering his final comments to Hamlet by alternately looking at the prince and into Osric's eyes. The sharp-eyed viewer cannot help but suspect that the two men had been romantically involved with one another. In 1948 the

[21] As opposed to the other costume sketches available, Furse's conception clearly depicts the early intent to portray effeminacy in the character of Osric. Given the sexual themes throughout the film, I find it significant that Laertes dies in the arms of this particular courtier. This reproduction of the sketch is from The Film Hamlet, Brenda Cross, Ed., London: Saturn Press. 1948, 38.

implication of homosexuality in a mainstream film had to be subdued, but consistent with the sexual themes of this film, the shot has the appearance of providing yet another example of Olivier's transfer of culturally-accepted normative sexual desire to relationships that demand that audiences take a closer look. While there is no former suggestion of a relationship between Osric and Laertes as the former does not appear until the final twenty minutes of the film, Laertes seemingly has transferred his affection for the dead Ophelia to the courtier.[22]

Man of Indecision

While Freud did not make a direct correlation between Oedipal desires and melancholy, Olivier blends the two themes to create a causal connection that leads to Hamlet's indecision, illustrating Freud's analysis of melancholy ("Mourning" 165). Not only does Hamlet fail to act, resorting to reaction throughout most of the film, but Olivier also perpetuates the theme by means of a lone chair as a repeated motif.[23] From the first appearance of Hamlet, he sits and broods in a heavy wooden chair, establishing himself as a contemplative figure. Walton's theme music associated with Hamlet reflects the Prince's melancholic nature in its poignant mix of strings and horns which imply emotional turmoil. After Ophelia bids Laertes farewell

[22] Remarkably, the only criticism I found regarding sexual transference in Hamlet is in the discussion of Gade's 1920 adaptation in which Hamlet is played by a woman, Asta Neilsen. This adaptation portrays Hamlet's problem being that she is a woman who has been "passing" as a man. Gade compounds the problem by representing Hamlet in love with Horatio, who is in love with Ophelia, who, in turn, is in love with Hamlet.

[23] Although an empty chair was often a symbol of death in Renaissance art, Olivier's use suggests more of an emptiness of action than a foreshadowing of Hamlet's death.

and Polonius forbids her to speak with Hamlet, the two younger characters gaze down a passageway at one another in a deep-focus shot, neither making any move to challenge or change the situation. Although the sequence reveals that Polonius prevents Ophelia from joining Hamlet, from the protagonist's viewpoint, he has been rejected, which establishes his mistrust of Ophelia early on (Donaldson Shakespearian 44).

Horatio's entrance provides an end to what Olivier referred to as the "longest distance love-scene on record" ("An Essay" 12), to inform Hamlet of the appearance of his father's ghost. After Horatio exits, Hamlet remains in his chair to sit alone in the great hall lost in his own dark introspection, ostensibly until nightfall when he will join Horatio and the guards to attempt to discover the ghost of the late king. But the cinematography that Olivier uses suggests that Hamlet's indecision is related to the general sense of confusion that pervades Elsinore. While Hamlet sits in his chair, the camera travels throughout the castle weaving down halls, sometimes moving along circular steps, and often with fades to other hallways.

The sequence of Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy from 3.1 amplifies this confusion. Olivier delivers the speech in a voiceover, indicating to the audience that the speech should be interpreted as Hamlet's most private thoughts. The scene begins with a close-up of the back of Hamlet's head, and then the camera zooms in to an extreme close-up before fading to waves crashing on the rocks. This image implies the metaphoric storminess of Hamlet's thoughts, which audiences can also hear

by means of the voiceover, that are further amplified by the melody composed of bass strings and horns that, by this point, viewers recognize as a leitmotif. The combination of the visual editing and soundtrack work in the spectator's mind to interpret the famous soliloquy as a torturous introspection, not merely a repetition of a well-worn quotation. The shot of the waves then fades back to Hamlet pulling a dagger from the folds of his clothing as if contemplating whether to take his own life. Olivier's interpretation of Hamlet as more suicidal than philosophical can be attributed to Freud's theory that someone suffering from melancholia is suicidal because of "murderous impulses against others [that are] redirected upon himself" ("Mourning" 173). Hamlet's melancholia, however, is complicated by his Oedipus complex.

Because Claudius actualized Hamlet's repressed desires, Hamlet unconsciously identifies with his uncle, therefore, to obey the ghost's directions to take revenge on Claudius is, in effect, suicide (Jones 100). Olivier's Hamlet, then, is doubly conflicted in this soliloquy. Not only does he struggle against a suicidal tendency that stems from melancholia, but the alternative that he faces is to kill the actualization of his deepest desires. The scene continues with a close up of Hamlet's face covered in beads of sweat, a testament to his internal struggle, and ends when he drops his dagger into the water from the battlement and walks into the fog as the shot fades to black, which punctuates the finality of Hamlet's decision to not kill himself.

While Hamlet's inaction is an accepted theme as he steeps in his melancholy, this film provides a shift in characterization after the scene of Hamlet's deep introspection. Olivier, seeing himself as an actor "more suited to stronger character roles . . . rather than to the lyrical, poetical role of Hamlet," created a protagonist that is full of action ("An Essay" 15). Olivier was well-known as a very physical actor, and indeed, Weller comments on his athleticism and preference for acrobatics and swordplay (120). But only after Olivier establishes the indecision and inaction of Hamlet does he demonstrate a physical Hamlet more suited to his acting style.

Olivier's portrayal of the Prince represents melancholy up to the point when he witnesses Claudius's plot with Polonius, upon which he starts behaving manically. The following scene opens on Hamlet once again brooding in his chair when Polonius brings news of the players' arrival at Elsinore. By moving Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy prior to the arrival of the players, this scene not only provides a causal relationship between Ophelia's betrayal and Hamlet's suicidal thoughts, as scholars have pointed out,[24] but it also marks a shift in Olivier's characterization of Hamlet by suspending his inaction and contemplation as he realizes that he can use the players to solve his dilemma. In a burst of manic behavior,

[24] Douglas Brode (121-2), Yvette Khoury (120) and Bernice Kliman ("A Palimpsest" 246) all note that Olivier's rearrangement of three key scenes provides a different reading of Hamlet's emotional state and motivations than when the scenes are enacted in the Shakespearian sequence. By switching the "get thee to a nunnery" scene with the arrival of the players, Hamlet's terminated relationship with Ophelia causes, or at least contributes to, his suicidal musings of the "to be or not to be" soliloquy.

Hamlet springs from his chair, thus ending his indecision. Hamlet runs and leaps, demonstrating not only the active nature of Olivier, as has been noted by Weller (120), but the shift from inaction, or contemplation, to action. The newly-arrived thespians provide a solution to the puzzle over which Hamlet has been brooding and that catapults him into action. He no longer has to trust the ghost's questionable testimony because he can acquire proof of Claudius's guilt by forcing a confession by means of a staged reenactment of the suspected crime. Olivier uses this action to demonstrate the madness that Hamlet was supposed to be feigning since the visit with his father's ghost. This arrangement suggests, however, not that Hamlet is mad, but that his feigned madness purchased the time he required to solve the riddle of discovering the truth about his father, even while dealing with his frustration over the fact that his uncle was the one to realize his own Oedipal desires. Prior to the performance of the play, however, Hamlet reverts to inaction, standing expectantly on the stage, the still, silent shot holding for a full ten seconds before Horatio enters to break Hamlet's momentary solitude.

Unique to cinematic adaptation is Hamlet's evidence of Claudius's guilt. Unlike stage productions, in which the majority of the audience would be too far away to decipher facial expressions with accuracy, the editing of Olivier's film provides explicit detail of Claudius's reaction to the pantomime of "The Murder of Gonzago" by cutting from an over-the-shoulder shot of the

stage to a close up of the king's face, which darkens and twitches as, on stage, the villain pours poison into the player king's ear (Figure 1.6).



Figure 1.6 – Catching the conscience of a king

The sequence continues in a series of eyeline matches of Hamlet, Horatio and Polonius watching Claudius, establishing the King's guilt, followed by a slow pan around the gallery that reveals the entire court closely observing the King's reaction, suggesting that they are equally aware of his guilt.[25] When Claudius calls for light, Hamlet acts most decisively by running at his

[25] Although many scholars, including Andrew Gurr, have pointed out that Renaissance playgoing included observing royalty as they watched performances and this has been written into a number of plays of the period, this cinematic representation of a play within a play depicts a pointedly suspicious cast of observers watching for an expected reaction, i.e. the same evidence of guilt for which Hamlet awaits, as if they are privy to the intrigue and transgression that Hamlet only suspects.

uncle with a flaming torch, laughing maniacally to a crescendo of booming bass tones on the soundtrack. This flash of extreme emotion visually demonstrates the peculiarity of melancholia to "turn into mania accompanied by a completely opposite symptomatology" (Freud "Mourning" 174). Further following Freudian assumptions regarding melancholia, this "circular insanity" is precisely the manner in which Olivier portrays Hamlet (174). As the hall empties, Hamlet stands up on a chair and madly sings the verse lines:

> Why, let the strooken deer go weep,
> The hart ungalled play;
> For some must watch, while some must sleep:
> So runs the world away, (3.2.271-74)

while waving his arms around and finally throwing the flaming torch toward the camera. But Hamlet's manic phase is short-lived. Olivier portrays Hamlet's obvious madness as merely an act, as he suggestively revealed to Horatio following his meeting with the ghost on the battlements, and this mania is followed closely by a sober scene of Hamlet witnessing Claudius's prayer for forgiveness.

The scene in the play that is usually pointed to as the proof of Hamlet's indecision is the one in which he overhears Claudius praying, and Hamlet refuses to kill the seemingly shriven man. In Olivier's Hamlet, however, the lighting of the scene suggests an added meaning as Claudius kneels before a Christ-like statue and Hamlet enters behind him. As he stands there with

dagger raised for an extended time,[26] Hamlet's face is half lit and half in shadow (Figure 1.7).



Figure 1.7 – Hamlet in conflict

The lighting in this scene, as in the majority of the film, is directional, which creates a sense of moral ambiguity as Hamlet contemplates whether or not to murder the praying Claudius. In paradigmatic symbolism, the light/good instincts of Hamlet win out and he decides not to kill Claudius. But even Hamlet's refusal to act is laced with ambiguity because his decision includes his reasoning that if he kills Claudius at a later time, he will be able to ensure his uncle goes to hell because of unconfessed sin.

[26] Hamlet stands apparently undetected behind Claudius for nearly a full minute (54 seconds) while the soundtrack plays a voiceover of the soliloquy from 3.3 of Hamlet's internal argument, which emphasizes the Prince's dilemma.

Babcock reads Hamlet's delay as motivated by a revenge that demands not only Claudius's death, but his damnation. Therefore, although Hamlet's instinctive reaction upon seeing Claudius in a vulnerable position is to raise his dagger to kill him, when he is struck by the realization that the confessed killer would not be damned to hell because he has prayed for forgiveness, he aborts his assassination attempt (260). This reading is probably closer to authorial intention, given the revenge nature of the play and based on other examples of such tragedies extant from Renaissance England.[27] However, Olivier chose, in his psychoanalytic interpretation of the play under the tutelage of Jones, to minimize the revenge element in order to demonstrate a Hamlet tortured by a repressed Oedipus complex.[28]

Following the Olivier's psychoanalytic reading, however, Philip Weller applies Freudian assertions to surmise that Hamlet's hesitancy in this scene stems from Claudius serving as Hamlet's unconscious self. Because Claudius had done the two things that the Oedipal Hamlet wanted to do, i.e. kill his father and marry his mother, by killing Claudius he would in effect be

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[27] Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy is recognized as the prototype of English revenge tragedy and which influenced Shakespeare's creation of Hamlet. John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, however, provides a better example of a revenge that desires the soul as well as the body to be destroyed.

[28] Kliman offers a completely unrelated argument to explain the reason for Hamlet's hesitation to kill the praying Claudius based on the mise-en-scène. She interprets a change from the screenplay property of a crucifix to the final film containing a statue of Jesus without a cross to signify a shift in allusion from Christ's passion to his teaching ministry. She concludes that Hamlet's procrastination in this scene hinges upon divine intervention as he decides not to kill the king at that moment ("A Palimpsest" 251). In another essay she further states that the statue signifies "heavenly approval for Hamlet's delay," rather than the implied instructive message ("Spiral" 164). But what Kliman fails to consider is that Hamlet never approaches his problem with Claudius through a Christian attitude, nor does he appear to consider the icon before which Claudius prays, but Hamlet maintains a focus on his internal turmoil throughout the scene.

killing himself, or at least the actualization of the self he wishes to be (119-20). And, indeed, this is one of the conclusions at which Jones arrived in his comprehensive psychoanalysis of Hamlet:

> In reality his uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his own personality, so that he cannot kill him without also killing himself. This solution, one closely akin to what Freud has shown to be the motive of suicide in melancholia, is actually the one that Hamlet finally adopts . . . Only when he has made the final sacrifice and brought himself to the door of death is he free to fulfil his duty, to avenge his father, and to slay his other self—his uncle [sic]. (Jones 100)

But in keeping with a psychoanalytic reading, at this point in the film Hamlet is not prepared to revenge his father's death because he still harbor's unresolved Oedipal urges toward Gertrude.

Although these conclusions all have some validity, the high-key lighting which divides Hamlet's face equally in light and shadow suggests an internal struggle, not between action and inaction, which Olivier resolved at the entrance of the players, but a conflict of timing. In the obvious symbolism of good versus evil, with the lit half of Hamlet's face representing good, and the shadowed half of his face symbolizing evil, the question becomes which decision would be good, killing a praying Claudius, or intentionally waiting until he commits another sin so he can be sent to hell without forgiveness? Furthermore, by Hamlet's face being cast in half light and half shadow, the

audience perceives the moral ambiguity that is inherent in Hamlet's decision between disobeying his father and committing a mortal sin. The accompanying score that includes orchestration in a minor key adds a sense of inner turmoil to this pivotal scene.

Hamlet's bulky chair, which represents the indecision that plagues him, appears again when Ophelia behaves madly. In the replication of Shakespeare's 5.5., Ophelia plucks the rosemary out of her bodice and places it on the vacant chair, addressing it as if Hamlet is still sitting there brooding, as he did in several earlier scenes. The chair with the rosemary appears again in a shot that occurs between Ophelia's burial and Laertes's challenge to Hamlet for a duel. This repeated motif increasingly fixes itself as a metonymy for Hamlet, who upon his return to Denmark has again become indecisive and reactive. As Hamlet tells Horatio,

> There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all," (5.2.219-22)

reinforcing and highlighting Hamlet's indecision by a suggestion that he will leave his destiny in God's hands, without any action on his own part other than preparedness. But Olivier deletes the following lines, "Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows what is't to leave betimes, let be" (224-5), which provide a more philosophical than practical application to the speech, in keeping with Olivier's portrayal of a reactive, repressed Hamlet, as opposed to a character full of thought.

In the final scene, however, Olivier again shifts from the inactive character of Hamlet to highlight his physical acting style in a stunt that might be considered grandiose. Rather than a standard choreographed duel that Shakespeare's play suggests, Olivier opted for a fourteen-foot leap onto Claudius, which resulted in injuring the stunt double King (Taylor 184). [29] Furthermore, rather than merely "hurting" the King with the poisoned rapier (5.2.322 s.d.), he viciously stabs his uncle. With Gertrude dead and Hamlet dying, there are no impediments, psychological or otherwise, to prevent Hamlet from exacting his revenge on Claudius.

Conclusion

The final scene of Olivier's Hamlet returns to the motif of a vacant chair, this time being Claudius's throne, from which he has fallen, slain. But this chair does not remain empty long, as Hamlet takes his rightful possession, his final action, before requesting that Horatio tell his story. By means of an epilogue, the film ends with a montage of shots that reinforces the major themes: Hamlet's funeral procession passing illustrates the end of the Oedipal and incestuous family that created "something rotten in Denmark;" and a final shot of Hamlet's empty chair, still sporting its rosemary for remembrance and signifying the indecision that characterized

[29] Olivier further describes the filming of this scene in his autobiography as so risky that they filmed it last, fully expecting an injury that would prevent him from working for some time. After the acrobatic choreographers had planned the stunt, Olivier requested the "bottom-of-a-strongman-act King" to move back "farther, [and] farther still. When he was at a distance [Olivier] thought [he] could just cover in an outward dive" he leapt, knowing there would be only one take, while his friends, Anthony Bushell and Roger Furse, hid their eyes (Olivier 152-4).

Hamlet for much of the film. A shot of the chapel backlit by cannon fire follows, before the camera pans the bed-dominated chamber, one of the few rooms that contained furniture, representing the sensuality and sexuality that created the tragedy. And finally, a silhouette of Hamlet's body being carried up to the same battlements from which he had contemplated his life brings the cinematic storytelling to a close; in the end, Hamlet was not to be.

The predominant theme that emerges from this cinematic adaptation is the injection of Freudian psychoanalysis in the form of Oedipal connections, not only between Gertrude and Hamlet, but also between Ophelia and Laertes. "The impression that the film as a whole explores Hamlet's inner life is reinforced by using voice-over[s]" (Taylor 182). Olivier's utilization of this technique provides the foundation for subsequent Hamlet filmmakers as they continue to probe Hamlet's psyche, not necessarily as a Shakespearian character, but as an identifiable person with whom their contemporary audience might relate.

Olivier's psychoanalytic interpretation of Hamlet is complemented by the consistent use of directional lighting that repeatedly casts characters in half light, half shadow that lends a sense of moral ambiguity. Adding to Olivier's novel approach is the musical contribution of William Walton, who created separate musical themes for the primary characters which influenced the audience perception of their personalities and psyches.

Throughout the twentieth century, however, except for the psychoanalytic critics, the various critical movements persistently "put the

prince back into the play," rather than treat him as a realistic person (Jenkins 40-1). But in cinematic expression, modern realism continued, and Olivier's exploration of Hamlet's psyche establishes the foundational layer of the palimpsest of performance for twentieth-century Hamlet films. Olivier's Freudian perspective also provides the reason for Hamlet's indecision and a baseline from which his insanity will be questioned in later interpretations.

Chapter Two:

Prison of Passion: Tony Richardson's Hamlet

In the more than twenty years between Laurence Olivier's seminal film of Hamlet (1948) and Tony Richardson's adaptation (1969), remarkably, there were no major English-speaking Hamlets produced for the cinema.[1] Like Olivier's project, Richardson adapted his successful stage production into a film. Richardson, however, retained his stage cast as well as his location, the Roundhouse Theatre in London (Richardson 261). This chapter will discuss how Richardson adds an "anti-poetic, even anti-heroic" dimension to Hamlet's Freudian neurosis that reflects a "half-world where values and duty are obscured and ambivalent" (Duffy 151), an approach that reflects 1960s student culture and audiences in England.

The cultural environment in which Richardson directed the cinematic adaptation of Henry Fielding's Tom Jones (1963) and "kitchen-sink realism" films such as Look Back in Anger (1958) and The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1962) led him to reexamine the character of Hamlet. Believing there had been no "major reevaluation of the character since the legendary 'poetic' Hamlet of John Gielgud's in the 1930s" (257), Richardson saw the key to Hamlet as, "understanding his sense of irony—irony of mind,

[1] As mentioned in note 9 on p. 23, Gielgud's recorded stage production that featured Richard Burton in the title role was released in 1964, but did not significantly contribute to the evolution of cinematic Hamlets with which this study is concerned.

thought, feeling, language, [and] action," and he understood Hamlet as a character who stood back and clearly assessed those around him (258). But Richardson's Hamlet, as played by Nicol Williamson, does not portray this detachment.

At first glance one of the major differences between Richardson's 1969 adaptation and Olivier's successful Hamlet from 1948 is the portrayal of the character of Hamlet. In Richardson's film Williamson projects a Hamlet as far removed from Olivier's portrayal of the quintessential man of indecision as possible. Douglas Brode points out that Williamson was known for his "portraits of flawed, angry working-class men" (130), which contrasts greatly from the traditional portrayal of Hamlet as a brooding royal character. Brode also suggests that Williamson's delivery can be attributed to "a reaction against Olivier's exalted elocution" (131). Instead, Williamson adopted a style that Buhler describes as an appropriate voice with which to point out the corruption in the English status quo Richardson saw in the context of "the spirit of the student movements of 1968" (42), which struggled to define themselves in contrast to established tradition and lifestyles. And while indeed, Richardson's Hamlet stands in stark contrast to the iconic production of Olivier's film, Williamson's too speedy delivery often prevents coherence.

Richardson transforms Olivier's lethargy, belabored inaction and Walton's melodious accompaniment that flows like a story told on a summer's day into a hurried, verbally-intensive film that "includes more of

Shakespeare's original text than Olivier's Hamlet, but ruins [sic] through it twice as fast" (McMillin), barely utilizing the musical talents of Patrick Gowers in his soundtrack. Richardson himself describes the technique as "an interesting experiment to try to make a movie of Hamlet in which in a way you would devalue the power of the image and let the text and performance speak uninterruptedly" (260-1, emphasis in original). But the fact that filming took only about ten days in between live performances may also contribute to the film's quick pace (261). Williamson's rushed delivery of Hamlet's lines allows for a more complete version of Shakespeare's play, restoring dialogue that Olivier deleted in his film.

Williamson's portrayal of Hamlet demonstrates none of the hesitation which marks the belabored internal struggle that plagues Olivier's character. This feverish pace of the vocal delivery, however, combined with the subplots and restoration of marginal characters, disorients the spectator not familiar with the plot of Hamlet. Furthermore, Richardson does not utilize lengthy transitional scenes and tracking shots as did Olivier. This shift in rhythm also allows time for the restoration of characters such as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as well as the Fortinbras subplot notably absent from Olivier's film. The result is a more complete translation of Shakespeare's play to screen in two hours, shorter than Olivier's film by more than thirty minutes.

In the years between Olivier's and Richardson's films, literary criticism blossomed as post-WWII academics developed theories coalescing New

Criticism and formalism, as well as initial forays into reader response criticism. Many scholars worked to put Hamlet back into the play and read him as a literary character, not a realistic person, as Bradley had. The New Critics focused on close reading and finding patterns in literary symbolism, and although it was already outdated, Glenn Litton relies on this school of criticism in his 1976 reading of Richardson's Hamlet as heavily-invested in a metaphor of Elsinore as diseased beauty. While I agree that Richardson's extended use of metaphors suggests that he was influenced, at least to some extent, by the New Critics, it is overshadowed by the influence of psychoanalytic criticism. One might argue that the influences of the psychoanalytic school of criticism only influenced Richardson's Hamlet in so far as it was a primary influence in Olivier's chosen reading, which in turn provided the psychoanalytic impact on Richardson's film. Nevertheless, Richardson's film demonstrates a 1960s understanding of psychoanalysis, which rejected Freud's de facto human behavior patterns and adopted an approach that valued process analysis and individuality.

Maynard Mack's 1952 essay, "The World of Hamlet," took a metaphysical approach to the play by drawing a conclusion that the mysteries of Hamlet impel readers to delve into the universal nature of mankind. In the following decade Jan Kott's Shakespeare, Our Contemporary suggested that audiences of Hamlet performances should use Shakespeare's text to "get at [their] modern experience, anxiety and sensibility" (59). The influence of these two works contributed to a new

generation of psychoanalytic criticism. Furthermore, the nineteenth-century notions that prompted Olivier's search into Hamlet's subconscious continued to thrive, with "the influence of Bradley and Wilson remain[ing] strong until the arrival of critical theory in the universities in the 1970s" (McEvoy 56), and modern readers and viewing audiences persisted in trying to determine Hamlet's internal motivation. Contributing to such perceptions of Hamlet was the fact that Olivier's film reigned as the cinematic Hamlet for over twenty years, and as such, laid a foundation of celluloid translation that echoed in subsequent films. While Richardson's film draws distinct contrasts between Olivier's often lethargic Dane and Williamson's more active portrayal, Olivier's interjection of an Oedipus complex into the Hamlet tradition set a precedent that Richardson developed to create his neurotic Hamlet.

Although Richardson managed to eradicate Olivier's man of indecision and minimize Hamlet's Oedipus complex from his adaptation, the overt sexuality that was a characteristic of a distinctively Freudian reading permeates this 1969 film. Additionally, instead of Olivier's assertion that Hamlet is a "tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind," Richardson's adaptation utilized the tagline, "from the author of Romeo and Juliet . . . the love story of Hamlet and Ophelia" ("Hamlet"), deceptively shifting the focus from Hamlet's character to the relationship between the hero and heroine, which he fails to deliver in the film. As I will illustrate in the second part of this chapter, however, the sexuality in Richardson's film

does not pertain to the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, but rather shifts to an Oedipal relationship between Ophelia and Laertes, previously suggested in Olivier's film, while Gertrude and Claudius overtly demonstrate a lifestyle of opulent decadence that evinces the reason for Hamlet's disgust with the older generation. Finally in this chapter I will demonstrate how Richardson expanded Olivier's visual theme of Elsinore as a prison, creating a set that illustrates Hamlet's labeling of Denmark as such and prevents Hamlet from escaping the decadent society that surrounds him.

Neurosis

Although Richardson excised the immediately recognizable Oedipal manifestations from this cinematic adaptation, he follows the path laid out by Freud regarding the psychological results of unresolved Oedipal notions in his portrayal of Hamlet. Richardson's tragic hero exhibits interpersonal conflict and a feeling of isolation—classical signs of neurosis.[2] Stephen Buhler remarks that "Richardson concentrates almost exclusively on the main character's philosophical journey, reflecting this Hamlet's preoccupation with intellect and psychology" (42), but Williamson's portrayal of Hamlet's journey is more psychological than philosophical. As a contemporary critic noted, Richardson's focus on faces locates "the essential geography of Hamlet far more relevantly than if he had built some grandiose castle of Elsinore" ("Elsinore"). He illustrates Hamlet's

[2] Freud claims that when libidinal desires for the mother are not resolved the son is "incapable of transferring his libido to a new sexual object…[and these desires become] the kernel of the neuroses [sic]" (Introduction 295-6).

psychological journey by using cuts between close-ups and medium shots that "create a disorientation analogous to Hamlet's vertigo" (Litton 110). Furthermore, Hamlet's manic pace of speech, which often is nearly indecipherable,[3] requires the audience to rely on its familiarity with the story, reinforcing the palimpsestic nature of the Hamlet tradition.

Continuing this theme, Williamson's Hamlet is clearly old enough to have experientially progressed through the Freudian stages of denied sexuality to the point of neurosis, being in his early thirties. Williamson appears closer to Shakespeare's stated age of Hamlet, complete with male-pattern baldness, rather than the other major films in which he has been presented as a much younger man, even when played by actors such as Olivier, who was older than Eileen Herlie (Gertrude). Roger Manvell points out that Williamson's Hamlet is a student of advanced academic standing, reinforced by the casting of Gordon Jackson as Horatio who appears as a "bespectacled and middle-aged don" (Shakespeare 128). In addition to Williamson's scholarly appearance, Richardson jettisons all of Hamlet's humorous lines, rendering the character as dry and suffering from chronic depression as well as the effects of denied sexuality.

Richardson further illustrates Hamlet's neurosis in the repeated close-ups of Williamson as he addresses his soliloquies directly into the camera, speaking his soul's torment to his audience, "embody[ing] the 1960s version of creative maladjustment, the idea that insanity is the appropriate response

[3] In explaining the overwhelming importance of Williamson's reflection of Hamlet's soul over verbal content, an unidentified Time critic stated that "as far as Williamson is concerned, elocution be damned" ("Elsinore").

to insane conditions" (Buhler 42). Hamlet's insane conditions include the cognitive dissonance created by his father's death and his mother's remarriage to his uncle, whereas Hamlet's love for his mother is complicated by his feelings regarding her actions. R. D. Laing posits that repression is one of the defense mechanisms that leads to self-alienation (34), which Hamlet exemplifies through his impersonal self-examinations via dissociative soliloquies.

Hamlet's detached examination of himself and his dissonant conditions also echo the perceived situation of the student youth revolt of the 1960s. This movement found the contradictions of reliance on an extravagant consumer culture while hating the system that created goods to be unbearable (U.N.E.F. Part 2). Richardson's projection of Hamlet as a Wittenberg graduate student reemphasizes the disconnection between the reigning status quo consumer culture, represented by the overtly opulence of Gertrude and Claudius, and the rebellion of the 1960's idealistic academic as portrayed by the scholarly demeanor of Hamlet and Horatio. As the Prince within the isolated court of Elsinore, however, Hamlet is not able to openly revolt to the culture he finds detestable, but is limited to spiteful asides while he internalizes the majority of his frustration.

Williamson draws attention to Hamlet's potential for emotional instability by playing Hamlet as a "man of violent emotion and action" (Mullin 129), caused by the cognitive dissonance of his own experience in which he is torn between his ideal and the opposing reality he witnesses. He begins

the famous “to be or not to be” soliloquy while lying on a white fur throw, then restlessly rises halfway, then sits again, before finally standing up and walking away from the camera. Since Polonius already apprised the audience that Hamlet’s madness comes from unrequited love, Richardson’s transposition of two key scenes underscores the prince’s emotionally precarious position. By placing 3.1. (the famous “to be or not to be” and “get thee to a nunnery” scene) prior to the arrival of the players (2.2), Richardson prolongs the audience’s focus on Hamlet’s neurosis and gives the opportunity for viewers to determine the accuracy of Polonius’s observation.

Hamlet’s anguished self-reflection as visualized in Williamson’s “to be or not to be” soliloquy cuts to Ophelia returning Hamlet’s “remembrances.” In contrast to Olivier’s 1948 reversal of these two key scenes that demonstrates a causal relationship between Hamlet’s loss of Ophelia and his subsequent suicidal thoughts, Richardson creates a neurotic Hamlet who is tender with Ophelia. This feeling is illustrated by resting his cheek on her hair and giving her gentle kisses; that is until an eyeline match of Hamlet reveals that he sees Polonius and Claudius spying on the young couple. At this point Hamlet’s face hardens as he delivers his most biting lines directed at Ophelia, but the lines are clearly spoken for the benefit of the older men. This angered, neurotic Hamlet then finds himself presented with the opportunity to discover Claudius’s guilt by means of the traveling players, and Hamlet’s anger fuels his plot to uncover his uncle’s devious nature by using similar tactics of spying. The rather sudden change highlights

Hamlet's extreme emotional state and his ability to make an instantaneous shift between different intense emotions, causing audiences to doubt his stability even further.

Hamlet's next soliloquy addresses his adaptation of "The Murder of Gonzago," that he renames "The Mousetrap." Richardson capitalizes on Hamlet's Freudian neurosis as Williamson fixes his eyes on the camera, in effect locking eyes with the viewer, while he delivers the soliloquy:

> O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all the visage wann'd,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, an' his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit?
> . . . .
> Make mad the guilty, and appall the free,
> Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
> The very faculties of eyes and ears. (2.2.550-7, 64-6)

In these lines Hamlet considers his own character, but the lines also serve as a meta-theatrical moment, reminding the audience that it is being

manipulated by the representation of emotions on the screen.[4] This soliloquy begins as a careful musing in a direct address to the camera, with a cut to Hamlet clenching his hands, studying them closely, and opening them again. As the scene continues Williamson raises his voice and begins speaking faster as Hamlet vehemently reveals his tightly-wound emotional state as he tries to decide if he is a coward or a villain.

Furthermore, this speech, deleted in Olivier's earlier psychoanalytic interpretation, represents one of the distinguishing characteristics of melancholia, as Freud notes, the "lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" ("Mourning" 165). This melancholia manifests itself in Hamlet's desire for revenge, which torments him even as he isolates himself from significant interaction with those who could help him successfully deal with his father's death. Indeed, from a psychological point of view, plotting revenge itself is seen as self-destructive, and in the case of Hamlet, and most dramatic characters, revenge eventually leads to the untimely death of the revenger.

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[4] Paul Meier reads Richardson's Hamlet as a film that is self-consciously metatheatrical in honor of Shakespeare's intentions. In addition to retaining lines that utilize the language of the stage, e.g. "These indeed seem,/ For they are actions that a man might play,/ But I have that within which passeth show,/ These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (1.2.83-6, emphasis added), Richardson double-casts his actors in theatrical tradition, which draws attention to the fact that they are merely players. In addition to Williamson doubling as the ghost of the elder Hamlet, Roger Livesey plays the first player and the gravedigger. While Meier claims that some of the supporting cast even tripled the smaller parts, he does not provide specific actors or parts for the uncredited roles, which are stated in the film credits merely as, "others taking part are…" (Richardson Hamlet).

Richardson uses the text in two ways to reinforce a thematic interpretation of the neurosis that Hamlet suffers. The first is the deletion of Hamlet's consideration of the reliability of his father's ghost (2.2.598-604). The second is the addition of, "Our vengeance!" between Hamlet's rant regarding being a villain and, "Why, what an ass am I!" (582). Both of these alterations suggest Hamlet's complicity with the ghost ("our vengeance") while eliminating the traditional questioning regarding the reliability of the ghost's claims. Hamlet's overwhelming emotional state is emphasized in the bitter delivery coupled with the body language of pent-up emotion as he stares at his tightly-clenched hands.

The scene draws to its end dramatically as Hamlet punctuates the final lines of his soliloquy by snuffing out the candles, deliberately, one by one.

> [___][5]—I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play [___]
> Have by the very cunning of the scene
> Been strook so to the soul, that presently
> They have proclaim'd their malefactions:
> For murther, though it have no tongue, will speak
> With most miraculous organ. [___] I'll have these players
> Play something like the murther of my father
> Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,

[5] Hamlet puts out the first candle by blowing on it. The silent blowing replaces the "Hum" in Shakespeare's text. Hamlet extinguishes the remainder of the candles by snuffing the wicks between two fingers as he punctuates his words with the actions. I have underlined the words that Hamlet emphasizes by snuffing out candles, and bracketed underscoring to show where candles are extinguished between words.

I'll tent him to the quick. If 'a do blench,

I know my course. [. . .][6] the play's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King. (2.2.588-605)

Other than two pauses combined with extinguished candles that act as punctuation, the emphasis created by snuffing candles while voicing the words, "strook," "soul," and "speak," has an alliterative effect. Linking these hissing sounds with the final word, "king," completes the visual portrayal of Hamlet gradually plunging himself, and thereby his psyche, into darkness, which as Litton notes is a "discomforting sense of movement in the opposite, horrible direction—toward darkness, confusion, non-being," away from the revelatory light that he seeks (116).

This search for revelation continues when the players stage "The Mousetrap" for the court. Hamlet's pointed search for signs of Claudius's guilt is colored by a close-up shot of Hamlet's static face and darting eyes. The brief shot serves to suggest Hamlet's mental instability that influences his ability to read Gertrude's and Claudius's reactions, even while Horatio maintains an objective viewpoint, framed with eyes gleaming sharply through his spectacles. Providing a contrast to Hamlet, who is unstable, Horatio performs careful and seemingly objective surveillance of the royal couple through a curtain of flames.

Hamlet's manic glee at the discovery of Claudius's guilt causes his neurosis to take a new form, building on earlier manifestations.

[6] This deletion marked by bracketed ellipses is Hamlet's questioning of the validity of the ghost's claims, as mentioned above.

Richardson's Hamlet, in contrast to Olivier's, distinguishes himself in his actions after he has witnessed Claudius's reactions to "The Mousetrap." Instead of madly rushing around threateningly with a torch, Hamlet gleefully celebrates his discovery of Claudius's guilt by singing. The scene ends with Hamlet donning Horatio's glasses in a "better to see you with" moment, amusing his friend and demonstrating that now he sees the situation more clearly, and even has figured out the schemes of Claudius via Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and those of Polonius (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1 – Hamlet demonstrates his clear vision

Richardson transposes the scenes following "The Mousetrap," a change that Michael Mullin thinks draws a more distinct contrast between the right and wrong that separate Hamlet from Claudius. By removing Hamlet's musings of "spiritual revenge" that lead to his inaction, Mullin

concludes that Richardson simplifies the action, making Claudius's remorse "a general reaction to the whole course of events," rather than in direct response to the play within the play (126). In effect, this interpretation removes some of Hamlet's more questionable actions that helps audiences relate more fully to his situation.[7]

Richardson's Hamlet, however, is not an entirely sympathetic character. The use of close-up cinematography magnifies his neurotic behavior throughout and Williamson's rapid delivery of lines increases doubt of his reliability. McMillan describes Williamson's portrayal of Hamlet as "energetic, frenetic and unbalanced. . . angry, self-righteous and ironic by turn . . . a train wreck of a man," which reinforces Hamlet's emotional instability. Furthermore, as Litton points out, Richardson's casting of the "handsome" Anthony Hopkins as Claudius begs the viewer to question Hamlet's perception when he venomously describes his uncle as "a mildewed ear" and a "moor" (112).[8] Another alteration in this adaptation that lends unreliability to the character of Hamlet is the deletion of the Ghost's reply in the closet scene. Although Hamlet never questions the Ghost, the audience should since it never sees it. In fact, in Richardson's film, Hamlet only hears the Ghost when he is alone, always accompanied by a jarring discordant metallic cacophony that suggests that it is a manifestation of

[7] Richardson's transposition of the prayer and closet scenes also serves to clarify the supposition that Hamlet believes Claudius is hiding behind the arras. Instead of Hamlet striking out at an unknown figure, who probably is not Claudius because he has just left him praying for forgiveness, the audience can more easily accept that Hamlet believes he is taking justified revenge on his uncle for his father's murder.

[8] The speech to which Litton refers is 3.4.53-88, when Hamlet demands that Gertrude compare the miniatures of the two brothers and find Claudius severely deficient.

something that “lurks within Hamlet” (Mullin 127). Paul Meier also concludes that Richardson’s audience should question the Ghost, but for a different reason. Just as Olivier had doubled as Hamlet and the Ghost in his film, in Richardson’s Hamlet, Nicol Williamson also dubs the voice of the Ghost, which suggests that Hamlet only hears his father in his head (185). In psychological terms, the Ghost’s voice figures as Hamlet’s superego, which Herbert Marcuse argues creates a bifurcation of personality and leads to self-destruction (53), and in the end Hamlet’s decision to avenge his father’s death leads to his own demise.

Richardson’s Hamlet, in effect, is not maniacal, or bipolar, as is often portrayed, but suffers from a neurosis that, according to Freudian theory, is a reaction against repression, possibly of Oedipal urges. The ensuing neurosis is an “expression of the rebellion on the part of the id against the external world, of its unwillingness—or, if one prefers, its incapacity—to adapt itself to the exigencies of reality” (“Loss” 185). In Hamlet’s case this outer world includes the overt sexuality that he witnesses at Elsinore, and in which he feels imprisoned, that develops into a loathing for his mother. But while he suffers from this neurosis, he maintains the capacity to parse the motivations of the characters around him, while justifying his own actions.

Transference of Sexuality

Unsurprisingly, Richardson’s film from the 1960s period of sexual revolution contains more overt references to transgressive sexuality than

Olivier's film, the product of a more conservative era. Brode interprets the addition of "graphic sensuality" as a compensation for making Hamlet "leaden [and] dull" (131). Although the scenes between Hamlet and Gertrude contain none of the obvious Oedipal relationship initiated by Olivier, reflecting that "mother complexes were no longer trendy" ("To See"), the suggestion of a sexual relationship between Ophelia and Laertes that was hinted at in the earlier film is brought to the forefront in Richardson's film. As Ernest Jones explained, an Oedipus complex can be manifested in a brother-sister libidinal attachment (157). In writing about the development of Freudian representations of Ophelia, Elaine Showalter perceives Richardson's Ophelia to be "equally attracted to Hamlet and Laertes" (236). Reading the sexuality in Richardson's Hamlet as merely a 1960s rewriting of Olivier's Freudian interpretation, however, leads one to see the overt sexuality of this film as purely Oedipal rather than taking into consideration the changes in psychological theory during the intervening years. While Richardson's Hamlet does not live up to the tagline promising "the love story of Hamlet and Ophelia" ("Hamlet"), it succeeds in fulfilling the secondary tag, "the Hamlet of our time, for our time" ("Hamlet"). But Hamlet does not embrace the sexual freedom he sees around him. Rather, as Marcuse points out, the removal of sexual constraints leads to a repression of moral behavior, which leads to suppressed sexuality (197-202). Richardson exemplifies Marcuse's understanding of idealism as it applies to the youth revolt of the 1960s. Because cultures can be identified by their "common

denominator," the rebellion against the status quo consumer culture by engaging in free love necessarily commodified sexuality as an "assimilation of the ideal with reality" (Marcuse 57). Therefore, even as Hamlet logically should embrace open sexuality as a part of the student culture, Richardson recognizes that this rebellious expression is merely a commodification, making sexuality part of the courtly system that includes Gertrude, Claudius, Ophelia and Laertes, while Hamlet demonstrates a rejection of sexuality in what Marcuse terms "repressive desublimation" (56-60). In this myopic film, Richardson draws attention to the transgressive nature of sexuality that Hamlet perceives to be a manifestation of the power structure he opposes, but as heir to the throne cannot escape. Furthermore, in Freudian terms, his rebellion as a manifestation of neurosis makes him unable to adapt to his sexualized courtly environment.

From the first appearance of Ophelia and Laertes, there is an obvious sexual connection between the two, starting with a prolonged kiss, after which Ophelia lies back on her bed with Laertes hovering above her (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2 – Ophelia and Laertes kiss

The two jump apart guiltily as their intimate moment is interrupted by Polonius's entrance upon which he instructs Ophelia not to continue a relationship with Hamlet. Following his father's litany of proverbs, Laertes takes his leave of Ophelia with a considerably chaster kiss, presumably because Polonius is present. But the sexuality of the young woman cannot be overlooked, especially since she was played by Marianne Faithfull, a contemporary pop star who was seen as a sex object by virtue of her romantic association with Mick Jagger as well as being the star of the 1968 erotic fantasy film, Girl on a Motorbike (Taylor 188-9).

Given the chaste portrayal of Ophelia by Jean Simmons in Olivier's Hamlet, Faithfull's representation of Ophelia's sexuality is hard to miss since she is often seen in a prone position. The "get thee to a nunnery" scene

begins with Ophelia reclining in a hammock, dress disheveled. As Hamlet approaches her she waits eagerly. It is only after they have kissed that Hamlet sees the spying men and turns on Ophelia in anger.

One of the most memorable scenes of overt sexuality depicts Polonius telling Gertrude and Claudius that Hamlet is mad. Richardson sets the encounter in the royal bedchambers, with the king and queen lounging in bed, feasting on an opulent banquet. Dogs lie about on the bed with them in a show of decadence while the court looks on (Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3 – Grotesque royal behavior

Litton notes that Richardson establishes “freakish” public displays of affection early in the film, in this first scene at court (112). This scene includes lingering kisses and meaningful gazes between Gertrude and Claudius as the courtiers laugh and applaud, even as Polonius feels

compelled to curtail such overt displays of sexuality by means of a discreet cough. The "situational context of [the courtier-filled bedchamber] makes [their sexuality] grotesque" (Litton 112); and the last shot of the scene focuses on a passionate kiss between the King and Queen, but Polonius is no more prudish in his views than is the scholarly Hamlet.

Hamlet lies in this same bed of grotesqueness after killing Polonius, having seen his father's ghost once more. Instead of Hamlet acting on Oedipal desires, however, he lies back weeping unashamedly over the loss of the ideal image of his parents. Gertrude lies down next to Hamlet, exuding sexuality rather than maternal love as she cradles his head in her hands and cries with him, cheek to cheek. Hamlet leaves for England in the throes of overwhelming emotion over his bedchamber encounter with Gertrude, but with none of the sexual tension that Olivier portrays in his film.

Another example of overt sexuality in Richardson's adaptation is in the portrayal of the courtier, Osric. Just like Olivier, Richardson portrays him as an effeminate dandy. Richardson, however, carries things further in the way Osric delivers his lines as he informs Hamlet of the King's wager on his duel with Laertes (Figure 2.4). In keeping with the rapid speech that characterizes this film, Osric's line, "Nay, good my lord, for my ease, in good faith" (5.2.105), is altered to, "Nay, my good lord, for my knees," accompanied by a suggestive downward eye movement toward Hamlet's codpiece. Osric also noticeably wears lipstick and an earring



Figure 2.4 – Osric's effeminate appearance

identical to that worn by the sexually-transgressive Claudius, which the King offers for the next scoring hit in the fencing duel between Hamlet and Laertes, even while Osric dances around the duelers gleefully, "eyes alight and lips wet with pleasure" (Mullin 129). While these homosexual implications further add to the sexuality Richardson incorporated into his adaptation, Hamlet remains aloof to the sycophantic overtures of the courtier, and the power system he represents. The transgressive nature of sexuality that Richardson portrays in his film underscores the fact that he's not interested in capitalizing on traditional love relationships, despite the film's "love story" tagline. Indeed, Ophelia's eventual madness in this adaptation is represented as being less attributable to Hamlet's rejection

than is often portrayed.[9] Richardson, however, enlarges the forbidden love between siblings, the "o'er hasty marriage" of Gertrude and Claudius, and even the suggestion of homosexual attraction into graphic visuals that draw attention to overt sexuality on the fringes of contemporary moral standards rather than conventional relationships. By emphasizing transgressive sexuality, Richardson creates a stark contrast to Hamlet's altered repression that makes him feel imprisoned as he maintains his philosophical position far removed from the sensuality of the Danish court.

"Denmark is a Prison"

While Brode claims that Richardson's set has "no visual scheme" (130), in fact, he capitalizes on Olivier's take on Elsinore as a literal prison in his selection of shots, backgrounds, and the desperation Williamson portrays by delivering his lines with haste. Robert A. Duffy remarks that Olivier visually created Elsinore as a prison by juxtaposing Ophelia's surroundings of nature (i.e. herbs, flowers, water, and scenery visible from her chamber window) with Hamlet's scenery of battlements, a bulky, wooden chair, and stone walls (147-8). Olivier further enhances the visualization of this isolation and prison-like setting in the opening establishing shots of the fortress surrounded by crashing waves giving the

[9] Richardson does not include Ophelia's herbal tribute to Hamlet, as did Olivier. In fact, she noticeably focuses on Laertes in her ravings. A suggestion of Ophelia's criticism of Gertrude's transgressive sexuality permeates one shot as the young woman gives rue to the queen and pointedly looks at Claudius as she says that the queen "[must] wear [her] rue with a difference" (emphasis added; Richardson changes Shakespeare's wording from "may" to "must, 5.5.182).

impression that Elsinore is an island. Although there is never a shot that confirms that the castle is totally surrounded by water, the series of shots from different angles suggests that Elsinore is isolated from the world beyond.

In expanding on Olivier, Richardson's film opens with the credits over a backdrop of a brick wall, establishing the impenetrability of the fortress of Elsinore. Olivier's deletion of the world outside of the castle wall created by the elimination of Fortinbras, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "makes the movie seem all the more centripetal and claustrophobic," which is effectively multiplied by Richardson's choice of stark settings (Rothwell 61) that include black, empty backdrops that suggest that beyond the scope of the camera is a "visual nothingness" (Litton 111). Although Paul Meier claims that Richardson's visual strategy is remarkable in that it focuses on "actors lit against a very indeterminate background . . . or simply a void," which makes the space infinite as opposed to Olivier's determinant space marked by specific backdrops (179), his techniques create the opposite effect. In a medium known for "opening up" a play by adding scenic backgrounds, this film perversely creates a more closed setting than that of a stage performance, via close-up shots that cut to other close-ups, forcing viewers to study the same faces that Hamlet must in order to obey his father's Ghost (Litton 111). Furthermore, while Gower is credited with the score for the film, the musical background is limited to courtly trumpet flourishes, the cacophonous brassy leitmotif of the ghost, and the players' revelry, limiting

viewers' aural reception to the spoken word. This film also contains very few establishing shots between scenes, which keeps the myopic focus on the characters, especially Hamlet and his intensity of purpose.[10]

Richardson reinforces this fortress setting when Hamlet is taken to the location where Horatio and the guard have seen the Ghost of Hamlet's father. As opposed to Olivier's setting on the battlements, Richardson positions the Ghost in a shadowy, echoing passageway. The sound of dripping in the background reveals the locale to be a catacomb-like atmosphere, suggesting that rather than the Ghost hovering around the heavenly rooftop, he resides in the depths of the earth. The Ghost, who is never embodied in this film, appears only as a light that shines brightly on Hamlet like an alien presence, and is announced by the sudden cacophony of trumpets and drums that reverberate like a gong, highlighting the reactions of those who see the spirit (Figure 2.5). Hamlet's soliloquy following the ghost's exit further promotes the prison metaphor as his voice echoes:

> . . . Remember thee!
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
> That youth and observation copied there,

[10] Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White link the use of mainly close-ups to art cinema. The classic example of such a device is Carl Theodor Dreyer's film The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928), in which this artistic use of close-ups "conveys the psychological intensity" of the character (150). Richardson's use primarily of close-ups produces the same effect.



Figure 2.5 – The “appearance” of King Hamlet’s ghost

> And thy commandement all alone shall live
>
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
>
> Unmix’d with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!
>
> O most pernicious woman!
>
> O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
>
> . . . meet it is I set it down
>
> That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain!
>
> At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.
>
> So, uncle, there you are. . . (1.5.97-110)

As he venomously delivers the lines in the echoing brick catacomb, he violently etches, “VILLAIN,” into the wall, establishing his extreme mental state and emphasizing his shift in focus to proving Claudius’s guilt. The

visual reassertion of Hamlet's opinion of his uncle/step-father strengthens the association of Denmark as a prison, Hamlet's crude etching resembling marks left behind in prisons throughout the world.

Hamlet punctuates the last line by grinding the tip of his dagger into the etched word, emphasizing the simulacrum of the carved stone to the prison that is Denmark as well as the etched "VILLAIN" to Claudius. This sequence also serves as foreshadowing of the association between the carved stone of the catacombs and that of tombstones. Hamlet carves an epitaph for Claudius deep in the "prison" of Elsinore, but his own epitaph will exist in the form of the tale he charges Horatio, in the final moments of the film, to tell.

As Horatio and Marcellus rejoin Hamlet after the initial appearance of the Ghost, the camera refocuses on Hamlet's face as his eyes quickly dart back and forth to illustrate his feigned madness. The darkness of the subterranean setting assists in portraying Hamlet more as a trapped animal than the man pretending lunacy he is more often thought to be. The consistent use of close-ups, especially those of Hamlet, serves to illustrate his internal "anguish that living as a prisoner . . . creates in him" (Litton 111).

Far from creating a contrast with Ophelia's background of natural beauty that Olivier portrayed, Richardson confines the young woman in the same prison in which Hamlet must live and die. Ophelia fails to escape into the verdant landscape even in her burial as Richardson has her buried in the

dark of night, enclosed in the same bleak prison to which Hamlet has returned.

Conclusion

Richardson's Hamlet provides only the second layer in the palimpsest of English-speaking cinematic performance, but it stands out in its unique interpretation, even while it builds upon the well-known Olivier production it follows. The consistent use of close-up and medium shots lends a "sense of psychological and spiritual claustrophobia" that pervades what is "essentially a psychological study" of Hamlet (Giannetti 139, 60). This claustrophobia is further enhanced by the soundtrack that includes echoing voices and the rare musical punctuation that is more sound effect than music. But Patrick Gower's minimalist score is distinguished in its sparseness, containing no flowing orchestration such as William Walton composed for Olivier's film.

Richardson's adaptation follows Olivier's cue of a Freudian psychoanalytic reading of the title figure by characterizing Hamlet as a "neurotic outsider, a nervous academic far removed from the romantic, melancholy Prince" (Manvell Shakespeare 130), but adds a 1960s alienation from the status quo by means of repressive desublimation. By integrating the visual motif of Elsinore as a literal prison and Nicol Williamson's clipped speech with formal cinematic elements Richardson portrays a shift from Olivier's tragic character that could not make up his mind, to a man as imprisoned in his neurosis as he is within the walls of Elsinore. As a social

commentary, however, Hamlet's psychological condition is not "true madness" in Laing's terms, but an "artifact of the destruction wreaked on [him] in his "alienated social reality" (144). To apply Laing's theory, Elsinore's normality echoes Richardson's 1969 social reality in which the mentally stable status quo seemed anything but sane to the new generation of academics and students, thereby creating an alienating disjunction and questioning where the true neurosis resided.

Richardson's film does not stand up well as an educational visual aid or replacement for reading Shakespeare's text, since its hastily-delivered lines are hard to follow and the complexities of the characters' conflicts are condensed. Richardson, however, was fully aware that his film did not exist in a vacuum—it is part of a larger tradition. Unfortunately Richardson's film could not erase the critical acclaim and strength of the thematic images that continued to be imprinted upon Olivier's ever-widening audience and the popularity of Olivier's performance. Although Richardson claims that his film was "not unsuccessful" (261), it was not received well in Britain (Manvell "Literature" 300), and critic Roger Greenspun of the New York Times stated that Richardson's film was "quite without interest" and that other than Williamson, "the major players range from the nondescript to the unspeakable" (Greenspun).[11] While this film contains some original developments, one being the myopic focus on the emotional instability of Hamlet, this addition to the palimpsest of Hamlet films was all but deleted in

[11] Richardson terms the success in monetary term, with the cost of the film being $350,000, and the sale of the film for $500,000. Although Richardson states in his memoir that the film "plays constantly," there are no numbers provided to support his claim (261).

the years that followed. It is, in fact, often overlooked in formal discussions of cinematic Hamlets in literature studies.

The benchmark of successful Shakespearean adaptation is often seen as the usefulness of the film for the classroom, and by this criterion, Richardson's film fails. Olivier's film remained the staple of classrooms until the 1990s when Zeffirelli's addition to the cinematic palimpsest replaced Olivier's as the visual aid in classroom instruction of Hamlet.

Chapter Three:

Zeffirelli's Hamlet: The First Action Hero

Although Franco Zeffirelli is famously indifferent to critical observations—in fact he described his idea of a Shakespearean scholar as being a "dusty Welsh bookworm with petty notions of how the Bard should be preserved" (Zeffirelli 212)—scholars such as Kenneth Rothwell and Ace Pilkington have helped explain Zeffirelli's accomplishments. Critics often consider Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film the next major English-speaking Hamlet adaptation after Olivier's, all but ignoring Richardson's in terms of critical discussion.[1] In the twenty-one years between Richardson's claustrophobic character study of the neurotic, melancholy prince and Zeffirelli's visually opulent adaptation, literary theory and criticism exploded, often with theory articulating the praxis of criticism that had preceded it by decades. Like Olivier and Richardson, Zeffirelli directed Shakespeare on stage, but he had also directed successful film adaptations, the most notable being the phenomenally successful Romeo and Juliet starring Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey in 1968. With successes ranging from blockbuster films such as The Champ (1979) and Endless Love (1981) to spectacular operas that include Otello, Zeffirelli did not merely translate his

[1] Just to name a few, Harry Keyishian's and Cortney Lehmann's discussions of Hamlet films do not mention Richardson's 1969 film, and in the two volumes of Shakespeare, the Movie edited by Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt there are no articles on this film.

stage production to the screen, however, as Olivier and Richardson did, but he completely opened up Hamlet into a spectacle worthy of the director's operatic background that reflected the box office expectations of the decade by amalgamating the castles of Blackness, Dover, Dunnottar and Rochester into Elsinore and integrating the opulent, colorful scenery of Scotland. He also capitalized on the character personae of his chosen stars, utilizing Mel Gibson's identification as an action hero and Glenn Close's famous sex appeal to reinterpret the Hamlet tradition with a change of perspective that relies on the advances in literary scholarship and criticism achieved during the late twentieth century.

One of the major shifts Zeffirelli made in his production from the previous cinematic adaptations was in the focus of his interpretation. Olivier and Richardson's films relied on psychoanalytic criticism and concentrated on motivations for the actions, or inaction, of the characters. Although the school of psychoanalytic criticism continued, albeit in a slightly different form from Freud's and Jones's types, other schools of theory and criticism opened up texts to a myriad of readings. Like Olivier, Zeffirelli sought an interpretation that would differentiate his production from those that had come before, and as the latest layer in the palimpsest of Hamlet performances, Zeffirelli attempted to erase the previous images, but the impressions of Olivier's iconic performance influenced reception of this newer film.

Genre studies, which included the Chicago school and neo-Aristotelian theory, supported various accepted readings of canonical texts, and different approaches. An important aspect of the Chicago approach allowed students of literature to resolve ambiguities by allowing the text to shape the reader's experience (Richter 708-10). Zeffirelli relies on this experiential shaping in his Hamlet, which is less about motivation or plot, and more about character, interpreted in a way that makes Hamlet less enigmatic than traditionally portrayed. In addition to the influence of genre studies, the 1980s introduced New Historicism—the practice of discovering meaning through reconstructing the historical context in which a text was written. One of the effects of New Historicism was the examination of performance aspects of Shakespearian drama, as opposed to primarily textual scholarship. Because Shakespeare's plays were performed for popular and often mixed-class audiences, Zeffirelli's attempt to repopularize Hamlet echoes the bard's own achievement. In addition, the prevailing practice of surveillance in the court system was one of the major features of the English Renaissance the New Historicists used to help interpret literature of the time, and Zeffirelli's Hamlet demonstrates the pervasive nature of such an environment that eventually destroys itself. The constant watching, however, does not end with the characters on the screen, but extends to the audience that not only absorbs what it sees on the screen, but also incorporates metacinematic identification into its reception of the film.

In addition to the influences of previous Hamlet adaptations and critical debate, Zeffirelli also fell under the influence of cinematic trends of the late twentieth century, capitalizing on the star personae of Mel Gibson and Glenn Close to present his adaptation of Hamlet as a study of character.[2] Paparazzi and tabloid journalism revealed the scopophilic nature of twentieth-century Western culture in their sometimes perverse desire to see into the personal lives of others, particularly those in the public eye. By 1990, when Zeffirelli made his Hamlet, film spectators were conditioned to interpret character nuances that they saw unfold before them on the screen. In contrast to Richardson's use of primarily close ups which led to a claustrophobic effect, Zeffirelli's use of close-ups interspersed with scenic exterior location shots allows the audience to examine the characters closely in order to assess the personality being portrayed but without the claustrophobia of Richardson's film.

Influence of New Historicism—Surveillance

The New Historicism that began in the 1980s provided an approach to literature that relied on reconstructing influences and anxieties that existed for original audiences. In the field of Shakespeare studies, one of the foremost of this school is Stephen Greenblatt, who along with social

[2] Linda Charnes argues that Gibson's identification with characters that have become mad by loss of a marital partner and Close's successful characterization as a sexual predator create a cinematic intertextuality that affects the public perceptions of the characters of Hamlet and Gertrude (8). Barbara Hodgdon also provides observations on the film's particular casting and its impact on audience identification in "The Critic, the Poor Player, Prince Hamlet, and the Lady in the Dark," Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts, Russ Mc Donald, Ed., Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994, 259-76.

philosopher, Michel Foucault, influenced new readings of English Renaissance literature.

Foucault's history of the prison system outlines the concept of surveillance as a tool of control by which fear of being observed precludes unacceptable behavior. Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, although never built, was designed to provide a central observation tower into which prisoners could not see, but from which they assumed they would be watched at all times. Prisoners would then be controlled by their own fear of being watched, rather than by actual surveillance (Foucault Discipline 200-05). This fear translated into a method by which to maintain the status quo of the governmental structure that was very much a part of Elizabethan England, and therefore, a part of Hamlet's Elsinore.

Using a New Historicist approach, Michael Neill points out that the morality of revenge is absent in Hamlet, while the Prince's delay for revenge can be attributed to the exploration of "survival in an authoritarian state" (311). Neill illustrates the theme of surveillance of the time by pointing out that one portrait of Queen Elizabeth shows her costumed in a dress embroidered with eyes and ears, symbolizing the surveillance of the monarch (312). Although Zeffirelli reportedly has little respect for scholars or their work (Pilkington 168), Gibson approached the role with the perception that "[e]veryone spied on Hamlet, and Hamlet spied on everyone else" (Jensen 2), echoing the New Historicist theme of English Renaissance surveillance that pervades his film and incorporating contemporary critical

perspectives.[3] In addition to Zeffirelli's historical contextualization of court surveillance, his emphasis on this theme echoes the prevalence of observation that characterizes the Hollywood system and creates a sense of intimacy between screen actors and their fans.

Gibson's Hamlet is a complex, but not indecipherable character, contrary to T.S. Eliot's perception of Shakespeare's character. In the first view of him attending his father's funeral in the castle's crypt, Hamlet is wrapped in a black hooded cloak. He ceremoniously filters dirt through his fingers onto his father's armored corpse, prior to attendants placing a cover over the body. With only a portion of his face showing, an eyeline match reveals that he watches Gertrude throw herself onto the vault before exchanging a significant look with Claudius over her husband's dead body. The light that shines down from a vent illuminates the honored king, only providing marginal light on the faces of the other characters present. The shadowy atmosphere together with Hamlet's furtive glances emphasize that he suspects that something dodgy has taken place.[4]

The opening scene establishes a theme of surveillance, and Hamlet's ice-blue eyes reveal his character gradually. Indeed, Hamlet lurks on the periphery of almost every scene in which he is not featured, and in the initial disclosure of Hamlet, although he is physically still, his watchfulness reveals

[3] For a comprehensive discussion of surveillance in Europe that includes correlation to practices in Renaissance England, see Foucault's Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1995.

[4] The question of whether or not Gertrude and Claudius were intimately involved prior to the murder of King Hamlet has been the subject of speculation for years. Zeffirelli, however, highlights this possibility with eyeline matches and lighting. John Updike later explored this possibility in his novel, Gertrude and Claudius (2000).

him to be an active observer. This practice of characters continually watching and being watched contrasts with Olivier's Hamlet, who sits brooding in his chair, as well as Richardson's who is full of pent-up energy with which he is unsure what to do. Zeffirelli's Elsinore recreates a sense of Renaissance courtly intrigue in keeping with historical accuracy, but he provides Hamlet with a further reason to be careful of those around him due to a transposition of Claudius's lines in which he tells Hamlet he is "most immediate" to the throne. A wary Claudius delivers these lines in the opening scene over King Hamlet's body. This setting emphasizes that Hamlet should appropriately be his father's successor, therefore, Claudius and Hamlet both have sufficient reasons to be mindful of one another's attitudes and actions as they both feel entitled to the throne of Denmark.

In keeping with the English Renaissance reality of the "culture of courtly surveillance," the pervasive nature of spying in Zeffirelli's Hamlet can be viewed as protection of Claudius's monarchy, which was the Renaissance purpose for such practices (Archer 5). Zeffirelli's Hamlet, however, is obviously suspicious of everyone, and throughout the film Hamlet's watchfulness suggests his need for self-preservation as he engages in counter-surveillance of the status quo governing bodies. The cuts between Hamlet watching from the top of a wall and Polonius, below, instructing his children, further reveals the atmosphere of watching that permeates this film. In contrast to prior portrayals that raise the question of when Hamlet is aware of Polonius's manipulation of Ophelia, Zeffirelli

explicitly shows Hamlet still lurking above when Polonius instructs his daughter to stay away from the Prince. Although there is a considerable distance between the two parties, Polonius's fatherly advice is given while walking between two high walls, and the echoing setting suggests that the acoustics would have projected his voice a great distance, making it easy for Hamlet to hear clearly. This Hamlet is fully aware from the beginning that Polonius controls Ophelia. The sequence ends with Polonius looking anxiously up to where Hamlet had been lurking, either aware of his presence, or as a member of the court system, generally suspicious of being watched.

Zeffirelli continues the theme of Hamlet's surveillance in his creation of the scene that in Shakespeare's play is only reported. As Ophelia prepares to do needlework in her chambers she is startled by Hamlet, who has been lying in wait for her. As he grabs her and demonstrates his new antic behavior by looking around wildly, the camera cuts to Polonius watching from above. Zeffirelli does not reveal whether or not Hamlet knows he is being observed, but the pervasiveness of surveillance throughout the film allows one to infer that all primaries suspect that they are watched at all times.

Indeed, Hamlet is next revealed entering the scene from above as Polonius and Claudius plot a means by which to discover the cause of Hamlet's madness. The camera cuts from the two older men to Hamlet, who in medium shot, is alternately looking at his books and glancing

downward from the balcony. His entrance with one book in his hand and a stack of books on one shoulder appears to be an obvious contrivance to appear casual while intently spying on the conspirators (Figure 3.1)



Figure 3.1 – Hamlet spies on Claudius and Polonius

In accordance with the modern interpretation of the scene, Hamlet witnesses Polonius's and Claudius's instructions to Ophelia by which she is supposed to discover Hamlet's madness by returning his remembrances. Hamlet's awareness that he is being watched is revealed by eyeline matches between Gibson's bright blue eyes and the shadows on the wall of the two men in hiding.

Hamlet's careful surveillance of everyone around him appears to be justified when the players reach Elsinore, coinciding with the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet tells his schoolmates that they are welcome, but when they cross the courtyard toward the main stairs to the

castle, having taken their leave of Hamlet, he peers around the corner of the gateway to watch the pair greet Claudius.

Zeffirelli further expands Hamlet's classic scene of surveillance by transposing the "get thee to a nunnery" scene into the internal play sequence. Having turned his back on Gertrude's sexuality, Hamlet teases Ophelia and then sits beside her. The sequence cuts between the jugglers and Hamlet's face as he watches Ophelia carefully. In a low tone, almost whispering, Hamlet tells Ophelia:

> Get thee to a nunn'ry, why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? . . . [B]elieve none of us. (3.1.120-8)

Ironically, by repositioning the scene, Zeffirelli deletes the question of whether Hamlet knows that Polonius and Claudius are watching because he knows exactly where they are. But Hamlet's open surveillance of Ophelia precedes the lines. Zeffirelli cast Helena Bonham Carter, who is ten years younger than Gibson, in the role of Ophelia, but the twenty-four-year-old actress portrays Ophelia as considerably younger and much more naïve than Hamlet. The Prince's treatment of the girl, for the most part, is careful,

as if he is always aware of her fragility. The biting curses of Hamlet's affront are deleted, making Hamlet tenderer toward the girl whom he knows is being manipulated by her father and the King. The scene ends with a close up of Ophelia, her eyes rolling back and forth in a confused manner. This last view of her prior to her father's death plants a suggestion of mental instability that lurks under the surface for just the right, or wrong, event to trigger. By demonstrating the seeds of insanity before Polonius's death, Zeffirelli absolves Hamlet of causing Ophelia's death because the close-ups of the girl reveal that she is already suffering from a degree of madness. Surveillance during the play, however, is not limited to Hamlet watching everyone else; the King and Queen both watch Hamlet with expressions of suspicion from the very beginning of the play. As the heir-apparent prior to King Hamlet's death, Hamlet is the most obvious threat to Claudius's claims on the Danish monarchy, and as an echo of Elizabethan modes, intelligence achieved by courtly surveillance was effective in exposing domestic espionage (Archer 5). Furthermore, Hamlet's madness, whether feigned or real, as Claudius observes, "must not unwatch'd go" (3.1.188).

Zeffirelli again highlights the theme of intrigue and surveillance by moving lines from the closet scene a little later in the narrative. The scene in which Claudius presents the letters that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will carry to England cuts to a created farewell scene in which Gertrude scampers down Elsinore's steps to see Hamlet off. With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern watching in the background, Hamlet tells Gertrude of the

letters and his suspicion of his schoolmates. These lines often get lost or deleted in the more substantial events of the closet scene, but by repositioning them to a scene of their own, Zeffirelli draws attention to the change in Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude that is characterized by confiding his suspicions of Claudius to her. Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern observe Hamlet's farewell, it is the Prince's powers of surveillance that prove successful, reinforcing the theme of information gathering via spying. While Foucault (Discipline 195-228) and Greenblatt (Shakespearean 21-65) are concerned with the power that a government has because of an ever-present threat of surveillance, John Michael Archer points out that in the English Renaissance culture of courtly observation, the disciplinary power of surveillance and the gathering of intelligence were bound together (5-6).[5] As Hapgood points out, because of Hamlet's extensive eavesdropping as portrayed by Zeffirelli, he is never surprised by the actions of others, and his awareness lays down a clear path of logic for his actions (88).

Zeffirelli also portrays Ophelia's growing madness as an opportunity to demonstrate visually the overwhelming surveillance that the film features. By means of reaction shots and eyeline matches, Zeffirelli shows Gertrude watching from an upper window as Ophelia lurks about madly. But instead

[5] Related to the theory of power and surveillance is the concept that the capability to observe the source of power, i.e. the monarch, creates more controlling power, which is discussed by Leonard Tennenhouse, "Playing and Power." Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama. Ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass. New York: Routledge, 1991 and Ann Jennalie Cook. The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London 1576-1642. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981.

of singing bawdy songs to the Queen, as it is written in the play, Zeffirelli shows Ophelia stumbling up to a royal guard and touching his face, singing, and then playing vulgarly with the end of his belt. Meanwhile, Gertrude maintains her surveillance and distance until the young woman confronts her directly. Even as Horatio is instructed to keep a watch on Ophelia, the scene reveals that she is being watched by numerous pairs of eyes, all transfixed on the madness they see before them. As Ophelia walks toward the camera, which pans upward, a panopticon of sorts dominates the frame, revealing the scope of possible surveillance (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2 – All watch Ophelia's madness

In a feminist reading of this film, Gulsen Syin Teker argues a further application of the surveillance theme: that Ophelia's madness is brought about by the constant surveillance and her inability to break free from the

patriarchal system under which she is objectified. Teker points out that Zeffirelli constructs the Danish court in which "spying, eavesdropping, whispering, and voyeurism are commonplace, and people live in fear, restlessness, and suspicion" (116). While Claudius and Hamlet seem to feed off of this atmosphere, Ophelia becomes increasingly unsettled as those around her observe her more closely.

As extensive as the surveillance is in this film, Zeffirelli deletes the external political motivation created by Shakespeare in the form of the potential threat of Norway, led by Fortinbras. John McCombe points out that the spying is confined within the walls of Elsinore, with even Reynaldo's surveillance of Laertes deleted. This expansion of internal spying and deletion of threats outside the walls creates more of a family melodrama than political intrigue that the play projects by including "a more general atmosphere of espionage" (125), and this enclosed atmosphere of surveillance provides Hamlet's sense of imprisonment from which Claudius will not allow him to escape until he plots a way to contain him ultimately. The threat to the Danish throne, however, is not totally eliminated. As the spying between Claudius and Hamlet escalates, each attempts to stay one step ahead of the other in an attempt to control the intelligence and thereby maintain a sense of power. By casting Mel Gibson in the title role, Zeffirelli encourages audiences to reject any residual association of Olivier's Hamlet "who could not make up his mind" with his new action hero Prince who waits only for the right opportunity to bring justice to Elsinore.

Hamlet as Action Hero

When Zeffirelli saw Mel Gibson's near-suicide scene in Lethal Weapon, he perceived a parallel to Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy and determined to have him play the title role in his newest Shakespeare project (Hapgood 83).[6] In addition to Gibson's box-office drawing power, which ensured that Zeffirelli would be able to get his project financed, his characterization as an action hero provided Zeffirelli the opportunity to present a Hamlet far removed from Olivier's representation. As Harry Keyishian points out, "in action movies . . . the social institutions charged with providing justice either don't exist, fail to function or have become corrupt" (77). In this respect Hamlet lends itself well to Zeffirelli's recreation of the play as an action movie, as the Prince threatens Claudius's corrupt government with his apparent madness as well as his active counter-surveillance.

Although Edward Quinn claims that "Hamlet's intellectual arrogance, quick-witted verbal play, not to mention tortured self examination, are quite beyond [Gibson's] register" (2), he adds "an air of manic desperation . . . from which his Hamlet benefits" (Pilkington 174). As the action hero, Gibson's trademark characterization fulfills Zeffirelli's intention. Rothwell explains Hamlet's more active portrayal as having a "strong masculine presence" by being "skilled with swords, wrestling, and horses as with a fast

[6] Neil Taylor expands the anecdote in a quotation from Alasdair Brown's Hamlet (London 1990, p. 9), in which Zeffirelli recounted, "There was a scene in which there's a kind of 'to be or not to be' speech. Mel Gibson is sitting there with a gun in his mouth but he can't pull the trigger. When I saw that I said, 'This is Hamlet! This boy is Hamlet!'"

quip, always with sprezzatura, or nonchalance, no matter how daunting the challenge," in keeping with the dictates of a courtly man laid out by Castiglione, and therefore, not contradictory to Shakespearian intention (139).[7] The complexities of the character of Hamlet, according to Zeffirelli, make him the invention of the "modern man" (Tibbetts 139), and his casting of the "wildly popular" Gibson in the role also served his intention to "restore Shakespeare's Hamlet to the masses" (Rothwell 139), much as he had done in the 1960s with The Taming of the Shrew (1967) that starred Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, and Romeo and Juliet (1968) with Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey. And indeed, this Shakespeare adaptation featuring the handsome faces of Gibson and Close did make Hamlet a success, both in the box office, grossing nearly $21 million, and in the classroom where it replaced Olivier's film as an audio/visual teaching tool.

Zeffirelli's recreation of Hamlet as a twentieth-century action hero full of complexity draws attention to Hamlet's overwhelming desire for movement after Horatio informs him of the appearance of the ghost. Finding Hamlet pacing along the battlements, Horatio greets his friend. As they speak, Hamlet's eyes reveal his discontent with standing still, his glance darting back and forth, not in a maniacal manner, but as if he is full of pent-up energy. The scene continues inside the tower, and as Horatio and the guards reveal what they have seen of the ghost, Hamlet stands still, unblinking. He muses on the appearance,

[7] Castiglione wrote a conduct manual for courtly behavior entitled, The Courtier, with which Shakespeare's audiences were aware, even if not familiar.

My father's spirit . . . All is not well,

I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!

Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,

Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes. (1.3.254-7)

But restless fidgeting, darting eye movement, and short, breathless phrasing in his musings emphasize the active nature of the man who longs to act immediately but must wait until the proper time.

Hamlet's meeting with the ghost ends in another display of action as, finding himself once again alone, he overhears the revelry in the hall below. Looking down through the vent he watches his mother and uncle playfully caressing one another as he exclaims,

O most pernicious woman!

O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!

My tables—meet it is I set it down

That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain! . . .

So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word. (1.5.105-110)

Gibson uses the motions of his broadsword to emphasize his lines, much in the manner of Richardson's Hamlet, while he etches something into the stone. But contrary to Williamson's more conservative action, using a dagger to etch on the wall of a claustrophobic catacomb, Gibson's actions are wild and sweeping, and he uses the sword to score the large stones of the promontory, concluding his passionate outburst in an all-out assault on the stones, sparks flying.

Hamlet displays his more active nature in his encounter with Polonius as well. Not content with expressing his disdain for the older man, this Hamlet climbs into a loft with his books, stating the obvious, that he's reading "words." Perched above Polonius, Hamlet maintains his position by further action in pushing Polonius away forcibly, giving the ladder a shove with his foot. And when Polonius sets Ophelia up to discover Hamlet's madness, the Prince reacts very physically by pushing Ophelia into a wall before running up a flight of stairs and throwing a necklace down at her.

By opening up this play to the wide expanses of sweeping landscapes and clear blue skies, Zeffirelli also presents a Hamlet who is not shackled in the prison of Elsinore with no options before him. Rather, this Hamlet "believe[s] he has more options, avenues of awareness, and modes of attack" (Crowl Shakespeare 56). Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy is set in the royal crypt, and Gibson delivers his lines in a philosophical tone while browsing over the various remains. The scene cuts to a verdant green landscape view of Elsinore, an overhead long shot that shows Hamlet galloping along a pebbled beach, an accomplished horseman in Renaissance fashion. Then Zeffirelli cuts to Hamlet resting in the wind-blown grasses, revealing the contemplative nature within him. While Hamlet reclines on the grassy slope with his sword protruding from the ground beside him, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive. While he may have escaped from the confines of Elsinore, the watchfulness of courtly

surveillance has followed him. He takes them to a cottage where they lunch outdoors while Hamlet tries to determine the reason for their arrival. When they refuse to answer him directly, Hamlet again reacts physically by kicking the stool out from under Rosencrantz.

Zeffirelli also gives his Hamlet a more active role in the arrival of the players to Elsinore. In a pageant-like entrance Hamlet, dressed in some of the players' props including a motley cloak, rides his horse in front of the players' caravan, blowing on a ram's horn. The scene is full of life and festivity, accompanied by the sound of flutes being played in merriment. Gibson's portrayal of Hamlet provides a convincing change of attitude from the sullen Prince prior to his recreation outside the walls of Elsinore, but when Hamlet sees Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go directly from him to Claudius, the Prince reverts to his earlier trenchant behavior. With eyes darting, Hamlet delivers part of the "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I" soliloquy, deleting the self-accusation of deception, beginning the essence of the speech about halfway through the soliloquy:

> . . . Am I a coward?
>
> . . . .
>
> …'swounds…it cannot be
>
> But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall
>
> To make oppression bitter, or ere this
>
> I should 'a' fatted all the region kites

With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

(2.2.571, 576-581)

The change in demeanor is apparent as Hamlet realizes he has been lulled into a sense of well-being, and Zeffirelli adds "O, vengeance!" at the end of the speech to emphasize Hamlet's anger and determination to bring Claudius to justice. In contrast to both Olivier and Richardson, Zeffirelli's Hamlet punctuates his soliloquy by expressing an energy that must find release by stomping up wooden stairs and throwing his jacket against a pillar. He calms down as he reflects on the charge he was given, and as the soundtrack adds the bustle of the players outside, an eyeline match reveals that the players have caught his attention. With mouth gaping, Gibson's eyes demonstrate the epiphany that has come upon Hamlet as he schemes to have the players uncover Claudius's guilt. The soundtrack accentuates this revelation in muted brass that seems to say, "ah ha!"

Noticeably absent in Zeffirelli's Hamlet is the metatheatrical element of Hamlet as the director. Whereas Olivier opened himself up to psychoanalytic criticism by directing and starring in his production that applied Jones's Freudian reading of the play, Zeffirelli displays his creation of Hamlet as a man of action, not sitting around telling others how to act, but being in the center of the action himself, which in the scene of the internal play is the diegetic world of the spectators. Rather than brooding and thoughtful as Olivier's and Richardson's Hamlet, Zeffirelli transforms

Shakespeare's melancholy prince into a man of pent-up emotion that cannot be contained. This man of action cannot remain still while the play is being performed. From the moment that he sits, having embarrassed Ophelia, Hamlet fidgets, his eyes quickly moving back and forth from the play to Claudius and Gertrude. The editing adds to the impatient feel of the scene with numerous cuts between close ups of Hamlet's face and eyeline matches.

Unable to contain himself, Hamlet leaves Ophelia and perches behind Gertrude and Claudius. When the player king is poisoned, Claudius rises with his hand on his ear, and as if in a trance, walks toward the stage. Hamlet leaps off of the royal dais and climbs over the other spectators, keeping his eyes fixed on Claudius (Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3 – Hamlet actively watching Claudius's reaction

When Claudius calls for a light and confusion breaks out, Hamlet shouts, "What, frightened with false fire? Why, let the strooken deer go weep!" (3.2.266,271), before laughing harshly and leaping onto the players' stage and singing and dancing with them. Then, leaping off of the stage holding a drum, Hamlet vaults from bench to bench to affirm his observations with Horatio before returning to Ophelia to bid her one last time to go to a nunnery. His final farewell to her recalls Gibson's characterization of the manic Martin Riggs in Lethal Weapon 2 in which, while surrounded by gun-carrying villains, he looks at a bad guy and says in Three Stooges imitation, "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, hey moe!" before shooting up the exotic fish tank in the South African Embassy. By using the same tone of voice and demeanor, Hamlet's flippancy invites the audience to associate Hamlet's madness with that of Riggs as Gibson shifts effortlessly between a serious demeanor and his lighthearted, "Farewell." (Figure 3.4).

Gibson again recalls his Lethal Weapon character when Claudius is having the castle searched for Polonius's body, Hamlet enters the scene with a whistle, jumping up onto a table and kicking rolls of parchment out of his way. While verbally jousting with Claudius, Hamlet dons Polonius's cap, visually recalling Rigg's style of madness in actions such as jumping off of a tall building with a man attempting suicide in the initial film that earned Gibson the part of the Prince who is traditionally characterized as melancholy.



Figure 3.4 – Hamlet's lethal farewell

Zeffirelli once more portrays Hamlet as an action hero in the blocking of a scene in which Hamlet exchanges Claudius's letters with the forgeries he has created. With bold brass music in the background, Hamlet slips into the cabin in which the two schoolmates sleep and in the style of Hollywood action films, he is able to find the letters in a bag on which one of the men sleeps without disturbing the sleeper. Verifying the contents, he replaces the letters with his own, which he pulls out from the waistband of his trousers. Having the replacement letters prepared in advance follows a twentieth-century Hollywood, rather than English Renaissance, type of stage business in two aspects. Not only does Hamlet as the action hero remain one step ahead of the villain in Hollywood tradition, but by being prepared, the pace of the action remains constant.

Gibson, known for his outrageous puns in film promotion interviews during the 1990s, demonstrates his trademark zany behavior in the cemetery when Hamlet returns to Denmark. After arriving on a galloping horse and trading wittiness with the gravedigger, Hamlet examines Yorick's skull. But rather than the arm's length iconic address used by Olivier, Zeffirelli's blocking has Gibson set the skull on the ground and lie down next to it in order to talk to the long-gone jester in an intimate two-shot (Figure 3.5).



Figure 3.5 – Alas, poor Yorick!

The boyish charm Gibson exudes in these moments is part of what endears him to female audiences, while the action-hero approach makes him attractive to male viewers. A virile Hamlet duels with Laertes in the final scene, with Zeffirelli using broadswords instead of Shakespeare's rapiers,

the substitution demonstrating an increased sense of manliness,[8] even while they provide Gibson with an opportunity to play up his characteristic buffoonery in a sequence in which he pretends he cannot lift his sword, and then winks at Gertrude. The reaction shot reveals her amusement at his antics. A few moments later Hamlet again seizes the opportunity to play the clown when Laertes knocks him off of the dueling floor. He prances around the perimeter of the floor to the uproarious laughter of the courtiers in attendance and the ladylike twitters of Gertrude. His antics reach a climax as he sneezes in Osric's face before resuming the duel of which he has made a mockery.

Gibson also projects action in his death sequence. By staggering about and contorting his face to express the agony of being poisoned, it appears that Hamlet is loath to relinquish the action hero role that Zeffirelli created for him. But even action heroes sometimes succumb to dastardly plots, and as Hamlet has failed to anticipate Claudius's final action, at last he relinquishes control of his story to Horatio, his faithful sidekick.

The zany action hero Hamlet in the form of Gibson helped Zeffirelli to popularize his adaptation and this casting choice transformed the character of Hamlet from an antique melancholy Prince to a contemporary 1990's man of action with whom audiences were willing to identify. And as action hero, Hamlet's unpredictability threatens Claudius's government and makes him a character to be watched carefully, both by the corrupt government he seeks

[8] Rothwell characterizes the replacement of epées with broadswords as "Zeffirelli's conception of a macho Hamlet, equipped to survive in the world of Rambo and the Evil Empire" (139).

to expose, and by audiences drawn by Gibson's persona. Like many action hero types, Gibson was also a major sex symbol at the time and his status as such makes him an even more sympathetic character even while he is paired with another highly-sexualized actor in the role of Gertrude, Glenn Close.

Gertrude's Particular Fault

Gertrude features much more prominently in Zeffirelli's adaptation than in either of the previous two major English-language films. The credits forecast the shift in emphasis by placing Gibson's and Close's names prior to the film title, trumpeting them as the stars of the feature. Furthermore, as Samuel Crowl points out, the first close up in the film is of Gertrude, and she is Zeffirelli's diva in this adaptation, "the golden girl at the center of a drab masculine world" (Shakespeare 51). With Glenn Close cast as Hamlet's mother comes the sexual identity associated with the actor.

Having starred in films such as Fatal Attraction and Dangerous Liaisons, even the added gray hair at her temples does not mask her sex-symbol status. James Simmons comments that

> Glenn Close as Gertrude is clearly the most overtly sexual of any actress who formerly played the role, and her portrayal elevates her character to a whole new level of complexity. While Herlie's Gertrude was sexually suggestive, she never became the sexual predator that Close does. (116)

Lupton and Reinhard agree that Close's representation of Gertrude "depends on the cinematic unconscious, the intertextual Other constituted by the relation between the received code of genres and narratives on the one hand and the reflected light of the movie star on the other" (84). Indeed, there is no escaping the dominant sexuality that oozes from Close's characterization of Hamlet's queen, which contrasts greatly with Parfitt's Gertrude in Richardson's film who seems more at the mercy of Claudius's sensuality rather than using her own sexuality to wield power.

Feminist critic Janet Adelman argues that this centering of the mother echoes the Shakespearian signal of tragedy. Whereas the histories featured strong male characters, and mothers were conspicuously absent in the comedies, the tragedies are marked by the intrusion of female sexuality (14), and Zeffirelli's projection of Gertrude in this film demonstrates a transgressive sexuality as seen through Hamlet's eyes, rather than a general sense of malaise as Richardson portrays. As opposed to both Olivier's and Richardson's films, Gertrude is often the center of both the male and female gaze throughout Zeffirelli's adaptation (Crowl Shakespeare 53), and as such, viewers perceive her as objectified through the gaze of others.[9]

[9] Olivier focused on Hamlet's thoughts, retaining soliloquies as voice-overs at the expense of action while Richardson emphasized Hamlet's emotional instability in light of the cognitive dissonance he experienced in his perception of a world turned upside-down. Zeffirelli, on the other hand, consciously focuses on the visual banquet he creates, in part by casting Glenn Close as Gertrude. Quinn and Crowl both note that Close dominates the many scenes that she is in and Quinn goes as far as to suggest that Zeffirelli deleted scenes in which he couldn't figure out a way to include Close (2A).

Hamlet's conflict with Claudius causes him to watch Gertrude carefully, and his perception of Gertrude's sexual nature is revealed when she gleefully skips down the castle steps to join her new husband on a hunt. As Hamlet peers from an upstairs window he comments:

> Fie on't, ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. That is should come to this!
> But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two.
> So excellent a king, that was to this
> Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
> That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
> Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
> Must I remember? Why, she [w]ould hang on him
> As if increase of appetite had grown
> By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—
> Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman!
>
> (1.2.135-56)

His tone moves from musing to accusatory, with the final lines being forced, vehemently, from his lips. The sequence shifts from Hamlet watching Gertrude through an upper window to her joyful approach to Claudius, who is already mounted on his horse. She reaches up to kiss him to the cheers of surrounding courtiers before mounting her own steed. Philip Weller observes that Close's Gertrude is "girlish, impulsive, and extremely

attractive," marked by the numerous scenes in which she runs (122), in contrast to Parfitt's Gertrude who seems more infected with the corruption of Elsinore than invigorated by new love.[10] The sequence ends with Hamlet shutting the windows to the scene below him as the hunting party rides off amid the sound of hunting horns. Implicit in this scene is the accusation that Hamlet holds against his mother: that she places her own sensuality and youthfulness above the respect he believes she owes to the memory of his father. The above soliloquy, when combined with the visual portrayal of Gertrude's bright clothing and joyful action in contrast with Hamlet's gloomy state of mourning, accentuates the problem with Hamlet that Zeffirelli emphasizes: Hamlet is appalled and embarrassed at his mother's flaunted sexuality. Rather than being thrilled with watching his mother's happiness, as the court is, he repeatedly turns away in disgust, refusing to participate in their scopophilic enjoyment. The sexuality that Zeffirelli exploits is identified from Shakespeare's text by Carolyn Heilbrun as an excessive passion that "drives Gertrude to an incestuous marriage, appals [sic] her son, and keeps him from the throne" (202), which is, in effect, the cause of the tragedy. His feelings, however, pale in comparison to Hamlet's revulsion as portrayed in Richardson's film, which suggests that the passions of Gertrude and

[10] Ironically, the girlish Close is nine years older than her onscreen son, Gibson, whereas in Olivier's film, he was older than Eileen Herlie by thirteen years and Richardson's Gertrude (Judy Parfitt) was only three years older than Nicol Williamson. The more believable, although not totally realistic, distance between the real ages of the actors allows Zeffirelli to portray Gertrude as a youthful mother, while Olivier and Richardson needed to make their young mothers appear older than they were.

Claudius have infected Hamlet's entire claustrophobic world with their excessiveness.

Hamlet reveals his reaction to Gertrude and Claudius again when he awaits the ghost's appearance. The scene begins with Hamlet broodingly watching the court revelries from a balcony. Gertrude and Claudius are both dressed opulently in red, and they kiss merrily and toast their courtiers as Hamlet spies on them from a superior position, both logistically and morally. He rises even further above their frivolity to mount up to the battlements where he resumes his surveillance through a roof vent, pointedly saying:

> So, oft it chances in particular men,
>
> That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
>
> . . . .
>
> [Their] virtues else, be they as pure as grace,
>
> . . . .
>
> Shall in the general censure take corruption
>
> From that particular fault… (1.4.23-36)

In this truncated speech, although Zeffirelli maintains "men" from the play, Hamlet pointedly criticizes his mother, whose fault, in his opinion, is sensuality, which she continues to display as he watches. Indeed, Heilbrun connected these lines to Gertrude three decades before Close's sexualized portrayal of the queen (201).

Although Hamlet occasionally throws out barbs to indicate his problem with Gertrude, in the closet scene he reveals to her the extent to which her behavior has galled him. His physical attack combined with his venomous words finally get Gertrude's attention and force her to see herself as Hamlet sees her as she intones:

> O Hamlet, speak no more!
> Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
> And there I see such black and grained spots
> As will not leave their tinct. (3.4.88-91)

By realizing her fault she is able to repent and become the mother that Hamlet thinks she should be, a royal figure able to temper her sexual desires. Upon Gertrude's enlightenment the ghost of her dead husband intervenes to curtail Hamlet's own excessive emotion, reminding Hamlet



Figure 3.6 – Gertrude's sexuality

that his conflict is with Claudius and admonishing Hamlet to restore the relationship mother and son enjoyed prior to her marriage to Claudius. The costuming of Close also assists in portraying the sexuality of Gertrude. Immediately following the scene of King Hamlet's burial, Gertrude appears in dresses that accentuate her sexuality (Figure 3.6). After the closet scene, however, there is a noticeable change in her costuming; Gertrude transforms into a more matronly queen, albeit still beautiful. She exchanges the clingy gowns of Claudius's trophy wife for layers of heavy fabric that reflect the shield that Hamlet wishes her to use to rebuff her husband's sexual advances (Figure 3.7).



Figure 3.7 – Gertrude's new conservative attire

Hamlet's return from England marks another change in Gertrude's costume. Appropriately, Gertrude is veiled during Ophelia's funeral scene, but she

also appears with a veil on her head in the duel scene, and she dies in that conservative attire indicating that her sexuality is tempered at last.

Ironically, the excess passion that characterizes Gertrude throughout most of the film is what she warns Hamlet about when she thinks that he mourns too deeply for his father. While Gertrude expresses to Hamlet that he should temper his emotions, her hasty marriage suggests that she cannot control her own passions. Because Zeffirelli's Hamlet is crafted as a sympathetic character, we do not see Gibson's passion as excessive, as Renaissance audiences probably did,[11] but this film aptly demonstrates the excesses of Gertrude in terms that were evident to twentieth-century audiences. Complicating the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude are the actors' personae as sex symbols who project sexuality merely by their appearance on screen. Zeffirelli, however, further capitalizes on the identification of Gibson and Close as prominent screen stars by removing the sexual implication between Hamlet and the naïve Ophelia. In contrast to Richardson's sexy Ophelia (Marianne Faithfull), Carter portrays her as barely more than a child, unable to grasp the sexual context that surrounds her, which further accentuates the adult, sexually-charged atmosphere of the court.

[11] Harold Jenkins's textual introduction to the Arden edition of Hamlet states that Hamlet's actions echo the English Renaissance description of melancholia (106-08). Humoral theory, which was still popularly believed, dictated that such maladies were caused by excesses of certain bodily fluids, melancholia being caused by excess bile. The text further leads audiences to accept that Hamlet behaves excessively, with both Gertrude and Claudius telling Hamlet to throw off his melancholy behavior.

Legacy of the Oedipus Complex

Some critics such as Douglas Brode interpret Zeffirelli's Hamlet as a more perfect illustration of Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex than Olivier's. Brode argues that the Prince's violence toward everyone except Claudius proves his association with the uncle who has realized his deepest desires (136). My cursory reaction was similar, but upon closer viewing I think that what seems to be Zeffirelli's Freudian reading of Hamlet should be credited to the iconic nature of Olivier's 1948 film. By creating a Hamlet that is so far removed from Olivier's, Zeffirelli's Prince "is not a product of unprovoked sexual fantasies" (Simmons 16),[12] nor is he paralyzed by his neurosis, but he struggles with an issue of morality.[13]

One indication of Zeffirelli's attempt to erase the Oedipal connections in Hamlet that had been made in previous films is the lack of metatheatrical connection between Hamlet and the ghost of his father. Both Olivier and Richardson used the voices of their Hamlets, distorted, in order to create that of the ghost. Zeffirelli chose to cast a recognizable Shakespearian actor, Paul Scofield, as the ghost, making his image visible to Horatio and the guards, but with a definite distinction from the young Hamlet. This casting creates a disassociation between the desires of Hamlet to replace

[12] Edward Quinn also agrees that Zeffirelli avoids the Freudian reading, but on a different premise. He argues that with Gibson and Close in the roles "there's nothing Oedipal in their straightforward sexuality" (1).

[13] Robert Hapgood offers another interpretation of the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude as portrayed by Zeffirelli. Pointing out the scene from early in the film in which Hamlet kneels and places his head against Gertrude's abdomen, he argues that Zeffirelli's Hamlet is suffering from separation anxiety—that he has not yet moved away from the protecting presence of the womb. This, according to Hapgood, reflects Zeffirelli's own unresolved issues with losing his mother, and subsequent mother figures at a young age (90-91).

his father in his mother's life coming from a projection of himself as the ghost. And rather than doubting this ghost, Zeffirelli compels his audience to believe this nearly-tangible ghost that sheds a heartfelt tear before it disappears.

Zeffirelli further alters the Oedipal relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude that was portrayed in earlier films by emphasizing Hamlet's disgust with his mother's blatant sexuality. As opposed to Richardson's Hamlet who noticeably suffers from the corrupt environment of Elsinore, and neuroticism that presumably stems from repressed sexuality, Gibson's entrance to the closet scene is with sword swinging in bravado as Hamlet proceeds to insult Gertrude. When she slaps him for his insolence, he reacts quite violently by roaring like a beast before backing her onto the bed at sword point.

After killing Polonius, Hamlet resumes his verbal assaults. They reach an apex when Hamlet forces Gertrude onto the bed and thrusts violently, as if raping her, accenting his verbal attack. Gibson claims that he is bothered by Freud but admits that the scene contains actions that are "more than motherly" (Jensen 2). Gertrude's actions, however, are not those that remain in viewers' minds after the credits roll, but rather one recalls the image of Hamlet thrusting violently into his mother's prone body in his anger and frustration.

Although one can read this scene as a blatant Oedipal portrayal, Hamlet's actions complicate the sexuality by an overt display of violence. The identification of Gibson and Close as sex symbols obscures the

perception of Hamlet's assault on Gertrude as one of rape, an act of violence rather than a result of sexual desire. But Hamlet is not dealing with repressed desire; he is physically punishing his mother for her sexuality. Lupton and Reinhard also read Hamlet's attitude toward his mother as one of loathing, rather than desire.

> Zeffirelli's production. . . places the mother as the Other of demand: at once overanxious and oversexed, Gertrude's hungry kisses and caresses are resisted with barely concealed disgust by her son. . .Gibson's Hamlet appears viscerally repulsed by his mother's sexuality. (83)

Indeed, Zeffirelli leads audiences to see her filtered through Hamlet's sensibilities rather than objectively. Zeffirelli's positioning of Hamlet, often watching from above, reinforces the moral superiority from which he scrutinizes his mother as well as the other characters. Close represents a Gertrude "physically threatened by Hamlet," who behaves violently as he is "suspended between the role of accuser. . . and the genuine repugnance that he feels for Gertrude's 'sullied flesh'" (McCombe 131). Passion does fuel Hamlet's attack on his mother, but it is a moral indignation, not a sexual desire that spurs him to punish Gertrude physically by graphically illustrating the horror of what he perceives as her incest with Claudius.

The physical assault ends with a kiss, but again, there is no suggestion of dormant sexual desire in the action, rather, Gertrude desperately kisses Hamlet's mouth in an effort to shut him up in the only way she knows. The

kiss ends when Hamlet sees his father's ghost approaching from a hallway, and the ghost reminds Hamlet that his purpose is to avenge his father's death. In the visual context that Zeffirelli creates by having Hamlet punish Gertrude, the visitation also serves to compel Hamlet to remember the instructions to "[t]aint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive/ Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven . . ." (1.5.85-6). Upon the ghost's exit Hamlet changes his tactic by urging Gertrude to put off Claudius's overtures. Kissing her on the top of her head, Hamlet exits with Polonius's body, leaving his mother with the miniature of King Hamlet, metaphorically reuniting his parents while the soundtrack adds to the poignancy of the moment with a soft accompaniment of slow, mellow strings as Gertrude fixes her eyes on the portrait in careful consideration until her reverie is interrupted by Claudius looking for Hamlet.

The added scene of Hamlet's departure from Elsinore again minimizes any sexual attraction he has to his mother. Their parting kiss is slightly prolonged, but only because Gertrude tries to hold onto Hamlet, even as he pulls away from her. Although she has tried to mask her outward signs of sexuality, her sensual nature still shows through her actions. But in the final scene, Gertrude is the picture of decorum, maintaining a separation from Claudius with the royal thrones set apart as opposed to the initial court scene in which Gertrude and Claudius maintained physical contact even while seated. And Hamlet's final parting from his mother concludes with him kissing her hand, which reinforces the idea that the problem between

Hamlet and Gertrude in Zeffirelli's film is not Oedipal, but rather that he is disgusted with her extreme sensuality. They are reconciled in the end, however, and are able to resume a relationship in which the son acts like a son, not her otherwise absent conscience or her lover.

Additionally, the suggestion of incest, or transference of Oedipal desires to a sibling, is also not recognizable in Zeffirelli's film. The exchange between Laertes and Ophelia contains none of the sexual tension that Richardson portrayed in his film. In fact, Laertes instructs Ophelia in a protective, big brother fashion, while Ophelia fiddles with an unfinished tapestry. Metaphorically, she is the unfinished project with which she plays—merely a young girl who is unready for a relationship with the considerably older Prince. But as she fingers the tapestry, Ophelia peers from under half-closed lids in a coy manner, suggesting that she knows a little more about the compromise of virtue that Laertes speaks of than he realizes. Laertes's departure from Ophelia includes a kiss on her lips, but not prolonged. In the funeral scene Zeffirelli even scales back the excess emotion indicated in Shakespeare's First Folio stage direction by not having Laertes leap into the grave, but rather, he kneels beside Ophelia's body, and holding her, plants a last kiss on her jawline. Zeffirelli's siblings seem to be just that—siblings who love one another, without any suggestion of a sexualized relationship.

Conclusion

Zeffirelli's Hamlet is a product of Hollywood as well as an amalgam of many other factors. This production is unashamedly an attempt to restore Hamlet to a popular audience. Although audiences should not see this film as a "dumbed-down" version, Zeffirelli has created a visual format that arranges the text in order to maintain a narrative flow for audiences accustomed to the pace of an action film. Furthermore, he provides visual answers to age-old questions that if not definitive, at least prevent confusion by viewers not familiar with Hamlet scholarship. One does not, for example, need to question Hamlet's problem—it is revealed in the very first scene in an exchange of looks between Gertrude, Claudius and Hamlet. As Valerie Traub points out, "Gertrude's adultery and incest—the uncontrollability, in short, of her sexuality—are, in Hamlet's mind, projected outward" (29). Zeffirelli accentuates the problem of this sexuality by demonstrating Gertrude's sexuality through her son's eyes with point-of-view shots.[14] Whether Hamlet's conflict with Claudius lead him to observe his mother's sexuality or his disgust with Gertrude's sexuality causes him to suspect Claudius, Hamlet's surveillance of Gertrude is directly linked to his objection to the status quo of Elsinore. Hamlet, however, is not the only one watching, and the camera focus draws attention to Gertrude's sexuality as

[14] The transgressive nature of Gertrude's sexuality is not necessarily an a priori attitude in English Renaissance drama. John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi contains a widow who remarries, and although her brothers perceive her sexuality as transgressive, Duchess is very much a sympathetic character and Webster projects her love for Antionio as pure.

attractively transgressive, placing the audience in the same position of moral superiority as Hamlet even as it thrills at Gertrude's radiance.

The casting of Mel Gibson and Glenn Close provides a rich opportunity to engage in a character study that reveals shifting fashions both in the realm of literary criticism and theory and in the popular tastes of cinema audiences. Having to cut the script drastically in order to maintain the contracted length of the film of approximately two hours,[15] Zeffirelli's adaptation rearranges lines and even complete scenes in a manner that weaves the essential elements of Shakespeare's drama together in a narrative fashion that maintains a consistent pace and "fit[s] the requirements of a moving picture" (Rothwell 140, emphasis in original). Zeffirelli's and Dyson Lovell's edited script along with their addition of colorfully rich establishing shots help to create a sense of activity that makes this film aesthetically pleasing as well as engaging, contributing to the "quick pacing" that "appeal[s] to contemporary sensibilities" (Sloboda 146).

Notably absent is the subplot of Fortinbras, which, according to Hapgood, shifts the focus away from the political elements Shakespeare intended, making the narrative a family tragedy (87). But the courtly surveillance provides an adequate political element that maintains a sense of complex conflict by which to convey Renaissance intrigue, even without the threat of outside forces. All of these alterations work together successfully to achieve Zeffirelli's goal, to make this cultural icon "available

[15] The film with credits runs a total of 135 minutes.

to as many people as possible. . . in the one medium that can do that, the motion picture" (Tibbetts 138-39).

The many cuts from the play text simplify the plot, but more important than the cuts are what Zeffirelli retained, and the silent additions he made by means of cinematography and choreography. He creates with Mel Gibson a Hamlet who is already an action hero to his audience, and capitalizes on the emotions that flicker in Gibson's blue eyes, even while fidgeting, ranting and raving. His creation of the sexualized Gertrude with Glenn Close again utilizes her screen persona as a femme fatale, and her wardrobe emphasizes her physical appeal by accentuating her sexuality until after she is violently castigated by her son. Furthermore, by the casting of highly sexualized actors in the roles of both mother and son, this film maintains a high level of sexual energy throughout. The Freudian theory of Hamlet's Oedipus complex, however, is deleted. The overt, pervasive sexuality that Gibson and Close bring to the film destroys the repressed nuance of sexual urges. Unlike Richardson's depiction of sexuality as an ugly disease that infects Elsinore, represented most explicitly by having royalty and dogs all feasting in the same bed while the court looks on, Zeffirelli's film demonstrates sexuality framed by beautiful landscapes and Gertrude's face glowing radiantly. Because of Zeffirelli's emphasis on the theme of surveillance, the camera often focuses on Close who is the picture of health and vitality in contrast to Richardson's Gertrude who dines with dogs in her

incestuous bed, and on Gibson as the picture of virility and athleticism as opposed to Richardson's neurotic Hamlet.

Although William Watson suggests that Zeffirelli's homosexuality is evident in the camera focus on Gibson,[16] my viewing experience supports Crowl's argument that the film privileges Gertrude, bringing her closer to the center of the film than she is in the play. If we read this film through the filter of Zeffirelli's biography, as Watson and Crowl suggest, the Oedipal conflict is complicated "by [Zeffirelli's] bastardy and homosexuality" which "destroy[s] the father" and "glorif[ies] the mother" (Shakespeare 57).[17] And Zeffirelli centers Gertrude throughout the film, with admiring men always around her. The notable example of her not being the center of character focus is in the play-within-the-play scene when Hamlet chooses "metal more attractive" (3.2.110), upon which point she appears uncomfortable with her marginalized status.

As Rothwell notes, "single-handedly Zeffirelli has probably done more than the entire educational establishment to keep Shakespeare's language alive in an age when images have eclipsed words" (142). This adaptation creatively mixes Zeffirelli's artistic conventions into an exciting film more

[16] I agree that Gibson projects a sex symbol persona, but I perceive that Watson's observations are procrustean rather than objective since he is arguing that Zeffirelli's hidden homosexuality is reflected in Hamlet. He claims that the scene in which Hamlet perches in a library loft features a camera focus on Gibson's crotch to satisfy a homosexual gaze. Having viewed the scene carefully, I argue that there is no crotch focus except in Watson's projection of Zeffirelli's homosexuality on the film. Furthermore, Zeffirelli's autobiography does not attempt to hide his sexual preference, as Watson claims (310-11), but is rather open about his sexual relationships.

[17] Further complicating a biographical reading of Zeffirelli's film is the fact that when he was young he slept with his mother in a single bed (Zeffirelli 7), which Hapgood reads as demonstrating "incestuous implications derive[d] authentically from his own life" (90).

accessible to younger audiences. His visual opulence is created by an amalgam of the real castle locations that include Blackness Castle in Scotland and Rochester Castle in Kent. This backdrop of authentic earth tone castle walls is accented by the use of rich colors and relieved by verdant landscapes. Furthermore, cinematographer David Watkins attempted to create a Renaissance "Old Master" portrait composition that utilizes the dramatic use of colors that echoes the spectacle associated with opera, Zeffirelli's other creative genre (Tibbetts 139).[18] Ennio Morricone's score is unobtrusive, adding only incidental accompaniment which does not emotionally sway audiences, unlike Walton's score did in Olivier's production. But the minimalist musical backdrop satisfies the popular expectation of creating bridges between scenes and occasionally punctuating action, unlike the almost nonexistent score of Richardson's film.

As a visually satisfying and accessible adaptation, although the textual deletions and scene rearrangements frustrate purists, this film is useful in the classroom. By replacing Olivier's Hamlet with this more recent film, high school teachers have contributed to the popularizing this adaptation and to Zeffirelli's palimpsestic overwriting of Olivier's film. As the character, Cher, argues the source of "to thine own self be true" in Clueless, while she may not know Hamlet like Heather, she does "remember Mel Gibson accurately," and therefore, is culturally literate (Boose and Burt 9), demonstrating not

[18] Cf. David Impastato, "Zeffirelli's Hamlet and the Baroque" Shakespeare on Film Newsletter 16:2 (1992) 1+ for a description of the use of light and color in the composition of this film's reproduction of period art.

only the source of her knowledge, but indicating a reference to Zeffirelli's film that youthful popular audiences recognize.

Chapter Four:

Branagh's Epic: Hamlet Across Time

Kenneth Branagh produced his epic-length Hamlet (1996) only six years after Zeffirelli's successful adaptation. One of the reasons why he made this film so shortly after another successful one may be answered by Zeffirelli's observation that, "In the heart of every actor, no matter how big or famous, there is this thorn, this stinging thing, that they wish to do Shakespeare. . . everybody wants to do Hamlet" (Tibbetts 138). Although much older actors have performed Hamlet, albeit often to stinging criticism, I think Branagh realized that at age thirty-six, it was time to immortalize this monumental role on film. In his effort to create a unique Hamlet, Branagh reverted to the entire Shakespeare script with the original claim that his film contains every word written by the Bard. Echoing the text of The Riverside Shakespeare,[1] and adding a few words of his own and some minor rearrangements, Branagh's major additions to his four-hour film lay in the visual elements, reinforced by Patrick Doyle's Oscar-winning musical score, that tend to resolve some of the most asked questions in Shakespeare

[1] G. Blakemore Evans's textual note explains that The Riverside Shakespeare text of Hamlet incorporates all scholarly authoritative early editions, with preeminence given to the First Folio and the Second Quarto (1186).

studies such as whether or not Hamlet and Ophelia were having a sexual relationship and what was the cause of Ophelia's madness. Unfortunately, however, the overwhelming length of the film deters many prospective members of Branagh's targeted populist audience, limiting spectatorship to students and Shakespeare enthusiasts.

According to Sloboda, Branagh attempted to create a Hamlet that denied reference to its cinematic forerunners (148), and in many ways, like a palimpsest, he erased the theories that previous directors used to interpret the play for popular audiences, but he also complicated the issue in his attempt to "authenticate himself as a Shakespearean" (Sloboda 149). In the arrival of the players, however, Branagh pays homage to the great Shakespearian actors of the past in the casting of John Gielgud and Judi Dench in a scene that illustrates the first player's recitation of the fall of Troy. But as Judith Buchanan points out, this casting of the old Shakespearians in non-speaking representations of characters from a lost era suggests the displacement of the older generation's Shakespearians by a new breed (186). This breed, according to Branagh's vision, includes character actors such as Robin Williams and Billy Crystal who help Branagh deflect some of Hamlet's humor while retaining all of Shakespeare's, as well as actors that serve as a bridge between the generations and nations such as American film greats Jack Lemmon and Charlton Heston and British acting icons Richard Attenborough and John Mills as the English Ambassador and Old Norway, respectively. This eclectic casting, however, received a mixed

reception by critics, who described the supporting cast by terms such as "motley" (Rosenberg), "gimmicky" (Rose), and "polyglot" (Maslin), while others such as Roger Ebert and Mick LaSalle applauded the casting of Crystal and Heston, in contrast to the performances of Williams and Lemmon. Lanier also sees Branagh's vision in the naming of his theatrical company, "Renaissance," as an indication that he desires to "return . . . Shakespearean theater to its once organic relationships to a popular audience" ("Art" 153 emphasis in original). Even though Branagh conceived this film "as a vehicle for mass entertainment" (Burnett 90), it grossed only one quarter of the estimated $18 million budget during its four-month United States box office run ("Box").

This chapter will address various ways in which Branagh contributes to the Hamlet tradition, both in unique interpretations and by utilizing Shakespearian scholarship. As a product of the 1990s, this film reflects the influence of Branagh's own time and includes visual clues by which audiences can access the director's own reading of Shakespeare's text. Branagh's adaptation suggests a relevance to his own cultural anxieties regarding his identity as a British Shakespearian actor while also being a working-class lad from anti-British Belfast. Using setting and costume as well as blocking techniques, Branagh identifies the problem with the Danish monarchy, both in the lapse of morality that was also highlighted by earlier films, and by reinterpreting Hamlet's fatal flaw. By utilizing Victorian England as the setting, these issues provide a critique of the status quo

monarchy and political climate that Branagh experienced during this decade. Furthermore, one of the major aspects of Branagh's restoration of the full text to performance is the influence of international politics, made more universal to a contemporary audience due to modern sense of globalization that was fully realized in the 1990s.

Secondly, this chapter will position this film within the context of ongoing Hamlet scholarship and criticism, specifically the influence on this film of the New Historicists, who attempted to restore historical context in the arena of literary criticism and theory. In addition to general scholarly rejection of Freud's suggestion that Hamlet suffered from an Oedipal crisis by demonstrating developments in psychoanalytic theory, Branagh also utilizes the scholarly approaches of the New Historicists that brought attention to cultural and political influences of Shakespeare's time.

Finally, this chapter will examine Branagh's visual interpretation of thematic ambiguities. As a Hamlet for popular 1990's audiences, Branagh answers some of the classroom questions regarding Shakespeare's text, providing flashbacks and special effects that are standard fare in Hollywood filmmaking, and leave little room for debates regarding questions that have arisen from literary studies, making this film more Branagh's Hamlet than merely a cinematic version of Shakespeare's play.

A Product of Time: Victorian and Twentieth Century

Although this film retains all of the Elizabethan language, the setting and costumes reveal it as a more modern adaptation. Using Blenheim Palace as a backdrop that signifies politicized family tradition, Branagh creates his Hamlet in the Victorian period, complete with decorated military uniforms and opulent gowns. Courtney Lehmann argues that Branagh's aim to "out English… the English" in the reproduction of their cultural icon creates a need to discover a point at which to repair his schizophrenia from his cultural identity that was split due being a proud Irishman, but with an English accent ("Kenneth" 6, 9, 10).[2]

Just as Shakespeare's Renaissance audiences understood that foreign and/or historical princes in his dramas could also represent the contemporary English political system, Branagh's historical Denmark in a Victorian English setting reflects a twentieth-century political situation, which is reinforced by the backdrop of Blenheim Palace, the Duke of Malborough's ancestral estate and Winston Churchill's childhood home. While Lehmann's argument regarding Branagh's cultural identity revolves around Branagh's Henry V, application of her premise to Hamlet reconciles the problem that Michael Anderegg and Douglas Lanier see in the implication of the last scene. The destruction of King Hamlet's statue does not signify "a triumph of popular community but the fall of paternal icons and the utopian potential

[2] Branagh's contextual identification as Irish includes his militant behavior in Belfast that led to his parents fleeing to England (Branagh Beginning 20). The Protestant/Catholic conflict that gave birth to the Irish campaign of terrorism that defined Northern Ireland for decades and that Branagh witnessed in his youth developed out of the Victorian period Branagh represents as falling to the proletariat in his Hamlet adaptation (Roth).

they signify" (Lanier "Art" 164, also qtd. in Anderegg Cinematic 133). If indeed, Branagh represents a "break in the cultural-political-patrilineal line," then the resulting "nostalgia [for class-coded order] seems entirely at odds with Branagh's populism" (Lanier "Art" 164). The Victorian setting, however, to apply Lehmann's argument, suggests that the fall of the Hamlet dynasty represents an Irish vision of the decline of the British Empire, by which he can reconcile his English acting persona with his Irish political views that resist the patriarchal control of the British throne.

Gertrude's demeanor provides essential clues that Branagh's adaptation is not merely Shakespeare's play transported to Blenheim Palace, but that Branagh visually altered the characters while maintaining the original text. One could argue that Gertrude reflects the Elizabethan example of a female monarch, which can be attributed to the work of the New Historicists. She, however, also suggests Queen Victoria in Branagh's Victorian setting—another period in which the monarchy was represented by a strong woman which, as film critic Todd McCarthy notes, is "well suited to the issues of shifting European borders and interrelated royalty," since industrialized Britain under the reign of Victoria expanded to include over 410 million people, more than twenty-five percent of the world's population and land area, in Africa, Asia and the West (Roth). But this film is also a product of the twentieth century as evidenced by the numerous cameos by Hollywood actors, and Julie Christie's Gertrude stands out as a strong woman in modern terms, not the sexualized character that she is in the films

of Olivier and Zeffirelli. Although she first appears as a woman in love in the initial court scene that Branagh transforms into a wedding, upon the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Christie presents Gertrude as firm and businesslike, gracious to the men, but also taking care of household matters with a secretary in the background.

While Gertrude exhibits overwhelming emotions in the closet scene, she does not become the blubbering weak-willed woman that Glenn Close portrays in Zeffirelli's film. Indeed, the only time she truly is disturbed by events around her is when Ophelia is mad. When she observes the young woman wrapped in a straightjacket banging herself into the walls, Gertrude's eyes roll back in her head as if she will faint. Her ineffective resolve returns when faced with the threat of Laertes's insurgency and she raises balled fists as if to fight the mob with hand-to-hand combat, momentarily believing she can conquer a band of rebels. Recognizing her insufficiency in the end, she retreats onto the royal dais with Claudius, but she asserts herself again by grasping Laertes's arm and holding him back when he threatens the King with a sword.

Gertrude stands up even to Claudius, however, toward the end of the film. The first example of her show of strength against her husband comes after she tells him and Laertes about Ophelia's death. Interrupting their plan to kill Hamlet, she blatantly refuses to accompany Claudius, contrary to Shakespeare's stage directions that indicate that Gertrude and Claudius exit the stage together when Claudius says, "Let's follow, Gertrude. . . Therefore,

let's follow" (4.7.191-94). At Ophelia's grave, when Claudius instructs her to "set some watch over [Hamlet]," Gertrude acknowledges her husband's order with a slight head tilt and eye movement, suggesting that she is peeved with Claudius (5.1.296). Branagh's Gertrude remains strong to the end, tossing her head when the King tries to stop her from drinking from the poisoned cup, and although this portrayal of a strong queen may be perceived as an accurate view of a Victorian woman of class, she is also quite modern, and as such, a character attractive to popular twentieth-century audiences. In the end, however, the status quo monarchy, even with its strong queen, becomes obsolete.

Branagh depicts the final replacement of the old Danish government, not in the typical final shot of Hamlet's body, but in the destruction of the monarchy's icon—the statue of King Hamlet. Lanier convincingly argues an ambiguous interpretation of the scene, which encapsulates, in his opinion, Branagh's major theme. Suggesting that Hamlet's defect is his "utopian ideal of the family" ("Art" 160), and that Fortinbras represents a "ruthless will to power" (163), the destruction of the statue symbolizes the fall of the dysfunctional imperial family by the forces of the populace. Following a long critical tradition about the structure of the play, Kenneth Rothwell observes the theme of family that pervades the film. He points out that the film focuses on three sons of wronged fathers, Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras (257). Branagh's goal was to visualize the cultural icon of Hamlet for common people, i.e. in a mass-market medium, and he does this by

Fortinbras's destruction of the ruling family. The newly-energized plebian force led by Fortinbras invades the isolated space of the privileged upper class and topples the iconic Hamlet. By destroying the icon of Hamlet, however, Branagh also minimizes the elevation of Shakespearian drama as well, since it traditionally belongs to the educated and often powerful classes.

The animation of the statue to create the ghostly visit adds another dimension to the final sequence of the film: Hamlet's statue destroyed violently to the sound of percussive music. The head of the statue falls in front of the engraved base, obliterating "HAMLET." And as Burnett points out, in the context of the 1990s, the fall of the bronze image parallels the collapse of the communist system. Paradoxically, Branagh uses this image to illustrate the "perils of theatrical, aristocratic, and royal authority" (94-95). In Branagh's own political reality, however, while the toppling of the empire may look like the demise of eastern block nations, as a Catholic lad from Belfast, it is most likely the reflection of Branagh's Irish wish to see the end of British control over the nation of his deepest identity.

Julie Sanders also relates Branagh's subtext to the twentieth century English monarchy, ignoring the Victorian implications of the setting. The public display of private lives of the royal family plagued the monarchy in 1990. Sanders points out that this public exposure of difficulties the crown wished to keep private contributes to the problem in Branagh's Elsinore, with the mirrored great hall exposing all events to public scrutiny (150). She

further connects Ophelia with Princess Diana since both endured seeing their private romances exposed in public, via the forced reading of love letters (153). As with the 1990's royal family's relationship with a modern, vocal public, these mirrored doors also serve to reflect the actions of the dysfunctional family back on itself as an opportunity for self-reflection and correction. Although Sanders sees the "overhearing" of royal conversations to signify the loss of private lives of public figures, she does not account for Hamlet shouting out his conversations in Branagh's film. While I agree with her that Branagh's perception of the decline of the English monarchy might be implied in the cultural context of the film, the theme of an old corrupt regime being replaced by a modern, functional government was already present in Hamlet as well as in other Shakespearian plays, such as King Lear. Produced before the death of Princess Diana amid rumors of a conspiracy in 1997 and the Belfast Agreement in 1998 and premiered in Ireland, Branagh uses a dramatic system of mirrors cloaked in Shakespearian drama and Victorian costume to reflect a failing, narcissistic monarchy, project a dream of peace for his homeland and as a vehicle by which to repair his divided identity.

System of Mirrors

Jan Kott saw the structural interpretations of Hamlet as a "system of mirrors" where characters have doubles, i.e. young Fortinbras and Laertes are both doubles to Hamlet (71), and Branagh transforms that structure into

a visual metaphor with which to convey meaning in this film. But the mirrors do not just reflect the structure of the play; they also serve as an opportunity for the court to watch itself closely. Shotgun rooms, each with a mirrored door, line the great hall. When Claudius and Polonius use Ophelia to discover the reason for Hamlet's behavior, they hide in one of the side rooms and watch, revealing that the mirrors are two-way. This further emphasizes the pervasive nature of surveillance in the Danish court that Zeffirelli highlighted in his film six years earlier. Hamlet enters the great hall and delivers his "to be or not to be" soliloquy in full view of Ophelia, and as a direct address to his own image reflected in the mirror behind which the paternal figures hide. Hamlet's gaze suggests his possible awareness of Claudius's and Polonius's positions as he speaks directly to them, and reaction shots reveal that the men suspect the same. In the middle of the soliloquy Hamlet pulls out his poniard and taps it against the mirror as if directly threatening Claudius (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 – Hamlet's soliloquy spoken to two-way mirror

The king flinches at Hamlet's approach to the mirror with drawn poniard, but Branagh leaves the cause somewhat ambiguous. Is Claudius afraid that Hamlet will attack him, or is his conscience pricked by Hamlet's philosophical musings regarding the afterlife? Branagh's adaptation is unique in providing witnesses to Hamlet's most famous soliloquy, which serves to illustrate Claudius's fear of his nephew.

The mirror motif, however, does more that just provide more spying opportunities. As Paul Meier observes, Branagh's hall of mirrors serves further to illustrate the metaphysical "reality within reality within reality" perspective that Shakespeare's theatrical metaphor creates to "render the mundane affairs of men antlike in the light of the larger story of their souls' progress" (184, 183). But Branagh told Michael LoMonico that his intention with the set suggests "a vain world…looking in on itself…that seems confident and open but conceals corruption" (6). "While [Hamlet] keeps trying to hold the mirror up to both Gertrude's and Claudius's natures it keeps throwing back more images of his turmoil than of their transgressions" (Crowl "Flamboyant" 234). This vain world of mirrors reflects not only the family melodrama that prevents a newly-crowned monarch from facing the threat of foreign troops, but also reflects Hamlet's self-absorption, even while it reveals Claudius's narcissism (Crowl Shakespeare 138).

This hall of mirrors further reflects the "drama of power and heredity" that Kott argues is the most plausible historical explanation of Hamlet (71).

His father's death, then, provides the reason for Hamlet to reflect on his life in the hall of mirrors. After Polonius's death, these same mirrors reflect Ophelia's madness as well as Laertes's return to avenge the death of his father. Appropriately, the mirrors also reflect the tragic scene of the duel, with Claudius, Laertes and Hamlet all dying in the great hall. In the end, however, soldiers crash through these mirrors, revenging the death of Fortinbras's father and "breaking all the illusions of [Old Hamlet's] reign and his dynasty" (Buhler 120).

As a visual metaphor, the system of mirrors also serves to illustrate the three time periods that Branagh represents in his epic film. Shakespeare warned his England of Elizabeth I against the end of the monarchy of uncertain succession in his production of Hamlet, and the imperialistic attitudes that prevailed in Victorian England gave rise to the "Irish Question" that became a threat to the government for many years thereafter. In twentieth-century terms, Branagh holds a metaphorical mirror up to history, as well as the current monarchy, giving the Royal family of Elizabeth II the opportunity to see themselves through the eyes of others.

What is Rotten in Denmark

Branagh effectively conveys meaning visually about the moral consequences the story suggests. Rather than portraying Hamlet's tragic flaw as being unable to make up his mind or emphasizing an emotional instability, this film suggests a recrafting of the Hamlet tradition that

demonstrates character flaws that led to such tragedy. By creating a Hamlet whose behavior readily contributes to his downfall, Branagh reestablishes one of the classic purposes for the study of literature: to teach men to live more humanely. The first lesson that this story relays is the price of self-absorption. The other is that frivolous enjoyment of life's pleasures is destructive.

In Branagh's film Claudius carelessly disregards the threats of Fortinbras, which leads to Norway's invasion of Denmark in the end. Branagh portrays him as so caught up in his own enjoyment that he cannot be bothered with affairs of state. Branagh transforms the initial court scene into the joyous wedding of Gertrude and Claudius. As Lanier observes, the court setting of the "gilded hall of mirrors that opens onto a warren of private chambers and hidden passages where the court's real life of secret machinations is conducted," serves to mirror the state of the monarchy ("Art" 159). And this government places the joys of fine living above the safety and security of the nation, echoing Branagh's 1990s culture of prosperity and abundance known as the "Roaring Nineties" under the leadership of President Bill Clinton in the United States and Prime Minister John Major in Britain. After Gertrude's and Claudius's exit from the great hall, they are next seen being escorted to their nuptial bed by their equally drunk courtiers. The scene conveys decadence, although not to the extent of Richardson's grotesqueness, but the courtiers escort the royal couple all the way to the bedroom doors. Claudius and Gertrude both knock back several shots of

Rhenish wine during the progress. The wedding party is shown not only rejoicing in their legal union, but also in the physical consummation of their marriage (Figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2 – Courtiers celebrate the royal union

The corruption and licentiousness that bothers Hamlet is not limited to the incestuous marriage between Gertrude and Claudius, however. Branagh embellishes the scene in which Polonius instructs Reynaldo to spy on Laertes to show a scantily-clad woman, presumably a prostitute, in Polonius's bed. The scene progresses with both men smoking cigars and drinking. The woman, clad in only undergarments, is clearly visible. This interpretation of Polonius creates him not only as a man who endorses the morally loose behavior of the court, but as one who contributes to the sexualized atmosphere. The scene also reveals hypocrisy within the Danish court since Polonius sent Laertes to France with his best conservative

advice and he also charges Ophelia to “set [her] entreatments at a higher rate” (1.3.107), even while he smokes cigars and drinks brandy with Reynaldo with a prostitute in his apartment. After the prostitute’s exit, Ophelia enters the chamber and collapses on her father’s disheveled bed to report her encounter with the “mad” Hamlet. By Ophelia sitting on the bed recently vacated by Polonius’s prostitute, Branagh implies that the young woman is also being prostituted to her father’s desires (Burnett 92). Like the royals he serves, Polonius remains inwardly focused, which will lead to the destruction of his family as well.

Throughout the film Branagh juxtaposes the frivolity of Elsinore, which features Claudius almost always with a drink in his hand, with the exterior reality of guards pacing restlessly in the snow and the military activity of Fortinbras. While the world continues to experience the discomfort of weather and the realities of war, the decadent Danish court remains insulated in their illusionary world of sensuality.

Horatio speaks the final words of indictment that Branagh portrayed visually. The monarchy of Denmark fell because:

> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forc’d cause,
> And in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall’n on th’ inventors’ heads. (5.2.381-85)

While John Mc Combe points out that Hamlet's final words that endorse Fortinbras's succession demonstrate that he wishes Denmark to return to the military state that it was in the heroic age of his father (125),[3] I interpret the final images of Branagh's film, the destruction of King Hamlet's statue, to suggest that Hamlet's father no more represents governmental order than did the reign of Claudius. Hamlet comments early on that the crown's practice of revelry, although customary, is

> More honor'd in the breach than the observance.
> This heavy-headed revel east and west
> Makes us traduc'd and tax'd of other nation.
> They clip us drunkards, and with swinish phrase
> Soil our addition, and indeed it takes
> From our achievements . . . (1.4.16-21)

This type of behavior, by being customary, existed prior to, and possibly enabled in its licentious nature, the murder of King Hamlet, making him partially complicit in the decline of the monarchy. He no longer stands for honor and dignity, as young Hamlet thought he did, but he is just another part of the Danish tradition that ruled by emotion rather than reason. As Julie Sanders articulates, "Something is indeed rotten in this state of Denmark: this is an unsustainable world, which has eaten itself apart with corruption and betrayal" (156), but Hamlet precipitates the fall of Elsinore, not through the inaction that Olivier portrayed, nor deep-seated psychosis as Richardson

[3] The lines to which McCombe refers are, "I cannot live to hear the news from England, / But I do prophesy th' election lights / On Fortinbas, he has my dying voice" (5.2.354-56).

interpreted, but through a narcissism bred by his imperialistic upbringing.

Hamlet's Fatal Flaw

Many scholars, including Linda Charnes, claim that Hamlet's fatal flaw consists of suffering from inaction as a result of too much knowledge. She points out that paranoia in the literal sense is a "surplus of knowledge that leads, paradoxically, not to discovery but to undecidability" (5). Although Branagh's film incorporates the traditional mise-en-scène which includes an overabundance of books, this Hamlet does not carry stacks of books, as does Zeffirelli's. In fact the only times he appears holding a book is when he looks up Demons and when Polonius asks him what he reads.

Branagh portrays a different flaw in Hamlet from those other filmmakers have suggested, even while he pays homage to those who have come before. When Hamlet first approaches the great hall in his black clothing, standing apart from the royal festivities, the camera's focus is on a chair. This acknowledgement of the iconic nature of Hamlet's chair from Olivier's film resonates, but only as a momentary recognition of the great Shakespearian actor who initiated the first image in what became the palimpsest of English-language cinematic performances of Hamlet. The camera pans up to Hamlet's face with a brief close-up, the first of many, as in his own film Branagh assumes the metaphoric mantle that represents the pinnacle of achievement that previous Hamlets attained. And just as

Branagh assumes center stage from his predecessors, elevating himself as the epic Hamlet creator, he makes Hamlet's narcissism the flaw that causes his tragedy.

One can explain Branagh's interpretation of Hamlet's flaw in the development of psychoanalytic theory post-Freud. In the 1970s Margaret Mahler and Heinz Kohut, rejecting Freudian theories of infant development, suggested that failure to negotiate the break from full dependency upon the mother does not result in an Oedipus complex, but rather, narcissism (Russell 22-23). Indeed, Herbert Marcuse had provided a definition of narcissistic eros as a shift from a position of "I love myself such as I am" to "I am such that I love myself" (Eros fn. 209, qtd. from Gaston Bachelard, L'Eau et les Rêves [1942]), and this narcissism explains Branagh's portrayal of Hamlet. From the first appearance of the Prince, all of the events that occur in Elsinore are about him. Michael Anderegg notes that "Branagh quite precisely 'overacts,' not in the sense of giving a too broad, 'theatrical' performance, but in the sense that he finds intensity in far too many moments" (132). But rather than seeing the "overaction" as Branagh's acting flaw, I argue that Branagh follows Russell's observation that Hamlet as a narcissistic character "expects its exhibitionistic performances, its active displays of grandiosity, to provoke from the mirroring gaze of its maternal audience approval and appreciation" (32). Although Hamlet's rightful succession to Denmark's throne was usurped by his uncle, and the Ghost charges Hamlet to take action against Claudius, Branagh plays

Hamlet in a manner that reflects his self-absorption, even in the face of an imminent foreign threat. The intensity of Hamlet's emotions draws attention to Hamlet's overreaction to the events around him, specifically in how they affect him personally. Instead of reflecting the absence of T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative,"[4] this portrayal of overreaction serves to paint Hamlet as immature, in keeping with a narcissism that developed out of a failure to achieve independence from his mother. Rather than brooding as Olivier's Hamlet, or carefully observing everyone around him to gather intelligence as Zeffirelli's Hamlet, Branagh becomes the focus of all events around him, and all activities appear to be a personal affront to his sensibilities.

Although Hamlet knows that Gertrude is concerned about him, he persists in his manic behavior. But Branagh's portrayal of this madness is quite different from previous actors. This Hamlet acts less mad and more impertinent. After Hamlet observes Polonius talking with Gertrude and Claudius about him, he startles the older man at the top of the stairs by jumping out at him in a skeleton mask. When he tells Polonius that he reads "words," he twists his face around in juvenile fashion, mocking the older man.

Hamlet seems to abandon his narcissism briefly when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell him of the arrival of the players. Having just waxed philosophical about mankind while smooth, melodious strings play in the

[4] Eliot's famous "objective correlative" argument claims that the external facts of Hamlet's circumstances do not justify his excessive emotion regarding Gertrude. According to Eliot, Shakespeare's failure to express why Hamlet suffers from excess emotion makes this play a problem, as opposed to Shakespeare's "more successful tragedies" (25).

background, he welcomes the news of forthcoming entertainment with a sudden shift of mood, as if he has forgotten himself and his problem, much like a child that is easily distracted by a new toy. When the players actually arrive, Hamlet remains the focal point of the scene, greeting the players, picking up a little girl and kissing her. As he begins his recitation, he makes grand, sweeping gestures, as he will later instruct the players not to do.

Hamlet's self-focus is again apparent in his soliloquy as he considers his circumstances with an egotistical self-reflexivity:

> . . . Am I a coward?
> Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
> Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
> Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i' th' throat
> As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this? (2.2.571-75)

He blames himself for his situation because he is the center of his universe. Although no one has maligned his character, he feels inadequate and expresses his frustration in an outburst of temper by angrily sweeping objects off of a table. His tantrum stops just short of shattering a window as he formulates his scheme for "The Mousetrap."

Hamlet displays his immature behavior again in the next scene. After Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy, Ophelia attempts to return "remembrances" to the prince. He greets her tenderly, with the flowing melody of string accompaniment in the background suggesting sincere affection. But when Ophelia holds out the small packet, Hamlet slaps it out

of her hand, again appearing merely juvenile, not emotionally or mentally disturbed. Rather than linking Hamlet's sudden suspicion of Polonius's spying and Hamlet's change of demeanor, however, Branagh's characterization includes a drastic change in Hamlet emotional state prior to a distant noise of a door shutting, signifying the presence of Claudius and Polonius in the hall. At this moment the soothing melody that has seemed out of sync with Hamlet's petulant ranting ceases, and Ophelia casts a quick glance down the great hall. Hamlet reacts slowly and deliberately, his eyes moving as if assimilating a variety of information before whispering, "where's your father?"

Realizing that Ophelia lies, Hamlet drags her roughly through the great hall, opening the doors along one side before stopping with her outside the one behind which Claudius and Polonius watch. Eyeline matches reveal Hamlet and Claudius face to face through a two-way mirror as Hamlet again brings the focus back to his own narcissistic viewpoint. Pressing Ophelia's face against the mirror and looking into his own reflection, Hamlet declares though the two-way mirror directly at Claudius, "I say we will have no moe marriage [sic]. Those that are married already (all but one) shall live, the rest shall keep as they are" (3.1.147-49, Figure 4.3). The horror on Claudius's face indicates a direct causal association between Hamlet's overheard rants and the King's decision at the end of the scene to send Hamlet to England. Seeing that Hamlet "will be some danger" (3.1.167), it is in Claudius's best

interest, and possibly a matter of national defense, to get him out of Denmark.



Figure 4.3 – Claudius's and Polonius's view of Hamlet's rough handling of Ophelia

Hamlet demonstrates his narcissism again when he gives directions to the players. In addition to creating a metatheatrical moment, as scholars usually interpret the scene, Branagh, the film's director, is Hamlet, the play's director, but he remains the focal point of the scene, overshadowing the players he instructs. As he and a player traverse the balcony above the great hall, the camera focuses upon Branagh. His nasally-voiced condescending dialogue suggests that instead of offering a critique of bad acting, Branagh's Hamlet assumes that he is a much superior actor than the professional players. When he arrives at the makeshift tiring house, he stands out among the players, being the only figure in white in contrast to

the darkly-clad members of the acting company. And like Olivier's, Branagh's Hamlet takes center stage to announce the play to the court.

Hamlet's mockery of others upstages all other action in "The Mousetrap" scene. When Hamlet mocks Polonius for his enactment of Julius Caesar, he does so from the stage in order to humiliate the older man publicly. Then when he takes his seat with Ophelia, he makes his comments about Gertrude and Claudius very loudly and creates an uncomfortable situation for the principals, but also for all of the courtiers in attendance, as evinced by their uneasy glances at one another. Hamlet meets Ophelia's request that he explain the action to her by twisting his face in a sophomoric mock. He shouts out when he comments that the prologue's briefness is like woman's love, drawing the courtly audience's attention to himself.

At the point in the play where the king lies down to rest, not content to make loud, offensive comments from the audience, Hamlet descends from the stadium-style seating and again assumes a position at center stage to ask Gertrude if she likes the play before providing his own running commentary on the action. Refusing to let the players be the center of attention, Hamlet takes the vial of "poison" away from the player when he describes the "mixture rank." Even after the audience disperses, in contrast to other cinematic adaptations, Hamlet remains on center stage. Not only the center of the scene, Branagh's Hamlet is the center of the courtly spectacle within the film. While Olivier, Richardson and Zeffirelli all block

their Hamlets to change locations or at least move to the side of the performance hall, Branagh's blocking emphasizes that Hamlet relishes being the center of attention. These scenes demonstrate that Branagh's Hamlet is self-absorbed in his rude behavior—narcissistic, but not neurotic, as Williamson portrayed him in Richardson's film.

Horatio agrees to watch Claudius during the play with a sense of reticence, frowning and delivering his, "Well, my lord," unenthusiastically, suggesting that even Hamlet's bosom buddy gets tired of his selfish attitude. But he does hide behind the curtains with opera glasses and waits for a reaction from Claudius (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4 – Horatio's opera glass perspective

Upon the exit of the audience, Horatio joins Hamlet to report his observations, but does so with seeming reluctance. He bites one side of his lip and makes minimal comments. Horatio continues to stand quietly as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter to bid Hamlet go to his mother. The

Prince dominates the scene with antic behavior that is less madness than juvenile insolence as he waggles his head, obviously mocking his schoolmates.

Branagh also interprets the closet scene in a manner that denies any suggestion of sexual desire between Hamlet and Gertrude. The young man's yells precede him into his mother's chambers, and as he enters, he asks what she wants in a tired manner, as if he resents being bothered by her. As they exchange words, Hamlet yells disrespectfully and grabs Gertrude, and from behind attempts to force her to look into a mirror. He tears the neck of her gown, violently but not suggestively, while she screams. After he kills Polonius, Hamlet throws Gertrude down on her bed, but instead of joining her there immediately, as he does in other adaptations, Branagh's Hamlet keeps his distance from the mother who fails to live up to his expectations until he must get close to her in order to force her to compare the miniatures of her two husbands. Once the purpose for physical contact has been served, Hamlet flings Gertrude away and paces angrily, coming close to her again only briefly before the Ghost appears to remind Hamlet of his assigned purpose. After the Ghost's exit, Hamlet calms considerably, demonstrating affection for his mother, but with none of the charged sexuality that is portrayed in any of the full-length English adaptations made previously. But even in his calm demeanor, Hamlet demands conformity to his own desires, for Gertrude to act in a manner of

his choosing, even while he also has to face his own dilemma concerning his voyage to England and his suspicion of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Hamlet, however, remains self-centered as Claudius has the palace searched for Polonius's body. Branagh creates a chase scene with Hamlet running through the shotgun rooms that flank the great hall. Incorporating an action sequence that would have fit nicely into Zeffirelli's more action-oriented film, Branagh jumps up on a table where courtiers are dining to scatter people and break china as he runs from the guards. Violinists play in a quick tempo, rising up the scale, the music punctuated by an irregular drumbeat to add a sense of urgency to the scene. The chaos ends with Hamlet closing a bookcase door on the pursuing guards, thinking he has escaped, but he is startled by a rifle barrel pointed at his head. The music suddenly ceases, but even then Hamlet continues to spar verbally with Claudius until the King loses patience and puts an end to Hamlet's jovial misbehavior by backhanding him across the face, demanding to know the whereabouts of Polonius. Although earlier scenes indicated that Claudius's verbal reasoning with Hamlet was ineffective, his physical assault serves to demonstrate visually that Claudius as parental figure finally had to resort to corporeal discipline in order to correct the unruly Hamlet. Whereas Hamlet's melancholy aspect in Olivier's film, his neuroticism in Richardson's film, and his sex appeal in Zeffirelli's film draw audiences to sympathize with the Prince, Branagh's over-the-top misbehavior like the mad chase through dining rooms reinforce Hamlet's unique position as a member of the

privileged class who amuses himself at the expense of others. By emphasizing this difference, Branagh's Hamlet fails to be a sympathetic character throughout much of the film.

Rather than demonstrating Hamlet's character change at 3.1, the "to be or not to be" soliloquy, as Olivier did, Branagh's Prince demonstrates a monumental change of attitude upon his encounter with Fortinbras's Captain (4.4). Learning that many men will lose their lives fighting over a bit of worthless ground, Hamlet finally sees beyond himself to general humanity. Facing the realities of life outside his own circumstances, he examines his own position.

> . . . How stand I then,
> That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
> Excitements of my reason and my blood,
> And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
> The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
> That for a fantasy and trick of fame
> Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
> Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
> Which is not tomb enough and continent
> To hide the slain? (4.4.56-65)

While martial music swells in the background, this Hamlet proclaims himself no longer wrapped up in his own woes. Echoing the strident tone from his St. Crispin Day speech from Henry V, Branagh completes the soliloquy in a

declaration of intent, “O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!” (4.4.65-66). While film critic Scott Rosenberg finds the scene “ludicrously ineffectual,” it serves to provide a point at which Hamlet breaks with his royal narcissism and becomes a character with whom populist audiences can identify. Appropriately, the scene ends in a declared intermission, with the last image being Hamlet on a snowy, rocky landscape, arms outstretched declaring that his life will now have purpose. No longer the spoiled son of Gertrude full of mindless antics, Hamlet will face life more soberly, realizing that death is often a serious consequence of ill-advised action.

Harold Bloom, as well as other scholars, has commented on the unexplained change of Hamlet’s character between the fourth and fifth acts (429-31), and Branagh’s film provides an answer. An unspecified time has elapsed, allowing Hamlet to mature past his childish narcissism, and Hamlet has envisioned the costs of war on humanity when he met with Fortinbras’s men. He also faced his own mortality in the form of Claudius’s order for the Prince’s execution via the letter that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern carried to England. As Douglas Lanier points out, the change in Hamlet is reflected by a change in his clothing, “exchang[ing] his tailored black uniform for the rougher garb of the commons and players” (“Art” 162), and Hamlet’s approach to the gravedigger demonstrates this change. Ironically, given his prior behavior at Elsinore, particularly his jests after the death of Polonius, he now questions the lack of decorum that the man displays by singing a

merry tune as he digs a grave and juggles the bones he removes from the grave to make room for more.

In contrast to Hamlet's remarks regarding a man being eaten by a worm with which he insolently taunted Claudius, in the graveyard scene Hamlet waxes quietly poetic when he muses on Alexander's possible fate: "Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?" (5.1.208-12). Rather than displaying the antic disposition that marked his behavior earlier, Hamlet accepts the witty quibbles of the gravedigger, played by comedian Billy Crystal, with a dryness that indicates that he no longer relishes mocking humor. The scene suggests that during his absence Hamlet reached a state of maturity that abandoned self-absorption and he now is able to think about others. Branagh partially achieves downplaying Hamlet's humor in this scene in the casting of Crystal as the gravedigger to receive the focus of the comic interlude, in contrast to Zeffirelli's production, which cast an accomplished but nondescript actor (Trevor Peacock) in the role and highlighted Gibson's own stylistic humor. Even Branagh's echo of the classic shot of Hamlet with Yorick's skull as he remembers the jester from his childhood emphasizes the new, more sober Hamlet (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5 – Branagh's recreation of a classic scene

But in the context of the much-changed Hamlet, the scene transmits another example of the maturity that has occurred in the prince since his departure from Elsinore.

Although Hamlet again brings attention to himself during Ophelia's burial by claiming that Laertes could not possibly love her as much as he did, in the end the focus of the dialogue is on what Laertes will do for Ophelia. With Doyle's poignant string melody in the background, Hamlet rages, but his overwhelming reaction, enhanced by the musical score, focuses on the injustice of Ophelia's death. Hamlet still retains some of his narcissism which shows in his declaration that his grief outweighs Laertes's, as if they are in competition. But Hamlet delivers his regrets about this skirmish to Horatio in the following scene in a calm and contrite tone:

> But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
> That to Laertes I forgot myself,
> For by the image of my cause I see
> The portraiture of his. I'll court his favors.
> But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
> Into a tow'ring passion. (5.2.75-80)

Hamlet has cast off his old, playfully offensive nature, but it refuses to die a quiet death. Branagh's slightly kinder Hamlet toys with the obsequious Osric, much to Horatio's amusement. Although the joke is at Osric's expense, Hamlet displays none of the cruelty that laced his jests prior to his voyage to England. The casting of comedian Robin Williams in the role of Osric also affects audience reception of the scene. Rather than Zeffirelli's portrayal of Osric as a straight man for Gibson's comedy, Branagh's utilization of Williams's notoriety as a comedian results in Hamlet's mocking treatment of him appearing harmless, and serves to reveal the Prince's new brand of humor, one that is more reserved and actually funny.

Hamlet once again returns to quiet introspection that demonstrates his newfound maturity when he contemplates the duel before him. The soft strings swell in the background while natural-looking light shines on him from a window, suggesting that Hamlet is now a romantically heroic character with a noble exterior and a sentimental heart. Hamlet considers the odds that he faces with a sense of humility while he accepts the dictates of fate. Meeting face to face with Laertes, Hamlet offers his apology quietly

in an intimate moment that is unique to the new and improved Hamlet. Only when he concludes his private business with Laertes does he raise his voice to bring the spectators into the scene.

Branagh plays the duel scene with more aggression than those in other films, with the men traversing the length of the great hall several times. The poisoned hit of Laertes leads to an all-out fight up the stairs, with Hamlet determined to return a hit with the unguarded tip. But Branagh does not just create a flesh wound for the purpose of administering poison; his Hamlet also flips Laertes over the balustrade so that he falls on his back on the tiled floor below. Upon learning that Claudius planned the treachery, Hamlet finally acts on the Ghost's instructions, throwing his foil from the upper level, impaling the King. Following the rapier down on chandelier ropes, he feeds the poisoned wine to Claudius drop by drop with his saturated glove. Although Hamlet knows he is about to die, he must ensure that the rottenness of Denmark, embodied in Claudius, perishes as well. By restoring the subplot of Fortinbras, however, Branagh does not merely depict the end of the corruption that Hamlet hates in Elsinore, but he demonstrates that had Denmark not self-destructed, it would have fallen at the hands of Norway.

New Historicism: International Politics Restored

By restoring the subplot of Fortinbras, Branagh complicates Hamlet for viewers who may only know the story through truncated adaptations. But he

provides flashes of the martial element of the play through a variety of unique scenes that emphasize the international politics that make the play much more than a family melodrama. Rather than a Victorian British expansion of imperialism, however, this very English Denmark is in danger of the imperialistic intentions of young Fortinbras of Norway. Horatio's explanation of international events to the guards is punctuated by window-view shots of men assembling weapons in the armory, establishing an image of the defensive state of Elsinore and the immediacy of the guards' watchfulness. As Horatio continues, there is another short shot of Fortinbras as he plans attacks on a map.

Branagh again reinforces the political imagery as Claudius, in his new position as monarch, symbolically dismisses young Fortinbras, "So much for him" (1.2.25) punctuated by the action of tearing up the message that he received requesting Claudius return lands that King Hamlet had taken from the elder Fortinbras. Claudius's return correspondence is illustrated in a sequence in which Norway, Fortinbras's uncle, receives the report from Claudius of the younger man's activities, providing further visualization of the international politics that Branagh includes in his adaptation, which emphasizes Elsinore's impact beyond Denmark as opposed to the claustrophobic and domestic focus of earlier films.

This film also incorporates Hamlet in the political aspects of the plot. As Laertes takes his leave of Ophelia, they walk out on the grounds. The background of the sequence reveals rows of men fencing while Hamlet

coaches them. Although the scene suggests that he is taking responsibility for at least one aspect of national defense, as would be expected of a prince, Lanier points out that the art of fencing serves as a mere illusion ("Art" 159). Not only does it provide no real protection from outside forces, but Elsinore has become a court that functions only in appearance; the real government has been reduced to mere ritual.

When the ambassadors return from Norway, the sequence again includes cuts to the action of Norway, narrated by the Danish ambassadors' report, emphasizing the political intrigue that underpins the familial conflict. Branagh adds a suggestion of malevolence to the character of Fortinbras, however, by casting the swarthy Rufus Sewell, who always appears to be scheming, even when promising to obey his aging uncle (Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6 – Scheming Fortinbras

The scene raises questions of his sincerity by means of the musical score that features low brass horns and strings that emphasize the intrigue that

lurks under the surface. The music suddenly ceases when Polonius announces, “This business is well ended” (2.2.85).

But the international business is far from over in Branagh’s film. After Hamlet tells Ophelia to go to a nunnery, Branagh inserts a sequence in which Horatio, standing outside Elsinore’s gates, reads in the newspaper, Helsingør, “Norwegian Armies Advance, Prince Fortinbras in Command, Latest Dispatches From the Front.” Horatio’s reading of international news creates a contrast between him and the crown and courtiers who remain engrossed in their own drama, but it also serves to suggest an historical connection between the newspaper and Branagh’s underlying themes. The first English newspapers were published in 1620, four years after Shakespeare’s death, and while The Belfast Newsletter was launched in 1737, The Irish Times published its inaugural issue 29 March 1859, twelve years into Victoria’s reign, and nine years after newspapers started hiring war correspondents (“Concise”). One might argue that a newspaper is the most likely device by which to convey events outside of Elsinore set in the nineteenth century. Branagh, however, creates this scene independent of Shakespeare’s play, and with his Irish background, a connection between Irish politics as they relate to Victorian imperialism. While I do not suggest that Branagh necessarily researched newspaper history, his use of the newspaper in the chosen Victorian setting rings with authenticity.

In addition to the historical and possible political implications, the scene also serves to build a sense of impending threat that lurks outside the

safety of the illusionary Elsinore. Accompanied by a martial drumbeat in the score, the shot of Horatio reading cuts to the newspaper article headline, which dissolves into a closeup of Fortinbras's icily implacable face, dark eyes glaring, in the background we see flames and hear the sound of gunfire (Figure 4.7).

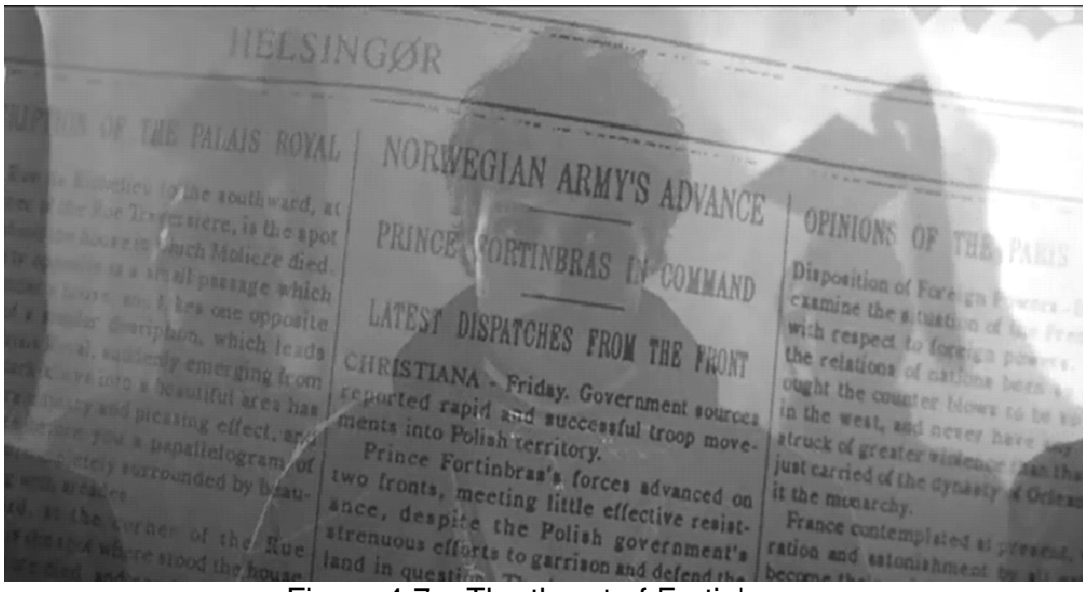

Figure 4.7 – The threat of Fortinbras

The sequence includes a cut back to Horatio, who with a worried expression on his face, checks his watch and looks at the sky as if seeking signs of impending doom before he turns to walk back to the palace. Elsinore is no longer able to remain isolated from the rest of the world, but is drawn into more regional conflicts, much as twentieth-century governments are drawn more and more into global situations.

Hamlet's encounter with Fortinbras's Captain establishes the presence of the foreign military element in Denmark. But although the dark eyes of the Norwegian prince suggest otherwise, his words convey that he merely

crosses Denmark in order to defeat Poland. The scene also creates a reminder that there is another intrigue being played out that is bigger than the domestic and personal conflicts that exist within the Danish court. Indeed, as Samuel Crowl observes, Fortinbras "clos[es] in on a world crumbling from within" ("Flamboyant" 233).

But before Fortinbras descends on Elsinore, Laertes returns with a band of rebels, another scene that screenwriters often delete in shorter films. Branagh, however, includes scenes of armed men running down the tiled floors of Elsinore, establishing the vulnerability of the palace despite the gates and guards. Branagh again emphasizes Elsinore's defensive posture prior to the duel between Hamlet and Laertes in a brief shot of a guard marching in front of the gates. And while Hamlet begs Laertes's pardon for killing Polonius, a montage of the guard in front of the palace, amassed Norwegian troops marching on Elsinore and the brooding dark eyes of Fortinbras with his sword at the ready serve to show the concurrent attack on Denmark's throne.

Shots of the duel cut to Norwegian soldiers massacring the Danish guards. After Gertrude drinks of the poisoned cup, the duel sequence cuts to Norwegian soldiers killing guards inside the palace while through a window we see a swarm of soldiers storm the palace entrance. When Laertes announces the King's part in the villainy, Osric slips into one of the side rooms where he encounters a Norwegian soldier who plunges a knife into his chest. Branagh punctuates Hamlet's death speech with a sequence

of Fortinbras peacefully riding up to the steps of Elsinore, his soldiers having overcome all Danish defenses.

When Hamlet hears the cannons fire, Osric reports that they are a salute from Fortinbras to the English ambassadors, but the bloody hand he raises from his stomach as well as a cut to soldiers crashing through the windows reveal Branagh's visual addition to the text: the foreign aggression of Fortinbras, not only on Poland, but on Denmark. The climax of the film occurs when Fortinbras's soldiers crash through the window and the mirrored doors shatter, breaking the reflections that maintained the court's fragile illusions (Burnett 93). But Branagh's creation of the invasion of Fortinbras is just that—a creation. In opposition to this invention, Franco Moretti argues that Shakespeare's tragic form hinges on the accidental outcome of conflict, and Fortinbras's fortuitous arrival at Elsinore causes him to assume the monarchy of Denmark (26). Branagh's restoration of international politics in Hamlet adds an external threat that urges one to delve further into his intentions. By making Fortinbras's invasion a result of Claudius's myopic focus on his own pleasures, he inadvertently placed his nation at risk. At the time of this film, England was still two years away from The Belfast Agreement that would provide a respite from the open hostilities between Branagh's native Northern Ireland and imperial England. His destruction of the imperial ruling class of Elsinore in favor of a proletariat led by Fortinbras echoes the wishes of many Northern Irish toward British royalty. Branagh, however, seems content to reconcile high culture to a

mass-market audience in his adaptations (Buhler 120, Lanier “Art” 161), and by creating a Hamlet that explains many of Shakespeare’s ambiguities, he is able to remove many of the problems of the play, making it more accessible to non-scholars.

Shakespeare’s Ambiguities Resolved

Branagh’s Hamlet is less the enigmatic “Mona Lisa” of literature and more the director’s own interpretation, spelling out what he perceives really happened in Hamlet. In keeping with Branagh’s theatrical vision to “reach a large group of potential Shakespeare-lovers, beyond the obvious range of RSC die-hards” (Branagh Beginning 174), he provides “simpleminded exegeses of ambiguous and complex scenes” by visually interpreting the text (Anderegg 120). By means of displaced diegetic inserts (i.e. flashbacks and flashforwards) and other visual elements, Branagh creates associations and forms causal relationships between events that elucidate ambiguities that we normally perceive to be in the source text. The following paragraphs will discuss Branagh’s resolutions regarding Hamlet and Ophelia’s relationship, the reliability of King Hamlet’s ghost, at what point Claudius’s and Gertrude’s “incestuous” relationship began, and the direct cause of Ophelia’s madness.

One of the questions Shakespeare students often ask of Hamlet is, “Did he sleep with Ophelia?” Although Olivier often repeated an anecdote in which one of his predecessors answered the question with, “In my company,

always" (Olivier 152), Branagh creates a graphically visual answer to this question. The first indication of a sexual relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia comes when Polonius instructs his daughter to avoid the Prince. Branagh sets this scene in a chapel, and as Polonius angrily lectures Ophelia he pushes her into a confessional. While he rants, Ophelia flashes back to scenes of lovemaking with Hamlet. She becomes distraught at her father's words and his supposition that Hamlet's "tenders" were expressed only as a means of taking her maidenhead. The scene ends with Polonius exiting before Ophelia says, "I shall obey, my lord" in a tearful close-up with voiceover and a cut to her in bed with Hamlet, with soft strings in the background indicating her heartbreak. By creating a conventional sexual relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, Branagh reinforces his shift away from the visual tradition of Hamlet's Oedipal connection to Gertrude (Sloboda 148). Although there are other flashbacks that remind viewers of the sexual relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, this early visual invention effectively establishes the nature of affection that the two share, at least in Branagh's interpretation.

The second ambiguity that Branagh resolves in his film is whether or not Hamlet should trust the ghost of his father. New Historicist scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt point out that there were mixed beliefs regarding the supernatural in sixteenth-century England—"there is always something suspect about such apparitions: they are specimens of 'folk beliefs,' to be savored or despised, or evidence of fraud, or signs of residual Catholic

'superstition'" (Hamlet 151). This doubt of the ghostly apparition of King Hamlet is reflected by Hamlet's own questioning:

> . . .The spirit that I have seen
> May be a dev'l, and the dev'l hath power
> T' assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps,
> Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
> As he is very potent with such spirits,
> Abuses me to damn me. (2.2.598-603)

Branagh relays this concern visually by having Hamlet remain in the library after Horatio and the guards inform him of the ghost's appearance. Once he is alone Hamlet opens a book, flipping through the pages to rest on "DEMONS." Although the voiceover reveals he thinks about the possibility of "foul deeds," the visual portion of the film suggests that he already questions the reliability of the ghost, planting a seed of doubt in viewers' minds.

Branagh effectively transmits the nature of the ghost through his creative use of visual images. He plays with the image of the ghost, thereby underlining the Renaissance dramatic commonplace use of ghostly apparitions to signify questionable or evil presences. In the initial appearance, the ghost is represented in King Hamlet's statue coming to life. The film opens with clock chimes as the camera focuses on a granite slab engraved with "HAMLET." The camera pans to reveal Elsinore in the background. This establishing shot serves to reveal not only the title of the

film, but also, as the camera pulls back to the face of the statue that rests upon the granite base, this sequence sets King Hamlet up as the iconic figure around which the story revolves. The soundtrack contains the nocturnal howling and crying of animals as the pacing guard looks around with wide, apprehensive eyes. At the very moment when the statue moves, Barnardo (Ian McElhinney) leaps onto Francisco (Ray Fearon) from behind, interrupting the immediate revelation of the life within the image that should be static.

After Horatio (Nicholas Farrell) and Marcellus (Jack Lemmon) join the guards, the statue comes to life again. This apparition is not merely a ghost, but a larger-than-life representation of the King that stands above all of his subjects in colossal proportions. Furthermore, by echoing the device of a military statue coming to life from the Don Juan tradition, Branagh compounds the association between King Hamlet's dynamic statue and demonic presence.[5] The statue's point-of-view crane shot of the four men running away in fear emphasizes the stature of the figure. A reaction perspective that reveals their upward fearful gazes further suggests the enormity of the apparition at which they ineffectively hurl their spears.

Reinforcing the possibility that the specter of the deceased king is evil, or at best, a suspect apparition, Hamlet encounters the ghost amidst horrifying special effects. As Hamlet walks out of the armory with Marcellus and Horatio, the spectacle of the animated statue greets him. Following

[5] In Don Juan the commander of Seville's statue comes to life and delivers Don Juan to devils.

conventions of a supernatural thriller, the soundtrack includes music building in volume, and Branagh shouting his lines over the screeching string instruments. As Hamlet follows the apparition into the woods the streams boil, rocks explode, geysers of fire spew from the ground and brambles tear at his clothing. The tempo and volume of Patrick Doyle's musical score, along with Branagh's emotionally charged speech, work together to create anxiety over Hamlet's eventual face-to-face encounter with his father's spirit. The ghost, played by Brian Blessed, confronts Hamlet with arctic-blue eyes glaring, visually affirming the possibility that he is, as the text suggests, "a goblin damn'd" (1.4.40, Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.8 – Glowing eyes of King Hamlet's ghost

The sequence includes extreme close ups of the ghost's eyes and mouth, creating a sense of disembodiment that keeps viewers from feeling any affinity with the "perturbed spirit." The ghost of King Hamlet also pushes young Hamlet against a tree in a brusque manner, the rudeness implying

the evil nature of the apparition. While Linda Charnes suggests that the ghost represents the Lacanian Other of patriarchal power, an "authority. . . [that] remains intact regardless of the violence loosed in its name . . . encoded in every aspect of ancient and early modern life and therefore is not (overtly at least) called into question" (3), Branagh's added special effects along with Shakespeare's text that specifically articulates questions regarding the ghost's reliability reinforce for the audience that, contrary to Charnes's claims, Hamlet should doubt the spirit.

When Hamlet presses Horatio and Marcellus to swear to keep the ghost a secret, Branagh represents the ghost as a gust of steam from the ground as the spirit commands the two to swear. In the scene Branagh shouts out his lines again, first over the sound of the earth's upheaval, then over the building strains of brass horns and pounding drums, which suddenly cease when the two finally swear to keep their silence, and thus reinforce the ghostly horror of the scene. At the end of Hamlet's first encounter with the ghost, the animated statue once again briefly turns to bronze before disappearing altogether. The soundtrack shifts from a cacophony of discordant noise to soft strings as Hamlet resolves to set things right. Although everyone else has cause to question the ghost, Hamlet sees "corruption, crime, licentiousness, and decay…everywhere <u>but</u> in the place of the father" (Charnes 6, emphasis in original). But with Branagh's characterization of Hamlet, I think that one could also interpret

Hamlet's belief in his father's spirit as providing justification for acting on his own desires.

The third ambiguity that Branagh visually resolves answers the question of when Claudius's "incestuous" relationship with Gertrude began. Unconvinced by Dover Wilson's and A.C. Bradley's argument that the specific wording of the play requires one to acknowledge that Claudius and Gertrude had engaged in sex prior to King Hamlet's murder, scholars still debate the question (Wilson 292-94). As the ghost tells Hamlet about his murder, the visual element includes a scene in which a group of courtiers are playing shuffleboard in a long hall. A shot of Claudius assisting Gertrude with his hands upon her hips suggests a physically intimate relationship. Another shot in this sequence includes a woman's, presumably Gertrude's, corset laces being undone by impatient male hands.

There is a visual suggestion, however, of the sexual relationship beginning much earlier. Branagh's casting of Derek Jacobi, his theatrical father, as Claudius, combined with their matching bleached hair and sea-blue eyes, Claudius and Hamlet work to create a suggestion that the prince is not merely Claudius's legal heir since his usurpation, but is his natural son (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9 – Resemblance between Claudius and Hamlet

Furthermore, while Hamlet insists that he is not like his mother and uncle, he sports an "imperial" beard, revealing himself as a physical mirror of the short-sighted monarchy Branagh suggests in the Victorian setting and anti-imperialistic themes. The similarities in their features become even more noticeable in the closet scene when Hamlet shows Gertrude the two miniatures. The scene contains cuts between the photographs and Hamlet's face, revealing that Hamlet resembles his uncle more than his father. Biographical critics such as Noel Sloboda and Courtney Lehmann perceive that this relationship is further emphasized by the fact that Jacobi was the first Hamlet that Branagh watched in live theater, the performance that made him love Shakespearian drama. Furthermore, Jacobi directed Branagh in a stage production of Hamlet for the Renaissance Theater in 1988 (Lehmann Shakespeare 182-83, Sloboda 152).[6] Because Branagh

[6] Courney Lehmann also notes this theatrical parentage in Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2002, p. 119. She further

views Jacobi as his theatrical father, by casting this father in the role of Claudius and dressing them both in military uniforms with similar, bleached haircuts, Branagh implies the new king to be his, Hamlet's, father. Branagh's Hamlet, however, appears to be unaware of his own resemblance to Claudius.

The final resolved ambiguity is the question of what caused Ophelia's madness. Zeffirelli's adaptation suggests that Ophelia was slightly unstable from the beginning, while Olivier left doubt that the young woman was ever really mad. Branagh, however, inserts a short scene that shows Ophelia screaming and clutching gates frantically as her father's body is carried out of the palace. Because she displays strength of character up to that point, except for one emotional display when Hamlet rejects her, Branagh's reading firmly establishes Polonius's murder as the cause of Ophelia's utter madness (Figure 4.10).

Building on this short initial momentary madness, Branagh portrays her later wrapped in a straight jacket and imprisoned in a padded room off of the great hall. Gertrude and Horatio watch her from above until her guards release her into the hall to speak with Gertrude. When Claudius enters and speaks the word, "father," Ophelia screams and runs down the length of the hall. Returning to him, she voices the lines of the bawdy song, complete with a pelvic thrust into Claudius before lying on the floor and

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observes that Branagh's resemblance to Jacobi suggests that Claudius is Hamlet's natural father (182).



Figure 4.10 – Ophelia's madness

simulating sexual intercourse, then running away from the king when he tries to restrain her.

When Laertes returns, Ophelia bursts into the great hall, giggling and delivering nonexistent flowers to her brother. Sitting on the floor in front of a mirror, she seems to sing herself into a calm state and then walk with head down into the padded room where she stands with her back to the camera while Claudius promises justice to Laertes while Ophelia's tune plays sweetly in the background.

Branagh portrays Ophelia as a resilient and resourceful character, even in the midst of the madness that leads to her death. He reveals Ophelia in an artistically interpretive scene when Horatio learns about the letters that have arrived from Hamlet. He looks through a peep hole to witness Ophelia being hosed down violently in a tiled room. When the attendant leaves, Ophelia slowly removes a key from her mouth. The

creation of this scene suggests, initially, that Gertrude and Claudius did everything they knew to prevent Ophelia from harm, but the young woman was crafty in her madness.

Secondly, the scene also serves to reflect on the cures for mental illness that were practiced in the portrayed Victorian period that compounded the problem. While Gulsen Syin Teker's feminist reading claims that Branagh's film portrays Ophelia's madness as being caused by her failed romance with Hamlet as well as her father's death (117), I think Branagh's use of a straightjacket, solitary confinement in a padded room and high-pressure cold showers to treat Ophelia suggests that she became mad after her father's death, with this event being what pushed her to insanity. Ironically, the treatment of Ophelia that includes being immobilized in confinement portrays Victorian practices different from those that would have been used in Shakespeare's own times. According to Michel Foucault, incapacity for work and madness both became reasons for imprisonment in the seventeenth century because they violated rules of morality (Madness 58-64). Eighteenth-century views of mania, which Branagh incorporates into his nineteenth-century setting, included the view that "incoherent thoughts, explosive gestures [and] continuous words" were caused by "boiling blood, furious bile, and mutinous liquors" that could be cured by ice water baths (Foucault Madness 128-29). Not totally anachronistic to Branagh's Victorian context, contemporary beliefs regarding mental illness included a belief that madness could be cured, but without formal training, doctors tested their

theories as treatments that were often more cruel than the older, rejected treatments depicted in Hamlet (Frick). Branagh's Ophelia begins her journey into madness because of her father's murder, but there is little doubt that the treatment itself pushes her further into insanity. Finally, in keeping with documented results of Victorian confinement enforced to cure mental illness,[7] Ophelia's madness progresses, making her behave lewdly whereas she previously conducted herself with courtly propriety. The results of the corrupt courtly doctors trying to treat Ophelia's madness represent a criticism of the failing monarchy that appalls Hamlet. Claudius's leadership of Denmark proves to be just as ineffective as the doctors' treatment of Ophelia. In the end their actions lead to Ophelia's death, just as the court system brings about the end of King Hamlet's family dynasty.

Conclusion

Branagh's film achieves the epic production he envisioned, and his major achievement in the arena of Hamlet adaptations is in his unique interpretation of the Hamlet tradition. His film is a visual feast that incorporates critic Jan Kott's metaphor of Hamlet as a "system of mirrors" (71) as a literal house full of mirrors that forces the characters to watch their own destruction. Drawing on contemporary criticism, Branagh uses cinematic devices to erase many of Shakespeare's ambiguities in an effort

[7] A full discussion of Victorian cures that includes treatment for hysteria can be found in Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness? by Jane M. Ussher, Ameherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1991.

to make the characters and their motivations more comprehensible to modern audiences.

Branagh does not, however, limit his interpretation to literary scholarship and criticism, but also emphasizes the inevitable demise of an imperial court that becomes so self-absorbed that it is destroyed from within. Branagh's setting in Victorian England reinforces his critique of the imperialistic system through his own association as a citizen of colonized Northern Ireland, which appears as a warning to the reigning English Royals, who were embroiled in their own scandals in 1996.

Not content to incorporate only literary and political themes, Branagh's published screenplay indicates that the final shot of the film is to "obliterate the name HAMLET. For ever [sic]" (173). Ironically, by ending with the destruction of Hamlet's iconic name, Branagh's film that resolves Shakespeare's ambiguities ends up creating an additional question. What, exactly does Branagh obliterate: Shakespeare's iconic status, imperialism, or some unnamed factor? One suggestion comes from Sloboda, who claims that Branagh's aim is "to create a definitive version of the play, one that transcends all previous cinematic interpretations of it" (150), and presumably any to follow. As a new layer on the palimpsest of performance, Branagh made a valiant effort to totally erase the preceding films by overwriting them in epic proportions, but as Sloboda also points out, "the ghosts of the past often refuse to be so easily put to rest " (150), and even

with Branagh's destruction of the iconic image, Almereyda's Hamlet will follow a mere four years later.

Chapter Five:

Michael Almereyda's Millennial Adaptation of Hamlet: Palimpsest or Postmodern Pastiche?

As should be expected from Michael Almereyda, who previously directed a variety of films from documentary to comedy and from the short adaptation of D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner" (1997) to the horror film, Nadja (1994), his Hamlet (2000) strongly diverges from what early adaptation theorists would term "authentic" adaptation, setting the action in turn-of-the-millennium New York City. This setting resounds with its postmodern environment "dominated by a sense . . .that originality is exhausted and that only parody and pastiche and intertextual echo remain" (Crowl "Flamboyant" 223). Indeed, Almereyda's adaptation vividly includes echoes of other Hamlet performances, thereby declaring that it is not a completely original work, but the latest layer of the palimpsest that is the Hamlet tradition. Rather than subtle references to previous Hamlet films, such as Branagh's casting of John Gielgud and Richardson's perpetuation of Olivier's Oedipal theme, however, Almereyda overtly demonstrates the intertextual nature of his film using other signals that provide a sense of disjunction that defines the postmodern movement in its "fragmentary images," blurring of "high" and "low" culture, and the "pastiche of techniques

. . .and. . .media" ("Postmodernism"). In theoretical terms, the palimpsestic overwriting that unsuccessfully attempted to obliterate the previous performance text that defined cinematic Hamlet performance during the twentieth century becomes blurred into pastiche as Almereyda boldly acknowledges the tradition that precedes him. Rather than paying homage to the underlying layers of Hamlet performances, however, Almereyda weaves references to previous films in a surface intertextuality that suggests random allusion to the past (c.f. Jameson 12,17-18). In keeping with postmodern notions, and adapting to turn-of-the century audiences, Almereyda's screenplay utilizes only about forty percent of Shakespeare's text, and he made further cuts during the film editing process,

> making this latest Hamlet the most condensed straight film adaptation in English. Entire scenes were dropped, Shakespeare's text was further trimmed and torn, and the result is, inevitably, an attempt at Hamlet—not so much a sketch but a collage, a patchwork of intuitions, images and ideas. (Almereyda William xii, emphasis in original)

This adaptation also alters the themes of incest and inaction in Hamlet to appeal to its contemporary audience. In addition, he perpetuates Branagh's theme of reflection, and also revives Shakespeare's often-overlooked theme of literacy to express late-twentieth-century anxieties about authority and the written word. Almereyda effects the most glaring alteration in his setting, however. Rather than positioning Hamlet in an updated but still antique time

period, as did Branagh, Almereyda transfers Hamlet's feudal Denmark to corporate America, replacing a sense of nationalism and government structure that prevails in Branagh's film with corporate dominance in which he complicates Hamlet's sense of isolation and alienation from the outside world via cold, impersonal skyscrapers and overt references to megacorporations as well as by portraying Hamlet as a film student and Ophelia as an amateur photographer at odds with their corporate-driven parents.

In this chapter I will discuss the reintroduction of the theme of literacy that echoes similar anxieties that mark the times of Shakespeare and Almereyda, both on the cusp of new eras. I will also point out some of the elements that mark Almereyda's Hamlet as a product of postmodernism, including its fragmentary composition that creates a sense of disjunction in audiences, in addition to Almereyda's use of bricolage and pastiche that identifies his film as only one part of the Hamlet tradition.

Visual Literacy in Practice

In his adaptation, Almereyda transforms Hamlet from "quintessential man of letters" (Ayers 423) to a quintessential man of electronic dexterity, while Polonius and his children, the courtiers, or rather, the upper-middle class as translated into late-twentieth-century social terms, display an antiquated interest in the printed word. While any modern audience might expect Shakespeare's Hamlet, as a Prince, to be well read, David Cressy's

historical work regarding literacy during the decades just prior to Shakespeare's writing of Hamlet reveals that the middle class would also have enjoyed a certain level of literacy. Education in the years preceding Shakespeare emphasized community benefit and the proliferation of "works of practical wisdom and volumes of literary diversion" (Cressy 7), which Shakespeare demonstrates in his portrayal of Polonius as a repository of archaic proverbs, his bookish knowledge being an accurate reflection of the state of literacy in the courtier class.

This issue of literacy as well as themes pertaining to university education and other political and social concerns were evident in the dramas of Shakespeare's London, just as recent adaptations reflect modern issues and incorporate them within their visual representations. Because literacy is a benchmark of minimum achievement for success in the Western world, the highlighting of such an issue has ceased to become worthy of dramatic attention. Lina Wilder points out that Shakespeare's audience would have been "more aurally than visually attuned" ("Toward" 174), as opposed to modern audiences which are much more visual in their reception of meaning. Given this sensory shift, Almereyda effectively transfers middle-class literacy into an outdated mode represented in print literacy whereas Hamlet, as royalty, demonstrates technological savvy by his electronic and visual literacy, updating Shakespeare's issues of literacy from verbal cues to visual. This focus creates the same effect in Almereyda's film as it did in Shakespeare's play, namely, that Hamlet's filmmaking as a more developed

literacy asserts dominance over that of Polonius's family. Rather than Hamlet waiting for an opportune time to act by retreating to the library, however, Almereyda's Prince becomes consumed with the process of reproducing meaningful simulacra, which serves to alienate him from his environment.

The mise-en-scène of Almereyda's film translates Hamlet's library setting that is prominent in Zeffirelli's and Branagh's films to Polonius's apartment, where the white rooms are nearly covered with white bookshelves, packed to overflowing with books, and the remaining space is adorned with photographs. But as Polonius recites his words of wisdom to Laertes, who fills his backpack with books, it is easy to make the connection between the excess of books and the insipid proverbs, both seeming outdated in the stark, modern setting (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 – Polonius's apartment overflows with books

Another point in the film shows Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) gazing at a video of Ophelia as she reads a book, keeping his informational mode visual while Ophelia remains tied to the written word. Almereyda further translates the act of reading and writing to the middle class as opposed to royalty, who had clerks perform these tasks for them, by Hamlet struggling to compose a letter to Ophelia in a coffee shop while Michael Hurley's downtempo acoustical guitar song "Wildgegeese" plays on the soundtrack. The Dylanesque music creates a fitting connection between Hamlet and his retrograde activity. Finally completing his task after many failed drafts, he visits her in her darkroom, which is in a seedy section of town. Polonius interrupts Hamlet's visit to Ophelia, arriving with a balloon bouquet,[1] one balloon having the image of George Washington from a dollar bill, clearly identifying himself as American bourgeois and emphasizing the class distinction in his gauche reference to money. Furthermore, Ophelia's engagement with visual literacy remains subordinate to Hamlet's on the basis of her low-tech photography as well as her studio location, which contrast to Hamlet's well-appointed video studio within Hotel Elsinore.

Although his apartment contains a few books scattered around, Almereyda visually emphasizes Hamlet's superior visual literacy early in the film as Hamlet watches videos of his father. As he views the King's images

[1] This scene exemplifies the extreme cutting Almereyda made from the filmed footage to the final product, which he describes as "sacrificed for the sake of clarity and momentum and to dodge mistakes" (William xii). While he retains Polonius interrupting the forbidden interaction between Hamlet and Ophelia, he cuts the birthday celebration context he included in his screenplay. By deleting the context, however, Polonius's arrival with balloons makes his character appear slightly daft.

on the screen, the voiceover is Hamlet's soliloquy from the first scene of Shakespeare's play in which he comments on Gertrude's overhasty marriage to Claudius. This mise-en-scène, which Almereyda repeats in several scenes throughout the film, includes white walls with a collage of photographs in a seemingly random placement, which positions Hamlet in his setting that privileges images over text (Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2 – Hamlet in his postmodern setting

Photographs, as well as duplications of artwork, form Hamlet's collage. With the inclusion of photographs of people in Hamlet's life and ancient sculptures in addition to prints of famous paintings, the absence of an apparent unifying theme creates a sense of disjunction that echoes in the eclectic selection of video clips that Hamlet watches. As a repository for Hamlet's memory, the images "become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" in Jameson's postmodern

definition, that makes up Hamlet's modified past (18). Carter Burwell's choice of musical tracks imported into the film add to the disjunctive sensation by interspersing modern and classical orchestra music in the soundtrack, drawing attention to the contemporary setting of an age-old story. Almereyda and Burwell repeat this type of disjunctive bricolage when Hamlet creates "The Mousetrap" using music from Tchaikovsky's Hamlet in his soundtrack ("Trivia"), and when he flips through unrelated pictures on the plane to England after he inadvertently murders Polonius, but this early scene establishes the discordant world in which Hamlet lives. The ultramodern Hotel Elsinore of glass and mirrors furnished with brocade-covered antique furniture further suggests Hamlet's sense of alienation. While he lives in a modern setting, the world within consists of relics of the past, including the technologically-produced relics of audio-video archives. While Hamlet may be superior to Ophelia in visual literacy, his advanced position has served to alienate him from everyone around him.

Almereyda further reveals a dichotomy of class as it relates to visual literacy when Hamlet screens the "Mousetrap" film, which effects the desired reaction from Claudius even while it leaves many in the audience with puzzled expressions. Rather than Branagh's efforts to level the differences between classes, Almereyda emphasizes the chasm via corporate structure and the selective presence of technology, and while computer technology is supposed to be a "democratizer" of intellectual and artistic capital (Welch

23), its use in this film suggests that upper-class access to technology serves to widen the gap between classes.

By shifting Shakespeare's minor theme of literacy to the center of his cinematic representation, Almereyda exemplifies what Jameson explains as a problem with the New Historicism movement by creating immanence out of an historical attraction (190-94). While recent interest in themes such as literacy and memory encourage centering these themes at the risk of obscuring other themes that may have been more prominent, Almereyda's use of the literacy theme effectively translates the relevance of Hamlet to late-twentieth-century audiences, echoing the contemporary concept of expanded literacy as he transfers the written word to visual and/or electronic reproduction. Throughout the film he ingeniously replaces or otherwise reconfigures much of the visual representation of literacy (i.e. books, letters, the library), as well as other elements deemed essential to the theme of Shakespeare's play, with a post-literate equivalent, in this "postmodern world saturated with video technology" (Abbate 82), while the use of the written word and tangible books seem archaic or merely incidental.[2]

The prologue of Almereyda's film features Hamlet alone in his room creating a video journal, in which he muses:

> What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how

[2] At one point as Hamlet watches videos of his parents, a reverse shot reveals a stack of books topped with a photograph, illustrating the primacy of the visual over the literate.

like a god! The beauty of the world; the paragon of animals;

and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?

(2.2.303-8, Figure 5.3)



Figure 5.3 – Hamlet's video journal

While the soundtrack transitions from the contemporary synthesized music of Morcheeba's "Let Me See" to Danish composer Gade's orchestration of "Echoes From Ossian Opus 1 in A Minor," and then back again to Morcheeba's song at the end of Hamlet's soliloquy, creating an amalgam of the modern with the classical, the opening of the film also establishes the primacy of visual communication over written and introduces Almereyda's "exploration of the ways in which people use media and technology as an extension and expression of their own conflicted lives" ("News").[3] After the

[3] Almereyda continued to express his interest in personal expression via media and technology in his next film, Happy Here and Now (2002).

introduction of Hamlet's philosophical musings mediated through electronic technology the title frames follow to introduce the textual basis of the film.

Text cuts to the action of Claudius holding a press conference, Almereyda having adapted the court reception from Shakespeare into a visual transmission of a live media event. Although Claudius has a physical audience, the event is broadcast throughout his corporate kingdom to a much larger audience, and his ability to manipulate news media establishes the power he wields in a visually-dominant culture. While Claudius preens before the commercial cameras, Hamlet walks down the side of the conference room with a video camera, capturing his own record of the event and creating a distraction. During the press conference, Claudius holds up a copy of USA Today showing headlines regarding Fortinbras' planned hostile take-over of Denmark Corporation. Claudius asserts his authority by tearing the paper in half, thus destroying the written word, but also reflecting the action of Branagh's Claudius when he declares that the business with Norway is over.

As Hamlet approaches the row in which Laertes sits next to his sister, Ophelia draws a picture of a fountain and writes, "3:30?" on a small packet, which Laertes refuses to pass to Hamlet. This moment provides a very distinct comment on shifting literacy in the fact that Ophelia draws the fountain, rather than writing her message out. Hamlet is, therefore, supposed to read her hieroglyphic meaning, a request to meet at the fountain at 3:30. Alessandro Abbate observes that by making Hamlet a film

student and Ophelia an amateur photographer, "their affinity is based upon the rejection of words as a vehicle of communication and knowledge" (Rowe 84), and this early sequence suggests the theme of a transition from a traditionally literate society to that of a contemporary view of expanded literacy that continues throughout the film. But by putting both Hamlet and Ophelia in artistic vocations, Almereyda also demonstrates their positions vis-à-vis mass media and the power structure of the Denmark Corporation.[4]

This shift from written literacy to visual literacy in Almereyda's adaptation is also evident in the representation of memory. Whereas Shakespeare uses the metaphor of a table book for the repository of his memory,[5] this latest adaptation of Hamlet features photography and video as keepers of memory. Lina Wilder posits that much of the conflict within the play is the result of Hamlet's vow early in the play to forget all but his father's memory. [6]

> …Remember thee!
>
> Yea, from the table of my memory
>
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
>
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past

[4] Peter S. Donaldson reads this struggle as a reflection of Almereyda's own resistance to dominant systems ("Hamlet Among" 217). Part of the director's vision in adapting Hamlet was to portray the "prison" of Denmark as existing behind "the bars of the cage [that] are defined by advertising" (Almereyda William xi). While Almereyda has been criticized for his blatant product placement, in keeping with his independent artistic vision, he chose to pay for use of trademark labels in resistance to the dominance of corporate capitalism that includes the film industry (xi).

[5] For a comprehensive discussion of table books in Renaissance drama, to which contemporary scholars believe Shakespeare was referring when he wrote, "from the table of my memory / I'll wipe away all trivial fond records" (1.5.96-97), see "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England" by Stallybrass et al.

[6] Presentation delivered at University of Oklahoma on Feb. 1, 2006, adapted from her unpublished dissertation, Shakespeare's Memory Theater (Yale, 2005).

> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandement all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmix'd with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!
> O most pernicious woman! (1.5.95-105)[7]

As a result of this vow Hamlet refuses to engage with Ophelia, choosing instead to watch video images while she waits for him at the fountain. The soundtrack emphasizes the poignancy of the two lovers in their isolation with a smoothly-modulated piano and violin melody and a soft bass undertone throughout the sequence that cuts between Ophelia patiently waiting while Hamlet watches video footage of his father, mother, uncle, and Ophelia. Almereyda's Hamlet does not have to rely on memory to keep his promise because the Prince can revisit King Hamlet in the form of digital media. Furthermore, there is no need for Hamlet to remember anyone else because he has covered his walls with photographs, a substitution of human memory, and he spends his time viewing and manipulating the electronic images that make up his "table of memory." Almereyda further represents visual images as memory when Ophelia, having been used by Polonius to set up Hamlet, crying hysterically, burns a Polaroid photograph of him in her studio bathroom sink, while Hamlet immerses himself in visual images by renting a stack of videos from Blockbuster.

[7] Katherine Rowe, however, reads this passage as a comment that Hamlet cannot fulfill his vow, even to the end of the passage because by verbalizing "baser matter," he is prompted to recall his base mater. The next line supports this reading: "O most pernicious woman," tells us that he has already turned his mind from the total remembrance of his father (42).

Although this adaptation of Hamlet into a twenty-first century American story translates themes and creates new motifs, by the final scenes of the film Almereyda creatively achieves closure that is a marked departure from his Shakespearian source. As Hamlet prepares to leave his apartment for the duel with Laertes, he removes the pictures from his wall to the accompaniment of violins and brass horns building to a crescendo that peaks with loudly booming drums as Horatio enters. If seen as the repository of memory, this removal of photographs forms a type of farewell, and as Hamlet leaves his rooms with Horatio, he looks back and turns out the light, a classic Hollywood exit, providing a foreshadowing of his final exit, but also visually erasing the table of his memory. While documentation of his experiences remain in his films, the still images that represent the collage of his memory are no longer important because they have become merely the preface to the present, where "the readiness is all" (5.2.222). Hamlet's dying request for Horatio to tell the story suggests a disjunction between a nostalgic verbal archive that would supercede Hamlet's visual images and Almereyda's creation that illustrates the postmodern privilege of scattered "photographic simulacrum" over historicity (Jameson 18).

Postmodern Representation

One aspect of postmodernism that continued to thrive in the late twentieth century is the "disappearance of the individual subject" in which personal style is eclipsed by pastiche (Jameson 16). This position argues

that nothing truly original is possible anymore, and therefore, artistic expression is expressed by pastiche and bricolage. Almereyda visually represents this concept by making overt references to earlier films and by the mise-en-scène that echoes his vision of the film as a collage (William xii) by presenting Hamlet's memories as a literal collage. Almereyda further realizes this concept by using technology to isolate characters, and even sometimes replacing them as his millennial Hamlet appears more as a byproduct of Almereyda's culture than an adaptation of a literary tradition.

Almereyda creates further disjunction in the film with numerous jump cuts and a startling vision sequence in which Ophelia jumps into the indoor swimming pool and appears to be drowning. But as the sequence continues, she is not in the water, but standing at the side of the pool staring into the water, and the shot is revealed to be a foreshadowing in her mind. This parenthetical scene suggests that Ophelia is suicidal even before Hamlet rejects her and murders Polonius. This foreshadowing, however, contains none of the wild-eyed madness that Zeffirelli indicates in his film. Taking into consideration the teen audience for which Almereyda must have intended his film, given the popularity of Ethan Hawke and Julia Stiles among filmgoers under twenty-five, the desperate passion that Hamlet and Ophelia display for one another, together with her suicidal thoughts while her father plots for her to betray Hamlet, evoke the tagline tease of Richardson's 1969 film, "[f]rom the author of 'Romeo and Juliet'…the love story of Hamlet and Ophelia" ("Hamlet"). While Almereyda's Hamlet was not

marketed as a love story, the intensity of emotion between Hamlet and Ophelia in this adaptation satisfies the unmet promise Richardson made.

When Ophelia does die, the crane shot shows her floating in the pool of the fountain beside which she had waited for Hamlet earlier. As her body floats in water less than knee-deep, the "remembrances" she had attempted to return to Hamlet float around her and the musical soundtrack emphasizes the importance of the sequence with mournful violins and woodwind horns punctuated by base tones and the rolling thunder of tympani. After the removal of her body from the pool, the framing of the remembrances suggests that it is the lost relationship with Hamlet that has pushed her over the edge of sanity, not the death of her father, despite her final speech in which she so emotionally grieved her father's death. This shift in motivation for her suicide is compatible with the persona Julia Stiles brings to the role of Ophelia. Twentieth-century teen audiences that Almereyda targets would be familiar with Stiles's 10 Things I Hate About You (1999), and by the time of video release, Save the Last Dance (2001) and O (2001), all films that overtly present the solidarity of youthful characters who are alienated from adult characters. Given this teen climate, such an audience would accept the gravitas of lost love over the death of a parent.

Following Ophelia's premonition of drowning, the next scene begins with an abrupt cut to Hamlet viewing black and white films, including clips from James Dean's movie, Rebel Without a Cause, while he muses:

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

Is it not monstrous that this player here,

But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,

Could force his soul so to his own conceit

That from her working all [his] visage wann'd

. . . . . .

… his whole function suiting

With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing,

. . . . . .

… What would he do

Had he the motive and…cue for passion

That I have?... (2.2.550-4, 556-7, 560-2)[8]

The placement of this soliloquy as a voiceover in the scene in which Hamlet watches the 1950s iconic rebel creates a connection between James Dean, whom audiences culturally identify as the "Rebel Without a Cause," and the rebellious Hamlet who Almereyda transported from the Denmark of Shakespeare's stage to twenty-first-century New York City. In Hamlet's postmodern world, however, there is no cause for rebellion and there is even less of an objective correlative for Hamlet's melancholy than in Shakespeare's play because Almereyda's Prince was already alienated from his mother and he demonstrates no desire to be a part of the corporate structure he stood to inherit from his father. As the film footage plays behind

[8] Almereyda's truncation of this soliloquy deletes, as marked by ellipses, the bulk of Hamlet's self-accusation of cowardice, making the speech more about his passion than his lack of boldness in action.

him, Hamlet's musing are accompanied by ominous-sounding music that features brass horns, with occasional nearly-staccato piano accents, suggesting that Hamlet's identification with the ill-fated Dean will have equally disastrous results (Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4 – Hamlet and James Dean

By positioning this voiceover soliloquy with James Dean in the background, rather than after Hamlet's instructions to the players, it is no longer only a metatheatrical reference to actors playing parts in general, but is also a more specific reference to James Dean and his portrayal of troubled characters and his untimely death. Furthermore, because Almereyda's screenplay originally called for scenes from East of Eden, his choice to use the more recognizable film, Rebel Without a Cause, solidifies the

association of Hamlet with the rebellion of Dean (William 57).[9] His relationship to The Actor's Studio, however, lends a further dimension to the metatheatrical aspect of the scene, connecting method acting to Shakespeare's "dream of passion" and "conceit" to Hamlet's emotional condition. While method actors draw on character motivation and have been known to experience physical and emotional pain while in character, ironically, Hawke, as Hamlet expresses his own "motive and cue for passion" as overshadowing any that the famous young actor may have had. The scene with its ominous background music continues, omitting Hamlet's questioning of his actions as cowardly as he further associates himself with the admired rebel he has been watching on the video screen. Hamlet then creates the avant garde film, "The Mousetrap," by which he hopes to entrap Claudius as he explains himself in another voiceover:

> . . . I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play
> Have by the very cunning of the scene
> Been struck so to the soul, that presently
> They have proclaim'd their malefactions:
> For murder, though it hav no tongue, will speak
> With most miraculous organ. (2.2.588-94)

[9] James Dean's refusal to attend the premiere party for East of Eden nearly cost him the lead role in Rebel Without a Cause, further making his name synonymous with rebellion toward the establishment ("East of Eden"). This iconic alienation from status quo culture serves as a vraisemblance to signify Hamlet's alienation from the world around him.

Hamlet's creation of his film frames this portion of his soliloquy while a clip of John Gielgud in the role plays the famous scene of Hamlet with Yorick's skull on one of the various video screens that compose the Prince's private studio. This inset of another film of Hamlet provides not only a reference to the Hamlet tradition and the iconic nature of Shakespeare's play, but it also provides a glimpse of that most famous graveyard scene, which could not realistically be replicated in Almereyda's twenty-first-century setting with the discovery of poor Yorick's skull in a New York City cemetery (Figure 5.5).[10]

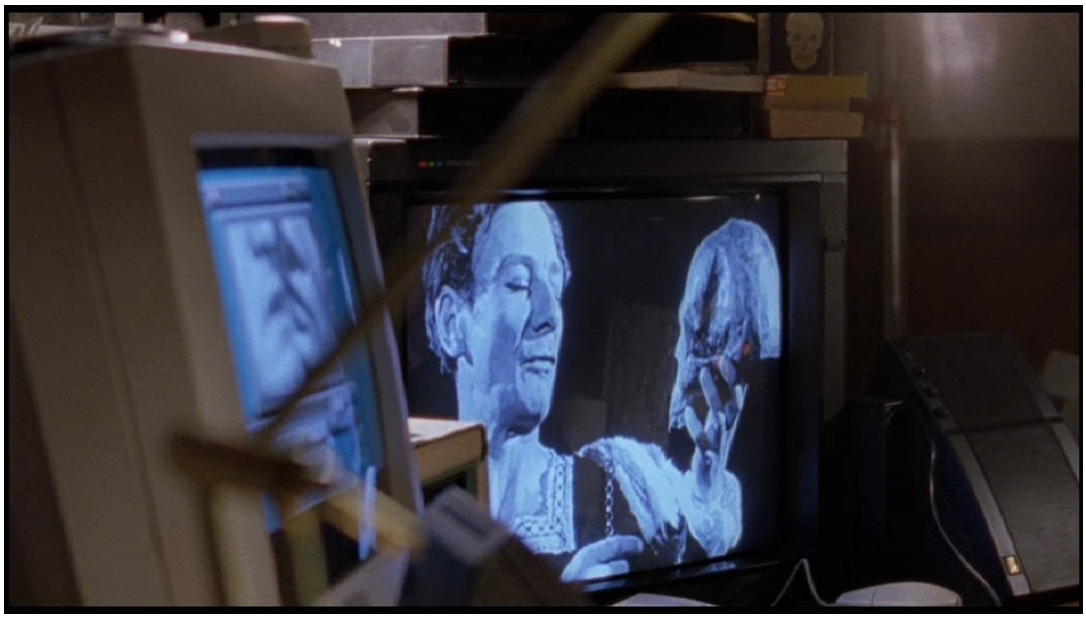

Figure 5.5 – John Gielgud as Hamlet

As Gielgud's biographer, Jonathan Croall points out, this footage from A Diary for Timothy (1945) "reveals a prince well into middle age" (316), not the man of a decade earlier, when Gielgud performed Hamlet on stage.

[10] Close viewing of the mise-en-scène of Hamlet's room, however, reveals a skull laying among the other clutter on his desk. Cf. Figure 5.2.

While Almereyda's inclusion of this scene confirms the Hamlet tradition, it also provides further disjunction as audiences realize the middle-aged John Gielgud and youthful Ethan Hawke are the same character. By including the clip, but only in the background, Almereyda illustrates Jameson's observation that postmodern "producers of culture . . . [resort to] pseudo-events and 'spectacles'" (18).[11] Gielgud does not appear as an historical documentation of the Hamlet tradition, but rather, Almereyda flattens history by including the reproduced scene of the aged actor juxtaposed with the youthful modern Hamlet.

When the unsuspecting royal couple finally attends the screening of Hamlet's film within the film, the translation of Shakespeare's "Murder of Gonzago" to Hamlet's "Mousetrap" creates meaning by contrasting different clips. Hamlet's montage effect appears contrived, obvious in its effort to accuse Claudius of the murder of King Hamlet, but as Rowe observes, it also reminds Gertrude of her affection for the elder Hamlet (52). This film includes home video clips of the elder Hamlet and Gertrude with young Hamlet as a boy, basking in familial happiness, and a clip of a turning globe, not only marking the passage of time, but also providing a referential nod to the Globe Theatre.[12] There are also various shots that include a bottle of poison, cells under a microscope, a man with a test tube, and liquid being

[11] In addition to Gielgud's film clip, a turning globe to refer to Shakespeare's Globe Theater and an Osric fax machine create simulacra that are reduced to trivia, creating an opportunity for careful viewers to make a game of spotting the referent, which reduces the value of the image to commodity reification (c.f. Jameson 18).

[12] As previously noted, the soundtrack of Hamlet's avant garde film is part of Tchaikovsky's Hamlet, providing another reference to the rich Hamlet tradition.

dropped into an ear, that appear to have originated from 1960s science filmstrips, all accompanied by increasingly rapid violin music. In Hamlet's world of video images, the montage is history, having been reduced in postmodern fashion from events to "random stylist allusion" (Jameson 18). But the low-tech footage also draws attention to a contrast between the simplicity and happiness of earlier in the century and Hamlet's discontent in the midst of his present high-tech culture. To add to the frenzy of the scene, the sequence cuts back and forth between Hamlet's film and close-ups of Claudius' face in eyeline match shots. The film reaches a climax after black and white sequences of death scenes, with the young Hamlet descending a staircase and peering around a corner. The shot cuts to a love scene from Anthony and Cleopatra, followed by a clip of an x-rated film containing a kiss with exaggerated tongue action,[13] at which point the sequence cuts to Gertrude shielding her eyes, followed by another film clip of an audience applauding in a metacinematic comment.

Almereyda effectively transmits to his audience the sense of disjunction, even to the point of vertigo that Hamlet's audience experiences by watching the short film. After Claudius calls for lights, Hamlet flees the screening of his film with a gun and hails a cab on the street, the large red sign opposite appropriately reading "MANIA," as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern slide into a taxi cab with him. While Hamlet tries to put his

[13] This x-rated film has been identified by Richard Burt as Deep Throat in the introduction to Shakespeare After Mass Media (7). The fame of this particular X-rated title rests on allegations that the featured woman was forced, against her will, to make the film. By using this film, Almereyda suggests that Hamlet does not blame Gertrude equally for her relationship with Claudius.

schoolmates off with rudeness, an acid rock song plays, echoing Hamlet's frustration.

In addition to pastiche and bricolage creating disjunction in his film, Almereyda positions technology to communicate a sense of Hamlet's isolation. The opening soliloquy, "What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason . . ." is interrupted by the ringing of a telephone, and serves to introduce the theme of Hamlet's isolation within his seemingly transparent world of multimedia, glass walls and mirrors. Ironically, the Hamlet that speaks is not a man of dust, but a virtual man made up of pixels (Abbate 83), and thus he is doubly isolated from the world around him as he speaks out of his private video journal. In addition to the virtual Hamlet being intangible, the journal itself has no physical characteristics, marking a shift in the way thought is transmitted, from traditional cardboard and paper books, to visual archiving. As Katherine Rowe observes, this "personal video is the technology of interiority" as he uses film and video to "mediate past experience" (46, emphasis in original). This historical past, however, punctuates the journal with a montage of scenes of war and destruction, illustrating the irony of Hamlet's speech and demonstrating Almereyda's exploration of "Shakespeare's interlocking themes [of] innocence and corruption, identity and fate, love and death, the division between thought and action" (Almereyda William x). This also elucidates what Shakespeare's Hamlet meant when he confronted Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with his knowledge that they had been sent for by Gertrude and Claudius and were

being used to discover the reason for his melancholy. But by relocating the speech and making it a soliloquy rather than part of a dialogue, Rowe claims that Almereyda emphasizes Hamlet's sense of "personal alienation in a media-driven world of hi-tech communications" (Rowe 82). Appropriately, Hamlet is only one of Almereyda's films that explores "the ways in which people use media and technology as an extension and expression of their own conflicted lives" (Najewicz), but it is a means that proves to further isolate Hamlet from those who could help him.

While Almereyda emphasizes the romantic relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, he transmits information by modern technology, which serves to create physical distance between the characters. Not risking being seen with the King and Queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report their secret observation of Hamlet to Gertrude and Claudius via telephone after meeting Hamlet in a bar, further emphasizing the isolation and alienation that characterizes this postmodern world of disembodied relationships.[14] Claudius receives his report while Gertrude initiates sexual foreplay, and he prematurely terminates the telephone call. This scene contains the lines in which Gertrude emphasizes the order of Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's names, appearing to correct Claudius regarding which schoolmate is "gentle" (2.2.33-34), which makes no sense, considering the

[14] Two further scenes suggest alienation via technology. Hamlet finishes his "Get thee to a nunnery" tirade by repeated messages left on Ophelia's answering machine, and Hamlet delivers the final lines of the closet scene to Gertrude from a pay phone in the basement of the hotel. Both scenes emphasize Hamlet's disengagement with people to whom he should be emotionally attached.

fact that exchange is totally non-visual.[15] Given Almereyda's drastic cutting of Shakespeare's play, his inclusion of these lines suggest a reference to Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead (1990) that parodied the interchangeability of the two characters.[16]

Almereyda's translation of Hamlet's rewriting "The Murder of Gonzago" for the traveling players to enact before the King and Queen into a film which he creates in the privacy of his own apartment furthers the theme of isolation and alienation. As Abbate points out, Shakespeare's Hamlet has a passion for the theater and enjoys interacting with the players, which Olivier and Branagh both adeptly demonstrate by their metatheatrical direction of the actors. Williamson and Gibson, as non-directing Hamlets also demonstrate joyful distraction at the arrival of the players. Almereyda's Hamlet, however, isolates himself with his technology, and the absence of people with which the Prince can interact lightheartedly to diffuse his overwhelming emotion denies audiences the interlude they find refreshing. The continuation of the speech is further enhanced by visual representation with Hamlet's digital manipulation of the opening of a yellow rose as his voiceover comments:

> I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
>
> May be a dev'l, and the dev'l hath power

[15] These lines (2.2.33-34) can be interpreted as Gertrude's assertion of which of the friends should be identified with the epithet "gentle," or her familiarity with the childhood friends of Hamlet, as opposed to Claudius's lack of the same, which would suggest that he had not been included in the senior Hamlet's and Gertrude's intimate family circle.

[16] Stoppard's character (mis)identification was compounded in the play by exchanging the actors in the roles every other performance.

T' assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps,

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

. . . . . .

Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds

More relative that this—the play's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

(2.2.598-601, 603-5)

This allows the observant viewer to connect the image of the rose to the devil who has "assume[d] a pleasing shape" at least in the eyes of Hamlet, who desires the return of his father. This creates a semiotic relationship among the three images, connecting the elder Hamlet, the rose, and the devil as images of the same attribute, which Hamlet incorporates into his avant garde film. The merging of these symbols into one signified entity causes further disjunction by mixing the positive connotation associated with roses, the negative connotation of a devil, and the ambiguous character of King Hamlet's ghost.

The editing scene cuts to a view of Hamlet's promotional flyer for "The Mousetrap" before further cutting to Polonius outfitting Ophelia with a "wire" in order to eavesdrop on her confrontation with Hamlet. The translation of Renaissance surveillance techniques to modern ones successfully adapts the space portrayed and opens up the single stage to encompass various locations. As Ophelia visits Hamlet's apartment to return the

"remembrances" he has given her, the young couple begin to kiss.[17] As he embraces her to softly swelling string accompaniment, he discovers the transmitting device and realizes Polonius's involvement and the music accentuates Hamlet's harshness as the melody becomes overshadowed by bass arpeggios: "Where is thy father?[18] Let the doors be shut upon him that he may play the fool no where but in his own house. Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1.129,131-2,136). Ironically, "the very thing they have in common—objects of mechanical reproduction—becomes the thing that tears them apart" (Abbate 84) when it is used by the older, more traditional generation, and the technology of surveillance and multimedia compound the struggle between Hamlet and Ophelia. Significantly, Almereyda does not include Ophelia's response because Hamlet is aware of Polonius's location, at the other end of the listening device, in a contemporary world of even more surveillance than Zeffirelli portrayed in his adaptation.

Modern technology also provides Almereyda an opportunity to translate into this twenty-first-century version the news of Hamlet's impending return from England, which arrives by fax. Upon Hamlet's arrival at the airport, Horatio picks him up on his motorcycle. The tracking shots show them speeding to the cemetery to attend Ophelia's funeral

[17] A yellow rubber duck is among the remembrances, which Crowl points out a reference to another Hamlet adaptation, Kaurismaki's Hamlet Goes Business, in which Claudius is in the rubber duck business (Shakespeare 196-97).

[18] Almereyda's line is clearly "where is thy father," whereas Shakespeare's is "where's your father," creating an even more "authentic" Shakespearian feel than Shakespeare himself. This minor adjustment of language demonstrates Amereyda's attempt, not merely to translate Hamlet into a modern American story, but to retain the flow of archaic language beyond authenticity to pastiche. From a linguistic point of view, however, Almereyda's use of the informal thy rather than your suggests more familiarity with Ophelia and direct accusation of her knowledge of Polonius's spying than Shakespeare's text contains.

accompanied by a synthesized cacophony on the soundtrack that further emphasizes Hamlet's position in his modern environment. After the confrontation with Laertes in the cemetery, the two friends proceed to Horatio's apartment where Hamlet informs him of Claudius' plot, which Hamlet has discovered on a laptop computer. He has retained proof in the form of a 3 ½ inch computer disk. The events of the intrigue unfold in Hollywood cinematic style, via flashback, with Hamlet's voiceover as narration, prior to an incoming fax from Claudius proposing the duel between Hamlet and Laertes.[19] By transferring Shakespearian content into a postmodern landscape relationships between characters change as well. Almereyda does not only exchange Osric for a machine and dilute Hamlet's forgery, but he also tempers the Oedipal issues introduced by Olivier into a subtle suggestion that Laertes's feelings for Ophelia are something more than brotherly.

The Oedipal Connection

Although Shakespeare did not strictly incorporate themes such as incest and an Oedipal complex into his play, critics and scholars have repeated them often enough that they have become part of the Hamlet tradition. Lawrence Olivier introduced Freudian themes in his 1948 Hamlet. Tony Richardson expanded the psychoanalytic approach in 1969 by portraying Hamlet as convincingly neurotic and visually suggesting a sexual

[19] The fax machine bears the brand name, "Osric," the character who in Shakespeare's play delivers the terms of the duel to Hamlet ("Trivia").

relationship between Ophelia and Laertes. The Oedipal theme also colors the reading of Zeffirelli's 1990 film that, as I have discussed, does not contain repressed sexuality even though it contains several other sexual issues. Although literary critics thoroughly rejected Jones's Freudian reading of Hamlet during the twentieth century, it remained as a subtext like an imprint that refused to be totally erased. But as Branagh did four years previously in his epic, Almereyda disregards Olivier's precedent that established an Oedipus complex as Hamlet's underlying problem.

This 2000 film refigures Gertrude as a sacrificial mother, who heeded Hamlet's exhortations not to "Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,/ Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse…" (3.4.182-3), and who denied her love for Claudius ever since the confrontation with Hamlet in her bedchamber. And, indeed, this is the impression given by the mise-en-scène when Gertrude rejoins Claudius upon Hamlet's departure for England, even to the point of visibly shrinking from Claudius's touch. Although Diane Venora's Gertrude resembles Sharon Stone in Basic Instinct, complete with slicked-back hair in one scene, her sexuality is tempered by her brittle exterior, in contrast to Zeffirelli's casting of Glenn Close in the 1990 adaptation. In Almereyda's film, Hamlet's efforts at prompting Gertrude's memory via the imagery within his "The Mousetrap" film succeeded, recalling her original love for her first husband, and her unconditional love for her only son.

In the final scene of the film Almereyda incorporates Gertrude's self-sacrifice that Olivier visually represented in his film (Cf. p. 33, above).[20] As the intrigue plays out, several shots show Gertrude listening to Claudius's plots at different times but never intervening. During the duel, she alone does not applaud when Hamlet scores his first hit but looks meaningfully at the wine glass, implying that she is fully aware of Claudius's plot. When Claudius tries to get Hamlet to drink the poisoned wine, Gertrude deliberately intercepts the cup intended for her son, snatches up the drink herself, and drinks from it before hugging him. Although Gertrude keeps Hamlet from drinking the poison, unaware of Claudius's backup plan that includes a handgun, she fails to keep Hamlet from struggling over the pistol that kills both him and Laertes.

From the first scene with Ophelia, Almereyda transfers the Oedipal relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude that has been perpetuated both in criticism and in film to an incestuous obsession of Laertes for Ophelia, echoing Richardson's reading. Laertes's refusal to pass the packet from his sister to Hamlet during the press conference may be merely an older brother's protectiveness if it were an isolated event, but when Laertes prepares to return to France, his embrace with Ophelia includes his surreptitious removal of one of her hair embellishments, a small cloisonné comb, apparently to keep as his own remembrance of her. This suggestion

[20] In Olivier's film Gertrude's self-sacrifice is colored by the Oedipal complex that pervades the entire film. Almereyda's film, however, suggests that, ironically, Gertrude has reverted to a traditional unconditional love for her son even in the midst of her nontraditional, postmodern reality.

of incest is again portrayed when Ophelia goes mad after her father's death. As she scatters photographs of flowers and herbs, with the poignant plucking of an acoustical guitar in the background, Laertes embraces her. The sequence includes a close up of his highly emotional facial features, reflecting a passion that surpasses filial love. When Laertes receives information regarding Hamlet's return, however, Ophelia's comb reappears. As Laertes seethes in his anger and fingers the comb as if a talisman for his planned revenge for his father's death and Ophelia's madness, Gertrude enters with news of the young woman's suicide. Laertes's fixation with Ophelia's comb transmits an implication of his sexual desire for his sibling.

The grave scene also suggests that Laertes harbors more than fraternal affection for Ophelia. His attempt to hold her once more in his arms is met with forcible restraint as Claudius and the minister hold his arms, accompanied by bass string arpeggios that musically articulate Laertes's deep emotions.

By shifting the twentieth-century theme of incestuous desire from Hamlet and Gertrude to Laertes and Ophelia, Almereyda reflects a shift in literary criticism that questioned previous positions. In addition to rejecting the Oedipus complex issue developed by Ernest Jones and perpetuated by Olivier, Almereyda's film also addresses Hamlet's failure to act upon his desire for revenge for his father's murder.

Hamlet's Inaction

Scholars throughout the history of Shakespeare studies debate whether Hamlet's inability to act is the tragic flaw that leads to his untimely death. Almereyda addresses Hamlet's inaction with postmodern disjunction as Hamlet watches a video of himself simultaneously on two screens in the solitude of his room. On the video, which he stops, rewinds and replays, he holds a gun to his temple, and then in his mouth as he muses, "to be or not to be." Anticipating the actual soliloquy, which will come later in the film, Almereyda links the famous lines with thoughts of suicide, just as Olivier had a half century earlier. In addition, as Douglas Lanier notes, this clip, which Hamlet watches three times, is reminiscent of Mel Gibson's near-suicide scene from Lethal Weapon that influenced Zeffirelli's casting of him in his 1990 adaptation of Hamlet ("Shakescorp" 176). This sequence serves to link Ethan Hawke's Hamlet with both Laurence Olivier's and Mel Gibson's as a self-conscious reference to the palimpsestic nature of the Hamlet tradition. But it also creates a disjunction for viewers who expect Hamlet's most famous soliloquy to follow the well-known lines.

Hiding the gun in his jacket, Hamlet proceeds to Claudius's office where he clearly expects to confront his uncle/step-father, but the office is empty, frustrating his attempt at action. It is not Hamlet's failure to act that is his problem in this film, but rather it is outside circumstances that prevent Hamlet from acting in a way that would bring a hasty end to his inner torment caused by his world of sterile, impersonal surroundings as well as

the self-imposed isolation that he creates by his absorption in high-tech electronic reproduction, as opposed to striving to "inter-be" as Almereyda suggests by inserting a video of Thic Nhat Hanh that Hamlet passively sees on his television.[21]

Although Almereyda's Hamlet doesn't appear to have the flaw of inaction, it is hinted at throughout this film by a memorable scene in a Blockbuster video rental store. As Hamlet walks amidst the shelving of videos, the sound consists of his voiceover of the lines from the famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy as it is finally delivered. But adding interpretation to the speech is the background; genre markers that all read, "Action," as if compelling Hamlet to end his indecision and do something drastic, while the video monitors in the background play an action movie, complete with explosive scenes of mass destruction, the antithetical violence contrasting with Hamlet's languid indecision that is emphasized by the mellow string melody on the soundtrack (Figure 5.6).[22]

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[21] Almereyda explains that Hawke gave him a video clip of Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, and he thought it was "a perfect ramp leading up to Hamlet's most famous soliloquy" (William ix). For an detailed discussion of the Buddhist concept of inter-being (a reliance on and interrelationship with other people as well as the other living objects), as it relates to Hamlet's isolation in a technologized environment, see Alessandro Abbate's essay.

[22] The film that plays on the video monitors is identified by Carolyn Jess as Tim Pope's The Crow II, which suggests a sequel phenomenon (92), with Hamlet "suffering an anxiety of influence" (93) in regard to reference to the original work. In effect, Hamlet himself is a sequel to his father, who appears primarily in video reproduction throughout this film, even as Hamlet creates self images in digital format. Courtney Lehmann adds the association of the original film, The Crow (Alex Proyas 1994) as a father-film, which starred Brandon Lee, son of the famous Bruce Lee. Brandon Lee's death created a sensation, occurring during filming of The Crow, which had to be completed using old footage, pieced together to salvage the action film (Shakespeare 97). Yvette Khoury further identifies one of the scenes shown as "Eric Draven (Vincent Perez) also contemplating revenge" (125).



Figure 5.6 – “To be or not to be”

Yvette Khoury, however, suggests that Hamlet is facing a “sea of troubles” because the suspense genre of his life is “antiquated and outmoded in the bustling New York City of 2000,” even as he is surrounded by action films (124).

The scene that scholars traditionally regard as proof of Hamlet’s failure to act is the one in which Claudius is praying and Hamlet decides against killing him so his soul will not go to heaven. In Almereyda’s film, this scene is set, not in a chapel, but in an equally cavernous automobile. After the screening of Hamlet’s avant garde montage film, “The Mousetrap,” Hamlet manages to shake Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and pays his uncle’s chauffeur to allow him to drive the limousine himself. In this sequence he overhears Claudius’s side of a telephone conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern regarding sending Hamlet to England. Claudius admits his wrongdoing and in an ineffective manner, prays for forgiveness while

Hamlet, with gun in hand, listens. In keeping with Almereyda's modernization to the twenty-first century and the theme of visual representation, Hamlet parks the car and flees into a theater,[23] leaving Claudius framed in a low-angle shot, effectively portraying him as larger than life with a neon stock-market ticker in the background, reinforcing the social critique of corporate America that Douglas Lanier finds a driving theme of the film ("Shakescorp"). This scene reveals that Hamlet's failure to act hinges upon his failure to engage with humanity, choosing instead to remain isolated in his world of technologically-produced simulacra.

Almereyda further chooses a motif of mirrored surfaces to illustrate Hamlet's inaction. Shakespeare's character achieves this through his many soliloquies, depicting Hamlet's soul-searching reflection, but like Kenneth Branagh before him, Almereyda translates the mirror motif into literal visual representation throughout the film. The setting of New York City provides a multitude of mirrored surfaces, the most obvious being the reflective surfaces of the metal and glass skyscrapers. Hamlet's living quarters offer a view of the city through the large windows on one side of the room. Hamlet sees his father through these windows and exits his glass surroundings to encounter the ghost face to face on the balcony. When Hamlet retreats to his apartment, he gazes at the reflective screens of television and computer monitors, with which he attempts to cast his inner turmoil through filmmaking.

[23] The movie showing at the theater is The Lion King, an animated loose adaptation of Hamlet, providing a further reference to its rich and varied tradition.

After Hamlet's abortive attempt to kill Claudius in the limousine, he returns to Hotel Elsinore, visiting Gertrude's suite, which, in contrast to his own stark white apartment, is decorated opulently in red and yellow, with framed artwork on the walls. When Polonius starts, revealing his hiding place, Hamlet shoots at him through a mirror, appearing to be shooting himself, or at least his reflection (Figure 5.7).



Figure 5.7 – Hamlet shoots Polonius

The bullet enters Polonius's body through his spying eye, shattering the mirrored door he hides behind. After disposing of the body, Hamlet's eye becomes the focus in an extreme close up as he washes his bloody clothes at a laundromat. While Hamlet contemplates his actions, Claudius's security team arrives, looking like secret servicemen complete with wired earpieces and mobster-like interrogation methods, roughing Hamlet up prior to his unceremonious banishment from New York.

This mirror motif as a symbol for self-reflection as well as a divided personality continues when Hamlet, departing New York on a jet, begins the soliloquy, "How all occasions do inform against me," from 4.4 as a voiceover as he walks through the plane, but this changes to live voice which concludes as Hamlet gazes at himself in the airplane bathroom mirror, creating a visual image of the reflective nature of his speech. Unlike Branagh's speech of bravado, however, Hawke delivers the soliloquy quietly with melodic strings and a soft bass horn in the background. His determination is careful, deliberate and measured, more private than grandiose. The scene of Ophelia's madness follows closely, her insanity illustrated by a cross-eyed stare and her scattering Polaroid pictures of herbs and flowers.[24] In this scene, Ophelia's grief becomes greater as she slides herself along the glass wall in which each pane reflects her madness. Throughout the film, Almereyda uses mirrored surfaces to create two-dimensional replicas of the characters that use technology in their struggle against the corporate world that created the technological devices they use. As film critic Rob Gonsalves put it, "[Ophelia] and Hamlet are the Prozac twins," not entirely crazy, but unable to reconcile themselves to the cold corporate world in which they live.

[24] Although these Polaroids have been identified by Carolyn Jess (92) as photographs of Polonius, after careful, repeated viewing, I am convinced that the photos that are shown are of flowers and herbs.

Conclusion

Notably absent from Almereyda's Hamlet is the protagonist's insanity, contrived or real. The scenes in which Hamlet seems most mad, and so convincingly portrayed by Mel Gibson in Zeffirelli's 1990 version, are totally absent from this adaptation. Although this millennial Hamlet is disturbed, there seems to be no real display of madness, but rather, he is unsettled by recent events, including Ophelia's betrayal. The technology-driven environment in which he lives has created a chasm between him and the other characters in the film, effecting his withdrawal from humanity and his isolation. Almereyda's change in the portrayal of Hamlet's mental condition easily reflects the advances made in the arena of psychiatry in recent years.

Hamlet could be described as having Borderline Personality Disorder, a recently articulated discovery by the psychiatric community. He definitely displays the symptoms,[25] but in a time and culture that accepts various emotional and mental complications, Almereyda does not focus on Hamlet's mental state, but rather, shifts the marginal issues of literacy into a more central position, and compounds the issue by illustrating the alienating effects of modern technology. In this modern translation from private print

[25] New York-Presbyterian Hospital describes the symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder with the following traits: extreme mood swings, difficulty in relationships, unstable self-image, and difficulty managing emotions (Borderline). Although Hamlet displays these symptoms, I am not attempting a diagnosis but rather suggesting that in the modern time depicted, the year 2000, "melancholy" and "mad" are not valid descriptors by contemporary standards. Hamlet, however, does fluctuate between suicidal tendencies and mania, expressing his frustration over his own character while maintaining his moral superiority over Gertrude and Claudius. Futhermore, throughout Almereyda's film he is the driving force behind the failed romantic relationship with Ophelia, standing her up when she proposes meeting at the fountain, and later embracing her passionately only to be interrupted by Polonius in one instance, and then finding her wired with a listening device in another scene.

literacy to private electronic literacy, Almereyda convincingly adapted sixteenth and seventeenth century concerns regarding the possible isolating nature of such endeavors to twentieth and twenty-first century anxieties of a similar isolation occurring from excessive electronic interaction. The theme of literacy features prominently in Shakespeare's Hamlet. This turn-of-the-century play (usually dated around 1599-1600) demonstrates the "transition…from a scribal to a print culture", which includes "reading… [as] a private and subjective process"[26] in the case of Hamlet, as opposed to Polonius's more "public and objective" literacy as demonstrated by his out-of-date performance of quoting old proverbs to Laertes (Ayers 424-5).[27]

In an effort to modernize Hamlet, Almereyda's millennial adaptation demonstrates a transition from a private print and a public visual culture to a private visual culture, in which Hamlet becomes alienated from society in general, but also severs almost all personal relationships in his engagement with digital media and ghostly representations of his father. Almereyda displays this transition by replacing mechanical reproduction, as signified by printed books in Shakespeare's stage practices, by electronic reproduction, evident in Hamlet's multimedia personal space. While Almereyda's film has been criticized as merely a riff of Hamlet (LaSalle), film critic Elvis Mitchell

[26] Ayers points out that another marker of Hamlet's private process of reading print is the fact that Polonius asks Hamlet what he is reading, which demonstrates that Hamlet was not reading aloud, and therefore indicates he reads from a printed book, rather than a manuscript as silent reading was a rare occurrence in the scribal culture (427).
[27] It is further noted by Ayers that Polonius' quotation of proverbs in Shakespeare's text indicates a memorization of gentlemanly knowledge without the "larger body of ethical and spiritual learning to which they refer and which should inform their use", but he has not internalized the maxims, which is "one consequence of an increasing supply of books" (431).

argues that this postmodern American perspective effectively translates Shakespeare's theme of characters who are out of touch with their environment, and Burwell's musical soundtrack emphasizes the claim of the new generation on Shakespeare's ageless themes, shifting effortlessly between classical and modern music.

But in the end the written text reasserts authority. In Almereyda's Hamlet, text is literally the last word as the concluding monologue is spoken by a talking head reporting Fortinbras's ascendancy to the Denmark Corporation throne, followed by the final visual image of the teleprompter echoing the final lines, reasserting the authority as belonging to the printed word and the media (Figure 5.8).

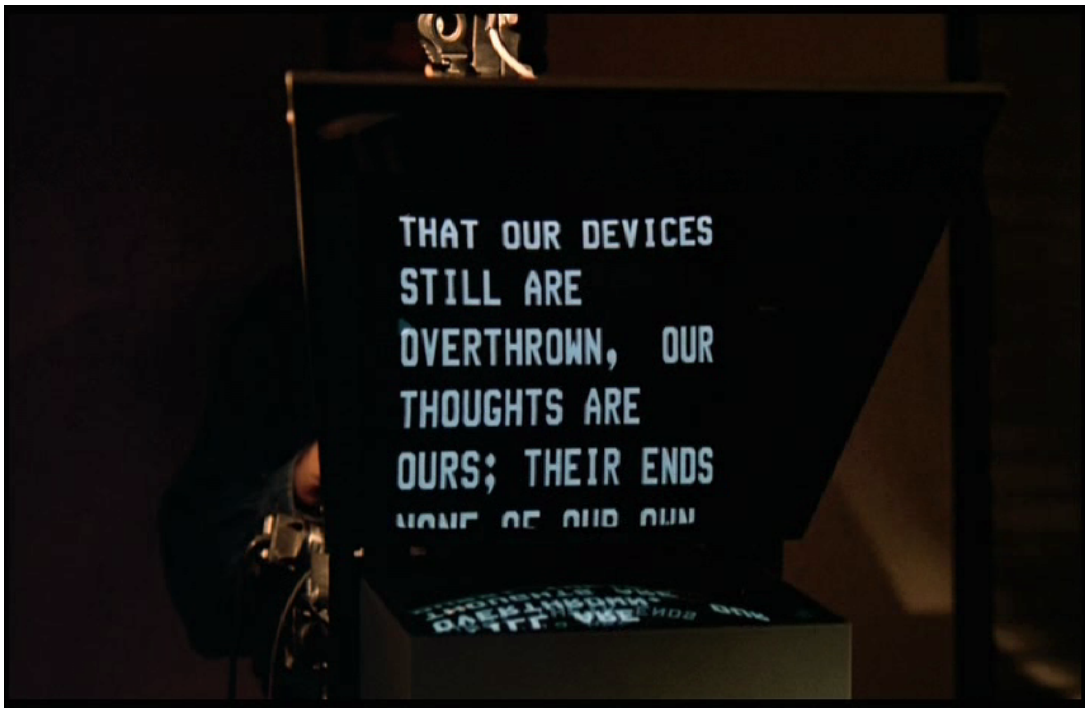

Figure 5.8 – The text asserts authority

Just as this film does not exist without its cultural context, neither is it isolated from the other English-language Hamlet films that were produced during the twentieth century. The postmodern concept of pastiche, much like its predecessor, the palimpsest, defines the intertextuality of this film that capitalizes on the rich cinematic tradition that precedes it, incorporating themes such as incest and inaction, and the motif of mirror reflection that previous filmmakers introduced and reproduced in their own creations. In his self-conscious use of pastiche and his effective translation of Shakespeare's timeless themes into contemporary terms, Almereyda consciously acknowledges the visual texts that underlie his film, paying tribute to the tradition, both in criticism and performance. The translation, however, overwrites the visual texts by appropriating their significance, which makes historicity irrelevant and leaves us with nothing but texts in Almereyda's technology-saturated environment.

Conclusion

Human minds, as natural palimpsests, overwrite images with others, with the select impressions becoming dominant. The Hamlet tradition, like other much-adapted stories, has become a palimpsest, Shakespeare having overwritten his source materials in order to create his iconic play. Because of its status, his Hamlet became the "original," rather than the histories of Saxo Grammaticus and Belleforest or the so-called Ur-Hamlet believed to have been written by Thomas Kyd. The innovation of cinema opened up a new wave in the Hamlet tradition with a visual format of performances that filmmakers preserved for close study, much like only texts had been previously. While adaptation theory in its early years focused on fidelity to the original text, more recent advancements recognize that adaptations may enrich the original by "provid[ing] a new gloss, a new emphasis, a new comment or interpretation" (Manvell Theater 47).

My study of Hamlet adaptations began with Olivier's 1948 film, which became the foundation for following generations of filmmakers. Olivier's utilization of Jones's Freudian reading of Hamlet influenced perceptions of the play throughout the twentieth century. Although scholars immediately rejected the concept of Hamlet as suffering from an Oedipus complex, the images initiated by Oliver continue to bleed through the overwritten text,

revealing the ghostly presence and palimpsestic nature of the Hamlet tradition as the visual images persist even in the presence of subsequent films. Indeed, this influence echoes throughout the twentieth century, with Richardson portraying Hamlet's problem as an ingrained neurosis two decades later while he transfered Freud's Oedipus complex to Ophelia and Laertes. Richardson's unique contribution to the Hamlet tradition, however, is the stark alienation of Hamlet from the status quo court culture of Elsinore. Even in the midst of a period of relaxed sexual attitudes, Richardson effectively associated sensuality with the consumer culture he critiqued, thereby restating Hamlet's tragedy as a contemporarily relevant issue.

The last decade of the century brought Zeffirelli's sexually charged film, which, in the practice of palimpsest, attempted to overwrite previous films in an effort to become a definitive Hamlet for a new, younger audience. By integrating the historical reality of courtly surveillance as a major theme and by casting box-office favorites Mel Gibson and Glenn Close, Zeffirelli created an action-hero film that popularized Shakespeare for a new generation. But the echoes of Olivier's film caused audiences and critics to see an Oedipus complex where there was none intended. While Zeffirelli's Hamlet managed to overwrite Olivier's as a dominant image, this layer of the palimpsest retained the vestiges of prior creative interpretations, at least in the minds of audiences. As Sloboda claims, Zeffirelli unsuccessfully attempted to bury Olivier's iconic film in the figure of King Hamlet, who refused to remain dead (148).

When Branagh directed his epic-length version in 1996 in an effort to create the ultimate Hamlet containing every word of Shakespeare's text, ironically, he was criticized for not including "an iota of sexual energy or tension in Hamlet's confrontation with his mother" (Rosenberg). While Branagh produced a film that could finally overwrite all previous adaptations by including all lines and scenes deleted by other directors, he chose to include Sir John Gielgud and Dame Judi Dench in a pantomime that reveals the foundation of another's work underneath even the most perfect palimpsest. But Branagh's film stands as a monument to his efforts to deliver the spectacle of Hamlet to a new generation, even as it failed to draw the populist audience Branagh envisioned. The last Hamlet cinematic adaptation of the century openly referred to the rich tradition it followed, with Almereyda including visual prompts to remind audiences of earlier performances. As a product of postmodernism, this film self-consciously acknowledged its place as merely the most recent Hamlet film, resorting to elements of pastiche even while it emphasized the alienating effects of a new form of literacy in a world of modern technology, much in the same way Shakespeare's audience might have experienced in their own changing world of private literacy.

While any one of these films in isolation would create a completely different effect, the wealth of Hamlets that exist intertwined in our memories contribute to our understanding and interpretation of each film, which becomes "one in a series, yet another taped essay on and journey into the

play" (Pilkington Screening 162). Like a reused sheet of parchment partly scrubbed away and then overwritten, each step in the cinematic tradition includes original material that reveals the film as a product of its time combined with flickering images from the past. Thematic shifts such as various psychoanalytic readings and cultural anxieties can also be noted in this twentieth-century series of Hamlets. These adaptations reflect the cultural times and places for which they were produced. But "nothing dies in Hamlet criticism; the same insights found in older paradigms recur under a different guise in the newer paradigms that have apparently superseded them" (Simon 708). The next major Hamlet film will, then, necessarily be built upon these antecedents, and as our world changes we will need to reread literary texts through contemporary lenses. Furthermore, as more English scholars become familiar with cinematic techniques, the discussion of literary adaptations are sure to prove more enriching and satisfying with understandings of origins and traditions taking new shapes in diverse media that ultimately show the power of Shakespeare's Hamlet to generate new perspectives.

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