Tetiana Kurtiak, *Hamlet on Screen: William Shakespeare’s Play in Film Adaptation*

BA thesis
Opponent’s Report

The submitted thesis discusses four film adaptations of Shakespeare’s famous tragedy: Olivier’s (1948), Zeffirelli’s (1990), Brannagh’s (1996) and Almereyda’s (2000). It is structured in a most expected way: the introductory chapter presenting basic problems of film adaptations of theatrical pieces is followed by four chapters, each devoted to one of the studied films and to special issues which characterize these adaptations (or, in the student’s words, “points idiosyncratic for a specific film”).

These “idiosyncratic points” of course narrow the scope with which the cinematic versions are viewed. What we get mostly is a discussion of technical elements supporting the intended conception of Shakespeare’s drama, which is handled very well indeed, with a keen sense of detail. As to the characters, greatest attention is put on Hamlet and his relation to his mother (Olivier’s version is interpreted in terms of the Oedipus complex) and partly to his deceased father (i.e. the Ghost); only with later versions the scope broadens. These scenes are also well commented on, yet we feel that it is a very partial view. I would appreciate a more complex approach which would provide a deeper psychological picture of the protagonist’s (and not only his) character. As it is, we never learn, for instance, about how the play within the play scene is represented in any of these films, and the same can be said about many other important motifs (Ophelia’s madness and so on).

The above problem implies that we in fact lack more clearly defined criteria for the selection of analysed topics, as well as criteria for the selection of film versions themselves. There are about fifty film adaptations of the play, including Grigori Kozintsev’s (1964), Bill Colleran’s (1964) and Tony Richardson’s (1969), the most important film adaptations of the play in the 1960s. With regard to this, the time gap between Oliver’s *Hamlet* and the other three seems to be all too conspicuous to be passed tacitly.

Finally, I am afraid Jack Jorgens’s typology of film adaptations (I believe the student really meant “typology” though she persistently uses the term “topology”, which makes little sense) is not sufficient as a theoretical background of her analysis. This is evident especially when it comes to the assessment of Almereyda’s version. The student is rather brief here calling it simply filmic, but this seems to be a very broad term. Applying a different kind of typological concept (e.g. Geoffrey Wagner’s) may have brought a more specific characterisation of how Michael Almereyda approached the play.

To conclude, I am convinced Tetiana Kurtiak proved to be strong in characterising and interpreting certain aspects of her material, yet she should have elaborated her methodology in such a way as to eliminate the imperfections pointed out above, including several uncorrected language errors. Nevertheless, I recommend her thesis for defence and suggest it to be marked as “very good” (“velmi dobrá”).

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