

A Comparison of Various Film Adaptations of William Shakespeare's Hamlet

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This thesis is a very focused analysis of four interpretations of Shakespeare's tragedy, Hamlet. It chooses as its classic base Laurence Olivier's 1948 production, two interpretations from the 1990s by Zeffirelli and Branagh, and the 2000, tech-inspired version by Almereyda. It aims to explore the play through an examination of the four directors' readings and illustrate their various interpretations by focusing on their treatment of highlighted motifs and relationships.

After an introduction that clearly explains the reasoning behind his selection of the films, the author looks in general at each film before turning to look at the several treatments of Hamlet, the Ghost and Ophelia. He then focuses on the motifs of revenge, the madness of both Hamlet and Ophelia, and Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia and his mother Gertrude. His conclusion clearly recapitulates the various analyses in the chapters of the main thesis.

The many strengths of this thesis include the lucidity and focus of the author's analysis. He has clearly undertaken a very close and minute examination of all four versions and is able to bring this thoroughness to bear in making his various comparisons. At times this comparative analysis can feel a little too descriptive and mechanical and the thesis comes to life when the author points out how certain film techniques alter our experience of the characters, e.g. when he discusses how the direction of the camera in filming Ophelia in the versions by Branagh and Zeffirelli aids character depiction, i.e. Helena Bonham Carter is shot from above in Zeffirelli's version, making her appear smaller and therefore more vulnerable and helpless, whereas Branagh's Ophelia, Kate Winslet, is frequently filmed from below, making her seem taller and more powerful. Or when he makes very interesting comments on the various versions of Gertrude's death, or claims that the exclusion of Fortinbras in the versions by Olivier and Zeffirelli means that "all the dying might seem to be senseless" (p. 22). The author rightly points out the limited scope of a bachelor thesis, but it would also have been interesting to read more of his ideas about the most recent of the versions he analyses, i.e. the Almereyda, when he mentions in passing that "the youngest adaptation is also the bloodiest" (p.20). Another intriguing comment made without further explanation is that Branagh's Hamlet is "as close as possible to the impression one might have from the character of Hamlet as he is presented in the play" (p. 14), which seems to run counter to his illustration of the various possible interpretations of such a complex character.

The thesis is written and structured extremely well and shows a great deal of original analysis as well as very intelligent use of secondary sources and I am happy to recommend it for acceptance, with a mark of at least 2.

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