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HAMLET ON FILM: THE SCREEN HISTORY OF THE MAN WHO COULD NOT MAKE UP HIS MIND

HAMLET VE FILMU: HISTORIE MUŽE, KTERÝ SE NEUMĚL ROZHODNOUT, NA STŘÍBRNÉM PLÁTNĚ

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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ABSTRACT

The thesis deals with the film adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet;* a multi-layered and deeply ambiguous play. Its innate ambiguity pushes directors to take widely differing stances. The thesis looks at different approaches and contrasts their effectiveness. The aspects of the play different directors chose to highlight and with what result is also taken into consideration. By close watching of selected adaptations, the thesis observes the impact of different aspects of the films such as the acting styles, casting, setting and music. The role of the elements unique to film is also examined. Among them are close-up, distance and camera angle, the tempo of editing, and juxtaposition of shots and the use of flashbacks. The thesis discusses the general issues connected with adapting play-texts into the medium of a film. It will also focus on instances within the particular adaptations that demonstrate the shift between the two means of convening a story.

The thesis will be limited to the English language adaptations with one exception: Grigori Kozintsev's 1964 version based upon Boris Pasternak's translation into Russian. The thesis pays close attention to the way Kozintsev uses the film to capture the dynamics of a totalitarian state and its impact on society. He highlights the notion of surveillance already present in the play and emphasizes the recorder scene to show an alienated individual who cannot trust even those whom he considered his friends. The focus shifts from Hamlet as an individual to a man whose fate is molded by a deeply damaged society. The imagery and symbolism of natural elements are well developed throughout the movie and are one of its most notable aspects. The cuts will be also noted, especially the cut of the scene when Hamlet’s contemplating the murder of Claudius.

Sir Laurence Olivier's influential Oscar winning 1948 version will be examined as it influenced all the later adaptations. Olivier was the first to use voice-over for soliloquies. He also works inventively with the camera, linking its movements to Hamlet’s consciousness. The conception of Elsinore as ‘the palace of the mind’ is discussed as well as the meaning of its conspicuous emptiness. The Freudian interpretation and its limits in regard to the film are discussed. Olivier also offers a simple stance on his hero when he adds that “this is a tragedy of the man who could not make up his mind” during the opening credits. The thesis also takes notice of a biographical links of the film to Laurence’s Olivier early life.

Kenneth Branagh set himself a challenge of doing something that had not been done before and often had been deemed impossible; namely to adapt Shakespeare's longest play without making any cuts to the text whatsoever. This has resulted in a lavishly decorated four-hour

film that test Branagh's limits as a filmmaker. He endeavors to hold the audience's attention by offering a great variety of shots and often changing the rhythm of the film's narration. The sense of opulence is mediated both through the costumes and settings but also through the technical specifications; the film is very wide (2,2:1 ration) and is shot in ultrahigh definition. Branagh uses the epic genre to hold his audience’s attention.

The directors can achieve successful results through widely differing means. The film medium as such is not simply reductive in the process of adaptation because it is able to add strength to the scenes through its unique possibilities. While something might be lost, new ways of expressing the nuances of the play arise. At best, the films entertain their audiences while delivering relevant and intriguing interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays.

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zabývá filmovými adaptacemi hry Williama Shakespeara *Hamlet*. Jde o hru mnohovrstevnou a často dvojznačnou. Tato dvojznačnost tlačí režiséry k tomu, aby zaujímali zásadně odlišné postoje. Práce se dívá na různé režisérské přístupy a poměřuje je z hlediska efektivity. Zamýšlí se také nad tím, které aspekty původní hry se režiséři rozhodli zdůraznit a jak to ovlivnilo výsledný dojem z filmu. Metodou pozorného sledování vybraných adaptací se práce snaží zachytit různé aspekty filmů jako jsou herecké styly, obsazení, lokace příběhu a hudební doprovod. Zkoumána je také role prvků, které výhradně náležejí k filmovému jazyku. Mezi ty patří detail obličeje, vzdálenost a úhel snímání kamerou, dynamika střihu, juxtapozice záběrů a použití zpětných záběrů. Práce se zabývá obecnými problémy spojenými s adaptací her do filmového média. Zaměřuje se na konkrétní případy v rámci jednotlivých filmů, kdy posun při adaptaci ukazuje dva odlišné způsoby zprostředkování příběhu.

Práce se omezí na adaptace v anglickém jazyce s jedinou výjimkou, kterou tvoří film Grigorije Kozinceva z roku 1964 vycházejícího z Pasternakova překladu hry do ruštiny. Práce věnuje zvýšenou pozornost způsobu, jakým Kozincev využívá film, aby zachytil dynamika totalitního státu a jeho dopad na společnost. Kozincev zdůrazňuje koncepci sledování, která je přítomna i ve hře samotné. V tomto kontextu vyzdvihuje scénu s flétnou, která ukazuje odcizeného jednotlivce, který nemůže věřit ani těm, které považoval za přátele. Film se spíše než na Hamleta jako jedince soustředí na příběh muže, jehož osud je formován hluboce poškozenou společností. Mezi nejnápadnější hlediska filmu se řadí obraznost a symbolika přírodních živlů rozvíjená napříč filmem. Práce se zaměří i na škrty, především na vyškrtnutí scény, kdy Hamlet zvažuje vraždu Claudia.

Pozornost bude věnována i vlivné a Oscary ověnčené verze sira Laurence Oliviera z roku 1948. Tento film měl zásadní vliv na všechny pozdější adaptace. Olivier jako první používá techniku voice-overu při monolozích. Olivier také invenčně pracuje s kamerou, jejíž pohyby spojuje s Hamletovým vědomím. Probrána bude i koncepce Elsinoru jako hradu mysli, stejně jako význam toho, že je často až nápadně prázdný. Pozornost je věnována i Freudovské interpretaci a jejím limitům s ohledem na tuto adaptaci. Olivier také hned v úvodu jako interpretační vodítko přidává slavnou větu, kde říká, že jde o tragédii muže, který se neuměl rozhodnout. Práce si všímá i biografických kontextů, které film spojují s Olivierovým dětstvím .

Kenneth Branagh se rozhodne podstoupit výzvu a udělat něco, co nikdo před ním neudělal a co bylo dokonce považováno za nemožné. Konkrétně se rozhodne adaptovat Shakespearovu

nejdelší hru a neškrtat ve scénáři. Výsledkem je bohatě zdobený čtyřhodinový film, který testuje Branaghovy filmařské hranice. Režisér se pokouší udržet pozornost publika mimo jiné tím, že používá velmi různorodé záměry a často mění rytmus filmového vyprávění. Opulentnost je komunikována skrze kostýmy a výpravu, ale také díky technickým specifikacím. Film je velmi širokoúhlý (poměr 2,2:1) a je natočen v mimořádně vysokém rozlišení. Branagh také k udržení pozornosti publika používá postupů typických pro velkofilmy.

Režiséři mohou dosáhnout výborných výsledků skrze rozličné postupy. Filmové médium jako takové není v procesu adaptace pouze reduktivní. Naopak je schopno dodat scénám sílu skrze své unikátní možnosti. Zatímco některé aspekty hry mohou být ztraceny v překladu, ve filmu vyvstávají nové cesty k vyjádření nuancí hry. V nejlepším případě jsou filmové adaptace schopné bavit diváky a zároveň přinášet relevantní a poutavé interpretace Shakespearových her.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to explore the ways in which Shakespeare's plays are translated into the filmic language. Several adaptations of *Hamlet* will be used as examples and the ways in which different directors search for the sense of the play will be examined. The crucial method will be close watching of three chosen adaptations. The thesis takes note of different aspects of the films and asks how the choices the directors made contribute to the overall experience of the audience and final meaning of the film. Among the aspects examined will be acting styles in terms of them being stylized or naturalistic. The thesis also pays attention to the setting and the effect it creates. Elements unique to the medium of film will be examined as well – editing tempo and its changes, distance and angle of the camera, focus, juxtaposition of shots and the use of musical score. The casting choices will be reflected upon as well.

The overall success of the play's translation into the medium of film will be judged. Are there any aspects of the play that the film does not succeed in representing? As *Hamlet* is the longest play in the Shakespearean canon, the directors often choose to cut. The thesis will look at the cuts and how they impact the meaning of the story.

The thesis will closely engage with three different adaptations of *Hamlet*. Two of them will be English-language films (Olivier's 1948 version and Branagh's 1996 adaptation); the other will be in Russian (Kozintsev's 1964 version). The second chapter will deal with Grigori Kozintsev's 1964 adaptation. Even though it was created later than Olivier's and was influenced by it in certain aspects, the thesis will examine this version first as it stands outside the English-language tradition. While Kozintsev's black and white film does not imply a specific era, it is clear that he relies heavily on his own historic moment and comments upon the situation in the Soviet Union. He envisages an audience that can read between the lines and understands his message even though it is never overtly explicit. It was conceived as a prestigious project because an acclaimed director teamed up with a Nobel Prize winner Boris Pasternak to create a definitive Russian take on the subject. The famous composer Dmitri Shostakovich was responsible for the score. Innokenti Smoktunovski, who was according to Douglas C. Brode "the Soviet Union's most highly regarded actor,"[1] played the Danish prince.

The third chapter will take a close look at the key moment in the history of English-language adaptations of *Hamlet* – Sir Laurence Olivier's celebrated 1948 version. Olivier cut

[1] Douglas Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies: From the Silent Era to Shakespeare in Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 128.

heavily and experimented with what could be done on film. He created a visually distinct black and white world, which helped us to access Hamlet's psyche. The film is, in contrast to his *Henry V*, strictly apolitical and focused on an individual psyche. Olivier brings in Freud's theories to build Hamlet's psychological profile. The adaptation is significant primarily because it was revolutionary in the ways it managed to use filmic devices to translate the play. Both the voice-over for soliloquies and the camera work are wonderfully inventive and still inspiring to filmmakers decades later. Brode sums up this adaptation's significance: "Whatever one's complaints about this *Hamlet*, its enduring importance stems from the fact that Olivier often succeeded in his attempt to search for ways in which technical devices of cinema could heighten the impact of a stage play."[2] This adaptation was chosen for close examination mainly because of its lasting impact and influence on later adaptations.

The fourth chapter will deal with Kenneth Branagh's 1996 version. Every discussion of this adaptation has to include prominently its sheer length – the film has 242-minute running time, which is unheard of. Branagh made a decision that no other adaptor made – he refused to cut the play's text. In fact, he did quite the opposite when he added excerpts from the Second Quarto version to the First Folio text that was his primary source. This adaptation was chosen for closer inspection because of the unique challenges it has to navigate thanks to the decision to produce a 'full-text' version. While Branagh acknowledges Olivier and uses some of his inventions, he is careful to differentiate himself from Olivier. For instance, he stays clear of any hint of Oedipal tensions, which he only re-affirms by his choice of historical epoch. Brode notices that "He [Branagh] sets the film in a European palace during the late 1800s, just before the world discovered Freud. Thus, we see the play as it might have been presented before the birth of modernism, an age that transformed *Hamlet* into a mirror for our neuroses."[3] Other defining aspects include the use of the epic genre including lavish setting and costumes and a strong cast headed by Branagh himself as Hamlet and equally compelling Derek Jacobi as Claudius. Branagh cannot use cuts to further his vision, so he uses flashbacks and flash-forwards instead.

Adapting Shakespeare

While several Shakespearean screen adaptations are known to wide public and are enjoyed even by people with no previous interest in Shakespeare (Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* is a good example of that), we often do not realize the scope of the screen versions.

[2] Brode 123.

[3] Brode 141.

> Peter Donaldson writes (in 1990) that there are literally hundreds of film and video productions of Shakespeare that span the entire period of film history, from earliest silents to the present, from independent 16 mm productions to high-budget feature films, from close transcriptions of stage productions to loose postmodernist collages.[4]

As a result, a film nowadays represents a first encounter with Shakespeare for many. Still, the films often have to face suspicion from the critics. Can they be 'true to Shakespeare'? Do they unduly simplify the plays? The argument of the critics as recorded by Anthony B. Dawson is that "it is impossible to film Shakespeare adequately because the text's imagistic language and the movies' strong visuals make each other redundant."[5] However the best adaptations show that it is indeed possible to transform the plays into an effective cinematographic experience.

According to Hutcheon, "film is usually said to be the most inclusive and synthetizing of performance forms."[6] There are numerous decisions the directors have to make that stem simply from the abundance of possibilities the medium has to offer. Donaldson reminds us that the theatrical space in the Elizabethan times was bare and as a result, "each director must invent a visual design to accompany or supplant the play's text."[7] Dawson juxtaposes the 'theatrical' versus 'cinematic' space and points out that in the theatre, a member of the audience has only one perspective of the action that does not change and he sees all there is to see of the fictional world in any given moment. According to Dawson, film differs as it is "providing multiple perspectives […], continuous space […], simultaneity (as in cross-cutting), and a host of other possibilities."[8] The never-ending possibilities make an extremely complex task out of any adaptation. They however also mean that while something might be lost in translation, there are countless ways to express the meanings in new and unique ways.

Adaptations as such have a firm position within our cultural sphere. Linda Hutcheon quotes Walter Benjamin who claimed that "storytelling is always the art of repeating

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[4] Peter S. Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) xi.

[5] Anthony B. Dawson, *Shakespeare in Performance: Hamlet* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 170.

[6] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 35.

[7] Donaldson xii.

[8] Dawson 170.

stories."[9] One must also bear in mind that this was exactly what Shakespeare himself did – he retold stories found in other sources and aimed to create popular adaptations. In this context, it is hard to blame the directors for deciding to retell his stories. Nevertheless, Hutcheon notices that "in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are most often put down as secondary, derivative, 'belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior.'"[10] However when one takes a closer look at the adaptations, many defy such a classification, most notably Branagh's movies. He is well known for bringing together the highbrow culture and Hollywood entertainment. Samuel Crowl describes his achievement: "His [Branagh's] films have created a unique synthesis of competing elements, often seen as mutually exclusive, between text and screen and between canonical and commercial values."[11] This thesis argues that it is possible to create an effective screen version of a Shakespearean play.

[9] qtd. in Hutcheon 2.

[10] Hutcheon 2. Hutcheon uses James Naramore's terms in this quote.

[11] Samuel Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 237.

2. KOZINTSEV'S DISSIDENT PRINCE

Every Shakespearean director has his own idea of what his adaptation of Hamlet should communicate to the audience. Grigori Kozintsev outlines his opinions on the topic in his essay "*Hamlet* and *King Lear*: Stage and Film." "What one sees in mind cannot easily be translated into visual poetry,"[1] remarks Kozintsev and sets thus his goal to develop visual means that would produce similar effects in cinema as Shakespeare's verse does on stage. The poetry of the play is unavoidably disrupted in the process of filmmaking and a simple introduction of physical scenery could not according to him make up for this loss. After pointing out the issues arising in the process of translating Shakespeare into the screen language, Kozintsev moves on to introduce his own solution and method: "The aural has to be made visual. The poetic texture has itself to be transformed into a visual poetry, into the dynamic organization of film imagery."[2] As an example of this approach from his film, he cites the presentation of Ophelia's madness in the middle of tumult and chaos of the revolt. She seems to be the only calm and happy person at Elsinore at this point. The key word to express Kozintsev's method is juxtaposition. But not only "juxtaposition of ideas, but also rhythm, movement, and the relation between sound and image: gentleness alongside coarseness and evil."[3]

This juxtaposition technique is very effectively used for Hamlet's first soliloquy. Kozintsev's film is just as much about the Danish society as shown within the walls of Elsinore as it is about the young prince himself. During the first soliloquy both are introduced and contrasted. The scene successfully presents several aspects of the world created by the director. The soliloquy begins as the whole court is applauding Claudius. We get to see that within Elsinore he is always in the foreground and virtually everyone is attuned to his moods and wishes. Hamlet makes his way through a stream of courtiers. He might physically be surrounded with people, yet he is clearly alienated from them. We hear the soliloquy in voice-over as he moves through the room. By using voice-over for soliloquy, Kozintsev uses perhaps the most significant innovation of one of his greatest predecessors – Sir Laurence Olivier. The motif of being alone in the middle of the crowd is apparent, chosen by Kozintsev because "loneliness in a crowd seemed to [him] to be more tragic."[4] At first we are watching

[1] Grigori Kozintsev, "*Hamlet* and *King Lear*: Stage and Film," *Shakespeare 1971: Proceedings* , eds. Clifford Leech and J. M. R. Margeson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) 191.
[2] Kozintsev 191.
[3] Kozintsev 191-192.
[4] Kozintsev 192.

the whole room, then the camera focuses on Hamlet's face in a close-up with shallow focus. This aptly demonstrates Kozintsev's theory of the shots and how they work in a Shakespearean adaptation. According to him, "the close shot catches the barely perceptible spiritual movement, while the general view shows the movement of the historical time."[5]

The movement of the historical time seems to be of primary interest to the director. The historical period of the narrated story is not important, it is the epoch commented on that matters. As Kozintsev was working in the Soviet Union, he could not possibly criticize the totalitarian state directly. This must have been clear to his audience and they would be attuned to covert meanings. The director in fact mirrors his own hero's approach; as Tiffany A. C. Moore suggests: "He [Hamlet], like Kozintsev, will use a play written by someone else to talk with his epoch."[6] While there is no direct link to Kozintsev's contemporary situation, his depiction of a society offers a clear parallel to his own environment. The members of the depicted society are persuaded of their powerlessness, of the unattainability of freedom and the impossibility of justice. The chilling result is a community of people constantly watching and constantly fearing being watched. People moulded by life in a totalitarian state are what constitute the prison of Denmark. The fact that the society stands in the forefront of Kozintsev's interest has direct implications on our perception of Hamlet. Anthony B. Dawson observes that "we are made to care much less about his [Hamlet's] subjective stance than about the pressures upon it from outside forces. These are what count."[7] This attitude differs significantly from Olivier's focus on Hamlet's psyche.

Elsinore is formed in accordance with the film's focus. It is always brimming with people and thus it is nearly impossible to be alone there. This lack of privacy is connected with the notion of surveillance, significant already in the play text and made even more pronounced in the film. Kozintsev himself stated that "the architecture of Elsinore does not consist in walls but in ears which the walls have."[8] No other director could portray the surveillance so poignantly as Kozintsev, though Branagh comes close at times, especially during his 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. As for Olivier, he lets go of the notion altogether. Nevertheless, the court life is still comfortable for most in Kozintsev's Elsinore, even though the physical comfort and safety is dearly paid for by the oppression of the free spirit. It is for the sake of

[5] Kozintsev 192.
[6] Tiffany Ann Conroy Moore, *Kozintsev's Shakespeare Films: Russian Political Protest in Hamlet and King Lear* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012) 94.
[7] Anthony B. Dawson, *Shakespeare in Performance: Hamlet* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 194.
[8] Dawson 185.

this comfort that even though everyone is looking, surprising amount of people manages not to see at times. As Dawson puts it, "courtiers [are] going about their business in the background as unnoticed agonies unfold in front of them."[9] This failure to notice is however quite deliberate in most cases. People in totalitarian society are trained to take care of themselves and ignore the injustices around them, as they feel powerless to set them right and afraid to try. Hamlet in apparent distress sits down in the middle of the castle shortly after the closet scene. Even though everyone is looking at him, no one would approach him. Surveillance does not overcome alienation; it only highlights it.

There is a special reason deliberately not to see Hamlet in particular. When Kozintsev characterized the tragic hero while commenting on his earlier stage production, he summed up why he proved lethal to Claudius's dictatorship. Hamlet "proved it was possible to break away from the system, disobey the command, tear off the suffocating uniform and refuse to be silent."[10] The prince becomes a dissident within his social environment, unveiling the unspeakable truths. He thus poses a threat to the regime and the courtiers make sure they will not be associated with him and linked to his trespasses. The play brings the two attitudes together in what Kozintsev believed was its most important passage – the recorder scene. Its significance lays in the way in which it "defines the individual against the operations of the state and its informers."[11] The horror and uncertainty of Elsinore's society are highlighted by the fact that the state informers are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet's own friends. The swiftness, with which they become untrustworthy, and even dangerous to Hamlet, is truly chilling. The hero is however able to stand up to them and identify their hypocrisy in pretending their only motivation was his own best interests. This Hamlet is not afraid. He tries to act as much as the oppressive regime would allow. His shortcomings are caused more by the lack of opportunities than by his doubts and fears. He does not have a problem with making his mind. To support this interpretation of his prince, Kozintsev cuts the scene in which Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius when he is praying. This Hamlet does not get this opportunity and he is not driven into the frustration and self-disgust of the 'How all occasions do inform against me' soliloquy, which is cut as well. If there is a trait in Hamlet that prevents him from achieving his ends, it is not doubt and melancholy but something Kozintsev labelled as a 'Slavic element' in him. This element is characterized by emphasizing "the energy of

[9] Dawson 185.
[10] Dawson 187.
[11] Dawson 188.

ideas and a desire to act which has raced ahead of the completion of the ideas."[12] This is understandable in his situation as he has so many impulses to act on and so little opportunities to do so.

While Kozintsev's Hamlet is more active than what is usual, his Ophelia is all the more passive. She is the second blazing symbol of the oppression after Hamlet. When Martin Hilský talks about the usual depiction of Ophelia of the 18th and 19th century stage, he uses adjectives such as "angelic, chaste, defenceless, […], tender and obedient."[13] Kozintsev creates Ophelia in this manner. She is passive simply because she is not capable of standing up to authority, being brought up to submit herself to it.

Hilský further explains that 18th and 19th century Ophelia was "understood chiefly as a victim of male power, which she could not resist."[14] In Kozintsev's film, this male power is mixed together with the state oppression. She is not allowed to become her own person. Kozintsev instructing Shostakovich in a letter wrote that he wants to "show how they denaturalize the girl."[15] When she dances, there is no freedom or pleasure in it. She is being trained to please others, to put on a show. She is not to express herself but rather to suppress herself. She demonstrates the learned behaviour also in interaction with her own family. She is docile and ready to accept guidance in her conversation with Laertes. The main difference between her and Hamlet lies in the fact that the oppression in her case penetrates the surface and forms her very core. She does not even have the ability to think freely.

Her madness is conditioned by the imprisonment of her free spirit and gentle nature in Elsinore. The audience is reminded several times that she is trapped, without any hope for freedom. At the beginning of the nunnery scene, we see her beautiful face through the grids. She is both trapped and irrevocably divided from Hamlet. The scene is intense and frustrating as it clearly presents their mutual affection and strong attraction on one hand; on the other the insurmountable divide of Ophelia's lack of individual will. She may long for Hamlet but she could never break away so severely from what is expected from her. The lessons she has been taught are engraved to the extent that they stay with her even after she loses her mind. Even though she is long gone, once she hears the dance music she obediently starts to dance.

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[12] Dawson 186.

[13] Martin Hilský, "Otázka smyslu, smysl otázky: Hamletovská zrcadlení," *Hamlet,* William Shakespeare (Brno: Atlantis, 2011), 77 – my translation.

[14] Hilský 77 – my translation.

[15] Dawson 189.

She was brought up to always be loyal and ready for sacrifice. But once her loyalties to her father and Hamlet crash, she cannot sustain the impact and she loses her mind. Paradoxically, out of her mind, she seems to achieve at least some semblance of freedom and happiness. She is not only entrapped in Elsinore, where her ladies dress her like a doll and quite literally put her in iron; Kozintsev strips her of any individuality or agency within the movie and even takes her 'O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown' soliloquy away. She remains just a symbol, however effective, of the oppressive nature of the regime.

It is also noteworthy that among the people responsible for Ophelia's fate are those she loved and trusted most. Nor Laertes neither Polonius can be accused of being truly villainous though. Mark Sokolyansky calls the inhabitants of Elsinore "moderately clever, moderately honest, moderately kind."[16] And that is exactly what they are. Those people forming the horrible prison of Elsinore are not, with the exception of Claudius, uncommonly cruel. The circumstances of their lives condition their moral offenses. They are in fact to a certain degree also victims of the system, even though they are guilty of helping to retain it. Kozintsev uses them to show the destructive effect of a totalitarian state on the society. The moral corruption goes beyond the immediate oppression and will outlast even Claudius's reign.

The use of symbols, especially of natural elements, is another distinctive trait of this adaptation. They are introduced already in the opening of the film. The credits are accompanied by a shot of a torch against stonewall, then the camera moves on to the sea, which reminds us of Olivier, who includes a view of Elsinore next to a raging sea for "the vicious mole of nature" speech that opens his film. The first scene is cut, instead we see Hamlet hurrying into the castle. The editing tempo is quite dynamic, and then suddenly comes to a halt when Hamlet enters the castle and the camera focuses on the slow and ominous raising of the drawbridge. Thus the prison metaphor is established early on as well. When the drawbridge is up, the castle is mirrored in the water of the well beneath it. The castle and the elements keep on mirroring each other throughout the film. However there is also a strict division between the castle and the natural elements enveloping it. This distinction presents the second key juxtaposition of the film; that between the strict rules and the rigid hierarchy of Claudius's Elsinore and the untameable wildness of the elements associated with the figure of the ghost. The conception of the ghost is one of the strongest aspects of Kozintsev's version.

[16] Mark Sokolyansky, "Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear," The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* ed. ," Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 208.

Kozintsev effectively captures the play's anxiety about the nature of the ghost. Horatio first introduces us to the idea of him, telling Hamlet about the earlier apparition. The scene is accompanied by alarming music and camera looks down on them. Fire burning in the fireplace behind them gains more and more prominence throughout the scene. It moves from a background motive to a dominant impression, accompanied by the sound of loud crackling. The fire is a menacing and fascinating presence even within the protected space of the castle. The ghost is thus associated with elements and characterized by being dangerous and uncontrollable. Several signs precede his apparition. The scene starts with the shot of an astronomical clock chiding, the last figure to appear being that of the Death. Strong wind is blowing and the horses apparently sense something unnatural that scares them.

These ominous signs of the ghost's arrival are transposed with the feast inside the castle. We see the shadows of dancing satyrs, associated with Claudius. The apparition itself strengthens the questionability of the spirit's nature. We never have the impression that this might be a father talking to his son. They are never even physically close to each other. The ghost is always above Hamlet, who has to look up to the apparition quite literally. In contrast to this, the camera looks down upon Hamlet, who has the roaring sea behind him and appears tiny in comparison with the elements and the ghost. The ghost's background on the other hand makes him appear even more grand and mystical. He is seen against the backdrop of the dark clouds, illuminated by moonlight. The castle, which hints at the ghost's proportions, completes the picture of grandeur. The ghost's movements are purposeful and hypnotizing, his voice inhuman. The only trace of humanity in this mystic figure are his eyes. We get a glimpse of them when he tries to protect the queen from Hamlet's fury. The humanity is thus expressed both in appearance and the expression of the very human sentiment of mercy. This scene is given great prominence and impact in this version, as this is the only moment when we get to see the ghost. The first scene is cut and when Hamlet sees the ghost in his mother's bedroom, neither Gertrude, nor the audience see it. We however do hear the ghost one more time. When Hamlet is travelling to England, we hear the ghost's 'Farewell' accompanied by a shot of a roaring sea, deepening the ghost's interdependence with the elements.

Neil Forsyth recognizes a special "film-language created for the ghost."[17] He characterizes the language as "everything, in short, that is other than the world of Claudius's earthbound and imprisoning court."[18] This juxtaposition is again brought to attention during the play-

[17] Neil Forsyth, "Shakespeare the illusionist: filming the supernatural," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* ed. Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 277.
[18] Forsyth 277.

scene. It is located quite literally between the two symbolic worlds. The actors have the sea behind them while the court members are seated in front of the castle. The royal couple is seated in such a manner that no one can fail to notice them. This of course complicates Claudius's situation when he on impulse reacts to the murder enacted by the actors and stands up. Before he realizes what he has done, the whole court are upon their feet as well, looking at him expectantly. The moment of truth is here, illuminated by the torches. For Tiffany A. C. Moore, the "fire and flame represent truth."[19] This is also true inside Elsinore, where "torches, candles and the fireplace, when lit, represent the glimmerings of truth inside the castle's hyper-controlled world of falsity."[20] She notices that when Hamlet and Horatio return to the castle after the play-scene, there is a raging fire in the fireplace. To her, it "illustrates the hidden truths now brought to the surface."[21] I would suggest that it also expresses the reality of unpredictable, dangerous situation all the protagonists are now facing. It becomes clear to Claudius that he cannot control everything, especially not Hamlet. On the other hand, the prince himself cannot control the situation either.

Hamlet seems to exist somewhere in between the court and the world of elements. Even though he repeatedly escapes the castle and seems to feel most comfortable near the sea, unlike the ghost he cannot exist independently of the castle. Even Hamlet's most famous speech takes place on the seashore. The 'to be or not to be' soliloquy is again heard in voice-over, there is even music in the background. Hamlet is at first looking at the sea, then straight into the camera. At the words 'sea of trouble,' he averts his eyes to the sea again and with the word 'to die' he starts walking towards the sea. Thus his death is connected with the elements. When he dies, he will cease to exist in between the worlds and he will possibly reach freedom in the world of elements. His dying scene upholds this interpretation as he deliberately leaves the castle to die leaning on a rock, facing the sea. His only words are 'the rest is silence' and when he dies, the camera pans to the sea. While the music has been a prominent part of the film, at this point there is indeed silence, we can only hear the sea and chiming clock. The idea that he manages to free himself after death is supported by reversed sequence from the beginning. We see the drawbridge again; however this time it is not trapping Hamlet in the prison of Denmark. He is carried out of the castle for good.

The ghost's film-language introduces elements of heroic tale into the film narrative as well. Pasternak even called Hamlet "drama of high destiny, of a life devoted and preordained

[19] Moore 95.
[20] Moore 95.
[21] Moore 97.

to a heroic tale."[22] This attitude can be traced in the film. Already the setting develops this line of imagery. We have a castle around which there is nothing but dangerous wilderness. The sea is especially menacing. Elsinore could function as a circle of light and safety in the middle of darkness and danger. There even is feasting in the castle. But Hamlet's tale is subversive to this set of images. There is, with the exception of Horatio, no companionship for him inside the castle. He is also in more danger within its walls than outside. The heroic tale narrative is nevertheless to be found also in the conception of the ghost and even in Kozintsev's Ophelia. The ghost does not conduct himself as a family member. He rather functions as a mythical creature setting the hero on a quest. Again, this primary narrative is subverted by Hamlet's initial inaction. The formula repeats itself in the case of Ophelia. We do have a beautiful lady, who is passive. She is supposed to be saved and the hero can by saving her prove his value. But Hamlet does not save Ophelia; he is the one that ultimately dooms her. This subversion of a familiar narrative pattern is very effective and has a disturbing effect. The audience feels even more acutely that something is amiss in Denmark.

The treatment of the ghost offers a useful point of comparison between different attitudes of the directors. I would argue that Kozintsev's ambiguous and symbolic one is the most effective. Kenneth Branagh's attitude looks similar at the beginning. When we first see the ghost, he looks inhuman, just like the statue of the old Hamlet. We do not even catch a glimpse of his face and his surreal air is supported by the fact that he does not move; the camera zooming in and out creates the illusion of movement. He also gets a set of attributes creating his own film-language, though they are not as much engrained into the film's structure, as it is the case in Kozintsev. When Hamlet follows him into the woods, the ever-present mist adds to the mysterious atmosphere. As the ghost leads Hamlet further, the mood becomes menacing as we watch repeated shots of ground moving, fire bursting and mist swirling. The wood itself seems restless. The ghost seems menacing and dangerous as well, he suddenly grabs Hamlet by the throat and pushes him against a tree. Then we see him and this time he has a distinctly human form with the exception of unnaturally blue eyes. As in Kozintsev, the ghost is above Hamlet. When the spirit starts to relate to Hamlet the tale of the murder, we see a detail of its mouth transposed by the shot of blood coming out of its ear. We are shown the murder. The scene seems to prove ghost's words and we are robbed of the ambiguity very much central to Hamlet's struggle. It also reduces the effect of the play-scene. I would argue that this makes Branagh's version of the ghost the weakest.

[22] Moore 90.

Gregory Doran's 2009 version starring David Tennant is also useful as a point of comparison here because his treatment of the ghost is unique as his ghost is by far the most human. David Tennant when speaking about his Hamlet's relationship to the ghost said that for him, the ghost was his Dad.[23] The audience does not get to see the ghost in the first scene. We only observe the three scared men addressing it. The unsteady movement of the camera is used to create the impression we are looking at the scene through the ghost's eyes. We only get to see the ghost after we have seen Claudius. This further highlights the choice to cast Patrick Stewart both as the ghost and as Claudius. The choice brings up the question of identity. Hamlet's uneasiness about the situation even before he learns about the murder originates in part in the way in which Claudius easily steals old Hamlet's place. He takes his crown, his wife and then even starts addressing Hamlet as his son. The life of the court goes on as if nothing had happened and Claudius simply steps into old Hamlet's identity. There is no place for memories because the vacant space has been already occupied. The ghost is accompanied by vapours but other than that he is a positively human figure. In the beginning of the scene the ghost is again above Hamlet but Doran's film overcomes this and brings the ghost on the equal ground with his son. In the end he even proceeds to hug him. He is however still cruel, especially to Hamlet in whom he inspires terror. He chides him mercilessly when he appears in Gertrude's bedroom but then he approaches the unknowing queen and gently strokes her hair, standing between her and Hamlet. For a brief moment we get a glimpse of a re-united family.

If Kozintsev said that the formula of a Shakespearian film is 'a conjunction between the specifically personal and the immensity of the general,'[24] he deals primarily and very effectively with the latter. Both his Hamlet and Ophelia works very well as symbols but as such they do not form an intimate connection with the audience as individuals. Kozintsev is at several instances clearly inspired by Olivier; nevertheless he employs the borrowed aspects in a different and original way that supports his reading of the play. The sea around Elsinore becomes an important symbol of the ghost and the voice-over in the first soliloquy is used to demonstrate the alienation of Hamlet from the crowd surrounding him. Olivier does not really develop his sea imagery and his Hamlet is alone when he delivers the first soliloquy. Kozintsev has a very strong directorial view and all the cuts and filmic devices are used to convey this view. He creates a distinctive world, which is effective but cannot encompass all the complexities of the play. Nevertheless, it provides a compelling comment on the nature of

[23] David Tennant in *Shakespeare Uncovered: Hamlet* (USA, 2013), PBS.
[24] Kozintsev 193.

the totalitarian state, which goes beyond Soviet Union and says something universal about the dynamics of a certain kind of society. As such, it is a clear success.

3. OLIVIER'S ESSAY IN FREUD: HAMLET WHO COULD NOT MAKE UP HIS MIND

Laurence Olivier's 1948 *Hamlet* is the one Shakespearean adaptation you cannot shy away from whatever your feelings about it might be. Hugely successful, this staple of British cultural history went on to become the first British movie to win an Academy Award for the Best Picture. While the critical success might not be such a surprise, the unprecedented popular success had far-reaching consequences. Patrick J. Cook credits the success with "effectively establishing the genre of filmed Shakespeare with mass appeal."[1] The status of the movie was inextricably joined to Olivier's status as a cult figure of auteur. His name became famous enough to enter the popular culture together with his *Hamlet.* The protagonist of J.D. Salinger's 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye* has this to say about the role and the man: "I just don't see what's so marvelous about Sir Laurence Olivier, that's all. He has a terrific voice and he's very nice to watch walking or dueling or something but…[he] was too much like a goddamn general instead of a sad, screwed up type guy."[2]

What is more, this adaptation has managed to pass the test of time. Anthony B. Dawson writing in the mid-1990's still labelled it "the best known and most widely screened of *Hamlet* films (perhaps even of Shakespearean films generally)."[3] The cult adaptation has beyond doubt found its place among the most successful Shakespearean films. Anthony Davies is convinced that the film "must be central among those which Lawrence Guntner[4] has identified as having become a 'Great Tradition of Shakespeare on Film', privileging the films directed by Olivier, Welles, Kurosawa, Kozintsev, Brook, Polanski and Zeffirelli."[5] While this status might have helped Shakespearean movies as an institution, it did slow down the experimentation with the film media for *Hamlet*. The Olivier version was looming so high it

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1 Patrick J. Cook, *Cinematic Hamlet: the Films of Olivier, Zeffirelli, Branagh, and Almereyda* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011) 62.

2 Barbara Hodgdon, "Cinematic Performance: Spectacular Bodies: Acting + Cinema + Shakespeare," *A Concise Companion To Shakespeare On Screen*, ed. Diana E. Henderson (Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 109.

3 Anthony B. Dawson, *Shakespeare in Performance: Hamlet* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 171.

4 Lawrence Guntner is a Shakespearean scholar and *The Cambridge Companion the Shakespeare on Film* contributor.

5 Anthony Davies, "The Shakespeare Films of Laurence Olivier," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* ed. Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 171.

was effectively discouraging other directors especially in the Anglophone cultural sphere and full "four decades intervened before the next major film adaptation of the play in English."[6]

Olivier started working on *Hamlet* after he had already enjoyed success with another Shakespearean adaptation. His *Henry V* was heavily influenced by the time of its creation. Anthony R. Guneratne explains "it was not prestige or moral rectitude but a wartime requirement for morale-boosting propaganda that provided impetus for Olivier's *Henry V*." [7] *Henry V* was chosen for this purpose because "the plot suits a message of national unity against a common foe."[8] The result is a decidedly political film. In *Hamlet,* Olivier entirely abandons the political and presents a strongly individualistic vision.

Adapting *Hamlet* is always an ultimate challenge, which in Michael Almereyda's words "allows one's reflexes as a film-maker to be tested, battered and bettered."[9] It was beyond doubt an ultimate challenge for Olivier as well and he knew it. He decided to throw caution to the wind and offer a radical interpretation while drastically cutting Shakespeare's words. Making significant textual cuts was certainly daring because the relationship between the Shakespearean canon and the new medium of film was still being established. Elsie Walker reminds us that "many professional and academic critics still responded in a positivist fashion in terms of loss, calculating each film's relative 'faithfulness' to *the* Shakespearean text."[10] Cook, referring specifically to Olivier's *Hamlet,* explains that "cutting the bard's sacred words, indispensable characters, and crucial scenes and speeches to create an 'essay in Hamlet' considerably shorter and less polysemic than the original produced predictable laments."[11] Olivier's need to cut is however quite understandable. The four-hour length of the complete play does not correlate with the demands of commercial filmmaking. When Kenneth Branagh decided to produce an uncut version decades later, it was still considered an audacious undertaking and it certainly was not a commercial success.

Olivier's claim that he created an essay in Hamlet hints at a strong directorial vision. Olivier himself however did not agree with the notion that he took liberties with the play and claimed with astonishing confidence that his "whole aim and purpose has been to make a film

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[6] Cook 5.

[7] Anthony N. Guneratne, "Cinema Studies: ‚Thou Dost Usurp Authority': Beerbohm, Tree, Reinhardt, Olivier, Welles, And The Politics Of Adapting Shakespeare," *A Concise Companion To Shakespeare On Screen*, ed. Diana E. Henderson (Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 45.

[8] Guneratne 45.

[9] Cook 2.

[10] Elsie Walker, "Authorship: Getting Back To Shakespeare: Whose Film Is It Anyway?," *A Concise Companion To Shakespeare On Screen*, ed. Diana E. Henderson (Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 10.

[11] Cook 23.

of *Hamlet* as Shakespeare himself, were he living now, might make it."[12] Olivier was not afraid to go a step further and leave the parts he was not interested in behind in order to zoom in on an individual and his psyche. The film becomes, in Dawson's words, "almost devoid of social ramifications of any kind."[13] Hamlet's struggle to emerge as an influential figure within the Danish society is abandoned (as is the notion of surveillance, so prominent in Kozintsev) in favour of presenting a Hamlet that is driven exclusively by his inner demons, above all his Oedipal inclinations. Olivier was inspired by Freud's disciple Ernst Jones, whose theories, as reported by Dawson, "Olivier had absorbed during his visits to [Jones] in 1930s."[14] Olivier recalled the effect that meeting Jones had on him in his book:

> […] ever since that meeting I have believed that Hamlet was a prime sufferer from the Oedipus complex […] 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.[15]

The most notable innovations Olivier introduced in his film are interwoven and the interplay between them helps to further his directorial vision. The Oedipus complex can work as a driving force only if the individual psyche takes a front row. The visual innovations correspond with the subjective approach. The camera movements are linked to Hamlet's consciousness and also help to hint at the unconscious. Hamlet's anxiety is often expressed via restless camera movements through the castle. Peter S. Donaldson even claims that "if Old Hamlet haunts the ramparts, Young Hamlet is the ghost of Elsinore's interior."[16] When we first get glimpses of Elsinore's interiors, the camera ponders at sights significant to Hamlet. We do not understand their importance just yet but we sense there is a reason why they are presented to us.

While further deepening the subjective angle of the narrative, this also helps to transform *Hamlet* into a more cinema friendly material. Cook notices that it establishes "the question-then-answer […] form of narrative that Noël Carroll[17] believes to be favoured by cinema."[18] The audience is presented "with memorable images whose meanings will be supplied, some

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12 Shaugnessy 63.
13 Dawson 176.
14 Dawson 173.
15 Peter S. Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 31.
16 Donaldson 54.
17 Noël Carroll is a leading contemporary philosopher of film.
18 Cook 28.

sooner and some later."[19] The setting thus helps to arouse the viewer's curiosity. The soundtrack contributes to the establishment of these symbols and conveys their meaning within the narrative. Donaldson notes that "at each site we hear a musical motif that will later have meaning in the narrative."[20]

Elsinore exudes a sense of uneasiness. There is undoubtedly something amiss, something defying the viewers' expectation of a busy centre of a kingdom. One cannot help but wonder where all the people are. According to Cook, the emptiness helps to make the details all the more haunting: "[details] stand out high against the castle's plain background, allowing the film's concentrated, evocative repetitions of a small number of visually characterized items to become one of its most memorable innovations." [21] The frequent and surprising absences of people are according to Donaldson related to Hamlet's psyche: "the frequent absence of human figures from the image is related to Olivier's interest in Hamlet's self-absorption."[22]

Possibly the most poignant expressions of Hamlet's self-absorption are the soliloquies. We can only properly appreciate how Olivier approaches them when we realize that "earlier Shakespearean films used simple camera placements and movements to follow characters who simply mouthed their words into the void."[23] Olivier's ingenious treatment of soliloquies (he is the first to use voice-over) is consistent with the film's effort to move "inside" and get under Hamlet's skin. Olivier's innovative technique is especially effective when introduced in the first soliloquy. The voice-over parts are combined with spoken-out parts. The voice-over is interrupted at times when Hamlet cannot contain the emotions driving him any longer and the frustration demonstrates itself when he breaks into voiced speech.

If we start searching for the main source of that frustration, we begin the search for the ultimate interpretation of the movie. The film opens with a shot of a funeral procession accompanied with Olivier's alternative key to interpretation ("the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind"). Juxtaposed with Hamlet's funeral, it is clearly meant as a hint at what had led to this situation. The funeral scene is a framing scene, so we return to it at the end of the film. We are invited to go back on a journey that led to this very moment. Was it really Hamlet's indecisiveness that drove him here?

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[19] Cook 28.
[20] Donaldson 51.
[21] Cook 19.
[22] Donaldson 51.
[23] Cook 31.

The shot of the funeral scene is seminal to Olivier's visualization of the film's structure. He began planning the film with this very scene in mind: "Quite suddenly, one day, I visualized the final shot of 'Hamlet'. And from this glimpse, I saw how the whole conception of the film could be built up."[24] Within the movie it functions as a framing device but according to Donaldson, there is yet more to it: "it is the […] last of a long series of staircase shots and sequences that occur throughout. These are consistently associated with Hamlet's meetings with his father."[25]

The final movement up the staircase, when seen in the context of the film's imagery and dynamics, could hint at several not mutually exclusive interpretations. We could be watching Hamlet's consciousness leaving the halls and staircases previously associated with it, vacating the physical and imaginary space of Elsinore. The staircase is steep and narrow. There is nowhere else to go but up, no deflection is possible. This might be symbolic of Hamlet's whole story. The prince is trapped in the resolution of his destiny and there is in fact no other way to go, he ultimately has to end being carried up this very staircase.

Olivier's Hamlet is dark and violent to an unusual degree; in fact he is often repulsive. Within the movie, the movement up the stairs is associated with aggressors. Donaldson speaks about a repeated pattern which he describes as "assault on a staircase followed by flight upward."[26] The victim of the particular aggression is always left behind while the aggressor climbs up, inflicting the ultimate hurt by abandoning the violated. Here the aggressor is Hamlet, climbing up the stairs, leaving behind the kingdom he has violated. By taking up the role of the aggressor, the prince also finally manages to overcome the position of the violated, left behind by the ghost of Old Hamlet. However, the upward movement also represents a moment of possible reunion as we see a son ascending towards a previously unreachable father.

During the funeral scene, we get glimpses of Elsinore from the outside. When the scene ends (with "something is rotten in the state of Denmark") and after we first encounter the ghost, it is time to explore the castle's interior. After we have been shown glimpses from within the rotten state, the camera finds a close-up of Claudius's face in a silent accusation.

Another thing is immediately made clear – the king is very much in charge. He is the centre of this universe and everybody is watching him, including the queen, who is leaning towards him fondly. Cook recognizes "a visual echo of the bed's notable canopy, which has

[24] Donaldson 38.
[25] Donaldson 39.
[26] Donaldson 43.

frequently invited the adjective *vaginal*."[27] The viewer is thus alerted to the royal couple's sexuality.

Hamlet is as of yet nowhere to be seen. The medium of film enables Olivier to delay his introduction. Donaldson remarks that "in contrast to theatrical productions, in which Hamlet must be present from the start, the film stresses his absence: he is the reason for the king's anxious manipulations, but he is not present in the image […]."[28] In fact, we don't see Hamlet until half the scene. Nevertheless, he is there and the link between his consciousness and the camera is reinforced during the scene. Dawson describes the manner in which Olivier achieves this: "The first section of the court scene (I.ii.) is shot from Hamlet's point of view, sometimes literally (…), sometimes figuratively(...); this helps to establish the fluid but essential links between individual psychology and the camera."[29] The only one who is able to get Hamlet's attention is his mother. Gertrude puts her hands around her son from behind and later caresses him. The interaction between Hamlet and the queen becomes progressively suggestive as the two start kissing. Apparently uneasy, Claudius leads Gertrude away and everyone but Hamlet follows the royal couple out of the hall.

Gertrude leaves the room without so much as looking at Hamlet. This is all the more striking considering she was just kissing him passionately and also because others, including Laertes, do turn to look at the prince. The scene establishes the special nuances in the relationship between the mother and the son, but also Gertrude's clear preference for Claudius at this point. She is ready to follow the king wherever he leads her without consideration for Hamlet. Perhaps this is the driving force prompting Hamlet to deliver his first soliloquy at this point.

The treatment of Hamlet in this scene establishes a pattern that prevails in the first half of the film. Anthony B. Dawson notices how in the first part of the film Olivier's Hamlet "is almost motionless, sitting in the chair with which he has already become identified […]. He remains expressionless, rooted in melancholy."[30] This sharply contrasts with his restless mind, epitomized by the erratic movements of the camera. The motionlessness pervades also in the scene that establishes Hamlet's connection to Ophelia, which Olivier called "the longest distance love-scene on the record."[31] Hamlet longingly gazes at Ophelia across the hall. When she turns around and leaves, he feels abandoned, because he does not know she only leaves at

[27] Cook 28.
[28] Donaldson 53.
[29] Dawson 173.
[30] Dawson 177.
[31] Donaldson 43.

her father's command. Olivier here finds a creative use of camera's focus to emphasize we are looking at a pair of would be lovers. Dawson explains that "the magic of 'deep focus' [is] allowing the separated lovers to remain in focus at the same time."[32]

Hamlet's passivity is partially the reason for the fail of his connection with Ophelia, because he interprets her behaviour as rejection. Hamlet does not even recognize the conflict Ophelia is facing. He devotes most of his attention to his mother and Ophelia is always an afterthought. The feelings of betrayal and anger he comes to associate with her belong for the most part to his mother as well. Ophelia becomes a symbol of a female betrayer but she is in fact an avatar for Gertrude in this sense. When we understand the way Hamlet associates Ophelia with Gertrude's betrayal, it helps us find the roots of his viciousness in the nunnery scene, when the passivity gives way to an outrageous act of violence.

Hamlet comes to meet Ophelia in the nunnery scene having overheard the plot. He immediately starts looking around, acutely aware of being watched. Ophelia is clearly uncomfortable with deceiving him, projecting uneasiness and guilt. There is no shift of knowledge in this version of the nunnery scene. Hamlet's rage bubbles up at a certain point anyway. He might have been hoping that it would prove too much for Ophelia and she would not stick to the scheme. She chokes when she lies about the whereabouts of her father but she plays her part despite her discomfort.

Ophelia is choosing loyalty to her father over loyalty to her potential lover. This seems to drive the betrayal home and in a sense really pushes Hamlet into a state suggesting madness. According to Cook, "Hamlet's show of anger rises when Ophelia openly lies about her father's whereabouts, but the triggers for his two overt acts of violence are Ophelia's attempts to embrace him, as his mother did in the first court scene […]."[33] Again we are indirectly reminded that deep down Hamlet's anger stems primarily from his mother's betrayal and Ophelia is a mere object for his violence, not its primary cause.

The violence itself is extreme, shocking and sickening. Hamlet forcefully pushes Ophelia down onto the stairs. Cook notes how "the film medium assists Olivier in intensifying Hamlet's violence."[34] The close-ups, the movement of the camera and the loud clear sounds of the fall seem to achieve a level of violence that could hardly be imagined on stage. The

[32] Dawson 178.
[33] Cook 39.
[34] Cook 39.

result seems uncomfortably real and raw. When he pushes her down the second time, "the camera swings rapidly to follow her as her face lands upon the stone steps."[35]

At this point the possibility of connection between those two snaps. The capacity of the audience to understand and sympathize with Hamlet becomes problematized as well. It certainly is a bold move on the part of Olivier to make his Hamlet so much less likeable by underlining the extremity of his aggression towards an innocent young girl. Even he seems to realize the horrific extent of his cruelty when he kisses Ophelia's hair as if saying goodbye to both her and the person he used to be. There is no way to take the damage back though and the situation is clearly past recovery.

He has stepped into the role of the aggressor, violating Ophelia and leaving her behind. She is seen sobbing and reaching after Hamlet in deep despair but he does not look back. He will not comfort her because that is not what the aggressor does. Unlike Hamlet, the camera does look back and offers us a heart-breaking view of Ophelia on the floor. Thanks to the link between the camera's point of view and Hamlet's consciousness, there is a sense he realizes the depth of Ophelia's despair and imagines it exactly as we see it.

Donaldson describes the camera's movements at the end of the nunnery scene: "the camera, in a series of backtrackings and vertical cranes […] pulls back and up from the prostrate figure of Ophelia, her hand still extended after Hamlet, as his own hand was after the fading apparition of his father."[36] This image of loss ties the scene with three other important moments in the film. Hamlet finds himself in the same position as Ophelia with regard to the ghost of his father twice. When he encounters him for the first time; and then again when the ghost appears to Hamlet in Gertrude's bedroom. Hamlet is apparently trying to assert himself by taking the role of his father and inflicting the violence on another. Ophelia mirrors this position in the moment of her death, hinting at Hamlet's guilt. The violence of the nunnery scene has truly broken her.

The nunnery scene also signifies a shift in Hamlet's erotic interest. Ophelia is no longer seen as a potential partner. The acceptable choice has been lost and there is no alternative to the Oedipal yearning now. The results of this shift are highlighted in the Mousetrap scene. When Hamlet rejects Gertrude, calling Ophelia 'a matter more attractive', he is rejecting Gertrude as a woman, using Ophelia to hurt her. The queen is however still a loyal partner to Claudius at this point in the film.

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[35] Cook 39.

[36] Donaldson 45.

The shift from one partner to another does not happen for her until the closet scene. Once her loyalty shifts though her resolve to put Hamlet first and leave Claudius behind is firm and she is ready to go to great lengths to protect her son/partner as we witness in the duel scene when Olivier has her drink the poison knowingly. When it comes to Ophelia, Hamlet does not seem to feel anything, not even guilt or pity. He treats her with disdain for the remainder of the Mousetrap scene, at one point roughly pushing her into her chair so he can turn his attention back to his mother. He does not repent his earlier violence, his roughness reminds us of it again.

Hamlet emerged as the aggressor after the nunnery scene and the closet scene confirms this transformation. Already the opening is brimming with menace. On his way to the queen's bedroom, Hamlet beholds Claudius, who is trying to pray. The king is not planning for Hamlet's death at this point, which makes him a much more sympathetic character than usual. Cook notes that "the implication that the king's response to the Mousetrap is not murderous action but attempted prayer elevates him morally."[37] This sharply contrasts with Hamlet's own response. His contemplation of the murder of Claudius is shot in the conversational over the shoulder shot, the second side of the conversation being the statue of Jesus on the cross. Hamlet is looking at Jesus while planning for Claudius to go to hell. His resolve and cruelty are emphasized by the fact that he coldly weighs the pros and cons in the face of God.

The sense of Hamlet being unmerciful and truly dangerous carries into the closet scene. Cook argues that the "first part of the closet scene emphasizes the suddenness of Hamlet's impulsive violence."[38] To make the situation even more alarming, Olivier pointedly delays the moment when we get the first glimpse of Hamlet's face and lets the suspension build up. When Hamlet throws Gertrude on the bed and pulls out his dagger, we believe he might harm her and so does she. While in other adaptations her cry of "What wilt thou do? Thou will not murder me – Help, ho!" (III.iv.20-21) often seems uncalled for, this Gertrude is rightfully calling for help. The pleasure Hamlet seems to be taking in killing Polonius (though of course he takes him for Claudius) leads us to believe him to be indeed unhinged if not mad. We are thus much more inclined to understand why Claudius might think he must get rid of Hamlet.

The eruption of violence from the previously victimized prince during the closet scene is put into perspective of the cycle of violence when the ghost of his father leaves him in exactly the same helpless position that we have last seen Ophelia in after the horror of nunnery scene.

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[37] Cook 45.

[38] Cook 46.

Hamlet's violent outbursts are not followed by remorse nor guilt but by depression and passivity.

Olivier moves the "To be or not to be" soliloquy right after the nunnery scene. Hamlet as the aggressor hurries up the stairs, leaving the victim behind. However once he is at the top of the tower and there is nowhere further to go, he succumbs to depression. Donaldson observes a "transition from rage to depression, from a grandiose and 'noble' anger to deflation."[39] Hamlet drops his dagger to the sea. Within the Freudian context, the dagger is a phallic symbol and this is thus an emasculating moment. It is representative of the end of his relationship with Ophelia. Donaldson sees the "T o be or not to be" crisis as a reaction to "the failure of that meeting [with Ophelia during nunnery scene] to re-establish trust."[40] This pushes Hamlet deeper into depression because while he cannot have the love of his mother, or the respect of his father, the woman whom he actually should be able to get also rejects him. Ophelia's love and admiration constituted a proof of his masculinity and this has now been stripped away. The reassurance is now to be sought in relationship with Gertrude.

The closet scene is undeniably sexually charged. Olivier announces the Freudian theme loud and clear. The sexual tension is all the more uncomfortable considering how young the actress playing Gertrude is. Hamlet exudes a strong desire to possess his mother and get rid of his sexual rival. At one point in the scene Gertrude reaches for Hamlet as if to kiss him. In contrast to the nunnery scene, he does not push the woman reaching for him away. On the contrary, he keeps holding her just until the ghost appears.

The appearance of the ghost is signalled by the heartbeat sound, which has been associated with the ghost since his first appearance. At this point the sound becomes ambiguous though. Considering the charged atmosphere, one cannot help but wonder if the sound does not also represent Hamlet's arousal. We are watching the scene from the ghost's point of view, which serves to intensify the understanding of how off limits the mother-son relationship is becoming. We can clearly discern desire in Gertrude's face when she is looking at Hamlet but at this point under the gaze of the ghost he does push her away and leaves the bed. Whether he feels disgust or guilt we cannot tell but while fondness will be expressed again later in the scene, the height of passion seems to have passed with the ghost's appearance.

Olivier cleverly uses filmmaking conventions traditionally associated with depiction of lovers. When the new alliance is forged and the queen promises to abandon her marital bed on

[39] Donaldson 46.
[40] Donaldson 46.

Hamlet's request, they kiss and embrace. Donaldson describes how the kiss is "accompanied by a romantic, circling movement of the camera keeping with a cinematic convention reserved for lovers."[41] The depth of the alliance stands the ultimate test during the duel scene. Olivier decides to let go of the play's ambiguity and has Gertrude drink the poison knowingly. Her action transcends a mere impulse; it is a plan, even if a spontaneous one. She looks triumphantly at Claudius after drinking the poison. Hamlet is preoccupied though and does not see her sacrifice.

Gertrude's role in the story ends when she saves her son, if only for a fleeting moment. The prince is the be all and end all of this fictional space and everyone and everything derives their meaning from their relation to Hamlet. I would argue that one such relation proves rather problematic. Because of the subjective nature of the narrative and the focus on Hamlet, the movie and its effect on the audience are to a large extent dependent on a relationship the audience is able to establish with the main character. However the members of the audience might find themselves struggling to do just that for a number of reasons, which together create a Hamlet who is significantly, detached from the audience. He is too violent to inspire sympathy, too stagy to feel real, too detached to be understood. On top of that, the proposed interpretation of his motivations is not consistent at all.

The film is well known for its particular atmosphere that is successfully built from the very beginning. Olivier manages to create a sense of zooming in on the individual psyche. But can we make anything out of what we see? Are we able to discern a full-fledged character or are we left with a symbol full of philosophical concepts but devoid of humanity?

There seem to be at least three conflicting interpretations within the movie, two of them brought consciously in by the director himself. The first and the most prominent is the Freudian angle. Olivier himself admitted to having been influenced by Freudian theories and this is the primary interpretation that he is presenting to the audience throughout the movie. The Freudian framework should thus help the audience to gain a better understanding of Hamlet's actions. However the cornerstone of Oedipal interpretation, Hamlet's relationship with his mother, seems to be slightly off. While Olivier tries to present this relationship as a defining one for Hamlet and while he also brings a lot of erotic tension to the relationship, he fails to create a believable Freudian link. The relationship does not feel real, believable and physical. Part of the reason is the inexplicable age difference between the couple (Eileen Herlie was only twenty-seven, Olivier was forty). Thanks to this disruption of realism, the

[41] Donaldson 49.

Freudian relationship feels more like a philosophical concept Olivier is playing with than an actual impulse. You cannot really believe them to be a mother and son, which diminishes the effect the relationship might have had on the audience. As it is, it feels like Olivier is merely playing with the concept without actually making a definitive decision to adopt it as a truth for his Hamlet.

Even Olivier helps us to reach this conclusion as he offers a parallel interpretation apart from Oedipal inclinations. The words "this is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind" appear at the beginning of the film – there could hardly be a more prominent place. They form our interpretation even before we can get any hints of Freud. It is hard to fathom why Olivier would undermine his intended interpretation with a competing one. It should however be noted that while this might seem like a strong statement, the attempt to authoritatively sum up Hamlet in one sentence inevitably fails. It is so vague that it ultimately fails to provide a framework to judge the film's action against. The question thus remains - why would Olivier offer an alternative interpretation and such a weak one at that? It might be understood as a hint from Olivier that the Freudian interpretation is just an amusing possibility for him and that he is merely playing with it and examining it, without being fully dedicated to the idea. This lack of dedication to already a complex and philosophical interpretation however makes Hamlet extremely hard to relate to.

This is made even worse by a certain staginess Olivier bestows upon the expression of Hamlet's inner dramas. Dawson notices that "there is a continuous edge of self-conscious play-acting in the presentation of the tortured inner life, a sense of pose and deliberate showiness […]."[42] A perfect example of this over-the-top theatricality comes with Hamlet's announcing, "The play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (II.ii.539-40). Olivier shouts the lines out while performing a pirouette on stage, accompanied by climactic musical score. Dawson goes as far as to call the delivery of these lines "extravagantly stagy."[43] Even Olivier himself notes with distaste "his [Hamlet's] weakness for dramatics" that "help to delay it [the action]."[44] We could argue that this "weakness for dramatics" which substitute for decision to take action might be an extension of "the man who could not make up his mind" interpretation but it is definitely not enough to establish this interpretation as viable within the movie. What it does achieve is to make Hamlet even less relatable to the audience.

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[42] Dawson 178

[43] Dawson 180.

[44] Donaldson 32.

To make the matters more complicated for the audience, a third interpretation emerges within the film. This one does not seem to be intentionally inserted by Olivier himself but is present and helps immensely in explaining Hamlet's behaviour. Olivier's Hamlet seems to be driven by a crisis of his gender identity. Above all the ghost of his father proves to be an emasculating presence. Hamlet struggles to assert his manliness in several major ways. First, he sexualizes Gertrude. Second, in relation to women, he asserts his masculinity by violence. The sexual tension is for him inseparably mingled with violence. Finally, to assert his masculinity, he needs to overthrow the king and become the ruler. At the end of the duel scene, Hamlet does grab the crown even though at that point it is obvious he is dying. But he still needs to assert himself as the king, even if only for a brief moment. The shift of power is palpable and clear to all who are present. Dying Claudius loses control of his own guards. They surround him with pointed spears as he rises after he had recovered the crown. Hamlet's own newly acquired position is contrasted when "the entrapping circle of spears is replaced by a circle of courtiers, who gather round the throne to honour their new king for the brief time that he has left."[45]

Hamlet feels the urge to ascertain his masculinity through sex, violence and power. Claudius was in a similar position but he ultimately overcame it. He defeated old Hamlet through sex and violence in order to appropriate his brother's power. While Hamlet cannot admit it even to himself, Claudius (rather than Laertes as is often the case) forms a sort of alter ego of Hamlet and is in part his rival, in part a role model. The link is expressed in filmic terms during the depiction of the murder of old Hamlet. The whole scene is ambiguous, rather than a real flashback, we access it through Hamlet's imagination. Cook clarifies that the "visual portrayal of the murder (…) is primarily a subjective visualization seen through the mind's eye of Hamlet."[46] The camera suggests a connection between Hamlet's point of view and the murderer's. It is peculiar Hamlet would imagine the scene through the eyes of the murderer. This particular director's choice has us questioning Hamlet's deepest secrets. Was he imagining killing his father? When shortly after the revelation the ghost disappears, having just revoked the incestuous bed, Hamlet's longing reach becomes problematic as well. Donaldson explains, "his [Hamlet's] longing for his father becomes confused with his relation to the incestuous bed his father's discourse evokes."[47] Cook also notes Hamlet's subjectivity

[45] Cook 61.
[46] Cook 34.
[47] Donaldson 41.

"focusing obsessively on the [dead king's] hand."[48] This suggests a desire Hamlet and Claudius share, "the desire to usurp old Hamlet's marital position."[49] Hamlet's hatred for Claudius does not originate with the murder of his father. He passionately hates him for being exactly the man Hamlet unconsciously yearns to be. The relationship Hamlet has with his uncle, and the male figures in his life in general, is much more consistent with the Freudian perspective than the one with his mother. Within Ernst Jones's Freudian theory "his uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his own personality."[50]

Hamlet's craving his father's recognition is a conflicted feeling because the ghost takes agency and self-respect away from him. Donaldson derives from Olivier's autobiographical writing a sense of "nurturance received from men [which is understood] as a kind of penetration of the self."[51] This might explain why the presence of his father is so violating to Olivier's Hamlet. He clearly feels threatened when Claudius calls him his son as he senses a further challenge to his identity. He later tries to turn the situation over by calling Claudius his mother.

Laurence Olivier himself had considered his adaptation a clear success. He declared that "the film of *Hamlet* was a rattling good story, inside and outside Hamlet's mind, told cinematically."[52] The adaptation is indeed successful on multiple levels. Dawson praises Olivier's acting, namely "the success with which he was able to suggest inwardness, to bring to the fore a brooding inner life."[53] The film techniques Olivier uses are revolutionary and effective as a whole. He manages to create a complex and intriguing atmosphere. The cycle of violence plaguing Denmark is very convincing, as is the treatment of the castle as a personal space of Hamlet's roaming consciousness. The camera haunting the eerily empty halls of Elsinore is bound to be engraved into the memory of the audiences.

However when Donaldson characterizes the adaptation as "a tragedy not of guilt but of the grandiose self and its unmet need for context and validation,"[54] he hints at the main problem and what I would call a significant shortcoming. Hamlet is grandiose, violent, cruel and detached. Especially this detachment from the audience dehumanizes him. Donaldson explains the detachment as deliberate on part of Olivier. At first, the character was conceived

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[48] Cook 34.
[49] Cook 35.
[50] Donaldson 33.
[51] Donaldson 35.
[52] Cook 34.
[53] Dawson 177.
[54] Donaldson 63.

rather too intimately, stemming from Olivier's own insecurities. The pattern of the act of aggression on the stairway has a counterpart in Olivier's life as well as the crisis of masculinity. The unconsciously provided "gender crisis interpretation" thus seems to be to a large extent autobiographical. Donaldson explains that "the young Olivier suffered from doubts and questions about his sexual orientation and 'effeminacy'."[55]

It seems that recognizing the film has become too intimate expression of his own issues, Olivier decided to take a step back and deliberately create a sense of detachment between himself and Hamlet. The director admitted that he wanted "to avoid a possibility of Hamlet later being identified with [him]."[56] While doing that, he unfortunately also alienated the character from the audience. Once he decided to cut the cord between himself and Hamlet, he took away the authenticity of his interpretation. While Hamlet is necessarily a complex character that audiences are not always at ease with, seeing him thus detached seems to take something away from the power of his character. It makes him less sympathetic and relatable. The Freudian undertones also suffer from this sense of detachment and seem to be treated rather academically than as organic impulses.

[55] Donaldson 35.

[56] Donaldson 37.

4. KENNETH BRANAGH'S FULL (ON) HAMLET

Samuel Crowl argues in his book on Kenneth Branagh's movies that his *Hamlet* is "the most ambitious and audacious Shakespeare film ever made."[1] It is a bold statement but Branagh has made a choice that was bold to an extent that it has seemed impossible to many, including Branagh himself several years earlier. When speaking about his first Shakespearean adaptation, Branagh proclaimed that "[His] own experience of cinema going convinced [him] that two hours was the maximum span of concentration that could be expected from an audience for a film of this kind."[2] Few years later, he presented a film much longer than what is normally expected of an audience of a film of any kind whatsoever. With its 242-minute running time, it is "the second longest English-language film ever."[3] The longest – Cleopatra - is only 1 minute longer. His change of heart came after he staged a full-text production with the Royal Shakespeare Company, which according to Patrick J. Cook "convinced him that a full-text film was not only desirable but also possible."[4]

Branagh understandably includes an intermission, which comes 158 minutes into the film, far beyond the two hours mark. In comparison, Olivier's whole movie lasts 153 minutes and still feels long occasionally. Kozintsev only needs 140 minutes to tell his story. Boris Pasternak, whom he asked to translate the play into Russian, encouraged the director to cut as much as possible. He advised him to "cut, abbreviate, and slice again, as much as you want. The more you discard the better."[5] Pasternak did not believe that a whole text of any play, regardless of the level of accomplishment of the writer, was necessarily indispensible. He said that he regarded "half the text of any play […] as a diffused remark that the author wrote in order to acquaint actors as thoroughly as possible with the heart of the action to be played."[6] American critic Geoffrey O'Brien on the other hand praises the full version of the play because to him "*Hamlet* is a much more interesting and surprising work – and, with its

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[1] Samuel Crowl, *The Films of Kenneth Branagh* (Praeger Publishers, 2006) 132.
[2] Patrick J. Cook, *Cinematic Hamlet: the Films of Olivier, Zeffirelli, Branagh, and Almereyda* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011) 105.
[3] Douglas Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies: From the Silent Era to Shakespeare in Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 140.
[4] Cook 7.
[5] qtd. in Elsie Walker, "Authorship: Getting Back To Shakespeare: Whose Film Is It Anyway?," *A Concise Companion To Shakespeare On Screen*, ed. Diana E. Henderson (Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 14.
[6] Walker 14.

roundabout strategies and gradual buildups and contradictions of tone, a more realistic one – when all of it is allowed to be heard."[7]

Branagh started planning for a film adaptation of *Hamlet* years before its actual creation, but the idea of a full-text adaptation did not occur to him at first. In fact, if he managed to get the funding he needed, he might have made a very different movie instead. Cook is confident that "the filmed *Hamlet* that Kenneth Branagh would have made in 1988-89, if Zeffirelli's plans had not materialized more quickly than his own, would no doubt have been a shortened, essayistic version in the manner of Olivier and most subsequent Shakespeare films."[8] The main reason Zeffirelli beat Branagh to the funding was his ability to persuade others it was going to be a financial success. The studio believed Zeffirelli would make them money when he brought the then extremely popular Mel Gibson on board. This proved to be a problematic choice because while Gibson's name recognition succeeded in bringing audiences to cinemas around the world, his Hamlet suffered from the limitations of Gibson's acting. He was able to bring convincing anger and aggression but generally failed to translate more nuanced aspects of the famous role. Nevertheless, Zeffirelli's film was an undeniable commercial success as it "grossed 20.7 million, and was distributed by Warner Brothers."[9]

Similarly to Laurence Olivier, Branagh was ultimately able to secure funding for his *Hamlet* thanks to the success he enjoyed with his *Henry V*. From the commercial point of view, Branagh's *Henry V* was a revelation. Samuel Crowl explains that in 1989 it "sparked a revival of creative and commercial interest in Shakespeare as a source for films, which had been dormant since the box-office failure of Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* in 1971."[10] Branagh was thus vital for the creation of other Shakespearean adaptations in the 1990's. His *Much Ado About Nothing* only confirmed that he was able to create commercially successful Shakespeare on film. Crowl explains which qualities helped Branagh to gain the confidence of the studios: "in his earlier films Branagh had demonstrated two crucial qualities: he had found a substantial audience for Shakespeare and he could make films on time and within

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[7] Harry Keyishian, "Shakespeare and the movie genre: the case of *Hamlet,*" *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 79.

[8] Cook 105.

[9] Emma French, *Selling Shakespeare to Hollywood: The marketing of filmed Shakespeare adaptations from 1989 into the new millennium* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2006) 87.

[10] Samuel Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 222.

budget."[11] Before gaining a reputation as a filmmaker, he had to rely on his successes on stage. Emma French remarks that "the success of Branagh's performance as Henry V on stage in 1984 in the Adrian Noble production was a significant determining factor in Branagh's ability to gain funding for the film version."[12]

Unfortunately *Hamlet* could not be considered a financial success by any measure. French notes that "on a budget of 18 million dollars, low for a film of such epic scale, it grossed only 4.42 million dollars at the US domestic box office."[13] The film had a little chance of financial success in the first place because its marketing strategies failed to convince the distributors that it would attract audiences. They refused to give it a wide release and thus condemned the film to only meagre profits. According to Russell Jackson, *Hamlet* "opened on three screens initially, and made only $ 148,000 in its first weekend."[14] That is a horrifying result, considering that the wide release of *Romeo + Juliet* in the same season meant it opened on "1,276 screens in the USA."[15] There was an understanding that "a special selling point was needed."[16] Author Sarah Keene explains that "[she] hoped that the marketing and advertising would make a virtue out of necessity by positioning the film as an 'event', in other words [she] wanted them to stress the length so that audiences would approach it as a very special night out." [17] However the advertising was not able to get this across and the length was the main reason why the film ends up as a failure from the economic point of view.

Henry V was a deciding moment for Branagh also from the artistic point of view. Stanley Wells writes that Branagh's *Henry V* "was notable for warm humanity,"[18] a trait that he was able to bring to his Hamlet as well. Branagh was able to gain crucial experience as both actor and director before he was finally able to start to work on his dream project, bringing to life *Hamlet*, "a part that obsess[ed] [him]", which, as Cook points out, is "if

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11 Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* 226.

12 French 69.

13 French 87.

14 Russell Jackson, "Introduction: Shakespeare, Films And The Marketplace," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 5.

15 Jackson 5.

16 French 89.

17 qtd. in French 89.

18 Stanley Wells, *Great Shakespeare Actors: Burbage to Branagh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 258.

anything, […] an understatement."[19] *Hamlet* was Branagh's fourth Shakespearean movie after adaptations of *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing* and a Shakespearean offshoot *In the Bleak Midwinter*. Branagh has thus with *Hamlet* "surpassed Olivier, Welles and Zeffirelli to become the only director to have produced four Shakespeare films."[20] By now, he has added *Love's Labour's Lost* and *As You Like It* into his filmography and has thus positioned himself as a unique figure in regard to adapting Shakespeare. He created a brand for himself as a person who is able to bring together Hollywood and highbrow culture effortlessly and translate Shakespeare into the language of a modern-day filmgoer. French characterizes his brand as associated with a "potent blend of Hollywood multiplex entertainment and fidelity to standards of quality and authenticity."[21] Nevertheless, before becoming a brand name himself, he had to deal with being associated with Laurence Olivier. The connection was easy to establish as *Henry V* was a first adaptation for both of them and they both starred as Henry.

The association was only to be strengthened when Branagh proceeded to create his own *Hamlet*. Branagh is very conscious of the parallels. The Guardian quoted him as denouncing comparing himself to Olivier: "Branagh said recently that Olivier has always been 'an inspiration' rather than someone with whom he'd compare himself."[22] Nevertheless he cannot escape the comparisons and he seem to be conscious about it and reconciled with it to the extent that he even portrayed Laurence Olivier in the 2011 movie *My Week With Marilyn.* In the case of *Henry V*, Branagh chooses to distinguish himself by highlighting the atrocities of war Olivier chose to keep concealed under the veneer of heroism. His *Hamlet* sees a seasoned and confident director who enters into a dialogue with his famous predecessor. J. Lawrence Guntner describes what is going on with regard to Olivier: "Branagh pays his dues to Olivier, plays with him, quotes him and finally deconstructs him while having a good time in the process."[23] Arguably the most obvious nod to Olivier comes with the first soliloquy. Branagh not only adopts voice-over but also the atmosphere and choreography. The platinum blond hair is also a reminder of Olivier. Nevertheless Branagh challenges nearly all of the most iconic features of Olivier's version. The film noir is

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[19] Cook 6

[20] Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh" 222.

[21] French 63.

[22] Michael Billington, „Kenneth Branagh: can he succeed where Olivier failed?," *The Guardian.* < https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/oct/08/kenneth-branagh-star-west-end-theatre-season-laurence-olivier>

[23] J. Lawrence Guntner, "*Hamlet, Macbeth* and *King Lear* on film," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,* ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 122.

transformed into a truly epic spectacle. The black and white film gives way to an opulent 70 mm format brimming with colours. The cold and austere medieval castle changes to the lavish setting of Blenheim castle, whose state hall takes the audience's breath away when seen for the first time. The charged mother-and-son relationship brimming with Freudian implications is utterly abandoned in favour of a sexual relationship with Ophelia. Ophelia herself gets much more space and significance within the movie. While Olivier focuses on Hamlet above all, Branagh presents an array of characters we care for. Olivier directs the film as his own solo-performance; Branagh focuses on Derek Jacobi's Claudius just as much as at his own Hamlet. Olivier leaves out the political aspects and cuts Fortinbras, Branagh foregrounds him by crosscutting and thus highlights the play's political dimension. Finally, against a heavily cut "essay on Hamlet" Branagh presents a full-text version without any cuts whatsoever.

Regardless of how you feel about cutting, the length of Branagh's movie creates a unique set of challenges as it seems almost impossible to hold the audience's attention for such a long time without becoming repetitive and eventually boring and ineffective. Benjamin Britten has said about the art of adaptation that "any adaptation is right if it reveals the heart of the story and engages and awakens the audience to the material."[24] Kenneth Branagh seems to be right to a surprising extent.

Branagh, according to Elsie Walker, "claimed authority for his *Hamlet* (1996) by promising the longest version."[25] The trouble with the question of authority is that the promise of full-text version creates an illusion that Branagh simply took a text and adapted in. In fact, he created the full-text himself by adding passages from Second Quarto to the Folio version. Walker believes this idea of authority was influenced by "the legacy of 'bardolatry'- the 'romantic ideology of the timeless and universal Author.'"[26] Nevertheless, if anyone should try to produce a film of such a scale, many critics agree that Branagh was the one to try. Crowl explains that "only Branagh had the creative and organizational skills to deliver on a scheme as potentially mad as Dr Frankenstein's."[27] Cook agrees and praises Branagh's "unparalleled mastery of both Shakespeare and the film medium."[28] The duration means that Branagh has to hold the attention of the audience from start to finish, he cannot afford an unimaginative rendering of any scene.

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[24] Walker 18.
[25] Walker 9.
[26] Walker 9.
[27] Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh" 227.
[28] Cook 159.

To keep the audience alert, he changes the editing tempo quite often. His camera is constantly moving; Crowl observes that "it tracks, pans, cranes, zooms in and out, flashes back and circles."[29] Branagh is also working with focus and alternates different types of shots. His chosen 70 mm format is very useful in this. Cook explains that "the format allows dramatic long shots of distant prospects to form one end of an enlarged spectrum of shot types, at the other end of which lies the immense and immensely detailed extreme close-up."[30] Some of the most memorable moments use the opposite ends of the spectrum. The extreme close-up is used when the ghost tells Hamlet about the murder, with the effect that it makes the audience extremely uncomfortable and sympathetic to Hamlet's distress. Cook notes that "flashbacks to the ulcerating flesh and bleeding ear of the murder scene are images at the limit of what can comfortably be watched, especially in the epic definition of 70 mm."[31] The dramatic long shot on the other hand ends the 'How all occasions do inform against me' soliloquy and with that also the first part of the film before the intermission. The significance Branagh puts on the camera is revealed when one reads the screenplay, which includes directions like this one: "the Camera creeping like an animal, pans left to reveal, a hundred yards away, ELSINORE, a gorgeous Winter Palace."[32] The camera is personified in the screenplay. Sarah Hatchuel describes the camera as if having "a life of his own or [being] another character in the story."[33] I would argue that this becomes most apparent during the first scene in the state hall. When the camera suddenly pans right to find Hamlet, it seems counterintuitive, because instead of following the action that does not slow down or cease, it seems to deliberately decide to turn away and seek Hamlet.

The casting also helps Branagh to make the audience invested in the story. He introduces an array of interesting and engaging characters. This sharply contrasts with Olivier's decision to focus singularly on Hamlet and also Kozintsev's tendency to ascribe his characters largely symbolic roles. Branagh is obviously comfortable with sharing his audience's attention and sympathies with other actors. Guntner notices that "he seems to direct his camera at least as frequently at Derek Jacobi as Claudius as at himself as Hamlet."[34] Even the episodic roles have well-known actors in it, so we see for instance Gérard Depardieu

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[29] Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh" 232.
[30] Cook 107.
[31] Cook 119.
[32] qtd. in Sarah Hatchuel, *Shakespeare, from Stage to Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 148.
[33] Hatchuel 148.
[34] Guntner 123.

as Reynaldo, Judi Dench as Hecuba and Robin Williams as Osric. The nod to the tradition of stage Hamlet comes with the fleeting appearance of John Gielgud, one of the most famous Hamlets.

However if one were to pick a single casting choice that helped to raise the film to a new level, it would have to be Derek Jacobi. Branagh/Jacobi dynamics carry us through the film. The duality, hinted at by the close resemblance supported by the platinum blond hair, comes to the foreground during the most famous scene of the whole play – the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, which sees Hamlet facing not just himself but also his uncle behind a one-way mirror. The casting of Jacobi also brings a metastory into the couple's dynamic. Jacobi himself is famous for the role of Hamlet, which "he has played close on 400 times."[35] He also previously directed Branagh in that very role on stage. Last but not least, seeing him on stage deeply influenced young Branagh, as "Jacobi was the first live Hamlet Branagh ever saw."[36] The metastory thus hints at Claudius being a role model for and alter ego of Hamlet. On top of that Jacobi does a splendid job. Stanley Wells praises his Claudius as "beautifully controlled and subtly sinister."[37]

For all that, the film would have no chance of succeeding unless Branagh created a relatable Hamlet. Fortunately he does avoid alienation of Olivier's Hamlet and presents the audience with a hero they can root for throughout the story. As an actor, he is able to channel the strengths of both Olivier and Gibson. Brode notices that "like Olivier, this Hamlet is sensitive yet masculine, like Gibson."[38] In other words, he manages to maintain both depth and energy while avoiding passivity and effeminacy. The flashbacks, which show Hamlet and Ophelia brimming with happiness, also make the hero more relatable as we see him as he was before the events of the play. Wells points out that Branagh is naturally better equipped for playing sympathetic characters. He argues that his likeableness "derives partly from the comfortableness of his figure – manly but huggable – and especially from the rich warmth of his speaking voice and the impression of relaxed intimacy that it can create."[39] His celebrated voice helps Branagh keep almost effortlessly the audience's attention during the soliloquies, which present the ultimate test for any Hamlet.

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[35] Wells 232.
[36] Brode 141.
[37] Wells 232.
[38] Brode 144.
[39] Wells 257.

The scope of the film goes well with "the cinematic model of the epic,"[40] which it seems to follow according to Harry Keyishian. Other examples of the genre such as *Ben Hur* or *Dr. Zhivago* also have generous footage. *Dr. Zhivago* is clearly referenced by the casting of Julie Christie as Gertrude. The genre seems to be well equipped to keep people entertained for prolonged periods of time. It is also clearly a mode close to Branagh's heart, which his recent adaptation of *Cinderella* for Disney confirms. American cultural critic Vivian Sobchack describes several characteristics of the genre. According to her, the movie epic "defines history as occurring to music – persuasive symphony music underscoring every moment by overscoring it."[41] She also mentions "spectacular, fantastic costumes" and an "extravagance of action and place."[42] The first court scene in the State Hall (I.ii) puts forward all of those characteristics.

Branagh's Elsinore is majestically beautiful from the outside; yet we have to wait for the opening of the first State Hall scene to have our breath taken away with the sheer lavishness of the setting. Crowl exclaims that "Branagh gives us an interior Elsinore which positively sparkles."[43] The extravagant beauty and richness of the State Hall is highlighted both by the way in which Branagh chooses to introduce it and the comparison with the settings in other adaptations. A dissolve of the royal crest on the gate takes us from the tense atmosphere of the night watch to the brightly lit hall full of people celebrating the royal marriage with all the pomp imaginable. The subdued voices are replaced by loud fanfares. An establishing crane shot introduces the red, white and gold colours scheme. Branagh's designer Tom Harvey recalls that "Ken wanted the sets to be…far removed from the rugged medieval gloom one usually associates with the play."[44] These associations were embraced by both Olivier's bleak Elsinore and Kozintsev's stone prison encompassed by raging elements. Branagh's State Hall is the central space of the whole film, and changes throughout together with the kingdom it represents. It is never more vivacious than in the beginning, brimming with life and the charm of the cunning leader. It looks big and warm and accommodating.

The first change comes just with Hamlet's first soliloquy. Once the courtiers leave, it looks smaller and bare. As the last confetti slowly fall on Hamlet, we realize that the room changes significantly when it looses the decoration provided by its lavishly clothed courtiers.

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[40] Keyishian 78.
[41] qtd. in Keyishian 78.
[42] qtd. in Keyishian 78.
[43] Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh" 227.
[44] qtd in Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh" 132.

The extravagance helps to highlight Hamlet's sense of isolation. Nevertheless the hall does offer Hamlet a privacy he needs after the excruciating celebration before. The unexpected arrival of Horatio hints at what will become obvious during the 'to be or not to be' – there are people behind the mirrors and you never know who is coming or who is simply watching you. Mark Thornton Burnett observers that the mirrors lining the walls of the State Hall also "stand as a testimony to a court that looks inwards rather than outwards."[45] No wonder that the court is in shock when the outside comes pouring inwards when Fortinbras's army invades the palace.

The evolution of the State Hall does not stop with the first soliloquy. The hall becomes the sombre witness of Ophelia's anguish and the tragedy of the royal family in the end. The space moves from the symbol of Claudius's strength and power to a fragile room of the last resort as Fortinbras's soldiers are moving in, not bothering with hiding behind the mirrors but breaking them and with them the Danish state. Denmark is buried in the moment Fortinbras seizes the crown and Hamlet's body serves as its fleeting epitaph when he is carried out by soldiers, his arms wide in the form of cross. The downfall of the State Hall is the downfall of the Danish state and its rulers.

The opening celebration taking place there is minutely orchestrated and Claudius seems to be very much in charge. He is performing the whole time and what a great performer he is. He plays with his court, showing his emotions, humouring them, charming them, re-assuring them, and dazzling them. Hamlet is the only one not under his spell but Gertrude, though apparently smitten with Claudius, is given her own agency and will as well. It takes a single short shot for Branagh to establish that she is her own person when she urges Claudius by a minute expression to bring Hamlet to the midst of the court. While the atmosphere seems cheerful, the perfection gives us pause. Everyone seems to be dressed according to some unspoken code, all knowing their place and dutifully occupying it. Everyone cheers at the required moment, attentively listening otherwise. The quick shots at the audience reveal bewildering uniformity. When the royal couple enters, we get a tracking shot of one row of courtiers. They turn their head one after another in a disquieting synchrony, as if moved by the unseen puppet master. In reality these are spontaneous reactions, even though they are absurdly synchronized. In other instances, we see rows of sitting people listening to Claudius only to realize no one moves an inch.

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[45] Mark Thornton Burnett, *Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 51.

The symmetry of the State Hall complete with the black and white tile floor contributes to this sense of control. Hamlet is nowhere to be seen and the only person who is slightly disruptive to the perfect choreography is none other than Ophelia. She is preoccupied by her search for Hamlet and this diversion, however negligible, links her to Hamlet long before they appear on the screen together. Branagh's Ophelia, is much more than just a symbol of oppression. She is strong, intelligent and likeable. Branagh includes flashbacks to lovemaking of the couple but they serve a deeper purpose than just to catch the audience's attention for that minute. He portrays them as partners and lets us feel for them, root for them. We also better understand the loss Hamlet feels when he realizes their partnership is gone and Ophelia is playing a part in someone else's play. We have witnessed their happiness and thus are more acutely touched by their tragedy.

The nunnery scene is especially effective because there is so much hope involved. Hamlet initially lights up when he sees her, then proceeds to hug and kiss her. He openly expresses affection and trust. We can see how close to happiness they are. Other adaptations have Hamlet be mean to Ophelia from the very start of the scene but that, as Brode points out, "makes no sense."[46] Ophelia is clearly uneasy about the whole scenario but keeps on playing her part. We have been prepared to sympathize with both of them. Ophelia is desperately trying to help Hamlet and that's why she agrees, if reluctantly, with the plan. We understand this because of the very effective rendering of the closet scene. Branagh for once forgoes a chance for a flashback and lets Ophelia demonstrate Hamlet's action, which shows how shocked she is. She seeks out Polonius because she is out of her depth. The queen, who is clearly a caring mother, further influences her decision to go with the plan. The women genuinely try to help Hamlet at this point but end up hurting and alienating him. After the scene gets violent after Hamlet catches Ophelia lying, we see the despair of both of the protagonists. The connection they yearn for cannot be repaired though. In the end of the scene, Ophelia is in shock but there is also a hint that deep down she understands Hamlet. Deborah Cartmell notes that "there is a sense in Winslet's performance that she feels she deserves what she gets."[47] In the scene where Olivier looses the audience's hearts, Branagh makes their hearts hurt for him.

The initial appearance of a court as a happy and united community is also disrupted when we realize that Claudius drives every action up until Hamlet's introduction. All the others are there to mirror the sentiments he brings up or to demonstrate their admiration and

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[46] Brode 143.

[47] Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 37.

loyalty to him. They are his mirrors, his props, and his decorations. The fact that they seem quite happy with their roles speaks volumes about Claudius's masterful ways of manipulation. He puts on a show, carefully crafting appearances and the only one that recognizes that is Hamlet. His uncle is charming, energetic and a great orator. These characteristics allow him to build his own stage persona of a good king for his subjects and tell his own narrative that shall not be challenged. Of course, the one who will ultimately challenge it is not applauding Claudius's performance with the rest of the court. The scene is presenting a complex, fascinating Claudius. But his keen intelligence, compiled with his chilling ability of persuasion and cruel ruthlessness cannot be fully grasped without the only one who has the capacity to see him for what he is and thus implicitly challenge him by his very existence.

The clash of the two is the greater the more it is postponed. Branagh ingeniously uses Olivier's strategy of building up expectations by letting the scene run on and on without showing the one person everyone is looking for. The camera finally tracks to Hamlet, unseen by the courtiers and apparently missed by no one but his mother and Ophelia. The contrast to the colourfulness and gaiety of the court is striking. He makes a stunning figure, the blond hair contrasting with his mourning clothes. He does not move, looking to the ground. He is passive, static, retorting to Claudius only in a voice over. The bigger shock it is when in the next shot he is moving but we are disoriented and cannot account for him in the space of the State Hall. The frame includes only his boots and what I at first wrongly identified as a throne. His chair has appeared out of nowhere as it was not there in previous shots in a poignant reminder that no one has missed him before. He is brought onto the stage to disrupt the performance but his success is only temporary as Claudius is too strong an opponent for him at this point.

Gertrude approaches Hamlet pleadingly, trying to console him in both his capacities – her son acting out in the midst of her family and the royal prince acting inadequately in front of the court. The shallow focus of following conversation communicates that even though so many people are present, for Hamlet and Gertrude this is a family issue first and foremost. However their communication is failing and they cannot seem to find any common ground. When Claudius joins their conversation, it is an act of aggression. He shows Hamlet that now his mother is bound to him and thus to a certain extent irretrievably lost to her son. He also takes back the absolute control of the situation. The aggression is exemplified in the juxtaposition of what we see and what we hear. The shots would suggest that three people are parts of the conversation but it is only Claudius who speaks and the conversation turns into a performance fortifying his narrative. He might be looking at Hamlet but Hamlet understands

perfectly well that this is a speech of a shrewd propagandist addressing the court, showing Hamlet how dangerous an enemy Claudius is.

But he goes further, taking his staging into a new level and demonstrating the amount of his power to Hamlet by profoundly humiliating him by using him in his masquerade. This demonstration of power is cruel and intimate. Though hundreds of people witness it, only the two protagonists understand what is happening. The ultimate gesture of dominance comes when Claudius proceeds to hold Hamlet around the shoulders. The aggression intensifies into the very invasion of personal space and while we see Hamlet's anguish and feel for his humiliation, Claudius manages to pull out an appearance of a loving father. The gesture mirrors itself in his physical contact with Laertes. While he touched Laertes briefly and wanted to reassure him while reminding him of the symbolic distance between them by retreating quickly; his hold on Hamlet is prolonged, tantalizing him to the very edge of what he can possibly take.

If Branagh was to have any chance of succeeding in making an effective uncut version, his ability of investing the audience intimately in the fate of the characters was crucial. And he knows it. He builds our expectation of Hamlet, lets us suffer with him through this scene, and lets us feel the full extent of Claudius's power. When the time of the first soliloquy comes, the white confetti celebrating the wedding slowly falling on Hamlet, we can feel his frustration keenly. We are prepared for the long take of the soliloquy without cuts because we have been prepared for this very moment by the previous scene.

Soliloquies in general are extremely effective in this adaptation. Branagh's abilities as an actor and filmmaker together help to produce memorable scenes. The first soliloquy works both as means of juxtaposing Hamlet and the court (as Kozintsev's did) and presenting the young prince in a deeply personal moment (in the manner of Olivier). Crowl notices this synthetizing quality in Branagh's work: "His genius as an artist is as a synthesiser; his imagination works like a magpie, stealing good ideas from others but linking them in surprising and original ways."[48] Arguably the most awaited scene of any *Hamlet*, the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, bears witness to Branagh's talents as a filmmaker. Even though it is technically challenging, the choice to deliver the soliloquy while looking into the mirror, which is also a one-way window, works out wonderfully. Brode was so impressed he wrote that the approach was "so right we wonder why no one thought of it before."[49] We know right from the start that Claudius and Polonius are hiding behind the mirror. Branagh establishes

[48] Crowl, „Flamboyant realist: Kenneth Branagh" 222.
[49] Brode 146.

this fact by a cut behind the mirror. However his hero only realizes he is not alone during the soliloquy. This adds tension and action to a soliloquy shot as a long take with only one cut to Claudius, which is nevertheless eagerly awaited by the audience. The scene is immersive and fiercely private. Camera slowly moves towards the mirror and so does Hamlet. Cook notices an important moment when we no longer see the frame of the mirror and when "the reflection becomes our only reality, deepening our immersion in meditation as Hamlet's deepens."[50] There is a sense of us moving through the soliloquy together with Hamlet rather than just observing him. Branagh's take on the soliloquy manages to merge several aspects without shattering our concentration. We get a private moment with our hero but we are also reminded of the connection between Claudius and Hamlet, Claudius being Hamlet's distorted reflection. The notion of surveillance, loved by Kozintsev and abandoned by Olivier, is also strong here. Crowl highlights the technical difficulty of filming in the mirrored room and hails the scene as "the film's most stunning merger of text and technique."[51]

The 'How all occasion do inform against me' soliloquy is just as iconic. It comes just before the intermission and as such is likely to be remembered. It will also help to determine whether the members of the audience will be coming back for the second part. Branagh must have been conscious of this and makes sure, that it is memorable. The scene is also a prime example of the epic genre with a shouted out climax accompanied by dramatic symphonic music. Keyishian notes that "Branagh makes it essential to his epic scheme."[52] The significance of the scene for Branagh is clear when we realize that he inserted it into his First Folio based screenplay from the Second Quarto. His mis-en-scene is a vast, wintery escape, which feels cold and barren. Branagh starts with a close-up on Hamlet, and then gradually pulls the camera back to a long shot. By the end, we cannot discern Hamlet's features; he becomes a tiny black figure against the sea of white. Behind him, we see Fortinbras's army, the size of which is simply breath taking. Branagh proves that he does not need the richly decorated State Hall to showcase his love for the epic. Doyle's music also helps to build up to the scene's climax. Crowl discerns Olivier's influence in handling of this scene, which according to him "works as a homage to Olivier's discovery of how to handle the Shakespearean soliloquy on film (reverse the normal camera movement, which is from long shot to close-up)."[53] Branagh, while shouting out the final lines, also outstretches his arms in

[50] Cook,129.
[51] Crowl 234.
[52] Keyishian 80.
[53] Crowl 232.

a dramatic gesture. Cook finds parallel to the end of the film in this "sacrificial pose to be seen again at his [Hamlet's] death."[54] The symbolic death of an era in the history of Denmark that is to be buried with Hamlet begins right here, with the army moving steadily towards Elsinore and Hamlet expresses it without being aware of it.

While the soliloquies showcase Branagh's strengths as a both director and actor, there are some less convincing moments within the movie. The most problematic among them all stem from Branagh's dedication to the epic. At few times he crosses the line and the over the top pathos stops serving its purpose. During the ghost scene, he expresses the restlessness Hamlet feels while following the ghost into the woods by rapid shots of moving ground, swirling mist and bursting fires. While at first interesting, after being repeated several times the shots loose their power and especially in the anti-climactic part of the scene after the ghost disappears seem superfluous and somewhat exaggerated. Similar to this, the epic gets out of hand during film's climax when Hamlet pins Claudius to the throne with his sword that he has thrown at him over the length of the State Hall. Especially the slow motion detail of the flying sword borders on unwanted comedy. While Branagh seems to be able to handle not cutting any scenes and characters, sometimes the overabundance of words can be felt. Branagh successfully navigates the soliloquies, which are risky in this aspect, however there are some less inspired scenes when the viewers end up waiting for the characters to say all they have to say. One such moment comes right before Laertes's rebellion when a woman runs into the State Hall to warn the royal couple. Sense of immediacy has been built but her warning is so long that it basically prevents them from escaping, which feels both frustrating and incomprehensible.

Nevertheless, Branagh's endeavour proves to be an overall success. His inventive work with camera and lavish settings and props keep the audiences entertained while the strong cast headed by Branagh himself, Derek Jacobi, Julie Christie and Kate Winslet gives us full-fleshed characters that are relatable. In contrast with other adaptations, it is especially the female characters that stand out. No other director was able to present such a strong relationships between Hamlet and Ophelia and Claudius and Gertrude. The political aspect is highlighted by crosscutting and extra visual material featuring Fortinbras. As usual with Branagh, this serves yet another purpose. Shots of Fortinbras strategically spaced out throughout the movie help to build a sense of immediacy, which intensifies as the film moves

[54] Cook 141.

closer to its end. Altogether, Branagh achieves something quite remarkable – his extremely long film feels much shorter than it really is.

5. CONCLUSION

The three adaptations demonstrate the sea of possibilities waiting for every director who decides to translate *Hamlet* into film. The close watching of these films prove that an effective scene can be achieved with widely differing strategies. Kozintsev's first soliloquy is a strong piece of cinema when he lets Hamlet face a crowd of people but so is Olivier's intimate moment when he lets Hamlet to face his frustrations alone. Each director also chooses aspects he wants to emphasize and an interpretation he wants to follow as his creative principle. Even though the films are distinctive artistic creations, the shadow of the text always accompanies them. Russell Jackson explains that "even if the ultimate measure of a film's worth is not its degree of fidelity to the words and structure of the original, understanding of the relationship between the two is an important element in the viewer's perception of what a given film is doing."[1] This extra layer of meaning does not reduce the film's impact – the interplay between a source and its interpretations makes the film adaptations, if anything, even more interesting. Linda Hutcheon speaks in this context about "inherently 'palimpsestuous' works" which are "haunted at all times by their adapted texts."[2] With the knowledge of the source texts, we are better able to appreciate the creativity with which directors come up with different solutions for all the questions the process of adaptation inevitably brings.

The choices that Grigori Kozintsev made were all parts of a concentrated effort to comment upon his own situation as a citizen of a totalitarian state. The result however is a widely applicable general reflection. Kozintsev consciously lets go of some aspects of the play (such as personal relationships and Hamlet's psychological struggles) in order to create a concise exploration of a concrete aspect. The movie is thus in relation to the source text not all encompassing. This does not mean it is not successful. The film is compelling and well balanced, definitely worth the viewer's time. The message it brings is strong.

Kozintsev manages to deliver on one of the most important preconditions of success – he builds a consistent fictional world with strong symbols developed throughout the film. His Elsinore is successfully juxtaposed with the outside world of untameable elements associated with the ghost, death but also freedom. The symbolism of the film is successful because it unfolds gradually and remains constant. It is also visually distinctive. The roaring sea next to

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[1] Russell Jackson, „From play-script to screenplay," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 15.

[2] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 6. Hutcheon borrows the term „palimpsestuous" from the Scottish poet Michael Alexander.

the uninviting castle will be one of the images the audience will take from this adaptation together with the flickering flames of the torches. Elsinore inspires uneasiness because there is no place within the castle that is safe and one can be oneself without being observed. The actors have a clearly delineated task and they deliver wonderfully. Especially Anastasiya Vertinskaya's portrayal of a gentle Ophelia trapped within the cold walls of the castle is moving. Kozintsev's adaptation demonstrates that even a somewhat restrictive interpretation and close focus on a certain aspect of the play can succeed in producing memorable cinema.

Olivier dazzles with his filmic innovations. Sometimes he does not get enough credit from contemporary audiences simply because we take his inventions, such as the use of voice-over for soliloquies, as given. He is also successful in creating a visually compelling world. His production designer Roger Furse "created Elsinore as a castle of the mind."[3] The way Olivier links the interiors of Elsinore to Hamlet's psyche is intriguing. It is full of long corridors and staircases, which represent symbolic places of violence. In a stark contrast with Kozintsev's castle, which is always full of people, Olivier emphasizes Hamlet's isolation by leaving his 'castle of the mind' conspicuously vacant.

Olivier introduces two conflicting interpretations – in his famous added sentence, he blames the whole tragedy on Hamlet's inability to make up his mind, later he instructs the audiences to interpret his behaviour with regard to the Oedipal syndrome. This is hard to do though as he cast an actress much younger than him to play Gertrude. As a result, they simply do not have the right dynamics to create a believable illusion of Oedipal tensions. The film is deeply personal, heavily influenced by Olivier's own traumas. Unfortunately, he does not seem to fully embrace the personal interpretation and tries to distance himself from the role. He ends up being detached from the audience. This detachment is also partly due to his acting style. Stanley Wells aptly explains where the trouble lies: "If he had a fault, or at least a limitation as an actor, it is that the self-conscious artifice of his acting drew attention to itself in a way that caused spectators to undervalue his penetration into the minds and hearts of the characters he portrayed."[4] This artifice proved very problematic in an adaptation based on the psychological portrait of the main protagonist. Olivier seems to be much more successful as a director of this movie than as Hamlet. While this version is deservedly praised for its inventiveness, the inability of its Hamlet to make the audiences invested into the story represents a significant shortcoming.

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[3] Jackson 22.

[4] Stanley Wells, *Great Shakespeare Actors: Burbage to Branagh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 181.

Kenneth Branagh does an unexpectedly good job in keeping his audience entertained for four hours without resigning on his effort to bring a serious interpretation of the play. The epic setting, lavish costumes and luxurious props help but it is his skills as director that keep the film interesting. He changes the editing tempo often in order to avoid monotonous passages and takes advantage of all the possibilities that film gives him. He uses a wide variety of shots from an extreme close-up to a long shot and is also inventive with the use of focus. He manages to deliver both on a portrait of a society under the influence of a charismatic leader and on a more intimate portrayal of complex relationships between the protagonists. He famously uses flashbacks to establish sexual nature of Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia and also manages to portray Gertrude and Claudius as a loving couple. At times, he also uses flash-forwards, most famously when contemplating the murder of Claudius. As is the case with Kozintsev's hero, this Hamlet is capable of killing the king.

Significantly, Branagh delivers not only as a director but also as an actor. He is able to introduce a conflicted, yet likeable Hamlet. His strengths are especially well suited for soliloquies. Wells quotes critic Charles Spencer, who highlighted Branagh's strengths as actor: "He lets you into his character's mind with a complete absence of guile and showy flamboyance and at almost every stage you feel you know exactly what he is thinking and what he is feeling. As a result, many of the play's difficulties seem to dissolve."[5] We can relate to this Hamlet and we can relate just as easily to his Ophelia, his mother and to a certain extent even to Claudius, who is humanized by his apparent love for Gertrude. While Branagh justifies keeping all the scenes and characters, I would argue the film would be even more successful if he cut within the scenes as he does in his other adaptations.

The language of film is capable of dealing with the intricacies of the plays, often in creative and unexpected ways. An adaptation can be successful even if it does not encompass all the aspects of the play and lets go of some of the countless ambiguities. It is crucial for any successful adaptation to build a consistent world for the story and to be able to emotionally impact the audience. The viewers must be invested in the destiny of the protagonists. Part of the delight in watching Shakespearean adaptations lies in observing how widely different treatments of the same scene can all lead to a very convincing result. The play's vivid imagery can indeed find a visual expression. Adapting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is without doubt an ultimate challenge but the synthetizing quality of the rich spectrum of different adaptations makes it into a truly compelling endeavour.

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[5] Wells 260.

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