OLIVIER AND BEYOND: FILM ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

by

Marc Lance Lusk

APPROVED BY SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

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Jessica C. Murphy, Chair

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Fred I. Curchack

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Pamela Gossin

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Adrienne L. McLean

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OLIVIER AND BEYOND: FILM ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

by

MARC LANCE LUSK, BA, MA

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And to my dear wife, Wendy, who was with me every step of the way on the PhD journey.

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OLIVIER AND BEYOND: FILM ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

Marc Lance Lusk, PhD
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Supervising Professor: Jessica C. Murphy

Adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have a long and wide-ranging history. For over four hundred years, there have been many theatrical versions that have, more or less, followed the written "text" of the play using various venues, settings, and casts. Beyond the stage, there are novelizations and children's stories, paintings and photographic tableaux, radio plays, and symphonies and operas all inspired by Shakespeare's works. More to the point of this dissertation, filmmakers are especially fascinated with the works of Shakespeare. As long as there have been movies, there have been Shakespearean—loose, traditional, or far from traditional—film adaptations all over the world. Even television has been no stranger to Shakespeare with its filmed stage productions, adapted films versions, themed episodes, or entire seasons based on the plays. Scholarship treats just about every example mentioned above; however, I am interested in how filmed adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, beginning with Laurence Olivier's 1948 version of *Hamlet*, exhibit a unique tension in the ways they mix innovation with preservation that can exert influence over subsequent versions and affect our understanding and enjoyment of the play. In other words, this dissertation investigates how adaptations of Shakespeare's plays both embrace and resist alteration of their "original" source,

in this case Olivier foundational *Hamlet* film—seeking sometimes to change the material yet wanting to return to or preserve some authentic founding "text" just as often.

This dissertation argues that filmed adaptations of Shakespeare's plays demonstrate the tension between tradition and innovation specifically because film as a medium asks different questions of the plays. For example, film emphasizes a type of "realism" that is different from theatrical illusion while also often elevating technological spectacle over language. Furthermore, film's conventional running times also affect the plays' structure, sometimes causing substantial cuts to the text. I contend that we can find similar traditional versus modern tension in most adaptations of Shakespeare's plays; however, his most filmed play, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* will be the exclusive focus of my dissertation.

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INTRODUCTION

OLIVIER SETS THE STAGE

Adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have a long and wide-ranging history. For over four hundred years, there have been many theatrical versions that have, more or less, followed the written "text" of the play using various venues, settings, and casts. Beyond the stage, there are novelizations and children's stories, paintings and photographic tableaux, radio plays, and symphonies and operas all inspired by Shakespeare's works. More to the point of this dissertation, filmmakers are especially fascinated with the works of Shakespeare. As long as there have been movies, there have been Shakespearean—loose, traditional, or far from traditional—film adaptations all over the world. Even television has been no stranger to Shakespeare with its filmed stage productions, adapted film versions, themed episodes, or entire seasons based on the plays. Scholarship treats just about every example mentioned above; however, I am interested in how filmed adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, primarily using Laurence Olivier's 1948 version of *Hamlet*, exhibit tension in the ways they mix innovation with preservation that can exert influence over subsequent versions and affect our understanding and enjoyment of the play. In other words, this dissertation attempts to contribute to the conversation of how film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays both embrace and resist alteration of their "original" source, in this case using Olivier's *Hamlet* film as the fountainhead.

A prime example of innovation versus tradition in adaptation is the recent *Hamlet* starring Benedict Cumberbatch. The lead actor is a classically trained British actor, famous for his television and film work, who takes on a modern stage version that comes off as wholly cinematic: a filmed stage play that was broadcast globally like a new-release feature film yet

leans into its filmic visual elements. However, like a play in its previews stage, it is criticized by critics for modifying the order of scenes and makes changes like a modern movie would for focus groups before release. Even fraught with problems measured against the high bar of theatre criticism, the production is wildly popular with audiences who may not have considered textual integrity in their enjoyment. Audiences feel comfortable with what they know, while at the same time desiring something fresh, or as Russ McDonald characterizes the history of Shakespearean production: "[a] paradoxical tension between old and new, between sameness and novelty, that persists."[1] This overall phenomenon of the old and new mixing elements of stage and screen and using Olivier's film version as a kind of touchstone is what this dissertation is all about.

My dissertation argues that filmed adaptations of Shakespeare's plays demonstrate the tension between tradition and innovation specifically because film as a medium asks different questions of the plays. For example, film emphasizes a type of "realism" that is different from theatrical illusion while also often elevating technological spectacle over language. Furthermore, film's conventional running times also affect the plays' structure, sometimes causing substantial cuts to the text. I contend that we can find similar traditional versus modern tension in most adaptations of Shakespeare's plays; however, his most filmed play, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* will be the exclusive focus of my dissertation.

In examining film iterations of *Hamlet*, I concentrate on how Olivier's 1948 version establishes certain essential ways of incorporating both traditional stagecraft and interpretations with contemporary psychology and film technique themes which all subsequent film *Hamlets*

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1. Russ McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 2001), 358.

must contend with in some way. I examine how certain performance, interpretation, and aesthetic traditions and innovations within the continuum of movie *Hamlets*, begun with Olivier are expressed by each filmmaker and film. I also look at how these filmic "texts" change in their various contexts—culture, historical moments, setting both in performance and viewing, actors, and audience. Filmmakers looking to adapt *Hamlet* carry a history of previous performances and adaptations mixed with our collective reading of the play while looking for familiar notes yet, paradoxically desiring to create something surprising and new to build upon the edifice of the old. I look to trace the continuum of film *Hamlet*s and how they change begun with Olivier's version in 1948.

Shakespeare's works are more perfectly suited for film than many other dramatic or literary works.[2] The visual aesthetic of the plays is often fantastical; there are aurally rich roles for actors both in dialogue and monologue, and there are inventive songs and transcendent poetry. These are just a few elements of highly effective theater experiences that film can expand and exploit through cut scenes and jump cuts, flashbacks, and visual effects even more despite the constraints of conventional running time for movies. Shakespeare plays, particularly the lengthy *Hamlet* have a long history of being cut and rearranged; nevertheless, they find success in the medium of film because cinema's emphasis of the visual often excuses significant loss of the verbal.

Actor influence is another factor that plays into how an audience receives a new adaptation of a work with an eye for the familiar and an expectation of something novel. Linda

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2. Shakespeare is the most filmed author according *The Guinness Book of Records*.

Cahir writes, "The actors' presence in the play or film…are often not isolated events, but, instead, exist within the context of past roles they have played, their degree of popularity at the moment, and their real-life situations to which the audience is privy."[3] The actors—especially in film because of the nature of the industry and the medium—are often celebrity personalities whose personal lives are even more outsized and available for public consumption. Moreover actors, either Shakespearean or non-Shakespearean, possess a reputation beyond their performance, and this duality informs the audience's experience by both affirming tradition of the role and offering something potentially fresh. My dissertation considers the relationship between actors, especially those celebrated thespians who have made Shakespearean roles their own, and audiences who come to a film adaptation with the double expectation of authenticity and originality.

Foreign-language versions of Shakespeare's plays create an interesting nexus for audiences who hold the simultaneous anticipation of the familiar with the wish for something different. Although many talented foreign-language filmmakers have adapted Shakespeare with great success, they are not included in this dissertation, primarily because their immediate influence is much more difficult to trace.[4] However, Russian director Grigori Kozintsev's 1964

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3. Linda Costanzo Cahir, *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006), 144.

4. Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, a filmmaker not covered in this dissertation, has a knack for adapting Shakespeare. His 1957 *Throne of Blood* is *Macbeth* in feudal Japan, *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) is *Hamlet* set in a modern, corrupt business world, and 1985's *Ran*, is a Japanese period *King Lear*. Kurosawa's Shakespeare scripts are not mere translations but are reimagined meditations that incorporate some of Shakespeare's plots and characters interlaced with Japanese culture and history.

Hamlet transcends all boundaries and belongs in the post-Oliver *Hamlet* film continuum. Our knowledge—even if limited—of Russian language and cultural components coalesces to speak to our subsequent understanding of Shakespeare's plays, informing our thinking about all these elements and whether we can synthesize them into our dual desires for the old and the new. If anything, the "foreignness" of Kozintsev's *Hamlet* forces us to the see the play with new eyes.

The tension between tradition and innovation in film adaptations of *Hamlet* can also be expressed in terms of author function. However cinematic Shakespeare's plays may be, adaptation of a "text" like *Hamlet*, [5] in a postmodern world, can be problematic when we blur the lines between the text and ourselves, that is, when we elevate ourselves as co-authors through our individualized understandings. Potentially ripe for investigation is that *Hamlet* is a work that seems to exist as both of Roland Barthes' readerly and writerly texts: simultaneously predetermined and open to interpretation. Adaptations can exist as types of writerly texts because the very nature of adaptation is an interpretive rewriting; however, *Hamlet* film interpretations still maintain most of their readerly, tradition-bound aspects through previous performance history, and the idea of a founding, definitive "text" that the filmmakers and, often, the audience are usually aware of.

My dissertation also considers the importance of cultural moments in certain film adaptations of *Hamlet* and how special contexts affect tradition and innovation. James M. Welsh argues that when history, time and context, is concerned, the adaptation of any work "tells us as much about the adapters themselves as about the historical figures they are working on…[and]

5. In this case "text" can mean written versions of the play, performance and performer history, and cultural or historical associations.

the same applies to Shakespearean adaptations."[6] In the case of Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*, the film reflects "late 1960s anxieties about 'youth' and its potentially destructive influence at a time when America was undergoing a period of liberalization."[7] Another example of an adaptation speaking to a cultural moment is Zeffirelli's 1990 *Hamlet* starring Mel Gibson, which captures the streamlined 1980s-90s action movie zeitgeist. So, the time and the place, or the context of the adaptation, can influence the piece, which in turn informs and talks to the source, affecting how we experience later versions. Of course, this is true of all adaptations; however, how these things are expressed in film adaptations of *Hamlet* is what this dissertation seeks to cover.

I also look at how the influence of tradition on innovation works the other way. Particularly useful is Marjorie Garber's theory about how "Shakespeare makes modern culture and modern culture makes Shakespeare."[8] She sees the plays' major characters as becoming cultural types that often do not match what they are like in the plays. For instance: a suave womanizer called a "Romeo." These misappropriations or misapprehensions can tell us something about "modern culture and modern life."[9] Gary Taylor argues throughout in *Reinventing Shakespeare* that societies "reinvent" authors according to their own needs, invoking

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6. James M. Welsh, "Adaptability: Questioning and teaching Fidelity" in *The Pedagogy of Adaptation*, ed. Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw, and James M. Welsh (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2010), 106.

7. Cahir, *Literature into Film*, 106.

8. Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 2008), xiii.

9. Garber, xiii.

Shakespeare and his excellence as a way of promoting their own values,[10] and political or social commentary. Looking into the presumptuousness of understanding something about Shakespeare's plays without meaningful reference to their written source will also reveal something about the interplay of the old and the new.

Chapter One of this dissertation looks at the seminal and foundational film, Laurence Olivier's 1948 *Hamlet* and its aftereffects. It is his adaptation, and performance in it, that launched an ongoing continuum of other films that imitated, reacted to and against, or played homage to while exploring the tension between the old and the new. Olivier's *Hamlet* is critical not only because it is the first major movie made from Shakespeare's play, it also set the film stage for its groundbreaking focus on Oedipal and Freudian interpretation, its aesthetics in the context of *noir* films of the 1940s, and its melding of traditional theatre techniques with modern film technology. Furthermore, Olivier's ability to synthesize and adapt those seemingly disparate elements of the old and the new created an amalgamation that looks both forward and backward within Shakespeare film adaptations, particularly the film *Hamlets*.

Chapter Two investigates how other 20th Century *Hamlet* films wrestle with Olivier's influential adaptation and contribute in their own ways. These versions had to contend with the "new" preserved master material of Olivier's film *Hamlet* while trying to establish their own stamp in a cultural and popular environment where film was fast becoming the dominant artistic medium for the masses. New *Hamlet* adaptations now had two masters of influence: the stage production history, and now Olivier's founding film. By looking at four of the other major

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10. Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Hamlet films made after Olivier's and up to the new millennium, this chapter asks how they react to, contend with, measure up to, and innovate in light of his new standard for future *Hamlet* films moving forward. The films covered are artful and abstract director Grigori Kozintsev's 1964 version, a foreign language *Hamlet* widely considered the best; Tony Richardson's 1969 film, the first in color; Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film, a "naturalistic" director's take on genres colliding; and Kenneth Branagh's "unedited" 1996 version, a return to tradition that is able to capture the visual, the aural, and the textual while riffing on the history of movies.

Chapter Three is a comprehensive survey of post-millennial examples of *Hamlet* adaptations that are each distinct in their willingness to expand the horizons of filmed interpretations of the play while enjoying their freedom from the proximity and influence of earlier versions. Shakespearean stage and screen icons from the past such as Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Richard Burton, Franco Zeffirelli, and Kenneth Branagh give way to a brave new batch of names like Michael Almereyda, Campbell Scott, David Tennant, and Benedict Cumberbatch. The new millennium signaled a significant slowing down of major film adaptations of *Hamlet* from the frenetic pace of the prolific 1990s while moving further and more quickly away from previous iconic iterations. Big studio budgets and international locales for productions that tended in the direction of the conventional and traditional pivoted to more modern or postmodern, racially textured and diverse, more Hollywood-backed, and primarily movie and television star-driven instead of classically trained stage actors. Film adaptations considered in this chapter include Michael Almereyda's 2000 meta-cinematic *Hamlet*, Campbell Scott's period yet racially diverse *Hamlet* (2001), the 2008 Royal Shakespeare production made into a film starring pop culture television phenom David Tennant, and finally the record breaking

2015 National Theatre simulcast production that features television and film actor Benedict Cumberbatch. The *Hamlet* adaptations in this chapter defy category; however, what all these versions share is that they still belong to the continuum of *Hamlet* movies that all deal with the tension between innovation and preservation begun with Olivier's version.

Before beginning the dissertation proper, I would like to share a few personal notes about this project. The topic of film and Shakespeare is a marriage of true minds for me. My early background is in theatre either onstage or, more recently, in professional theatre criticism. My love of film was really only surface level until I began graduate education and devoted time to the close study of the medium. I have watched enough live theatre and film to notice not only obvious similarities between the two, but deeper insights especially in regard to adapted works. The decision to choose *Hamlet* as the focus of this dissertation was an easy one because it is not only my favorite Shakespeare play, but it is also the most suited to tracing its many versions begun with Olivier's 1948 film. I am fascinated by a play that could spawn over fifty full-length films (the most of any Shakespeare work) and how they compare and contrast with each other. This dissertation looks at fewer than ten of those films; however, they are, according to my research, the most representative versions in the goal of contributing to the conversations about film adaptations in commercial cinema and as a detailed study of the historical importance and influence of Olivier's film *Hamlet*.

As a foundational prelude to this dissertation's close study of *Hamlet* film adaptations, a few things about what the play means itself are in order. Harold Bloom argues that *Hamlet* is

"part of Shakespeare's revenge upon revenge tragedy and is of no genre."[11] The doubling of Bloom's use of the term "revenge" is helpful even beyond the notion that the revenge within Shakespeare's play is his send up of that particular genre and its expectations. The much-delayed gratification of retribution within Hamlet and *Hamlet* causes its own kind of dramatic tension and has led to psychologists such as Sigmund Freud positing deep-seeded inhibitions against action, and later inspired Laurence Olivier to open his film with the lines, "This is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind."[12] The Ghost informs his son quite early in the play how he has been wronged by Claudius and how he should avenge him and yet Hamlet spends the next four acts completing his mission of revenge. Why Hamlet hesitates for so long is the essential question of the play.

Heightening, or even explaining, this tension is that the play is also about the duality of action and non-action within Prince Hamlet. There is no escape from what Hamlet has to do and yet he hesitates. Hardin Craig addresses this issue of inaction and the popular contention that Hamlet is a hesitator: "Hamlet…has become the very type and embodiment of hesitation and procrastination."[13] Craig claims that this is an unfair assessment and that there is plenty of evidence of Hamlet being able to act, and furthermore, his prolonged "inaction" is justified. Even though Hamlet is playing the long game, he still "acts" even as he is pretending madness to escape suspicion. As he is (slowly) approaching his final action, he dispatches Polonius, and then

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11. Harold Bloom, *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), 3.

12. *Hamlet*, directed by Laurence Olivier (1948; London, UK: Two Cities, 2010), DVD.

13. Hardin Craig, "Hamlet as a Man of Action." *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 27 no. 3 (May 1964): 229, https://doi.org/10.2307/3816794.

the false friends of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern before boldly returning to face his fate as dutiful avenger. Notable adaptations, chiefly the aforementioned film by Olivier eliminate the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the whole Fortinbras subplot as examples of a Hamlet's ability for immediate action. Olivier does this because his version stresses the internal and the psychological. However, this interpretational streamlining also reinforces the notion that Hamlet cannot make up his mind.

The argument could be made that Hamlet is not a "man of action," but something entirely different. Yes, he is compelled by the fundamental and age-old duty that a son owes a father. However, Hamlet is also contending with significant obstacles, not the least of which is the real suspicion that the Ghost is not really his father.[14] Furthermore, he must consider that dispatching Claudius transgresses the serious prohibitions of killing king and kin. John Lennard brings up another justification for Hamlet's hesitancy: [his] personal identity as a man of words rather than action, conflicting with his imposed dramatic and filial identity as revenger."[15] This is the most compelling argument I have heard that explains Hamlet's contemplative perseveration. Hamlet is a deep-thinking man who studies abroad; he is not an act first and ask questions later son like Laertes.

As far as film adaptations of *Hamlet* go, the question of action versus non-action is one of many strands that make up the whole of this dissertation. Filmmakers handle that question in

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14. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us! Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd." William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1990), 1.4.39-40. All quotes from *Hamlet* come from this version.

15. John Lennard, *Reading Shakespeare's* *Hamlet* (Tirril Hall: Humanities-Ebooks, 2008), 26.

various ways. For example, Olivier's aforementioned version leans into Hamlet's inwardness, whereas Franco Zeffirelli purposefully chooses the action star Mel Gibson to stress a more vigorous interpretation. Michael Almereyda's film-obsessed Hamlet only seems to be in his head; however, his constant watching of videos is a way of manifesting his actions before the fact. In a similar manner, many adaptations of *Hamlet* retain the language of the play and Prince Hamlet's words, which represent a type of action, especially as they lead to execution and resolution.

Ultimately *Hamlet*'s myriad of meanings is almost inexhaustible. It is a revenge play that parodies revenge plays. It is about fathers and sons, and sons and mothers, daughters and fathers, and brothers and sisters. It is about the nature of friendship, betrayal, and duty. *Hamlet* is a political play that is also philosophical, religious, and ethical. It explores the line between reality and unreality, the purpose of playing, and madness. The play is about life and death, murder, and suicide. In addition, *Hamlet* is also kingship, kinship, and corruption. These are only some of the major themes located within the play that's openness makes it ripe for interpretation and adaptation.

CHAPTER 1

A FOUNDATIONAL FILM ADAPTATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET* THAT SIGNALLED A NEW TRADITION

The *Hamlet* adaptation, against which all others must respond to and be measured by, is Laurence Olivier's 1948 film *Hamlet* because of the combination of his traditional stage experiences, modern movie techniques and technology, and the introspective philosophies and psychological theories of the 20th century. The chief aspect of Olivier's adaptation prowess, and what makes his *Hamlet* film so influential, is his ability to synthesize elements of the old and new that speak to the overriding tension in Shakespearean adaptation between innovation and preservation. Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* film weaves the most effective aspects of stage and cinema together. As such, Olivier's work on his film is defined by its illustrative amalgamation of traditional stagecraft and performance techniques and a pioneering focus on the Freudian, while showing its strong debt to contemporary melodrama proto-*noir* films of the 1940s in its visual aesthetics and inward-looking psychologies.

Any of those new interpretational or contemporary visual conceits would be enough to set Olivier apart as an innovative adapter of Shakespeare. Yet, having both the Freudian elucidation of Hamlet's behavior within the play, which was heretofore a psychological theory before becoming a prevalent adaptive strategy for *Hamlet*, and the intertextual expression of the then current cinematic movement of crime and detective melodramas pointing toward *film noir* are what make Olivier's film even more significant, enduring, and immediately influential. His classical theater tights-and-tunics aesthetic as Hamlet, his naturalistic and physical acting style, his British stage credentials, and the timeliness of his creations all helped Olivier make the

foundational transition from Shakespearean stage to Shakespearean film. The scholarly conversation about Olivier the director and his film run the gamut of revolutionary to dated; however, most agree that the influence of his Oedipal interpretation has become so orthodox that many Shakespearean theatre practitioners and filmmakers are unaware that there are other previous or even preferable ways of doing *Hamlet*. Olivier is, in fact, the originator that sparked a revolution of film adaptation of Shakespeare's plays and his *Hamlet* is the offspring that all other begotten *Hamlet*s owe a debt to either in imitation or in self-conscious reaction to his original.

Stage performance history is rife with the tense balance between the old and new in adaptation. When film came along, it accelerated, disseminated, and expanded and explored even more vistas concerning the tenuous yet rich balance between tradition and innovation. In other words, how each adaptation retains what precedes it and how will it say something new. The twentieth century saw the shift of popular entertainment importance from stage productions of plays to film adaptations of plays especially concerning the works of Shakespeare. Even in its earliest days, film began to rise in influence and popularity, growing alongside and even in some cases supplanting literature, and its closest cousin, live theater. Furthermore, because of film's initial reliance on theater for subject matter, presentation techniques, and similar or even the same venues, those two artforms are forever intertwined: compatible in source material yet competitive in artistic expression, scope, and audience exposure; still, film did not eradicate theater, nor was it meant to. Yet, more and more audiences were viewing the subject matter of plays onscreen with well-known movie celebrities instead of only seeing them onstage. This shift occurred because of a crucial recontextualization of the material from live, yet increasingly

inaccessible theater, due to high ticket prices and lofty or dated subject matter, to the technologically advanced and yet much more open vox populi of the Cineplex beginning with feature length films in the early 1900s, to the proliferation of sound films, or "talkies," and especially the common use of color beginning in the 1930s. This transition from stage to screen was well-suited to the 400-year-old plays of William Shakespeare, chiefly *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, a play long identified with high culture and theater.[16]

This conversion of artistic medium and venue was facilitated by the burgeoning technology and the wide reach of movies, and most importantly, brought about by a key figure. The harbinger who ushered in a new age of Shakespeare adaptation, Laurence Olivier, possessed a crucial combination of celebrity, craft, and fortuitous timing. He made films when the rise of the auteur began, when stylistic movies were entertaining the masses, and the interest in personal psychology was at a peak. Other film *Hamlet*s may have supplanted his 1948 version in chronological proximity and relevance, or as critical and film darlings; however, Olivier's formative *Hamlet* signaled a cultural transformation from stage to screen more than the works of any other Shakespeare film adapter because he embodied a special tension between preservation and innovation that is a hallmark of all subsequent Shakespeare adaptations. His is the moment when all *Hamlet* adaptations changed the most.

I argue that because Olivier came at the right time in film adaptation, possessed enough legitimate or classically-trained stagecraft, and was bold enough to go against the grain, that his

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16. "Both 'of an age' *and* 'for all time,' Shakespeare is the defining figure of the English Renaissance, and the most cited and quoted author of every era since." Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 3.

films and performances would affect all subsequent attempts at adaptation and force future filmmakers to respond to his founding filmic text by also balancing the levels of tradition and novelty in similar ways. Olivier, as a British actor, stage director, and filmmaker was not the first to adapt Shakespeare for film;[17] however, he is the most instrumental both through his groundbreaking Oedipal interpretation of *Hamlet* and by the power of his singular embodiment of that most iconic of roles. Furthermore, the amount of convention and originality is always shifting within Shakespeare adaptations and film emphasizes that tenuous yet productive interplay of the old and new even more. Moreover, this balance between those two elements is best exemplified by *Hamlet* films begun in full with Olivier's 1948 version.

With this "new" version of *Hamlet*, Olivier made a film that depicts a timeless world that is both rife with darkness and internalized. He is able to create something through a film adaptation of *Hamlet* that is different and unique because the camera focuses the audience's attention to its psychological themes, something difficult for a stage production to do. As a culmination of his biography and experience, Olivier embarked in early 1947 on an enormous project as a film adapter of Shakespeare after the success with his film *Henry V* (1944). This movie of the play marked many firsts for Olivier and for the history of Shakespearean adaptation both on and offscreen. His 1948 film *Hamlet* is the first sound feature of the play in English, the first British film to win an Academy Award for Best Picture, and the first time for an actor who was directed by himself to win Best Actor. The cuts to the plot are severe, and the interpretation

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17. Samuel Crowl traces the first filmed Shakespeare back to 1899 when "William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson (an associate of Thomas Edison) shot, in London, a four-minute scene from Shakespeare's King John." Samuel Crowl, *Shakespeare and Film: A Norton Guide* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 3.

for Hamlet's motivation are counter to onstage tradition; however, there is method to Olivier's thematic adaptation madness. What is most striking is that he made an innovative and iconic adaptation of Shakespeare's most famous play in a format that itself was fast becoming itself iconic. Olivier's *Hamlet* depicts old things in a brand new way, or how film historian Jack Jorgens describes the character of Hamlet: "Like a prophet, Hamlet is forced by the ghost to see everything with fresh eyes."[18] However, what makes Olivier's creation even more pioneering and transformative is that freshness mixed with an immediate sense that gave the film as Samuel Crowl claims, "from its inception…the aura of a classic."[19] It is the interplay of the new, film techniques and contemporary psychological interpretation, and the old, stage tradition elements coupled with its status as the first film, that all at the same time have made this *Hamlet* endure for over fifty years.

Olivier showcased his modern, visceral, and naturalistic form of acting in his own Shakespeare films, particularly *Hamlet*, making those adaptations of the plays even more accessible to movie audiences more accustomed to onscreen naturalism. This new movie-like style put in him stark relief to more traditional stage actors who, at the time, emphasized precise text delivery over emotive acting. Looking at Olivier's earliest professional experiences with Shakespeare we can see that they were already pointing to the innovation of the *Hamlet* film he would make in the future. For example, the actor and future director's distaste for comparison

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18. Jack J. Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 207.

19. Samuel Crowl. *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet: The Relationship Between Text and Film* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014), 60.

with traditional acting styles would lead him to seek out new areas of expression within his own performance style and mode of adaptation. English theatre giant John Gielgud represented that tradition when he came into Olivier's life in 1935. Gielgud cast him in his production of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* at The New Theatre on the West End. Gielgud had been impressed by Olivier's performance in the stage production of Gordon Daviot's *Queen of Scots* the previous year and recognized that he had more to offer if only he was given better material, a constant theme in Olivier's career. Gielgud staged the play with the roles of Romeo and Mercutio revolving between himself and Olivier. The production was a smash (189 performances) and garnered great reviews for both men, many praising Olivier's passion as Romeo, and Gielgud's poetic command of the language in either role.[20] As happy as Olivier was to be onstage in a "serious" play with a costar talented enough to challenge him, the constant comparisons irked the younger actor.[21]

Olivier's tendency to differentiate himself against current performance trends showed up later in his own Shakespeare adaptation films, particularly with his *Hamlet*. Early on, Olivier subdued his voice that he had trained for many years and instead mimicked the mumbling style of Gerald du Maurier, a popular British actor known for his naturalism. This kind of internality in expression was in opposition to the hammy performances and "singing" Shakespeare leads of

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20. James Agate writing for the *Sunday Times*: "[Olivier] is the most moving Romeo I have seen." He also praises for Gielgud who "builds his Mercutio out of the Queen Mab speech which, of course, he delivers exquisitely." James Agate, *Sunday Times*, Oct. 20, 1935.

21. Olivier writes in his biography about the criticism after opening night: "I had always seen myself so vividly as the one and only Romeo that when the sledge-hammer of opprobrium struck its blow from every critic to a man, I was so shocked that it was all I could do to get myself on to the stage for the second performance." Laurence Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor* (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicholson Limited, 1982), 75.

the 1920s. From the start, Olivier was on the cusp of innovation even in his delivery, something that is crucial for an actor expected to be heard and understood onstage, before body microphones would become popular. Olivier's ability to imitate actors outside of the classical Shakespearean sphere with a style subtler and more internal later drew him to roles, particularly in *Hamlet*, that explore that tension of nuance and outward expression. This predisposition toward finesse and verbal fluidity also made him more comfortable in the world of film which requires skills that are different than those used for the stage.

Olivier starred in a stage production of *Hamlet* where he was haunted not only by the character of King Hamlet but by the ghost of Gielgud's much-lauded version of the tragedy seven years prior. Olivier's muscular, active style of character interpretation was yet again in stark relief with Gielgud's clear and mellifluous delivery. Nevertheless, the opportunity to experience an uncut version of *Hamlet*, a rarity even today, helped Olivier expand his knowledge of the character and the play and set him on the path of new innovations with old material which he further develops later in his *Hamlet* movie. The stage work and experience learning about the whole play would also free Olivier to distill a unique understanding of the play down to what he would later call "an essay" of *Hamlet*.

An important step in the journey toward making Olivier's own Shakespeare films was playing Orlando in Paul Czinner's 1936 Shakespeare film adaptation. *As You Like It* gave Olivier his first real opportunity to combine his burgeoning stagecraft with films more consistent with

his interest in the classics.[22] This British production is significant because it is Olivier's first role in a film based on a Shakespeare play, and it is the first time this comedy was made into a movie with sound. Although the movie comes off as disjointed in most of its performances, it is still worthy for what film historian Douglas Brode notes as Olivier's "masculine yet sensitive" performance as Orlando, a characteristic style of acting that would serve him well when he would enliven the melancholy Prince Hamlet.[23] Furthermore, Olivier would take note of Czinner's disastrous vision of ignoring the essence of the play and its characters and instead casting for personal relationships over appropriateness for the roles, would be a lesson Olivier would take to heart in making his own Shakespeare films.

Olivier's first role in a Shakespeare movie came with some trepidation because it marked a major shift for him from stage to screen. Participating in Hollywood's versions of Shakespeare's plays would contribute to the continuing tension between tradition and innovation, or the old guard versus the new. Anthony Holden comments on Olivier's apprehension: "[it was] reinforced by conversations with Gielgud, who had turned down several Hollywood offers to film a version of *Hamlet*. But the money was much too tempting [for Olivier] …[and] the opportunity to work in any medium with Bergner, a most accomplished and then major star, was more than welcome."[24] Gielgud as Olivier's most immediate predecessor and stylistic foil yet

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22. The director, Paul Czinner was an Austrian Jew who had escaped persecution himself, which mirrors the play's own protagonists' journey to a type of freedom in the Forest of Arden.

23. Douglas Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies: From the Silent Era to Today* (New York: Berkeley Boulevard Books, 2000), 91.

24. Anthony Holden, *Laurence Olivier* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 199.

again influences the latter's relationship with Shakespeare. Olivier is simultaneously pulled in the direction of stage legitimacy and seriousness represented by Gielgud and his own need to define himself. Film represented a new arena in which an artist like Olivier could differentiate himself from the constraining bonds of stage tradition and classic practitioners like Gielgud.

The future filmmaker Olivier considered Czinner's *As You Like It* too stagy, or what critic Howard Barnes calls a "more a photographed version of a stringently cut stage presentation than a comic classic shaped to the cinema."[25] This too-much-stage slant later influenced how Olivier balanced his own stage roots with better film techniques and expression in his own adaptations that are much more complete films than filmed plays. Within the *As You Like It* movie, the role of naïve Orlando may have been a bit light for Olivier's darker tastes, but his performance is still effective in Czinner's film. Kenneth Rothwell surmises that "secretly his [Olivier's] inner being may have tugged him toward Austen's Fitzwilliam Darcy, who is thinly concealed in the sullen and diffident Orlando."[26] Still as a foray into filmed Shakespeare there were many advantages for Olivier's career due to exposure, an example of what not to do in an adaptation, and the professionals he would meet.[27]

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25. Howard Barnes, *"As You Like It*," *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1936. https://www.nytimes.com/1936/11/06/archives/the-screen-the-music-hall-presents-a-genial-film-production-of-as.html.

26. Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47.

27. Scottish stage and screen actor John Laurie, who played the older brother Oliver to Laurence's Orlando in the film would go on to work with him in three of his other Shakespeare films: *Henry V* (1944), *Hamlet* (1948), and *Richard III* (1955). The continuation and inclusion of a core cadre of actors and technicians reappearing in subsequent films is symptomatic of films in general, and Shakespeare films in particular.

Olivier returned to the stage after *As You Like It*, as he would often do when he was finished with a film. This early back-and-forth tendency shows the pull that the theatre still had on him—and remains to this day for classically trained actors—despite experiencing the creative possibilities, however nascent, that filmed Shakespeare promised. Olivier was Iago opposite Ralph Richardson's Othello in the play of the same name where Director Tyrone Guthrie wanted to experiment with an unconventional motive for Iago's hatred for Othello. He suggested a same sex attraction as the basis of Iago's machinations.[28] Olivier was willing; however, the straight-laced Richardson was not. Guthrie and Olivier consulted with noted Freudian psychologist Ernest Jones, as they had with their earlier stage production of *Hamlet* and Olivier would later do with his film *Hamlet*. What little remained because of this interpretive impasse was much too subtle for audiences; however, Guthrie's attempt to try something radical made an impression on Olivier and led to his willingness to take interpretive chances with plays with a long history of tradition in performance. This combination of the old and new and how to portray the subconscious, even in the face of resistance, became characteristic of Olivier's own approach as an adapter and director, and would reach its fullest expression later in his film *Hamlet*.

When Olivier made his movie version of *Hamlet*, he cut the play in an intentional way not only to shorten the material to fit the format but also to serve his streamlined interpretation. Judicious editing is an effective lesson he learned while making *Wuthering Heights* (1939). He witnessed the boldness that some writers could wield in adapting a classic work of great length.

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28. "Tony Guthrie and I were swept away by…[the] contention that Iago was subconsciously in love with Othello and had to destroy him." Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor*, 82.

Charles MacArthur, Ben Hecht, and John Huston's screen adaptation of Emily Brontë's novel showed Olivier that even with deep cuts and major alterations of a text considered sacrosanct, one could still make something that is successful, entertaining, and critically acclaimed. This was a fitting example for a budding filmmaker and actor who later adapted the long play of *Hamlet* in streamlining ways himself. Leaving an original text intact, as the author intended, is a nod to tradition and convention, even in the complicated world of adapting Shakespeare. Cutting that work to fit the parameters of a different medium, or to fit into an interpretation of that work is innovative.

Olivier's involvement with the feature film *Wuthering Heights* (produced by Samuel Goldwyn, starring Merle Oberon and David Niven, and directed by William Wyler), although it had huge monetary benefits, came at a high price to the actor's stage ego because of a demanding film director. However, it was yet another important milestone because it allowed Olivier to tap into his more naturalistic acting tendencies and apply them to a medium like film that was much more open to his style. Nevertheless, Wyler wanted Olivier to dispense with what he considered as the actor's tendency to be hammy, in a stage actor's way, and instead aim for more subtlety and nuance, which he deemed as far more suitable to the intimacy of the film camera. These were the necessary growing pains of Olivier trying to find a workable, creative balance between stage and film that uses classic material, mixed with the problems of celebrity and demanding auteur movie directors that would lead him to become his own director and adapter. Wyler's hard-driving demeanor, which was odious to Olivier at the time, paid off because the demand for

much more subtlety would serve him well with his introspective Hamlet character later.[29] He was learning to temper, or better yet, fuse his stage and screen acting styles, a maturation that was becoming more and more appreciated by critics and audiences alike.[30] Olivier was still adjusting to the acting style required for movies and this movement between stage and screen was causing an evolving hybridization of artistic expression. This particular synthesis is characteristic of what happens when the conventional and the experimental merge in the adaptation of classics and when classically trained stage actors like Olivier begin performing in front of the camera and adapting that material.

To execute the final transition into the kind of filmmaking and film acting necessary to make his *Hamlet* movie Olivier had to get over his snobbishness concerning film. His relationship with film acting was fraught with tension because his early biography is rife with stage productions that bolstered his theatrical education and enduring love for the stage. His mindset was long in the mode of conventionality when it came to film acting. As Melvyn Bragg writes in his biography of the actor, his heart still belonged to the stage: "this anaemic little medium [film] which could not stand great acting."[31] Movies may have not been "serious" enough for him at first, they did, however, provide financial security until he could marry what

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29. Niven recalled that after one day's shooting, when Olivier had been required to play one small scene again and again, as many as thirty times, he cracked and yelled at Wyler: 'Look, I've done it thirty times—I've done it *differently* thirty times. Just tell me, that's all. What the hell is it you want me to do?'" Holden, *Laurence Olivier*, 138.

30. Film Critic C.A. Lejeune remarked that "Olivier's dark, moody face, abrupt style, and a certain fine arrogance towards the world in his playing are just right." C.A. Lejeune, "Films of the Week," *The Observer*, 12. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2011/dec/18/archive-ca-lejeune-christmas-film-wishes-1938?newsfeed=true.

31. Quoted in Melvyn Bragg, *Laurence Olivier* (London: Sceptre, 1989), 65.

he learned onstage with the open potentialities of film. When Olivier first dipped an apprehensive toe into the movies; he was not impressed. Olivier, as a British stage actor accustomed to the energy of being in front of a live theater audience, would see the technologically generated, stop-and-start, non-sequential scene acting style, and visually driven world of film as antithetic to the real craft of acting onstage that stresses language and immediacy over spectacle. He would eventually get over his hesitancy to work in film, certainly by the time he made *Henry V* and *Hamlet* and recognize how rewarding using his stage talents in a new medium could be.[32]

In a crucial stepping stone to his film *Hamlet*, Olivier began with adapting another Shakespeare play first. The Ministry of Information, including Prime Minister Winston Churchill, approached Olivier about making a movie of *Henry V* to inspire a nation at war. At first, the actor was not interested in directing the film, but eventually he assumed those duties as well as producing and starring in the title role. The massive, expensive film was shot on location in Ireland and used Technicolor to create what many consider the first successful Shakespeare film.[33] Critics and audiences alike crowned the film as an instant classic. Pauline Kael deemed

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32. Years after his negative claims about working in film, he was fond to say that making the film *Hamlet* was "by far the most important work of my life." Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor*, 123.

33. Jack Jorgens deems *Henry V* a "classic among Shakespeare films, the first to be both an artistic and a popular success. It is a unique blend of realism and artifice, a bold departure from the singleness of style of earlier Shakespeare films." Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film*, 122. See also Olivier's statement that *Henry V* is "the first Shakespeare film." Laurence Olivier, *On Acting* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 268, and Rothwell who claims *Henry V* "launched, indeed invented, the modern Shakespeare film." Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 47.

Henry V "a triumph of color, music, spectacle and soaring heroic poetry."[34] Capturing a cultural and historical moment for a film based on material that is hundreds of years old is yet another instance of the tension within, and the taking advantage of, innovation and tradition in adaptation films.[35] Olivier's *Henry V* (1944) hearkens back to a time of English martial glory, and its Technicolor brightness bridged the time gap by making the film seem ultra-realistic and even modern.[36] The cultural and historical moment of an ongoing world war when so many anxieties about survival and what it meant to be a part of a waning, yet still-thriving, empire could now be captured in a new film version of a very old play for modern audiences. *Henry V* boosted British morale and lent insight into the original material in expanded and recursive ways. In contrast, a conventional stage production would struggle to do similar things on such a small scale and during a time of technological transition that demanded the kind of universality and immediate audience accessibility only a major film could provide.

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34. Pauline Kael, *5001 Nights at the Movies* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991), *google.com*.

35. As much as Olivier's movie contributed to the war effort (*Henry V*'s filming and release were concurrent with the Allied invasion at Normandy), he remained dedicated to continuing his serious work onstage and taking on more leadership roles in theatre. He was part of a trio of men (his actor friend Ralph Richardson, and stage director John Burrell) to head up The Old Vic and take over for Tyrone Guthrie. Their first two seasons were remarkable only for Olivier's iconic version of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and Richardson's Falstaff in *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*. The third season saw Richardson and Olivier playing the starring roles in *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *King Lear* respectively.

36. See also Deborah Cartmell's argument that "in *Henry V* the audience is transported from theatrical to filmic space, and the allusion to The Wizard of Oz, when Dorothy moves from black-and-white to colour, leads the audience to expect that something better is about to happen: in other words, Olivier implies that Shakespeare on film betters Shakespeare in the theatre." Deborah Cartmell, "The Shakespeare on Screen Industry," in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013), https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/adaptations/9780415167376/013_9781315006192_chapter3.html.

The success of *Henry V*, a movie he was pressured to make, empowered Olivier to make the movie he wanted to make. Nevertheless, creating a studio film version of *Hamlet* in 1948 was eased by Olivier's prior success in adapting Shakespeare, his box office bankability as a major motion picture star—necessary for securing a budget—and his facility in "translating" a classic play for movie audiences. Kenneth Rothwell notes that:

> After the heady success of *Henry V*, producer Filippo Del Giudice of Two Cities Films gave Olivier a free rein and a budget of £475,000 to do *Hamlet* (1948) as he wished. To dull the sharp edges of purists' tongues, Olivier let it be known that his film should be regarded "as an 'Essay in *Hamlet*,' and not as a film version of a necessarily abridged classic."[37]

Olivier's anxiety, which was helpful in this case, about adapting such a monumental theatrical work and his eye for practicality paid off as he tapped into the zeitgeist. Anthony Davies notes that "*Hamlet* took the 1948 Academy Award for 'best picture' (the first non-American entry to be so honoured) and its success in the United States can be seen against the background of a more disturbing aspect of the Cold War politics there" including the HUAC and the Hollywood Ten.[38] For a film that is so intentionally internal, Olivier was open to what was happening around him and using those influences either consciously or subconsciously to craft his adaptation. In fact, by releasing the film in 1948, he taps into the post-World War II sentiment that celebrated Shakespeare and British achievements, including *Hamlet*. Furthermore, Olivier simultaneously pays attention to what movie audiences would accept and enjoy either with new psychological interpretations, a contemporary film genre, his stage pedigree, and a vision of how to connect

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37. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 54.

38. Anthony Davies, "The Shakespeare Films of Laurence Olivier" in *Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 177.

tradition and innovation in a new medium of expression as it was becoming more and more dominant in the popular entertainment arena.

The reception for Olivier's film adaptation of *Hamlet* was mixed at first; however, the film garnered many American and British Academy Awards (historical firsts in several categories for a Shakespeare movie), Golden Globes, and Venice Film Festival accolades.[39] Nevertheless, a few scholars and critics found the film too truncated and thematically simplified for their tastes. Others took a broader view. Pauline Kael writes, "Whatever the omissions, the mutilations, the mistakes, this is very likely the most exciting and most alive production of *Hamlet* you will ever see on the screen. It's never dull, and if characters such as Fortinbras and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been sacrificed, it's remarkable how little they are missed."[40] Olivier's "new" *Hamlet* achieves addition by subtraction and by emphasizing how very "exciting" and "active" Prince Hamlet and Shakespeare's play are, which dovetail with his "new" acting style. The novelty of seeing Shakespeare fare onscreen, with a new psychological interpretation, a contemporary genre overlay that adds character insight, and a more movie-like running time all combined to reframe *Hamlet* for a much wider variety of audiences than any number of conventional theatre runs could ever do.

Modern psychology and the increasing focus on the mind of the individual were becoming more and popular in the middle of the twentieth century and Olivier as an avid reader

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39. Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948) is the only film to win Best Picture awards for the Golden Lion (Venice Film Festival's *Leone d'Oro*) and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscar).

40. Kael, *5001 Nights at the Movies*, *google.com*. See also Crowl where he deems Shakespeare onscreen as "defined by the work of Olivier and his American rival and counterpart, Orson Welles." Crowl, *Shakespeare and Film: A Norton Guide*, 11.

and actor accustomed to researching internal motivations was open to these psychological theories. Sigmund Freud (psycho)analyzed the protagonist of *Hamlet* to illustrate some of his theories. In short, Freudian psychoanalytic theory proposes that human beings have hidden or unconscious drives that explain our behavior. Freud's fellow psychoanalyst and biographer, Ernest Jones later developed Freud's analysis further and influenced Olivier's film.[41] It is my contention that although the Freudian symbolism is obvious and rife in Olivier's stage and film productions, that there is much more below the surface that deals with a unique conception of the mind that mirrors many of Freud's thoughts about the unconscious and conscious; in fact, Olivier's film *Hamlet* and his performance within have more to them than is apparent at first glance. Olivier's new approach to an old play that weaves in contemporary theories of psychological interpretation, a rarity ever since, and how he is able to keep the traditional feel of the film are some of the reasons his *Hamlet* was so successful and has endured as an influential icon of what it means to look and act like Hamlet for many years after.

Freudian themes in *Hamlet* channeled through Olivier's new take on the play and the character himself, who formed his vision through extensive consultations with Jones have been influential in subsequent stage and film productions. Olivier's film represents an innovation in interpretation that would become worthy of its own continuing tradition. In fact, until recently (most notably up to Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film *Hamlet* discussed in Chapter Two), most significant stage or film production, since Olivier's film adaptation, has a distinctive, Freudian flavor. Philip Weller argues that ever since Olivier took on the character of Hamlet (beginning

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41. During the 1937 production of *Hamlet* at the Old Vic, Olivier and the director, Tyrone Guthrie consulted with Jones about the psychology of the play.

with his 1936 stage turn), subsequent stage and film versions interpret the main character through a Freudian lens.[42] Mining Jones' psychological theories for a new interpretation of a centuries-old play is a way of distilling tradition into something unique. Olivier, in turn, interprets that literary/psychological interpretation and channels the gestalt of then-current psychological theories. All of these elements resulted in popularizing those psychological theories even more by encasing them in a popular film.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories have had significant influence within the fields of psychology, psychiatry, literature—where now it mostly remains—and popular culture.[43] Olivier would later concentrate and popularize these theories within his focused interpretation of *Hamlet*. Freud analyzed *Hamlet* and Hamlet to work through his own theories in his 1899 book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. While discussing Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and establishing his theory of the Oedipus Complex, Freud brings up the character of Hamlet's inability to act in certain instances.[44] That is, those times when he cannot heed his ghost father's order to kill his uncle Claudius. Freud argues, "In *Oedipus* Rex the basic wish-phantasy of the child is brought to light and realized as it is in dreams; in *Hamlet* it remains repressed, and we learn of its existence—as we discover the relevant facts in a neurosis—only through the inhibitory effects

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42. Philip Weller. "Freud's Footprints in Films of *Hamlet*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1997): 119-124. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43796783.

43. "As Joyce and Hemingway exploited the father-son relationship as a central feature of the Hamlet story, they participated in a cultural era dominated by Freud and his psychoanalytic formulation of the Oedipal Complex." Crowl, *Screen Adaptations*, 14-15.

44. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1994 reissue), 309.

which proceed from it."[45] Hamlet spends much of the play pondering his duty to the ghost of his dead father but with little success. However, he is quite apt, however, as Freud points out, for decisive action when it comes to stabbing poor Polonius while he is hiding behind the arras, or in dispatching the false friends of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern before they are able to betray him.

In Olivier's film and in Shakespeare's play, Hamlet opens his character up to Freudian psychoanalysis, which deals with the hidden and the internal, by wrangling with himself about his own thoughts and mind. He says things like "O my prophetic soul!" and he claims he can "wipe away [from his memory] all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past / That youth and observation copied there."[46] Knowing or predicting something in one's "soul" is a way of having knowledge but not knowing it, and thinking you have any control over your memories. If this is not just poetic hyperbole, it appears delusional. Nevertheless, Hamlet is aware of depths beyond his ken. He tells his friend, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."[47] Hamlet's insight of things seen and unseen, or even repressed, within himself are perfect fodder for the psychoanalytic interpretation Olivier is interested in exploring with his film version of the play.

Olivier's film *Hamlet* attempts to depict a war of indecisiveness within the mind of its protagonist by a wide variety of means: voiceovers, wistful looks where the camera pans in, and stark, angular shadows that obscure more than they reveal. To that point, action and inaction

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45. Freud, *Interpretation*, 309.

46. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1990), 1.5.41, and 1.5.98-101 respectively. All quotes, unless otherwise indicated, from *Hamlet* come from this version of *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet*.

47. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.5.174-5.

work together in their own tension within Hamlet's tortured conscious. Freud argues that "Hamlet is by no means intended to appear as a character wholly incapable of action."[48] Yet, Hamlet is wracked with guilt over his inability to carry out his orders, and he expresses this anxiety during his "To Be or Not to Be" speech. The camera rises up through a tower overlooking a cliff by a raging sea as the film score ramps us. We can see down over the cliff as the back of Olivier's head as his Hamlet also peers over the edge. The camera moves closer and closer to Hamlet's head until the picture resolves into a Rorschach-like image of a pulsating brain. The first lines of the speech are delivered as voiceover and then the image changes to Hamlet peering over the edge and speaking out loud as he removes his dagger. He then reclines on the rock and holds his dagger like a detached phallus and then drops it into the sea, completing the suggestion of castration. Finally, he shuffles off and down a foggy staircase into oblivion. The scene depicts a protagonist too much in his head, listless, and psychologically incapacitated.

Hamlet is caught in between a knowing and an unknowing because the real knowledge of what he must do is too terrible to contemplate. Freud argues that suppressed ideas are sometimes the most important and "mental life is the arena and battle ground for mutually opposing purposes" (94). For Freud, Hamlet knows what to do but he is not able to confront what it means if he does. All of this ruminating by Hamlet highlights the essential question of the play: Why is he unable to kill his murderous uncle right away? "Hamlet is able to do *anything*" Freud avers, "but take vengeance upon the man who did away with his father and has taken his father's place

48. Freud, *Interpretation*, 310.

with his mother—the man who shows him in realization the repressed desires of his own childhood."[49] In other words, he is unable to fulfill those Oedipal desires to kill his father and sleep with his mother. Yet, Claudius has already done just those things before Hamlet could; he has in fact actualized his nephew's buried wishes. Olivier shows how those desires might become manifest by using the many gifts that film has at its disposal. Notably he does just that in the opening of the film when the camera winds itself through the halls and passageways of Castle Elsinore before pausing on the bed in Gertrude's closet before suggestively dissolving into a shot of King Claudius gulping from a goblet with drunken abandon. There are musicians playing long trumpets and a quick shot of phallic cannons firing off just in case we miss the point. The twin distillations of Freudian theory—sex and death—dominate from the beginning of Olivier's film.

A father's wishes for the son and the obsessive identification the son has with the father are not only crucial components within *Hamlet*, but they also make up the overarching tension between tradition and innovation. This fundamental dynamic is one generation's passing into another while trying to maintain a legacy or honoring of the elder, in this case through revenge, which is itself a restoring of order.[50] Olivier as an adapter of the ultimate father and son play, *Hamlet* taps into the very Freudian theories that deal with that dynamic, because he edits out the political to instead focus on the psychological. Jones furthered the Freud's analysis of Oedipal themes present in in the play and popularized them in England with his 1910 article, "The

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49. Freud *Interpretation*, 310. See also Garber's praise for Olivier's film for recognizing "a key structural component of Shakespeare's play, the presence of several father figures rather than a single father." Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, 494-495. Emphasis mine.

50. Note Claudius' lines to Hamlet at the beginning of the play: "We pray you throw to earth / This unprevailing woe, and think of us / As of a father." Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.106-108.

Oedipus-Complex as An Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery: A Study in Motive" and even more so in his 1949 book, *Hamlet and Oedipus*. Jones contends that because of Hamlet's repressed Oedipal motives he unconsciously identifies with the murderous Claudius. That identification and his uncle's new father-figure status, and his role as king and husband to Queen Gertrude all serve to stymy Hamlet's ability to carry out the Ghost's demands to kill Claudius. According to Jones, it is not so much that Hamlet is jealous of his uncle or being some kind of coward, but that by killing Claudius he would be killing himself because his uncle has already accomplished all the things Hamlet secretly wants to do. We see this in the confession scene where Olivier depicts his Hamlet hovering over a distraught Claudius, dagger at the ready, yet just as he is about to strike and the music builds to a crescendo the camera pans up to a statue of Jesus in silhouette and Claudius is no longer in the frame. He stops and contemplates, and then all of his lines are delivered in voiceover to highlight his indecision. Hamlet is literally in his head and the camera forces the audience into his point of view, which of course is also the director's. Previous productions and historical stage performances make up a paternal history that subsequent sons must wrangle with to establish their own identities. Hamlet's father and son themes are expanded even more with Freudian psychology and the nature of film as a quasi-son of its progenitor theater. This all makes adapting the play into a new film even more of an exercise in meta possibilities expanded into new territories.

Olivier also emphasized the Oedipal themes of mother obsession in his *Hamlet* film through his unorthodox casting decisions. Queen Gertrude (Eileen Herlie, 27-years-old) in the film is much younger than his Prince Hamlet (40-years-old) The elder Olivier depicts prolonged kisses between the two, such as the one on the lips when she urges her son not to return to

Wittenberg, and other affectionate gestures between the two. Olivier mapped out his conception of Gertrude in a letter he wrote Marcia Swinburne, an actress he initially considered for the part:

> [Gertrude] has been seduced for the first time in her life into having one hell of an absolutely *gorgeous* time. For the first time in her life she has been sexually awakened…There is between many a mother and son, an overdeveloped affection that is commonly known as the Oedipus Complex. She must, in other words, be the most wonderfully glamourous mummy to Hamlet…almost impossible to cast in a film in view of the difficult situation wrought by either being too old for the part or too young for me.[51]

It is in the closet scene (3.4) though where we see mother and son inappropriately interacting in what amounts to a bedroom instead of a dressing room. Even the depiction of the queen's closet emphasizes the sexual nature of the mother and son relationship. Crowl writes about Olivier's Oedipal monomania in the film: "Her bed, framed by suggestively folded drapes intended to suggest the vagina, became an obsessive curiosity of Olivier's prowling, probing camera."[52] For Olivier, Gertrude is the nexus of Hamlet's motivations to act and, often to stagnate, and he stresses that through his treatment of her in the film. This casting also emphasizes the Freudian relationship between mother and son in stasis. She is young and beautiful and desirable, which is also a preservation of sorts but still breaks ground in its new interpretation of their relationship.

Olivier's Oedipal reading of the mother and son relationship within his film may be uncomfortable to some, yet he sidesteps a typical problem faced by many directors when his Hamlet confronts the queen. David Bevington notes that in this scene:

> actors often physically force Gertrude to look at the pictures of her first and second husbands…justifying such aggressive behavior because, they argue, the audience must witness the extent to which Hamlet feels the necessity of turning his mother's life around. If,

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51. Letter dated 19 March 1949 and contained in Box 80479 of the Laurence Olivier Papers at the British Library. Herlie's dark-colored costumes always emphasize a low, bodice exposing top, whereas, Jean Simmons' Ophelia is buttoned up and in light clothes.

52. Crowl. *Shakespeare and Film*, 138.

> however, physical violence is “overdone or come tardy off” (3.2.25), the actor risks alienating the audience’s sympathy for Hamlet.[53]

Therefore, Olivier’s decision to use an Oedipal interpretation for Hamlet’s behavior towards his mother is a way of channeling the angry and potentially triggering physicality often displayed in this scene into something more palatable yet also intentional in a thematic way. This directorial decision is deliberate because he is more interested in emphasizing the Oedipal rather than flirting with mere violence. What could be under the surface Oedipally appears now as a form of tenderness to maintain the audience’s sympathy for a kinder Hamlet even if the two seem too close for mother and son.[54]

Too much innovation is tricky when adapting traditional material; however, having both a new medium of film translation and particularly psychological underpinnings for interpretation can muddy the waters even more. This is what Olivier dealt with in making his *Hamlet* movie through the lens of the unconscious. For example, some critics, such as Weller see the acting out of unconscious Oedipal desires in such obvious ways as “simulated sex” with one’s mother, and suggestively held daggers and broadswords as inauthentic to the spirit of Freud’s theories.[55] The crux of the matter lies in how to depict these inner urges and motives. Granted, the text—be they

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53. David Bevington, Anne Marie Welsh and Michael Greenwald, *Shakespeare: Script, Stage, Screen* (London: Pearson Education, 2006), 571.

54. See also Deborah Cartmell’s contention that Olivier emancipates the queen at the end: “[Gertrude] Knowingly…drinks, in an effort to save her son: her face softens, her voice becomes more maternal as she bids good-bye to Hamlet with the words ‘let me wipe thy face’. Olivier fully redeems the Queen, making her almost Saint (Veronica)-like in her final moments.” Deborah Cartmell, “The Shakespeare on Screen Industry,” in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013), https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/adaptations/9780415167376/013_9781315006192_chapter3.html.

55. Weller, “Freud's Footprints in Films of Hamlet,” 120.

the many written or performative "texts" of *Hamlet*—is not explicit in the ways that direct association symbols or actions would be. Using Weller's rationale, if one has *repressed* feelings for his mother, then he would not act out on these hidden motivations by lewdly rolling around on her bed with her. However, one wonders how a filmmaker could avoid the "obvious" while still making those associations clear to a movie audience; he has to show what only be suggested. Furthermore, just because the audience may see some of the "obvious" Freudian symbolism does not mean the repressed characters in the film can or are even required to for the sake of "authenticity." Olivier pushes his Freudian interpretation agenda by the casting of a young and sexy Gertrude, he uses voiceovers to stress Hamlet's internality, and he eradicates the external and political in the plot. In any case, a certain amount of perceived inconsistency is to be expected when bringing an innovative interpretation of the play into the newer medium of film that has hundreds of years of stage tradition behind it.

In Olivier's application of a unique Freudian lens to interpret the character of Prince Hamlet, we might ask what kind of control this version of the character has, or more importantly, what kind of control he thinks that he has. When the prince first encounters Horatio, he seems not to recognize him: "I do forget myself."[56] He calls (intentionally?) Claudius "dear mother," and when he is corrected he maintains, "My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh; so my mother."[57] In Olivier's film the camera pans down to Hamlet's hands and he is tellingly clenching them with vigor. Whom does he want to strangle, Claudius,

56. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.161.

57. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 4.3.52-5. Fixating on the mother is another hallmark of Freudian psychoanalysis and the Oedipus Complex.

his mother, or himself? The tight focus on his hands begets endless possibilities. When he speaks a bit of gibberish to Claudius, the king replies, “These / words are not mine,” and Hamlet answers, “No, nor mine now.”[58] The Prince is either lost in his own thoughts, unable to recognize what is in front of him, or he has projected himself into everything and everyone so much that all is now confusion. As charming and clever as the Prince Hamlet is, he is unreliable enough for doubts about his sanity to arise even among his closest confidants.

Olivier’s psychological take on *Hamlet*, that will later become its own tradition, establishes an iconic version of the play that is well-suited to the medium of film because it can better focus, often literally, the audience’s attention to his new interpretation.[59] Patrick Cook argues that film aims to direct the audience’s attention away from the process of viewing and onto the object treated instead.[60] This kind of analysis reads like Freud’s conception of the subconscious mind and how it will try to keep things from the audience and the conscious mind. In other words, film sometimes tries to hide itself to focus on what it wants to portray without distractions. For example, Olivier uses voiceovers during soliloquys to internalize and emphasize the words even more than speaking them aloud would. Although film is full of innovative technological tools of expression it can still cut through all of the spectacle to direct the

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58. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.95-7.

59.“The wandering camera not only reinforces Hamlet’s disturbed mental state, it links things associatively, as the mind does when moving from thought to thought.” Jorgens, *Shakespeare on film*, 211.

60. Patrick Cook, *Cinematic Hamlet: The Films of Olivier, Zeffirelli, Branagh, and Almereyda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 8.

audience's attention in ways that are illustrative and insightful in ways that are difficult or even impossible for stage plays to do without seeming unnatural.

Film technique and editing create many occasions to dive into Hamlet's mind which align with Olivier's goals of a Freudian interpretation of the play. For instance, the prince's thrusting motions in the killing of Polonius behind the arras in the Olivier film, according to Cook, are reminiscent of beheadings and the "image of oedipal castration."[61] The audience is left wondering if Hamlet is trying to castrate the figure behind the curtain thinking he is the king, or is the unknown man a substitute for himself, or even the figure of his own ghostly father. Courtney Lehmann claims that "discounting the phenomenon of the Ghost itself, it would be hard to locate a more proto-cinematic scene in Shakespearean drama than the murder of Polonius, for he is killed at the very moment that he projects sound and movement onto the two-dimensional screen behind which he hides."[62] Olivier's *Hamlet* and Hamlet have also pierced the boundary or screen separating theatre audiences from the action onstage and reformatted the play to fit film and fit those audiences familiar with filmic tropes and techniques.

Along with Olivier's Oedipal interpretation for his movie version of *Hamlet*, he also uses the contemporary-at-the-time genre of melodrama ("crime" or "detective") and other films that point to *film noir*, even though the latter genre did not exist at the time, to infuse even more newness into the tradition and innovation equation. Melodrama is characterized by intense drama or dramatic rhetoric, stereotypical character "types" who are two-dimensional, and sentimental

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61. Cook, 47.

62. Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) 117.

dialogue yet it also represents a "victory over repression."[63] Some of these defining elements exist in Olivier's *Hamlet*, especially the characterization of Gertrude as a "temptress" and Claudius as a "villain." However, I am much more interested in looking at what many critics would define as the many *film noir* elements in Olivier's *Hamlet* instead. I argue that Olivier's adaptation anticipates *films noir* if even unconsciously.

Defining what qualifies as *film noir* is a slippery task even for film scholars, who often do not agree on the subject. Some argue that it is not even its own genre. Nevertheless, a working definition is that these films are American-made crime dramas released during the 1940s and 1950s. *Films noirs* are often cynical and dark both in look and mood, either in their black-and-white aesthetic and wide-angle focus, or in their disorienting and violent subject matter. The lines between good and evil are blurred and a sense of dread hangs over the plot that rarely dissolves even in resolution.[64] Upon first encountering Olivier's 1948 *Hamlet*, very few would deem it a classic *film noir* of shadowy streets, lone wolf detectives, and beautiful femme fatales. However, if we consider the dark and shadow-filled castle in Olivier's film, its claustrophobic tone, its flashbacks and voiceovers, its sense of hopelessness and fear, its unique relationship to the feminine, its conflicted protagonist, and its emphasis on Freudian themes of sex and death, it all adds up to a *noir*-era film. At times, Olivier's *Hamlet* film comes off as *noir* despite its use of

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63. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 41. I mention "repression" as thematically related to the notion of repression in Freudian psychology.

64. See Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton's chapter-long definition which includes the notions that film noir is a "film of death, in all senses of the word," and "it's the presence of crime that gives film noir its most distinctive stamp." *A Panorama of American Film Noir: 1941-1953* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002) 5.

period costumes and iambic pentameter. By looking at Olivier's creation through a synthesis of psychoanalytic and *film noir* lenses we gain new insights into old material freed from 400 years of stage tradition. Moreover, the way the *noir* elements work within Olivier's too-soon-to-be *noir* film enhance its psychological themes. This kind of contemporary overlay that even predicts the future of film highlights the interplay of the old and the new in film adaptations of *Hamlet* even more because we are seeing traditional material translated into a film genre that in itself brings a traditional play into modernity.

Olivier synthesizes several streams of influence into his film *Hamlet*: classical stage tradition, Freudian theory, and contemporary films and their film techniques.[65] Although Olivier made his film *Hamlet* in a pre-*noir* context, all of the typical hallmarks are there.[66] The Denmark of Shakespeare's play is "rotten," so Olivier's movie is bleak, vicious, and populated by covetous, licentious, and ruthless characters. Douglas Brode sees Olivier's *Hamlet* as a product of many timely currents in filmmaking: *film noir* and its "grim stories of confused characters disillusioned to find everything changed for the worse," and surrounded by such psychological films as Raoul Walsh's *White Heat* (1949), Howard Hawks's *Red River* (1948) and Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945).[67] Brode continues, "At the time, though, Olivier was as immersed in reading

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65. Closer to Olivier's homeland, British *films noirs* were available for inspiration too: Alfred Hitchcock's *Rich and Strange* (1931) and *Sabotage* (1936), *Gaslight* (1940), *Fanny by Gaslight* (1944), *The Man in Grey* to *Daybreak* (1947), *Odd Man Out* (1947), and *They Made Me a Fugitive* (1947).

66. Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg describe the "specific ambience of *film noir*" as "a world of darkness and violence, with a central figure whose motives are usually greed, lust and ambition, whose world is filled with fear, reached its fullest realisation in the Forties." Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, "*Noir* Cinema" in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Proscenium Publishers, 2001), 27.

67. Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies*, 119.

psychological tracts as he was watching recent *films noirs*. Not surprisingly, his *Hamlet* emerged as a representative work for the postwar years."[68] Films take longer than stage productions to put together, so they are more susceptible to absorbing contemporary influences and they are not as burdened by tradition as stage adaptations are. Furthermore, films have a wider audience demographic that is more amenable to change and outside influences.

Films noir made around the time Olivier made his film *Hamlet* are defined as sinister. For example, there is the pessimistic world of *Detour* (1945), the murdering and adulterous schemers of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), and the temptresses and twists of *Out of the Past* (1947) to name a few. The aesthetic of *noir* and its influence on so-called non-*film noirs* is a self-conscious nod to accessibility for contemporary audiences familiar with receiving their visual entertainment via the lens of the movies made at that time. Olivier is doing dual duty of introducing moviegoing audiences to Shakespeare and theatregoers to a preview of *noir*, which were not always the same demographic.[69] This genre influence was so powerful that it would even carry over into other Shakespeare films. Just five years later in Joseph Mankiewicz's 1953 *Julius Caesar* with its "night storm scene in the square, echoing the dark, rain-slicked streets and menacing shadows of *film noir*, establishes a sinister atmosphere and evokes Hollywood gangster films, children of *Julius Caesar* and *Little Caesar* which also portray with irony an

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68. Brode, 120.

69. "His [Olivier's] redeployment of these cinematic resources enables him to 'locate Shakespeare's play in viewing traditions of the late 1940s and thus more readily evoke an imaginative response from eyes more accustomed to accompanying Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade than Laurence Olivier as Hamlet.'" Quoted in Davies, "The Shakespeare Films," 175.

ambivalence power struggles, violence, killings and tainted revengers."[70] Thus, Olivier as a part of a new tradition of reimagining the old while looking forward, establishes an innovative way of seeing Shakespeare's plays—even dressed in period garb and using the original language of the play—through the lens of a what may appear to be an incompatible genre that would have far-reaching implications for other Shakespearean adaptations.

The visual features of *noir* are compelling within their genre and even more so when they communicate and provide insight with material outside of that genre such as is seen in Olivier's *Hamlet* adaptation.[71] From the opening of Olivier's film it appears to be perpetual night inside and out of Elsinore castle. The slanting shadows, ramparts, towers, and staircases provide visual lines typically associated with *films noir*. One scene in particular is Olivier's Prince Hamlet contemplating climbing the stairs to his mother's "closet." The stark slant of the exposed stairwell, a bright shaft of light in the middle, and more shadows bisecting the figure of Hamlet come together to form a living painting that exemplifies shadowy *noirs*. Even the acting style within Olivier's *Hamlet* fits into the category of a conflicted protagonist within a *noir*.[72] Olivier's portrayal of the prince is more active, physical and naturalistic, than most previous

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70. Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film*, 102.

71. There are many elements in his film that relate to the items on the list of recurring *film noir* techniques that Paul Schrader mentions in "Notes on *Film Noir*": "scenes lit for night"; "oblique and vertical lines"; where "actors and setting are often given equal lighting emphasis…[creating] a fatalistic, hopeless mood"; "compositional tension is preferred to physical action"; "Freudian attachment to water"; "a love of romantic narration"; and "a complex chronological order. Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," in *Film Noir Reader*, 57-58.

72. Of course the conflicted protagonist in a shadowy world contemplating dark deeds is not exclusive to *noir*. Many films of the 1940s and 1950s had similar setups, especially the melodramas.

Hamlets, yet the film still prefers "compositional tension"[73] such as in the aforementioned "To Be" scene in which Olivier suggestively holds a dagger in still repose. Olivier's use of voiceovers and narrative flashbacks in his *Hamlet* film contribute to its disorienting, *noir*-consistent chronology, and there is water, water everywhere around the castle, recalling Higham and Greenberg's pronouncement about *noir*: "here is a world where it is always night, always foggy or wet."[74] Water also begets many thoughts of depth, darky psychology, and machinations beneath the surface of the stormy waves Prince Hamlet stares into.[75] The sophistication of Olivier's film is that he is able to match up what we see as external visuals with the inner turmoil that his Hamlet is experiencing. He is showing the audience both worlds as one while using the layered elements of *noir* to support his interpretation.

The cinematography within Olivier's *Hamlet* is another contributing factor in the film's *noir*-ness, seen in its characteristic use of deep focus filming technique. The look of *noir* is perhaps its most recognizable aspect. To that point, Olivier stages the opening court scene with most of the action between King Claudius and others in central focus until he pulls the camera back and we see a sitting and silent Hamlet in the foreground even as the dialogue continues behind him. Olivier's use of deep focus photography here allows all the figures onscreen to

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73. Crowl notes that "when he [Olivier] first played Hamlet on the stage, one critic dismissively commented that it was the finest performance of Hotspur he had ever seen. The remark stung, and Olivier undoubtedly overreacted when he came to imagine his Hamlet on film." Crowl, *Shakespeare and Film*, 23-24.

74. Higham and Greenberg, "*Noir* Cinema," 27.

75. Prolonged and interspersed scenes of the raging sea is something film can do that even admirable attempts onstage (sound effects, video screen, dancing with undulating fabrics) have difficulty matching.

remain in focus but now we see Hamlet as if he is part of the scene in an equal manner even if he is in contemplative repose. It is an effective film technique for a play that also suggests that the action could be happening in Hamlet's head. Davies writes, "Olivier's decision to exploit the possibilities of deep focus in *Hamlet* was to have profound effects upon the nature of the film as a whole."[76] Although black-and-white film was necessary to handle deep focus definition and clarity for practical reasons, the visual essence of *noir* still comes through and it reinforces the strong psychological themes through that dark and shadowy aesthetic.[77] Yet again, Olivier is playing to several audiences at the same time by filtering his adaptation through contemporary and even future film genres. By tapping into proto-*noir* themes and visual appeals he attracts not only the highbrows looking for classic material onscreen, but he also makes contemporary audiences who are already comfortable with the look of contemporary movies to venture into a similarly dark and psychologically fraught work that just happens to be by Shakespeare.[78]

The aesthetics of Olivier's *Hamlet* film go beyond using *noir* as an effective dialect for contemporary audiences they also reinforce his interpretive vision of the play. Jorgens praises

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76. Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 47.

77. See Rothwell where he argues that the decision to do the film in black-and-white (Olivier's prior film, *Henry V* was in Technicolor), the use of a spartan and unadorned set, and the dark, deep focus cinematography as all contributing to the castle as a "metaphor for the protagonist's isolation and loneliness. The result is *film noir* for highbrows, with chiaroscuro effects reminiscent of Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*." Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 55.

78. See Jorgens' discussion on other ways to make a Shakespeare film palatable to contemporary audiences: "Olivier and his script editor Alan Dent not only pruned away characters and speeches, they rearranged scenes to make Hamlet more orderly, less fragmented, more like the movie stories familiar to 1948 audiences." Jack Jorgens *Shakespeare on film*, 208.

Roger Furse's art direction and set decoration for creating an effective space for Olivier's *Hamlet*. He claims that the "*mis-en-scène* for the film liberates the play's language and actions from deadening literalness and reinforces the psychological nature of the drama."[79] The dark castle with its winding stairways, foggy ramparts, corridors, blank stone walls, and preponderance of dark shadows all are "suggestive of the mind's labyrinths."[80] The idea of spare spatial considerations in a film that focuses the attention on characters and their state of mind, or really Hamlet's state of mind which for Olivier is the rotten state of Denmark writ small, are all helpful in the argument of the film as a complete vision that transcends timely visual elements that have bled in from popular *noir* films.

It is not just the psychological that anticipates elements of *noir* in Olivier's *Hamlet*, it is how certain characters are depicted, especially the female ones. The women both in *Hamlet* the play as it is written and in Olivier's film fulfill important functions in relation to the genre of *film noir*. Gertrude and Ophelia are looked at with suspicion, scorn, or in the queen's case, barely concealed Oedipal monomania. Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton point out that in *noir* the "ambiguity surrounding the woman: the *femme fatale* who is fatal for herself. Frustrated and deviant, half predator, half prey, detached yet ensnared, she falls victim to her own traps… [she is] violence eroticized."[81] These women of Elsinore embody that definition either by Ophelia agreeing to play along with Polonius' and Claudius' plot concerning Hamlet, or in Gertrude's

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79. Jack Jorgens, *Shakespeare on film*, 210.

80. Jorgens, 210.

81. Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir: 1941-1953*, trans. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), 22.

taking the poison cup. Furthermore, the role of the woman in *noir* is what Janey Place calls the "dark lady," or "spider woman who along with her sister (or *alter ego*), the virgin the mother, the innocent, the redeemer, form the two poles of female archetypes."[82] Using the *noir* lens to analyze these women reveals even more insight into their characters because we cannot help but see them as those *femme fatales*, spider women, and innocents all at the same time. They are a blend of women-as-subjugated tradition and innovation as dangerous *fatales* colored by the postwar anxiety of the feminine in *film noir*.

In Olivier's *Hamlet*, Queen Gertrude is the nearest to being a *femme fatale*, whereas Ophelia is a victim even though Hamlet treats her more like a villain. He accuses his mother in the Closet Scene of being complicit in killing the king, and for being in love with a murderer.[83] His lines to his mother are spoken in monotone until he flings her on the bed in the and shouts, "Sit you down." When she looks up he is brandishing the dagger both with menace and as if he would protect himself. Hamlet blames Gertrude, using almost the same language later heard from the Ghost, of having a rank and incestuous relationship with Claudius.[84] The queen straddles that uncomfortable position between villain, if even if by association, and punished victim that makes her even more *noir*. Ophelia tries to be the redeemer in the Prince's life, but she becomes tainted by her part in the plot, so he discards her with cruelty. To the audience

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82. Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. Ann Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 47.

83. Hamlet to Gertrude: "A bloody deed. Almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king and marry with his brother." Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.27-8.

84. The Ghost to Hamlet: "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned *incest*" (1.5.82-3 emphasis mine). Hamlet in soliloquy: "She [Gertrude] married—O most wicked speed! To post With such dexterity to *incestuous* sheets!" Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.156-7 emphasis mine.

though, Ophelia is the virgin or innocent, an alter ego to Place's "spider woman."[85] Nonetheless, both female characters pay with their lives for being women on the edge who are ensnared in this dark world. The heightened focus on the female, embodied by the much younger actress playing Gertrude to Olivier's Hamlet, is characteristic of *noir* films. Furthermore, its intertextual ripples of the women in other genres effect our experience of Olivier's *Hamlet* adding even more contemporaneity and insight into this old play.

The male characters in Olivier's *Hamlet* also live in a world of proto-*noir*, and the lead is the most *noir* of them all. Men in *noir* are often private investigators, police detectives, good citizens pulled into crime, or more often than not, unfortunate victims of dark circumstances. Prince Hamlet tries to reveal the rottenness of Denmark through his own analyses that lead to criminal activities. As a result, he succumbs to circumstances beyond his control. Michael Anderegg argues that "Olivier presents a Hamlet who recognizes his own corruption in a corrupt world."[86] Hamlet's motivation is clear—to avenge his murdered father—yet everything and everyone around him seem both corrupt and unclear.[87] Borde and Chaumeton, describing the "ambiguous protagonist" in *noir*, write that "at times, he is a passive hero who allows himself to

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85. Place, "Women in Film Noir," 47. An intriguing side note is that American movies, including foreign films released there, were restricted by the Production Code until 1952. The Code's prohibitions of sexually graphic forms or references might explain why Olivier's Ophelia is so meek and inoffensive.

86. Michael Anderegg, *Cinematic Shakespeare* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 100.

87. Note Marcellus' line to Horatio after Hamlet's first encounter with the Ghost: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." The corruption of the Danish court is even apparent to its guards. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.4.90.

[be] dragged across the line into the gray area between legal and criminal behavior."[88] Hamlet's impotence to act makes him ambiguous, even passive-seeming, or just flaccid in an appropriate manner to maintain his antic charade. He avoids being dragged into certain criminal or immoral acts either out of fear, damnation, or repressed Freudian motivations. This avoidance is apparent when Hamlet refuses to kill Claudius when the king is in prayer, so that he does not dispatch an innocent "in the purging of his soul" to heaven, an act both criminal and immoral.[89]

Notwithstanding any negative criticism of Olivier's polarizing *Hamlet*, primarily in the form of purists panning the cuts, [90] his interpretation was strong enough to influence his predecessor, John Gielgud to make the very same Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Fortinbras cuts in his 1951 radio performance for the Theatre Guild on the Air program. Gielgud's production was also notable for picking up the recent trend of Horatio uttering the final lines of the play instead of the missing Fortinbras.[91] Olivier is the new student on the scene set in interpretive opposition to the masters, Gielgud et al, becomes master himself. This "new" tradition that Olivier established became so strong that many audiences in uncut versions are shocked when

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88. Borde and Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir*, 22.

89. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.385.

90. See also Campbell Dixon's 1948 review for the *The Telegraph*: "Olivier still uses the camera to achieve effects that a stage producer might aspire to if his stage were big enough and money no object. His work will gain a great deal when he learns to forget stage entrances and the slow gathering of players, and cut or dissolve from one scene to another in full course." Campbell Dixon. "*Hamlet* Review." *Telegraph* (May 1948). https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/william-shakespeare/10782898/Shakespeare-Laurence-Olivier-as-Hamlet-original-1948-Telegraph review.html?onwardjourney=584162_v2.

91. "Given the length and complexity of *Hamlet*, it is no surprise that it is seldom performed entire and that actors gives us something less than whole characterizations. Even more than most productions, however, Olivier's is a conscious simplification and reduction of the play." Jorgens, *Shakespeare on film*, 208.

the play does not end with Horatio's famous near-coda: "Now cracks a noble heart. Good-night, sweet prince; And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."[92] Whether it is the blonde hair and black-suited look of its pondering protagonist, the slanting shadows, efficient edits, or most importantly, the Oedipal interpretation, what is most apparent in Olivier's groundbreaking *Hamlet* is that it establishes a fountainhead that all other *Hamlet*s, filmed or otherwise, must wrangle with.

The ripples of Olivier's *Hamlet* film were felt for the rest of the Twentieth Century, and beyond, both onstage and onscreen. I will examine now examine in the following chapters how subsequent movie adapters of *Hamlet* address Olivier's founding filmic text. These chapters analyze how various filmmakers' attempt to reconcile Olivier's onscreen *Hamlet* directly as either a positive inspiration or a problematic stumbling block to overcome while balancing both innovation and preservation in their own ways.

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92. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.364-5.

CHAPTER 2

ICONIC *HAMLET* FILMS IN OLIVIER'S WAKE

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, more than fifty films have been made of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* After World War II and right up to end of the Twentieth Century, there have been five feature films made from the tragedy that fulfilled important roles in a new age of Shakespeare adaptation: Laurence Olivier's 1948 film discussed in Chapter One that became the foundational standard; Grigori Kozintsev's 1964 Russian adaptation that emphasizes the political of its moment and place; the John Gielgud-directed Broadway, *Hamlet* (1964) that is a return to staged naturalism;[93] Franco Zeffirelli's action genre *Hamlet* (1990) featuring a bona fide Hollywood star; and Kenneth Branagh's 1999 version which seeks to reclaim a form of full text "fidelity" and a return to tradition. Chapter One of this dissertation focuses on Olivier's influential film *Hamlet* (1948) as an innovative interpretation in its own right that emerged as the new normal. Chapter Two looks at those other film *Hamlet*s that must contend with Olivier's film, how they are reactions or rebellions, what do they contribute to the film *Hamlet* conversation, and where do they fall along the innovation and preservation continuum. The methodology in separating all these films in this chapter is that they all were made under the shadow of Laurence Olivier's 1948 *Hamlet*, yet they each break free from his film's influence even as they retain traces of their struggle with it.

The *Hamlet*s under discussion in this chapter inhabit a new territory of expanded filmic influence similar to Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* version, but to a lesser extent because they come

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93. Sometimes referred to as the "Burton *Hamlet*."

after, but they are still affected by their proximity to that original adaptation. Setting aside the question of why *Hamlet* adaptations are granted a special status, one must ask why are these films influential? The chief reason, which is also the most simple and straightforward, is the fact that they are films in the first place. That is, the mere fact that these movies are made to be distributed and viewed by audiences in movie theaters, and later in classrooms and homes, grants them the popular exposure necessary for widespread influence.[94] The mantle of influence passed from the directors and major stages of New York, London, Chicago, and Los Angeles to the studio lots of Hollywood, Bollywood, and London into the hands of the filmmakers instead of stage directors. Film can reach more audiences, last longer, and can bear repeated viewings in a way that the theater never could; it is the very nature of the omnipresent celluloid beast.

More often than not, film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays used stage productions, some more immediate than others, as their format crossover guides.[95] Those productions, as helpful as they may be for the actors to rehearse and develop their characters, or for the directors to flesh out their vision, are limited and are ultimately incongruent precursors to the films they eventually become. There was a time during the early days of film, before movies became a legitimate form of artistic impression, or even just ubiquitous, that stage versions of the plays were considered the "true" form of the original. However, film speaks its own language, and the

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94. There is some debate about whether of a work of art's access also leads to importance. It is my contention that despite any potential "taint" because just anyone can watch a film its democratization instead allows for more discussion and analysis.

95. Several film adaptations are based on stage productions: most notably Max Reinhardt's 1935 film *A Midsummer Night's Dream* based on a 1934 production at the Hollywood Bowl, Olivier's 1948 *Hamlet* begot from a 1937 Old Vic production, and Richard Burton's 1964 *Hamlet* filmed from the 1964 Broadway run at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre.

best adapters are the ones who learn the language of film while simultaneously translating the language of the stage. Furthermore, film uses its own unique techniques so that a film adaptation of a play, particularly with regard to the works of Shakespeare, become yet another legitimate interpretation of its source material, and not just a pale reflection of what belongs or began onstage.

Nearly two decades after Olivier's *Hamlet* forever changed film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays,[96] Richard Burton's 1964 Broadway *Hamlet* came on the adaptation scene.[97] This version of *Hamlet* began onstage with a subsequent film that was made from that New York City production. Burton's *Hamlet* featured a trend-bucking use of informal sets and costumes, and non-stylized, method-like or naturalistic acting which all set it apart from previous "tights and castles" stage and screen iterations, particularly Olivier's. That filmed production and Burton's performance within it marked a return to a visually minimalistic approach[98] that instead stressed performance and language over spectacle.[99] Conversely, Olivier's film, although it also

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96. "Olivier's *Hamlet* was the first sound film of the play and has reached, in the sixty years since its release, iconic and canonic status." Crowl, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet*, 100.

97. I use the common convention of calling the 1964 film Burton's *Hamlet* although he was not the director or producer of the film.

98. As "stagey" as the production is, there are still, as limited and clunky as they are, movie-like closeups and alternative angles using footage from at least seven cameras.

99. See the connection to small performance venues that alter how plays may be produced. Andrew Gurr writes of the the Blackfriars Theatre of the 1630s: "Its small enclosed shape and half-sized stage also helped to make it more a place of witplay than swordplay, which prevailed at the Globe and the other ampitheatres. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).173.

spawned from a stage production, was always envisioned and executed as a film. The 1948 *Hamlet* is not a filmed record of a play performance. It is different from that because it uses the full array of film techniques and is not afraid to take its cues from other films of the era and non-theatrical psychological interpretations. On the other hand, Burton's *Hamlet* is more a film record of a seminal, stripped down stage experience. Burton's theatrical-forward product is not a movie in the classic sense; however, it is still self-consciously filmic because it exists firmly in the cinematic age with actors who spent much of their time in front of the camera rather than on a stage. It retains its filmic nature despite, or perhaps because of its equally self-conscious simplicity. The 1964 *Hamlet* is a stripped-down reaction to film; it is a return to the stage that also happens to have been recorded. This *Hamlet* (1964) foregoes the work of translating stage language into film and instead presents a filmed version of the play out of its medium. The film of the *Hamlet* production that Burton starred in was merely a disseminating vehicle for that production; whereas Olivier's film was a piece of theatrical art produced as a film with a definite eye toward movie audiences familiar with both stage and screen.

An audience is such a defining part of the live theater experience that its inclusion in a film, that is what is projected onscreen and not just in the movie theater, makes Burton's *Hamlet* even more of a stage production rather than a film.[100] Michael Anderegg points to the audience in the 1964 film as one of the more jarring elements of what he calls "The 'Electronovision' Hamlet." He writes, "the stage audience is 'in' the film along with the actors, its presence heard

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100. Other factors in the film that hearken much more to the stage rather than the screen are sound echoes, how the actors "turn out" to the audience rather than to the cameras, wide shots of the action that mimic a theatre audience point of view, and a lack of special effects.

if not seen, applauding, chatting, rustling programs, and coughing, and that audience is resolutely not us."[101] According to Anderegg, the blurring of onstage court audience and theatre audience is even more problematic because of the theatre, particularly Broadway theatre, convention of applauding well-known actors upon their first appearances with the unwieldy result of the prince (Burton) upstaging the king (Alfred Drake as Claudius).[102] A film audience should have little awareness of itself because, unlike a theater play, what it witnesses has no awareness of it. The film audience should also be unaware of its screen surrogate if it is to experience a film where its eyes should be focused on the actors and action onscreen.

In whichever way each of Olivier and Burton's adaptations is proximately close to its stage "source," they both are tied to stage and performance traditions, which are, in turn, attached to their own predecessors. The main difference between stage and screen is that the former tends to take its stage predecessors more seriously, if even in opposition, than the latter, which has more fluidity to change. Preservation is the name I assign to the predisposition to follow in the footsteps of previous performance tradition, productions, source material, or the "text" of the play. One could even be beholden to one's own particular history of performance, as is the case of Olivier's film, or to that of others involved in the same project, as in a famous *Hamlet* and Hamlet interpreter, John Gielgud directing Richard Burton's performance as the Danish prince. Innovation is what I call the motivation to break from the tradition of one's predecessors, living, dead, or textual.

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101. Anderegg, *Cinematic Shakespeare*, 35.

102. Anderegg, 35.

Adapting Shakespeare is complicated for many reasons. No matter how different adaptations are they all wrangle with the decisions between innovation and tradition, either consciously or unconsciously. The primary obstacle, and what this dissertation considers, is the contradictory motivation to both preserve and innovate within the same work. This two-pronged approach is realized in both Olivier and Burton's works at two ends of that same spectrum of sanctifying the source and breaking new ground in present adaptations. Olivier's desire to make a feature film—using a heavily truncated script—might be considered a betrayal of the stage and thus "tradition," yet his film plays it rather straight in regard to many traditional approaches to the play (setting, costumes, language). Whereas, Burton's close adherence to the stage for his performance—even going so far as to have the stage production resemble a rehearsal—betrays its own anxiety over how much to preserve and innovate. The Burton version's staginess is expressed by multiple factors. Chief of which is that the filming of the play was a qualified afterthought. It also keeps it close to its performative foundation by interpreting the adaptation like the latter stages of a read-through, or rehearsal. The mix of tradition and innovation inherent adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, particularly with *Hamlet*, is best seen in Olivier and Burton's works. They both take an exclusionary side in the preservation versus innovation debate. However, even in their respective desires to distance themselves from one side or the other of that pole they show how interrelated and self-sustaining each of those interpretive desires are because of their respective anxieties of influence. Olivier's *Hamlet* is a film qua film that expresses the spirit of the stage play as a byproduct. Burton's adaptation, on the other hand, dispenses with tradition as it places its foot firmly upon the boards and treats the camera, when it even considers it, as just another audience member there to witness the play.

The adaptations of Olivier and Burton exist as signposts at either end of the preservation versus innovation spectrum, and, in Burton, the pendulum inherent in adaptations of Shakespeare's plays swings toward preservation. Burton's movie marks a return to a visually minimalistic approach that stressed performance over language and spectacle. His "film" is actually more a film record of a seminal stage experience: the 1964 Broadway production, directed by John Gielgud. However, because it exists squarely in the cinematic age, the play is still self-consciously filmic, with actors who spend much of their time in front of the camera rather than on a stage.[103] It is clear that Olivier's *Hamlet* (and his Hamlet) influenced the junior Burton, but how does Burton's creation and execution of his *Hamlet* relate to the larger question of preservation versus innovation in Shakespeare's play, and what are Burton's later production's cultural ripple effects, which were themselves reactions to Olivier's version?

British male acting greats who dominated most of the twentieth century are interrelated by where they worked, with whom they worked, the roles they took, and their involvement with the Hollywood film industry.[104] Each performance, especially the iconic roles—most notably Hamlet—would set the new standard that subsequent performers would be judged by. The comparisons were often unfavorable just because it was new, despite how traditional, until that performance becomes the benchmark itself for actors who come later. For example, when Olivier attempted the title role in *Hamlet* through The Old Vic in 1937, he was haunted by the ghost of

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103. Although both Olivier and Burton had been in about twenty-five movies each before making their *Hamlet* films, the former's stage work far outstripped the latter's (Olivier's 106 plays versus Burton's twenty-four).

104. For Olivier, his experience on the stage and acting in films would allow him to pivot from acting into adapting and directing films. Burton would remain more comfortable acting.

John Gielgud's performance from just seven years ago in the same acting company.[105] Even mounting a rarely attempted uncut version of *Hamlet* produced in Elsinore Castle[106] (the literal setting of the play), surely a nod to traditionalism and a version of historical accuracy, did not immunize Olivier and company from the criticism of comparison to earlier productions. In a similar fashion, Burton would also wrangle with his Hamlet predecessors.

The Old Vic was the site of Richard Burton's first time to don Hamlet's "inky cloak" onstage. However, unlike his British predecessors, Burton was already an established force in the film industry, and was just coming off a starring role in the blockbuster movie, *The Robe* (1953) in which he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor.[107] Burton's success onstage, in the movies, and then back onstage again, established by a lesser degree by the more stage-focused Olivier, would become a hallmark in subsequent Shakespearean adaptations. Classically trained actors were no longer consigned, often self-imposed, to the stage. They could be effective in and travel freely between either environment. Yet, they still had to contend with what were considered as superior and established stage performances of *Hamlet*. Nevertheless, this new "tradition" of successful film actors welcomed back and forth to the classical stage would open up a rich influence between both of those worlds and inform the creative tension inherent between preservation and innovation in film.

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105. Ivor Brown, the drama critic at *The Observer*, in his review of the play noted Olivier's "magnetism;" however, he argued that the younger actor failed to reach the "pathos so richly established by Mr. Gielgud." Ivor Brown, "Old Vic Hamlet (in Full) by William Shakespeare," *The Observer*, 12.

106. The initial plan was to stage the play in Elsinore Castle's courtyard; however, persistent rains forced a relocation to a nearby hotel's ballroom.

107. Marlon Brando was nominated in the same category for Joseph Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* (1953), a role Burton turned down due to scheduling conflicts.

Burton's later stage performance as the Danish prince that began in the spring of 1964 was not only critically acclaimed but was quite popular with younger audiences who were attracted to his aggressive dynamism. Nevertheless, when John Gielgud attended the play he could not help but passive aggressively praising Burton's performance by hoping to come back when the actor was ready.[108] Another British acting icon, Laurence Olivier had defended Burton's "new style" of acting many times, but the elder was always an actor first, whereas Gielgud was more of an actor qua director.[109] An actor like Olivier, who had suffered his own barbs at Gielgud's expense, could relate to performances that go against the traditional, or what was "traditional" at the time.

Burton's embodiment of Hamlet and his performance signaled a change from moody, introspective Danish princes established by the likes of Gielgud, and the athletic Olivier, to an even more energetic, almost strident Dane. Crowl argues that Burton's Hamlet "allied the character's ironic power with the actor's remarkable voice, rough-edged but musical in its compound of Welsh irony and melancholy."[110] It is my belief that film's continuing technological development and growing low and even highbrow acceptance in the middle and latter part of the Twentieth Century played its own part in fomenting new acting styles both on and offstage. The segmented nature of movie productions, its idiosyncratic filming style, its

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108. Burton's estranged stepfather was even brought in to help with Gielgud's baffling direction that was more in the style of Olivier.

109. John Gielgud had his eye on Burton as a potential protégé quite early on in his career. Gielgud, along with such West End thespians as Binkie Beaumont and Terence Rattigan, were in impressed attendance when Burton played Angelo in a 1944 student production of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* at Exeter College.

110. Samuel Crowl, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet*, 19.

reshooting one scene at a time and often out of sequence, all allow actors to become hyper focused on crafting perfect moments bolstered by multiple takes that would potentially derail a stage production.[111] Performance changes could now happen much more quickly because actors could see a myriad of "new" productions than ever before because they could much more easily see a movie than they could fly back and forth between London and New York to attend seminal stage plays.

How Burton ended up taking on *Hamlet* onstage in 1964 is itself a strange nod to the mechanism of randomness in role decisions and how the old theatrical guard are instrumental in directing, often literally, and influencing their replacements. British theater world luminaries, Laurence Olivier and John Gielgud's were instrumental in how and why Burton became Hamlet on Broadway. It all began with a gentlemen's agreement between Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole, who were both starring in director Hal B. Wallis' 1964 film adaptation of Jean Anouilh' play *Becket or the Honour of God*. Burton and O'Toole agreed, based on a coin flip and O'Toole's initial idea for the setup, that they would play Hamlet onstage with either John Gielgud or Laurence Olivier directing in New York City and London respectively. The random result relegated O'Toole to London with Olivier as director, which went up later at The Royal National Theatre. The plan then was for Burton to go to New York and stage *Hamlet* under Gielgud's direction.

Gielgud, Olivier, Burton, and O'Toole had all taken on the role of Hamlet and even at the same place at one time or another, the venerable Old Vic. These four men were all a part of a

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111. Burton often tinkered with his interpretation throughout the production's long run.

British thespian club that kept coming back to the stage, and especially back to *Hamlet* even though they all had major success in the movies (not just Shakespearean adaptations).[112] The theme of theatricality born from the stage in experience and material transferred to the screen, and back again to the stage is strong with all these men, and there is something about that theme that kept pulling them back into *Hamlet* onstage. However, there was now this added desire to bring their stage creations into the world of cinema as well. Performing as Hamlet for movie audiences has its own appeal that transcends the work already done onstage. It is not only an indelible stamp upon the role because it is preserved on celluloid but also an opportunity to disseminate their performance to an even wider and more diverse audience than would otherwise be found on Broadway or the West End.

The film made of the 1964 Broadway production of *Hamlet* used three recorded live performances, and the newfangled and mysterious, yet high resolution Electronovision process to add to the technologically infused novelty of this *Hamlet*. Burton's *Hamlet* is a stage production first with its recording as a symptom of its success. However, the movie reception for Burton's play did not match up to the sensation of the original stage production. Bill Sargent who also created Electronovision, may have been more interested in promoting his new technology instead of the movie made from a play. Contracts stipulated that all recordings be destroyed after the

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112. This cyclical transition was particularly true with Burton and O'Toole. These two actors seemed to constantly be working with each other, acting in the same roles, and often offered the same parts. Even *Becket* (1964) the film, which coincidentally, is an adaptation of a play about an iconic event in English history had its own personal and thematic connections. Laurence Olivier played the starring role of Becket in the original 1959 Broadway production, and O'Toole was originally slated to play Henry II but left to make David Lean's 1962 film, *Lawrence of Arabia* instead. In yet another nod to interrelatedness and artistic continuity, Peter Glenville directed both the Broadway stage production of *Becket* and the film.

short theatrical run, only two days. After Burton died in 1984 a copy of the play was found in the garage and his widow agreed to rerelease the film on VHS and DVD.[113]

There are many differences that end up onscreen between Olivier's earlier film and Burton's later filmed *Hamlet*. The aforementioned stage venue, casual dress, and lack of film technique set Burton's production apart; however, its restoration of plot points, characters, and Shakespeare's words, and a softening of Olivier's Oedipal interpretation are equally as important. Olivier cut nearly half of the lines, left out the characters of Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Fortinbras for a streamlined running time of 155 minutes to achieve a more psychological film version of the play. Burton's *Hamlet* only cut about fifteen percent of the lines, restored all three of Olivier's missing characters, and has a running time of 192 minutes. The 1964 *Hamlet* reinstates what was lost in the 1948 version but comes off as new in contrast to the new old of Olivier's film.

Chapter One discusses Olivier's obsession with the Oedipal particularly as it is applied to Hamlet's relationship with his mother. Although Eileen Herlie plays Gertrude in both Olivier and Burton's versions she is much more maternal and age-appropriate compared to the actor playing her son in the 1964 *Hamlet*. Even the "Closet Scene" comes off as more tragic accident and conversion as opposed to filial and erotic monomania. Burton shouts "mother" three times as he approaches Gertrude's chamber and he is carrying a sword that is more menacing than phallic. There is no bed in the queen's closet and Burton vacillates between disgust and appropriate tenderness after he dispatches Polonius and the Ghost interrupts his harangue.

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113. In a nice bit of symmetry, the film was restored for theatrical release and shown at original venue of the recorded performances at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre.

One would think that a film that came much later into that technological art form's dominance of the twentieth century would be more firmly planted in that modern medium. However, Burton's stage and film creations represent a complicated place along that ever-swinging pendulum inherent in the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays: an innovative interpretation that comes off as traditional even in its new filmic packaging. Olivier was closer in time to theatre's dominance, yet he makes the first feature length English language *Hamlet*, and fashions it in a way that is as filmic as possible yet retaining classic features such as an authentic-looking location and period dress. On the other hand, Burton, who is a film star married to one of the world's biggest movie stars himself, sets out to be a part of a deconstructed stage play presented as a rehearsal. Nevertheless, Burton retains the spirit of theatrical traditionalism. The Burton *Hamlet* has a classically-trained Shakespearean actor and a famous Hamlet himself as director (John Gielgud), it is performed on Broadway, featuring casual modern dress, and foregrounds the aesthetics of a rehearsal. There are elements that ground the play on the stage yet combine technology and a return to naturalism that seems like a new interpretation of an old play: a synthesized and layered version of innovation and tradition.

I argue that every film adaptation of a Shakespeare play spawns from the stage, at least theoretically or conceptually.[114] Even films that are intended to be films, such as Olivier's, refer back, if even indirectly to a specific stage version. In Olivier's case, the preliminary work and research he did, particularly the meetings he had with Ernest Jones, eleven years before his film

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114. The "perfect" stage version that hearkens back to the fount of Early Modern times as the exemplar that all subsequent adaptations are only reflections of come close to what I mean by "conceptually." See the Platonic theory of Forms or ideas discussed in several Socratic dialogues.

was released sowed the seeds of interpretation that would later sprout in full Freudian bloom. Burton's "film" is far more specifically tied to the stage despite much newer technology and potentially wider distribution of the record of the performances. However, Burton's *Hamlet* is still a stage play slightly transformed to the screen. The many different film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays express their staginess in varying degrees, some choosing to embrace or retain their more play-like roots, others diverge into film's specialized milieu instead.

The casual aesthetic of Burton and Gielgud's *Hamlet* project came about because of the growing naturalness and informality of the 1960s, especially among the youth, and the desire to tinker with a classic. Burton was already opposed to performing *Hamlet* in period dress, and fortuitously Gielgud was fascinated with the idea of staging the play as a rehearsal which allowed for an innovative casualness.[115] Actors "costumed" in what they would normally wear out and about, vetted by the director of course, and performing within the relaxed atmosphere of a rehearsal stage all contributed to the accessibility of a play with the intellectual cachet of a *Hamlet* for a modern audience. Movies were already dominating popular entertainment, so a classic play onstage but with celebrity actors in casual dress makes the theater more palatable to modern movie audience tastes.

Richard Burton's participation as an actor in the British New Wave film movement is another factor in why his *Hamlet* film is so different from Olivier's.[116] Sometimes called "The

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115. "Gielgud told him [Burton] that for some time he had harbored the idea of doing *Hamlet* as a rehearsal run-through, without costumes or scenery. This revolutionary idea appealed to Burton." Richard L. Sterne, *Richard Burton in Hamlet* (New York: Random House, 1967).

116. See *Look Back in Anger* (1959; starring Richard Burton and directed by Tony Richardson) as one of the most characteristic of the British New Wave movement films.

Angry Young Men" movies, they were a socially-conscious and realistic collection of British films of the late 1950s and early 1960s often typified by black-and-white photography, shot on location in a documentary or naturalistic style, and using real life people as opposed to extras. A gritty, working class ethos is also a part of the British New Wave and watching Burton's *Hamlet* with its pseudo-rehearsal production with sparse or non-existent set pieces, and casual dress we can see the stuffy castle and court of Denmark as depicted in Olivier's film transformed to something much more stripped down, natural, and realistic.

Burton's performance in the stage production of *Hamlet* at the Lunt Fontanne Theatre[117] in 1964 broke records for the longest run of the play in Broadway history with 137 performances, it was wildly popular, exceeded all financial projections, was lauded by critics, garnered a Tony nomination for Burton, and secured a win for Hume Cronyn for his portrayal of Polonius. Eileen Herlie played Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, the same role she played in Laurence Olivier's 1948 film when she was eleven years Laurence's junior. In this later production, Herlie was seven years Burton's senior signaling a change from obvious Oedipal overtones in the mother-son relationship emphasized in Olivier's version. This *Hamlet*, like many other successful productions of the play tapped into the perfect zeitgeist of preserved material in Shakespeare's play because changes in the cultural atmosphere speak to conforming and adapting to the times both new and old. The Broadway stage production's innovative approach

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117. This Broadway venue is a perfect nod to the meta-intermixing of film and theatre of a "new" interpretation of an old work staged as a play and filmed for distribution. The Lunt-Fontanne Theatre was constructed in 1910 and called The Globe. From 1932-1957 the building was a movie cinema. In 1958 the theatre was restored as a playhouse and renamed Lunt-Fontanne Theatre in honor of the acting couple Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne.

of using casual costumes and relaxed rehearsal aesthetics, its celebrity intertextuality through Burton's elevated Hollywood status, and his gossip column fodder relationship with the mega movie star, Elizabeth Taylor all contributed to the ushering of a definitive *Hamlet* for the 1960s.

The Soviet Union would birth its own seminal film adaptation of *Hamlet* in the 1960s. Director Grigori Kozintsev's mix of new and old would stake its politically interpretive claim informed by the zeitgeist of the Cold War and filtered through the aural lens of a Russian translation, and an original musical score. Kozintsev's 1964 Russian film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, like many other projects under consideration in this dissertation, had its artistic roots early in the filmmaker's life. Films of most long-gestating ideas are often given first life onstage where they go through some metamorphoses and become ready for posterity on longer-living celluloid. In a nod to bringing an unconventional approach to classic material, Kozintsev conceived of doing a pantomime *Hamlet* in 1923, nearly forty years before he would make his film. Alas, Kozintsev did not realize that Shakespeare pantomime plan but turned to directing cinema instead.

There were many fits and starts along Kozintsev's journey to make his definitive version of *Hamlet,* yet he never gave up on the idea. He kept hope alive by approaching the play in innovative ways through conceptual art, an initial plan of doing a pantomime *Hamlet*, through making non-related films to build up his resume, and by adapting other Shakespeare plays. Even literary criticism interested him to the point that he wrote several essays on Shakespeare and he penned the book *Nash Sovremennik Viliam Shekspir* (*Our contemporary William*

Shakespeare).[118] Kozintsev's cerebral and critical approach to the material would pay dividends later when he got the chance to make Shakespeare's greatest tragedy. Kozintsev's filmmaking craft and experience with staging *Hamlet* and other Shakespeare plays all contributed to a film production worthy of his inclusion in this conversation.

Grigori Kozintsev's film *Hamlet* was first screened in 1964 as a part of the four-hundred-year anniversary celebration of Shakespeare's birth, yet there was a proud feeling for many Russians that the tragedy particularly spoke to them and their time. During the decade between Kozintsev's stage *Hamlet* and the film version, Russian society had changed quite a bit. The post-war "Thaw" after the tyrannical reign of Stalin had now been ushered in with the rule of Khrushchev. The upheaval of this period was also an invigorating return to art and expression brought on by "the mass rehabilitation of innocent people and their homecoming from the prisons and concentration camps, and an obvious intensification of intellectual and spiritual life."[119] As far back as the nineteenth century, Russians who were intellectually and politically isolated from their own country had felt a kinship with the brooding Prince Hamlet. Russian people also held an odious feeling toward the tyrannical court of Claudius in *Hamlet* which they felt was reflected by many in the policies of Alexander III, Josef Stalin, and Khrushchev. The

118. The book was given the English title in a 1966 translation, *Shakespeare, Time and Conscience*. The alternate title of the work was in response to Jan Kott's recently (1964) published work *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*.

119. Mark Sokolyansky, "Grigori Kozintsev's Hamlet and King Lear," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 204.

director Kozintsev was the artistic embodiment of that sentiment that considered Hamlet as "a man of our time."[120]

Although Kozintsev's *Hamlet* came out almost twenty years after Olivier's 1948 version, how interconnected and similar the two films are is striking. Even the differences in the latter stand out as reactions to the former film. Both versions are in black-and-white, even though Olivier and Kozintsev both had already made films in color prior to their *Hamlets* (*Henry V* in 1944 and *Don Quixote* in 1957 respectively). Both *Hamlet*s use castles ringed by the sea, staircases, drastic cuts, have strong theatrical foundations, and yet are much more like films than they are stage productions. The comparisons and contrasts between Olivier and Kozintsev's creations, as separated as they seem to be, bear much fruit in the discussion of the interplay of preservation and innovation in adapting *Hamlet*, especially when compared to Burton's *Hamlet* released the same year.

Whereas Olivier's deep focus, black-and-white creation *Hamlet* film had more to do with popular *noir* and melodrama films at the time, Kozintsev's decision to use a limited visual palette allowed a clarity of purpose. Making a film without color had little to do with preferences that Soviet audiences had, or a lack of budget; the choice was purely thematic. Mark Sokolyansky's thoughts about the choice to use black-and-white was that it was "to some extent determined by a desire to avoid the bright colouration as a way of glossing over the truth—the tendency encouraged by official Soviet ideology and despised by Kozintsev."[121] The director is turning

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120. Quoted in Neil Taylor's "The Films of *Hamlet*" in *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: The Plays on Film and Television*, ed. Anthony Davies and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 184.

121. Sokolyansky, "Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*," 205.

away from technology, avoiding the tools of aesthetic innovation, to strip the play down to an essential, preserved and eternal political message—as he sees it—within the play. He wants to distance his stark art from government-sponsored propaganda that hides the truth by embellishing it.

Although the similarities are prolific, film has many devices to separate it from theater and Kozintsev as a filmmaker is quite adept with these tricks at his disposal. Film has the ability to direct the gaze of its audience through close-ups and panning the camera, it can shorten or lengthen shots thematically, it can use much more sophisticated special effects, and it can be musically scored in a way that would seem obtrusive onstage. These are a few differences, but what is most striking and effective for Kozintsev is his use of cinematic black-and-white to distance himself from the stage especially in an era further removed from that film style than Olivier's was. I concur with Sokolyansky's supposition that the Russian filmmaker was "trying to overcome theatricality in the setting by broadening the represented space and through the specific language of black and white cinematography."[122] Kozintsev consciously flips the aesthetic to provide a contrast to the living yet glossed over color of the stage.

In another nod to the preservation principle, Kozintsev was adamant about using period costumes for his film. He writes in *Shakespeare, Time and Conscience*, "Hamlet is often staged in modern dress, but the performance tells a tale of ancient life. The tragedy must be played in sixteenth-century costumes but must be comprehended as a modern story."[123] Laurence Olivier's

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122. Sokolyansky, 205. The black-and-white also serves as subconscious acknowledgment of the beginnings of early film.

123. Quoted in Sokolyansky, 207.

Hamlet also famously used period costumes and expressed its modernity through its use of psychoanalytical theories and its similarities to contemporary film genres. However, when Olivier made his post-war *Hamlet*, modern costumes for Shakespeare plays were not popular onstage, and furthermore the first full-length English film version of *Hamlet* would be expected to look "classical," or otherwise audiences might not recognize that what they were seeing as a high brow version of the play. In other words, it would not look like the *Hamlet* in their minds. In Kozintsev's case, he wants the best of both worlds: honoring what he sees as the authenticity of story's setting—a return to preservation—and yet at the same time breaking free from the recent convention of using modern dress, which is an innovation in itself.

The omnipresence of music in Kozintsev's *Hamlet* is also a major factor that makes it not only a Russian creation, but a film, where a musical score can be foregrounded without taking away from the action. The composer Dmitri Shostakovich had worked with Kozintsev on his other films, and his stage productions of *Hamlet* and *Lear*. From the big opening fanfare as Prince Hamlet approaches the castle on horseback to the solemn drumbeats as his body is carried at the end one is struck by Shostakovich's score; it functions as another character. The look of the film may lack color, but the sound is so full that we hardly notice.

As globally iconic as Shakespeare's play is, Kozintsev's *Hamlet* is a Russian film made for Russian audiences, so a language translation was required. The director chose Boris Pasternak's translation because he felt it captured the spirit of Shakespeare's words without being too cold or robotically literal. The lyrical quality of the music is then simpatico with Pasternak's conception of the language in that it "lies in the rhythmic interchange of solemnity

and anxiety."[124] A prime example lies in Hamlet's first encounter with the Ghost. Kozintsev shoots the scene outside the castle and a loud boom of music escorts King Hamlet's shade into the frame as Hamlet utters the line, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!"[125] Kozintsev then shoots the Ghost in slow motion as Shostakovich's score drones ominously with light percussion and strings in the background.

Like Olivier, Kozintsev made radical cuts to *Hamlet* to fit into a conventional film running time, but Kozintsev's paring emphasizes the political over the psychological. In Chapter One, I note that Olivier cut most of the external scenes, particularly the Fortinbras subplot to concentrate on the psychology and interiority of the play. Kozintsev's film is shorter than Olivier's by thirteen minutes, yet he restores Fortinbras, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to make the film much more political. Kozintsev observes, "Olivier cut the theme of government, which I find extremely interesting."[126] Despite many other similarities, the aims of the two directors are different, sometimes expressed at the same time. Olivier uses staircases, narrow and winding, to indicate the complicated psyches of the characters, particularly Hamlet; whereas, Kozintsev's staircases are wide and full of courtiers, hangers-on, and potential spies. One of the most noticeable differences is the number of people in Kozintsev's shots, sometimes enhanced with background tapestries of even more people. His film is full of intrigue and open and

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124. Quoted in Sokolyansky, "Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*," 205-206.

125. *Hamlet*, 1.4.39.

126. Quoted in Neil Taylor's "The Films of *Hamlet*" in *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: The Plays on Film and Television*, ed. Anthony Davies and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 185.

external, on the other hand, Olivier's film is concentrated, isolated, and apolitical, both intentionally so.

Olivier and Kozintsev's *Hamlet* films share many similarities yet are juxtaposed in their differences. Kozintsev saps out all of the sexuality between Gertrude and her son. His Closet Scene features a bed yet neither character comes near it and all kisses are chaste and maternal. Not only do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reappear in Kozintsev's film, he generates a wordless scene on the voyage to England to depict how the pair are hoisted on their own petard. Each film's "To Be" speech happens near a rocky seashore; however, Olivier's speech intersperses a voice over with spoken lines, as if the prince is in conversation with his thoughts. Whereas, Kozintsev's Hamlet delivers his "To Be" all in voice over. Both Hamlets sport stark blond hair and simple, monochromatic clothing, yet they are worlds away in speech and affect.

Olivier's shortened film was "an essay in Hamlet," and Kozintsev's work is also something that although condensed becomes intensified into something new because of different yet equally judicious editing down to essentials. It is as if the process of adapting the long play to a conventionally short film distills something fundamental about the longer original. Kozintsev does this by using a different, yet still poetic language, in Pasternak's new translation, itself an adaptation that reconfigures the original, and by using new music by Shostakovich that gives the film a refreshing Russianness. Neil Taylor calls what Kozintsev and his cocreators produced "a reconstruction of the play as new art-work," and furthermore, "in some respects it could be argued that it becomes not just a play but a symbolist poem which foregrounds a non-verbal,

visual and musical text."[127] This way of looking at adaptations, especially film versions, as a new creation, not just a pale reflection of a supposedly superior "original" is the crux what is happening between the twin motivations of preservation and innovation. The poem analogy is apt because the structure of the poem, especially as it is read aloud, taps into the musicality of the words, and the condensed nature of poems relates to what film adaptations do to their sources.

Twenty-five years later, the dominance of movies and the popularity of the action genre would find their influence expressed in an adaptation of *Hamlet*. Italian director Franco Zeffirelli had great success with two major Shakespearean film adaptations in the late 1960s (*The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) because he was able to "translate" the plays into works of visual art that appealed to broader, and more importantly, younger audiences. Despite his track record adapting Shakespeare well, Zeffirelli's desire to make a major film *Hamlet* could only come to fruition if he promised a two-hour running time and secured a bankable star for the title role. He looked to Olivier's screenplay for a blueprint for judicious editing to fulfill the first part of that contract, which itself is a nod to tradition and convention, and he sought out non-Shakespearean action-movie film star Mel Gibson to sell tickets, an innovative choice for the lead role.

Choosing an actor such as Gibson fulfills box office appeal, but the added intertextuality from his previous film and roles also benefits Zeffirelli's conception of an indecisive Hamlet. The director had seen Gibson in Richard Donner's *Lethal Weapon* (1987) and was taken with the Australian actor's reckless and suicidal detective. Zeffirelli reflects, "There was a scene in which

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127. Taylor, 185.

there's a kind of 'to be or not to be' speech. Mel Gibson is sitting there with a gun in his mouth but he can't pull the trigger. When I saw that *I said This is Hamlet! This boy is Hamlet!*"[128] Bankability and intertextuality are themselves intertwined. Audiences will see a film because it features actors they love and trust without knowing anything else about the production. Moviegoers will also allow themselves to be open to understanding material they are unfamiliar with in the new film because they enjoyed the actor's previous work. In other words, "I liked Gibson as that crazy Riggs, and I hear he's a bit wacky in this Shakespeare flick too." Hence, the bankability of the star translates to new audiences for old material.

The entire casting of Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* is a portrait of straddling innovation and preservation in Shakespeare adaptations. Along with the aforementioned Gibson, there is Glenn Close, a superstar in her own right, whose sexually experiential Gertrude represents another innovative boon. Close's previous roles in *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), where she is a similarly strong, but also slightly unhinged, woman unafraid to take advantage of her opportunities imbues her Gertrude with even more character richness.[129] The fact that Close is older than Gibson and her Gertrude is still independently libidinous takes the Oedipal relationship established by Olivier's version even farther. The rest of the cast provides highbrow legitimacy and the preservation of stage and tradition because of their pedigrees. Royal Academy of Dramatic Art-trained (RADA) British actors Alan Bates and Ian Holm are Claudius and Polonius, West End and Broadway stage actor Paul Scofield is King Hamlet, and Ophelia is

128. Taylor, 191.

129. The original ending of *Fatal Attraction* had Alex (Close's character) commit suicide because she is more self-destructive than destructive.

a young Helena Bonham Carter who although she had no formal training, is British and came with an impressive Merchant-Ivory resume.

The actors' previous roles color their present characters, particularly with Gibson and Close (an action hunk prone to physicality, and a sexual spider woman in their *Lethal Weapon* and *Fatal Attraction* iterations). However, it is the increased visibility of the feminine[130] in this film that sets it apart from the director's previous work. Zeffirelli retains only thirty-seven percent of the text; he replaces what is missing with visual aesthetics, and by foregrounding his formidable females. In a series of odes to his hero adapter and forbearer, Laurence Olivier, Zeffirelli's interpretation makes more of Gertrude's choice for sexual fulfillment in her marriage with a young and virile Claudius than his murder of the former regent. The queen is more seductive than maternal with her son. Her longing looks, her near-rape in the closet scene, and her sexually suggestive death throes all contribute to heightening her visibility.

Zeffirelli's early, non-theatrical career would help him bring a new eye to Shakespeare film adaptation. He started out in architecture in Florence, but his studies were interrupted by his involvement in the Italian Resistance. After the war, he worked as set designer, costumer, film technician, and actor. His affinity for the visual continued in his directing for theater, film, and opera. The popularity of Zeffirelli's *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Romeo and Juliet* both established Zeffirelli as a box-office stimulator. These iconic adaptations allowed audiences, especially school-aged ones—his films have become classroom texts themselves—to become

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130. Another hallmark of the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example, the feminine forward films of *Aliens* (1986), *Working Girl* (1988), and *Pretty Woman* (1990) to name a few.

acquainted with the plays as visual expressions, making the words on the page come alive from Italian cobblestone streets to the balcony scene at the Palazzo Borghese.

In his film *Hamlet*, Zeffirelli's is able, along with Academy Award-winning cinematographer David Watkins[131] to make the most of his painterly gifts for cinematic expression and innovation by using historical locations. Castles and fortresses in Scotland, and Dover Castle in England are used for the film and Zeffirelli shoots many of his scenes outside and in the daylight. These aesthetic decisions are in contrast to Olivier's *Hamlet* which focuses on the dark interiors of his winding set. Subject to criticism for being just an interior decorator and fashion designer, Zeffirelli's reliance on visuals in the film comes from his philosophy that "an actor cannot hold the stage alone; he needs to be helped by…a beauty around him…It becomes a kind of additional character."[132] His penchant for aesthetics fills the gaps that too much reliance on the verbal can create. The "To Be" speech which Zeffirelli has Gibson deliver down in the family crypt amongst visible skeletons and the centered statue coffin of King Hamlet adds depth to Hamlet's existential pain and his inability to execute the Ghost's wishes as he must confront human mortality and the relics of his family.

Much has been written about Zeffirelli as not only a visual filmmaker who appeals to younger audiences who might be more apt to be visually stimulated; however, it is his ability to capture the cultural moments when he makes his movies that explains his enduring popularity.

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131. Watkins had also worked with Tony Richardson, another *Hamlet* film director.

132. Quoted in Ace G. Pilkington's "Zeffirelli's Shakespeare" in *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: The Plays on Film and Television*, ed. Anthony Davies and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 164. See the opening shots of the crypt, and castle with foregrounded green hills.

The Taming of the Shrew taps into the celebrity fodder of its two passionately warring costars Taylor and Burton, it highlights Sixties fashions, and provides a tongue-in-cheek send up of that era's battle of the sexes theme. In a similar manner, his *Romeo and Juliet* underscores the generational gap of the late 1960s by casting teenagers Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey, and its suggestive incestuous relationship between a Mrs. Robinson-esque Lady Capulet and her cousin Tybalt (Michael York).[133] The film also enhances the innocence of its titular protagonists by cutting out Romeo's dark dealings with the apothecary and his slaying of blameless Paris. Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* follows in this tradition and even expands its openness and accessibility to what is culturally recent by featuring Hollywood-focused, non-Shakespearean actors in Gibson and Close, an audience-friendly running time, and an action movie aesthetic more at home at the Cineplex of the 1980s and early 90s than stodgy stages of yesteryear. Zeffirelli's slimmed down, star-studded, and action-aesthetic *Hamlet* would pave the way for another version in the 1990s that although it looks like a reclamation of traditionalism yet wears its modern movie genre colors on its period costumed sleeve.

Kenneth Branagh has made more Shakespeare films than any other filmmaker; however, it is his *Hamlet* (1996) that is not only his best and most important work, but also the most interesting case in the overarching question of how the tension between preservation and innovation is expressed on screen because it looks and sounds traditional yet feels so vibrant and new. Branagh's work as a filmmaker and actor, especially in the 1990s, sparked a renewed interest in film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays similar to what actor/director, Laurence

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133. *The Graduate* was released in 1967. It is possible that director Mike Nichols and Zeffirelli were both tapping into an older woman and young man zeitgeist of the late 1960s.

Olivier did with his own groundbreaking films fifty years prior. The wunderkind Branagh takes on the mantle of master Shakespeare adapter through his uncanny ability to take the best parts from his Shakespearean predecessors' works, primarily those of Olivier, Orson Welles, Franco Zeffirelli, and Kozintsev, and extend them with his stage and screen knowledge and as a film aficionado. By synthesizing his experiences and modern movie fandom into an exciting new product based on something very old, he made watching Shakespeare movies cool again. Much like Olivier did with his enormous influence, Branagh sparked a subsequent flowering of films that was a new renaissance of interpreting Shakespeare.

If we imagine that film adapters of Shakespeare exist in an ever increasing and influential continuum that intensifies over time, it should be no mystery that the boy wonder Branagh emerged as an uber-talented scion of his predecessors. Branagh's strongest film paterfamilias is Laurence Olivier. Both men began their education and careers onstage and spun that foundation into a Shakespeare film birth and rebirth, and each launched their careers as Shakespeare film adapters beginning with breakout versions of *Henry V*. The history play is about a young prince who becomes king; choosing this particular material is perhaps not coincidental in that each man came into his own as an artist with their own versions. Branagh is the young prince who learned his craft from a king of a previous era. How Branagh's progression through Shakespearean subject matter, how he synthesizes traditional stage aesthetics and modern Hollywood film techniques and genre, and how he affects popular culture and its relationship with Shakespeare all smack of both dutiful homage and bold progression. However, the difference lies in how Branagh's passion for Hollywood movies. He came along when film and its techniques were more advanced and accepted, and, most importantly, mass audience attendance had swung in

film's favor instead of the stage. Branagh could not only reach more audiences with material he workshopped onstage, but he can speak Hollywood's movie language to moviegoers even if the form is iambic pentameter. His facility with artistic synthesis mirrors the theme of how film adaptations facilitate the combination of tradition and invention through the melding of technology and time-honored technique.

The saying that "good artists borrow, great artists steal" is apt when talking about the influential and immediate medium of film. Adapters already straddle the line of creative theft because they are not the originators of their source material. Moreover, filmmakers, who are often beholden to following the whim of fickle audience fads and answer to studio heads who care more about the bottom line, are even more comfortable working in the blurry lines of appropriation. Branagh's knack for adaptation lies in his ability to both borrow and transform. Samuel Crowl describes Branagh's special skill, "His genius as an artist is as a synthesizer; his imagination works like a magpie, stealing good ideas from others but linking them in surprising and original ways."[134] This adaptive ability is similar to what Shakespeare himself did with the plots and plays of his own predecessors. The melding of the old with a new spin has a long history.

As many interesting similarities as there are in Olivier and Branagh's Shakespeare film adaptations, it is their *Hamlet*s that mark the apotheosis of their skills as actors and filmmakers,

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134. Samuel Crowl, "Flamboyant Realist: Kenneth Branagh," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 226-227. Crowl points to Branagh's borrowing from Welles' *Chimes at Midnight* for *Henry V*, The *Magnificent Seven* and *Singin' in the Rain* for *Much Ado*, and Adrian Noble's RSC production of *Hamlet* for his film version of *Hamlet*.

and as influential Shakespearean interpreters. The way the two *Hamlets* and Hamlets favor each other may not be apparent at first given that Olivier's 1948 film is heavily edited, is Freudian and claustrophobically internal, and has a deep focus black-and-white look. Branagh's response nearly fifty years later is uncut,[135] dispenses with the Oedipal and is purposefully set in the pre-Freud 1800s counter to Olivier's Elizabethan environment, is full of exteriors, and shot in expensive 70mm color film. Yet the two films are still congruent because even the differences are self-conscious reactions by Branagh that show how much he is indebted to Olivier and his film *Hamlet*.

The primary sameness of Olivier and Branagh lies in each man's energetic commitment to the role as principal actors. Critic Milton Shulman of the *London Evening Standard* writes about the acting in the 1996 *Hamlet*: "On the positive side Branagh has the *vitality of Olivier*, the passion of Gielgud, the assurance of Guinness, to mention but three famous actors who have essayed the role. On the negative side, he has not got the magnetism of Olivier, nor the mellifluous voice quality of Gielgud nor the intelligence of Guinness."[136] Newspaper reviews of Olivier's early performances also praised his "magnetism" but made sure to offer the dig that he

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135. Kenneth Branagh, *Hamlet by William Shakespeare: Screenplay and Introduction by Kenneth Branagh; production diary by Russell Jackson*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 174. The screenplay is based on the text of *Hamlet* as it appears in the First Folio – the edition of Shakespeare's plays collected by his theatrical associates Heminges and Condell and published in 1623 by a syndicate of booksellers. Nothing has been cut from this text, and some passages absent from it (including the soliloquy "How all occasions do inform against me ...") have been supplied from the Second Quarto (an edition of the play which exists in copies dated 1604 and 1605). We have also incorporated some readings of words and phrases from this source and from other early printed texts, and in a few cases emendations from modern editors of the play."

136. Quoted in *The London Stage in the 20th Century* by Robert Tanitch, (London: Haus Publishing, 2007), 16. Emphasis mine.

did not have Gielgud's "pathos." Even acting performances suffer from comparison and tradition and the tradition of comparison, especially when it comes to performing Shakespeare. A new face in an old role, regardless of the actor's resume, will always be seen as an unwelcome innovation and offered up in comparative evaluation with the most recently established standard in the role.[137] Olivier and Branagh possess a similar electric vitality and striking presence. However, Olivier's "magnetism" either raises the performances of his costars or makes the audience forget them in his brilliance. Branagh is more comfortable being a standout in a talented ensemble.

Olivier and Branagh's performances as Hamlet are defined by each man's swashbuckling physicality. The final duel in each *Hamlet* film is what garners most of the talk of athleticism and vitality. Olivier's fencing match with Laertes features foils and daggers with each man rushing and circling each other with dramatic string music heightening each thrust and parry. After Olivier's Hamlet dispatches Laertes and discovers the king's treachery, he leaps famously over the balcony and lands on Claudius to thrust the envenomed sword over and over into his uncle's chest. Branagh's duel scene features Hamlet and Laertes (Michael Maloney) in similar white tops and black bottoms mimicking Olivier's scene. There is much chasing as they tackle, grapple, and throw each other around the ballroom. Branagh cannot help himself here as he goes beyond Olivier to bring in modern action movie techniques such as slow-motion camera work, a sword miraculously thrown halfway across the room to land in the fleeing Claudius' back complete with arrow-like whistling sound effects, and he even drops a chandelier on Claudius as

137. See covers of standard versions of popular songs and remakes of classic movies for a similar phenomenon of distrusting anything new.

he rides its rope down to the floor. Crowl notices an Errol Flynn quality in the scene: "Actor and director and movie tradition all converge in evoking and getting even with all the dominating fathers who haunt Branagh's keen awareness of the Shakespearean tradition on stage and film."[138] Branagh is Olivier but also Flynn in his over-the-top chandelier riding. He hearkens to an even earlier Hollywood tradition and puts his own movie touches on his adaptation.

The greatest departure from Olivier's film that Branagh makes is the refusal to engage in the Freudian overtones that the former established as the new normal in 1948. Whereas Olivier's *Hamlet* is a masterclass in expressed Oedipal fears and desires especially in his Hamlet's incestuous interactions with Gertrude, Branagh halts fifty years of *Hamlet* Freudian film and stage tradition.[139] When Branagh cast a more matronly and maternal Julie Christie, who was twenty years his senior, as Gertrude, he was signaling a change, or better yet a restoration, of the queen and prince's dynamic. Branagh cast Derek Jacobi as Claudius as a viable love-interest for Gertrude. This decision did much to contravene the Oedipal overtones of Hamlet and Gertrude's relationship, which had become standard practice before Branagh's film. Jacobi and Christie are too busy carousing and canoodling to allow much time for Hamlet to be obsessed with his mother as a sexually forbidden object. Douglas Brode avers that it is the "coupling of Christie with Jacobi as a married couple [that] can be taken as a key to the film's attitude, where the best of movie-movies and serious art are married in a single work."[140] That is, Christie's movie

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138. Crowl, "Flamboyant Realist: Kenneth Branagh," 239.

139. Subsequent Freudian stage productions were influenced by the more powerful and much younger artistic sibling, film.

140. Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies: From the Silent Era to Today*, 141.

résumé represents one world, and Jacobi's work onstage acting and directing and in film primarily in Shakespeare adaptations represents another. By the time Branagh's film *Hamlet* comes along at the end of the Twentieth Century, a return to a pre-Freudian vision of the play was almost innovative in its departure from the past and allowed all future versions to take place in a new tradition. It is a testament to Branagh's own cultural cachet that he was able to alter the dominant lens of understanding of the tragedy by restoring the "text" and political subplots of the play and returning to a pre-Olivier interpretation.

Branagh also blunts Hamlet's Oedipal fixation on his mother that dominated previous adaptations by inserting sex scene flashbacks between his Hamlet and Ophelia (Kate Winslet). In doing this, he emphasizes that his young prince's passions are "normal" and age-appropriate This extra-textual visual content, which may be a return to Shakespearean intent itself,[141] also gives more substance to Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia as loving, consummated, and real. Subsequently, this sexual relationship without matrimony will make Hamlet's decision to jilt her all the more tragic. Nevertheless, Branagh's (pre)modern Hamlet has more agency, is virile and not impotent in thought or will paralyzed by a mother monomania much like Olivier's perseverating prince was.

Even in death, Branagh's Gertrude is able to return to a pre-Olivier interpretation of the mother-son relationship. As it is written, Shakespeare crafts the poisonous cup episode during the final duel in Act Five as an unfortunate mix-up that causes the queen's death. Claudius

141. During Ophelia's Act Four breakdown she mentions "the owl was a baker's / daughter." *Hamlet*, 4.5.42-3. In editor Harold Jenkins' notes in the *Arden Shakespeare Hamlet* he writes, "The relevance of this legend to the context is obscure, but it possibly alludes to the loss of virginity," 350.

prepares the tainted wine as extra insurance if Laertes' envenomed blade does not work. Gertrude inadvertently takes up the cup and seals her fate: "The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet."[142] In Olivier's version, Herlie as Gertrude takes a long and meaningful look at the cup after Claudius drops in the poisonous pearl highlighting her suspicion for the audience. So, when Olivier's Gertrude drinks down the poison, she does it on purpose. She commits suicide to save her son, warning him with her last words: "No, no, the drink, the drink—O my dear Hamlet-- / The drink, the drink—I am poisoned."[143] This Gertrude remains focused on her son until the end; Branagh's Gertrude, on the other hand, is sacrificed by accident. Claudius' desperate warning to his wife, "Gertrude, do not drink!" takes on the meaning that it is the king's sacrifice of the queen instead that is occurring and allows for that tragedy to sink in before Hamlet is able to act against the king.[144] Branagh's version reestablishes Gertrude as unwitting victim.

It is the deep and touching love between the king and queen in Branagh's film that is almost shocking given how previous Claudius actors played the part as more one-dimensional villain. Hamlet's usurping uncle is often depicted as a dark opportunist who sees the queen as a stepping stone or bonus that came with the crown. It is a testament to Jacobi, a talented theater and film actor who not only had his own famous turns playing Hamlet, even directing Branagh in the role in 1988, that he imbues the role with much-needed pathos and elicits some sympathy from the audience This Claudius is still ambitious, but he shows real affection for Gertrude and at least initial concern for Hamlet before he suspects his stepson/nephew's motives. Branagh

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142. *Hamlet*, 5.2.266.

143. *Hamlet*, 5.2.288-90.

144. *Hamlet*, 5.2.2

emphasizes this fondness between Claudius and Gertrude in our very first glimpse of the couple by showing them celebrating and being celebrated in their formal wedding attire as crowds of subjects and dignitaries cheer and confetti reigns down in a throne room that is resplendent with light and color. This sequence also juxtaposes the sunny happiness of Hamlet's mother and uncle's special day with their son's dark, inner turmoil. Branagh the director highlights this contrast by a tracking shot that centers Hamlet in an inky cloak standing still amongst the festivities. Branagh as Hamlet is literally turning his back on recent *Hamlet* film tradition.[145]

The intertextuality involved in Branagh's choice of Julie Christie for his Gertrude is significant.[146] Christie is a British movie icon of the Swinging London 1960s who starred in many high-profile, award-winning films throughout her career (*Darling*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, and *Heaven Can Wait*) but her most indelible role was her turn as Lara in *Doctor Zhivago* (1965).[147] Branagh, as a movie fan in theater practitioner's clothing, taps into rich cinema history by casting Christie who would remind audiences of her feature film heyday, yet here she is in a Shakespeare adaptation, something she was not known for. Her displacement from her popular feature film milieu is an embodiment of innovation. Her presence in Branagh's *Hamlet* is a re-centering of the tradition

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145. The image of Hamlet's back foregrounded before the wedding celebration is so striking that it is featured on the movie's posters and DVD covers.

146. Adding even more preservative and innovative levels to Branagh's "authentic" film interpretation of *Hamlet* is Derek Jacobi's leadership of the Royal Shakespeare Company and, the much more problematic, issue of his Anti-Stratfordianism. Jacobi would later create his own stamp on the tradition by his involvement in the 2011 film *Anonymous* (directed by Roland Emmerich) that proposes that Edward de Vere was the real author of Shakespeare's plays.

147. Kenneth Branagh was born in 1960 and would be a young man when most of Christie's most important movies were released in the 1960s and 1970s.

into movies in general, not just the hybrid world of Shakespeare films. The interplay of what seems to be out-of-place while simultaneously toeing the line of tradition is characteristic of Branagh's Shakespeare adaptations.[148] Furthermore, that Christie also gets to play her actual age opposite a man who is appropriately aged to be her son is itself an innovation because it partially removes the erotic undercurrents associated with similarly-aged actors as Olivier's film did when he was trying to push the Oedipal with his mismatched age differences between mother and son.

Branagh's casting decisions for his film *Hamlet* are nuanced, yet appealing, and they also take part in the overarching question of how much innovation versus preservation plays into any adaptation of a Shakespeare play. As director he addresses that tension between the old and the new particularly well in The Players' involvement in the film and in the play. American Hollywood movie icon Charlton Heston is the Player King, and even at over seventy-years-old, his short scenes, especially his dramatic recounting of the Battle of Troy in Act 2, Scene 2 are a masterclass in converging streams of influence between the stage and screen tradition that straddles both sides of the Atlantic. Branagh centers Heston in the frame with a slow close-up from both straight-on and from below, adding an element of Heston as a Colossus declaiming from the stage as a sort of mountaintop.[149] The addition of imagined flashbacks to the sack of Troy adds even more layers to the scene as John Gielgud, often regarded as the best Hamlet of his era, plays King Priam. Gielgud is not only a link to the storied tradition of Hamlet stage

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148. See Branagh's Much *Ado About Nothing* (1993), *Love's Labour's Lost* (2000), and *As You Like It* (2006) which feature American non-Shakespeareans (Michael Keaton, Denzel Washington, Keanu Reeves, Nathan Lane, Matthew Lillard, Alicia Silverstone, and Bryce Dallas Howard).

149. Much like Heston's famous turn as Moses in the *Ten Commandments* (1956).

productions,[150] which adds its own legitimacy to Branagh's film, but he is also associated with Heston because they were both primary characters (Heston as Mark Anthony and Gielgud as Julius Caesar) in the 1970 British film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Branagh situates Heston, who proudly uses his American accent,[151] in a role that literally represents thestage. Heston is the Player King; however, he also represents America,[152] which, in turn, adds the extra representation of movies and Hollywood.

The meta aspects of the play within the play of having the Players in *Hamlet* are expanded even more in the melding of Hollywood movie actors in a prestige movie made from a Shakespeare play. Branagh provides another related intertextual curlicue with the Players in his casting of Judi Dench as Queen Hecuba in the Trojan flashback scenes. Dench's pedigree, much like Gielgud's, is essentially British stage royalty.[153] The pairing of Heston as Priam and Dench as Hecuba is yet another marriage between the traditions of British stage and American film that illuminates Branagh's project of constantly emphasizing the movie aspects of adapting Shakespeare. The wedding bells are more like death knells of the primacy of stage in interpreting the plays.

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150. Gielgud starred in a 1930 stage production of *Hamlet* that was noteworthy and radical at the time because it was uncut, much like Branagh's similarly bold decision to use a full version of the play for his film.

151. It is really just the accent that Heston always uses in all his movies.

152. Cementing even more of Heston's "Americanness" is his five-term presidency of the National Rifle Association.

153. Judi Dench's first professional theater role was Ophelia in *Hamlet* with the Old Vic Company at The Royal Court Theatre in Liverpool in 1957.

International casts beget a kind of universality. It is a lesson Branagh learned from another one of his influential forbearers, Orson Welles in his own film adaptation of a Shakespeare play, *Chimes at Midnight* (1965).[154] Branagh, like Welles, understands that by using Hollywood stars in some roles he is pointing to Hollywood over Stratford, or at least making room for other voices not from the stage. Actor intertextuality is also increased, or as Shakespeare scholar Harry Keyishian argues: when directors use Hollywood actors they set "the movie in film history, alluding to the larger story of the film medium itself."[155] In other words, movies become foregrounded even when adapting a play which is inherently meant for the theater. Samuel Crowl takes the argument even further: "Branagh wants 'different accents, different looks' to produce Shakespeare films that 'belong to the world.'"[156] Previous productions, particularly by Olivier, Kozintsev, and early Zeffirelli, shied away from too much, if any Hollywood, because film adaptations were still too tied to the stage. This kind of open casting represents a shift that is not only geographical, but philosophical as well. If movies are more democratic than the stage because of audience, distribution, and economic accessibility, then what Branagh is doing in his casting many different voices is even more inclusive it its universal and even non-Shakespearean expansiveness.

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154. *Chimes at Midnight* Cast: Keith Baxter (Welsh), John Gielgud (English), Jeanne Moreau (French), Walter Chiari (Italian), Patrick Bedford (Irish), José Nieto (Spanish), and Welles (American).

155. Harry Keyishian, "Shakespeare and Movie Genre: The Case of Hamlet" in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 80.

156. Crowl, "Flamboyant Realist: Kenneth Branagh," 231-232.

Branagh's decision to restore his *Hamlet* by removing the Freudian relationship between Hamlet and his mother popularized by Olivier's film version facilitated a new psychology to shift to the murderous Claudius and the Ghost. This Hamlet avoids the confusion of Oedipal feelings for his mother and, instead, focuses on the murky nature of fathers—real and surrogate—and sons. Hamlet already has enough questions on his filial plate to deal with: is the ghost real and how does he fulfill his promise to it; how involved is Ophelia in all of this; how much does his mother know; who are his real friends; and who is he? Branagh is innovating by returning to the older tradition of Hamlet as an Elizabethan revenge tragedy, and he is adding so much more by subtracting an interpretation that had become de rigueur in film tradition.

By using the democratization and visual power of film adaptation, Branagh becomes a new popularizer for Shakespeare much like Zeffirelli was with his aesthetically appealing movies. As Samuel Crowl writes, "Branagh was striving to reach the large popular American film audience dominated by teenagers."[157] As a director, Branagh's eye is conversant with the language of movies, yet because of his time onstage and working in the British theatrical tradition, his head is still text-driven; he is Zeffirelli but with a much better understanding of Shakespeare. Branagh melds text and image and interprets them into something that is both palatable and prestigious to the masses.[158] Branagh's visuals pave the way for the poetry. "His challenge is to use the camera inventively," Crowl argues, "to keep our eyes absorbed as the

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157. Crowl, 227.

158. See the rousing opening scene of Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* that is a kinetic and orchestrally bombastic depiction with little dialogue of Don Pedro's dashing soldiers returning from war as the giddy inhabitants of Messina rush back to the villa to ready themselves for their arrival.

verbal narrative hurries on uninterrupted."[159] From the grounds of Blenheim Palace, the sumptuous interiors of Shepperton Studios, and the big budget period costumes Branagh wields are honey for the wormwood of the words—the spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down. Movie audiences are so comfortable being dazzled by movie tricks and Hollywood genre flavor that even 400-year-old poetry can coalesce into something that goes well with popcorn, sodas, and candy at the multiplex.

Is Branagh using modern movie language because it represents his true love, or is he afraid of losing the audience with too much iambic pentameter? Furthermore, what are the risks of tipping your cinematic hand too much? Film historian Douglas Brode makes much of Branagh's misuse of the camera. He sees it as a distracting artificiality begat from insecurity which "calls attention to itself, which is disastrous in a movie that otherwise makes us all but forget the camera's existence."[160] Branagh became attached to the camera circling characters to dizzying effect in his 1994 *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* film. In *Hamlet*, he restrains the technique to just two noticeable instances: as Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude and Ophelia try to figure out Hamlet; and when Laertes and the king converse about killing the prince. Fair enough about potential distraction but reminding the audience that they are watching a film, especially one made from a play is not necessarily a bad thing.[161] Modern movie audiences expect whiz-bang camera tricks onscreen. Film and its technology build on themselves; it is a progression that

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159. Crowl, "Flamboyant Realist: Kenneth Branagh," 231.

160. Douglas Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies: From the Silent Era to Today* (New York: Berkeley Boulevard Books, 2000), 145.

161. Shakespeare himself points to stage and theatre elements in many plays (*Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, etc.).

embraces innovation, requires it even. If Branagh, as a director, does not take advantage of the many technological tricks available to him, it would not feel like restraint to contemporary movie audiences, but something antiquated in a frustrating manner. A purposeful technophobia would be far more "disastrous" in a modern movie, especially one based on an old play than using tricks of the trade.

By becoming more film-conversant, Branagh is breaking free from many staid stage traditions. This liberation—or graduation—allows Branagh to incorporate the camera and all its inherent techniques to amalgamate his two loves: Shakespeare's plays and the movies he grew up watching and obsessing over. Branagh is confident having paid his dues trodding the boards to step behind the camera to transform himself in front of it too. The reason his *Hamlet* is so different from his previous films, and all other Shakespeare adaptations, is that Branagh is hyper-conscious of working in the world of celluloid: "I'm making six films at once."[162] He is not just providing a film record of a seminal stage performance, or just porting over a stage version of a play to make it work onscreen. Branagh is a film director aware of that newer tradition, not just what comes from the stage. Modern movie directors, especially auteurs, consider very little, if at all, how their film may have worked in a stage production. This new film consciousness is an innovation that breaks free from too many preservative tendencies one falls into when he or she looks too much to the stage.

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162. Quoted in Keyishian, "Shakespeare and Movie Genre: The Case of Hamlet," 80. Branagh was also referring to the Hamlet and Laertes duel scene as being like *High Noon* and Fortinbras's storming of Castle Elsinore.

In Branagh's theatrical and preliminary history leading up to his 1996 film *Hamlet*, he chose many different avenues to prepare for that massive endeavor. Derek Jacobi, who would later play Claudius in Branagh's movie *Hamlet*, directed Branagh, who was in his late twenties, in a 1988 Birmingham Rep touring production. Branagh also starred in the 1992 Adrian Noble-directed Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Hamlet* which marked his fourth time playing the role. This RSC stage production had the most influence on the film that Branagh would eventually create, if in reaction to it, to fashion different thematic directions. Crowl writes, "For his [film] *Hamlet*, Branagh extended and revised the family focus of Noble's RSC production, which looked back at Shakespeare's play through the Scandinavian eyes of Ibsen, Strindberg and Ingmar Bergman."[163] One of the most significant parts of the RSC stage play was that it was a full-text production much like Branagh's film *Hamlet* would be. Branagh's 1995 film *In the Bleak Midwinter* is another prelude to his *Hamlet*. The black-and-white low budget movie, which he wrote and directed but did not appear in, is itself a meta-adaptation as it follows a group of actors trying to stage a ragtag production of *Hamlet* during Christmas to save a church. Not only was the film an opportunity for Branagh to focus on directing but it was a safe way to stage a quasi-*Hamlet* that mixes elements of old and new.

Even Branagh's non-*Hamlet*-related film projects and roles played a significant part in how he would create that later 1996 adaptation. The big budget flop *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) he helmed and starred in, and the Oliver Parker-directed *Othello* (1995) in which he played the iconic Iago stand out as the most influential and educational. Branagh directed

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163. Crowl, "Flamboyant Realist: Kenneth Branagh," 227.

Frankenstein for TriStar Pictures with the biggest budget (45 million dollars) he had ever been given before. Much like he did with *Much Ado*, Branagh filled his *Frankenstein* cast with international actors both dramatic and comedic (Robert De Niro as The Creation and John Cleese as Professor Waldman), he used exotic filming locations (Italy and Switzerland respectively) and based the films on classic texts. However, Branagh's horror adaptation failed with the critics, and underperformed at the box office because it was too big, loud, and too unsubtle for the source material. Film critic Roger Ebert's assessment was that "the film is so frantic, so manic, it doesn't pause to be sure its effects are registered."[164] Branagh is overwhelmed with so much money and all of its studio expectations, an A-lister Hollywood actor in the lead, and a bit of romantic intrigue related to his personal life.[165]

Although Branagh's *Frankenstein* is a flawed creation, many consider it the most faithful adaptation of Shelley's novel;[166] however, it is his deliberate departure from the screenplay originally written by Frank Darabont,[167] that may have sealed his fate. Reflecting on what material that made it to the screen, Darabont deemed the whole *Frankenstein* experience as "the best script I ever wrote and the worst movie I've ever seen."[168] It is possible that Branagh's first

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164. Roger Ebert, "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein," *rogerebert.com*, November 4, 1994, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/mary-shelleys-frankenstein.

165. Branagh is suspected to have had an affair during filming of that movie with his *Frankenstein* costar Helena Bonham Carter who plays Elizabeth Frankenstein.

166. To date, there have been over fifty films featuring or where Frankenstein's creature appears. James Whale's classic 1931 Universal film *Frankenstein* starred Boris Karloff as the iconic monster yet little resembles Mary Shelley's novel.

167. Steph Lady was later brought in for rewrites.

168. Erik Bauer, "Frank Darabont on *The Shawshank Redemption*," *creativescreenwriting.com*, April 22, 2016, https://www.creativescreenwriting.com/frank-darabont-on-the-shawshank-redemption/.

foray into adapting a non-Shakespearean work, even if it comes from a classic, proved to be a bit too much. Of course, adapting material from a novel can be much more demanding than transferring a play into a film. The vast majority of *Frankenstein* adaptations are sensationalized, or even bastardized, versions of the story that have little to do with the Shelley's smart, layered, and nuanced novel. Branagh, as a fan of movies would have had all of those powerful Frankenstein monster movies in mind, but he wanted to do something more. Even the title, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* signals to the audience that his film is a creature of a different sort. By using such a title, Branagh is setting his film apart from previous iterations and declaring that he will try to hew as close as possible to the source and revitalize the text. Despite this, Branagh the excited film lover, still cannot help himself.

Darabont gets to the heart of the problem with Branagh's *Frankenstein* and how tricky adaptation can be, "It's kind of like the movie I wrote, but not at all like the movie I wrote. It has no patience for subtlety. It has no patience for the quiet moments. It has no patience period."[169] It is almost as if Branagh did not trust the movie to speak for itself and had to keep reminding the audience to pay attention. The story should be enough, yet Branagh's movie shucks and jives with overwrought scenes of storm-tossed nights, electrified laboratories, and houses full of body parts so much that very few moments are allowed to land. Perhaps working with an experienced and successful screenwriter such as Frank Darabont muddied up the works a bit for Branagh. He had been his own screenwriter for *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, so adapting classic plays was something more comfortable for Branagh. Transferring a novel into a big budget

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169. Bauer, "Frank Darabont on *The Shawshank Redemption*."

movie with many name actors is quite another thing from using a stage play or production that has already had a long history of interpretation and tradition to help ease that adaptation process. That long performance history can be a burden that weighs down any new ideas or sense of innovation that each subsequent director may want to bring to the adaptation. However, that long tradition also provides a blueprint for how to bring life to written material, if even something to react against to define the adaptation as something altogether new.

In a step back for Branagh, he followed up his *Frankenstein* flop by acting in, but not directing, a film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* in 1995. British director Oliver Parker helmed this first major studio film of the play that features an African American, Laurence Fishburne in the title role. In another departure from what he built his career on, Branagh went against his usual leading man type (King Henry or Benedick in *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing* respectively) by playing one of Shakespeare's most famous villains, Iago. *Othello* was a big box office disappointment; however, it along with *Frankenstein* would prove to be useful with what he would do with his subsequent film version of *Hamlet*. Following earlier Shakespeare films' playbooks of broad appeal, *Othello* features an international cast, is shot on a lush location in Italy, and uses flashbacks to fill in the gaps and emphasize themes not overt in the original text. Also similar to *Frankenstein*, this *Othello* had a star American actor (Fishburne). It is the interpolated flashback scene in *Othello* that is most striking. Parker provides a dialogue-free sex scene between Othello and Desdemona that comes quite close to what Branagh later does in his *Hamlet* when he shows the prince and Ophelia in the throes of passion. Each director wants to literally show the audience how much these couples love each other by depicting their physical relationship. This is an attempt either to supplement the poetic dialogue

taken from the play in case the audience missed the meaning in those words, or to make manifest the language on the page brought to the screen, or both.

Although Branagh did not direct the 1995 film *Othello*, his performance is so strong that most people put it in the same category as his other Shakespeare films, which he usually stars in. At the time, film critic Janet Maslin wrote in her *The New York Times* review of *Othello*, "Mr. Branagh's superb performance, as the man whose Machiavellian scheming guides the story of Othello's downfall, guarantees this film an immediacy that any audience will understand."[170] In other words, his turn as Iago elevated an otherwise subpar film because of Branagh's accessibility and the topicality of the material, which is itself channeled through sheer personality, both hallmarks of his career as an adapter of Shakespeare's works. In addition, he makes pointed, fourth wall asides to the camera within his soliloquys, and he uses his usual natural delivery style and deep understanding of the poetry to make audiences comfortable with Shakespeare. Branagh at the peak of his youthful handsomeness even makes the villain Iago almost sympathetic through charm and affability. He performs like a master adapter of the material, adding depth and nuance even just participating as an actor.

Othello is not as difficult as *Hamlet,* but it is still challenging a play for modern audiences to process as *Hamlet* not only because it is Shakespeare, an obstacle for many in and of itself, it's a lesser-performed part of the canon, a tragedy, and it is also a play with its own checkered, racially-charged past. Considering all of those factors, it is a risk to adapt such a

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170. Janet Maslin, "Fishburne and Branagh Meet Their Fate in Venice," *nytimes.com*, December 14, 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/14/movies/film-review-fishburne-and-branagh-meet-their-fate-in-venice.html.

tragedy for movie audiences. Although the 1995 *Othello* film version is uneven and was quite flaccid at the box office,[171] there were many benefits that sprang from it. Primary of those boons was that it showed Branagh that it was possible to adapt a Shakespeare tragedy. He had already done *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, a history and comedy respectively, and now more than ever that and the right recipe of elements such as an international cast of stage and film actors, exotic locales, luxurious sets, and modern, genre-infused film techniques he could even reach a much wider audience while making it accessible and moving.

In a play traditionally associated with introspection, inactivity, and existential ruminations, especially post Olivier, it is remarkable that Branagh's *Hamlet* is so bright, inclusive, and charming. Zeffirelli's action hero *Hamlet* came close to this but does carry the same substance of a full text and legitimate Shakespearean lead. Branagh's visual interpretation of the "To be" speech is a perfect example of how even the most iconic of scenes of solitude and soul searching can be opened up and accessible. Branagh slowly paces into the Great Room of the palace. The walls are white with gilt accents and the floor is a black and white checkered parquet. He is dressed in nearly all black, with only a stark white undershirt peeking out. It is as if the prince treads between those two colors, simultaneously a part of them and apart. His footsteps echo like the resounding boards of a stage; however, the camera directs our eyes by slowly centering Hamlet and narrowing the focus on him and the mirror, among the many other mirrors in the room, that we now see is the object of his gaze.

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171. *Othello* grossed a little over two million dollars domestically and had an eleven-million-dollar budget.

It is the reflection of the mirror that Branagh delivers his lines to that holds the key to the many-faceted perspectives of this scene. The audience can see Hamlet's back and front simultaneously, allowing Branagh to multiply the images, mirroring both himself and his several selves. The many Hamlets mirror our many selves and brings us as the audience into the scene. Olivier and Kozintsev used voice overs for this speech but Branagh avoids this trick; his Hamlet is both speaker and audience as he speaks out loud to himself. He is also being overheard by the secret audience of Claudius and Polonius who are ensconced behind the two-way mirror just as we, the viewers, are an audience out of the frame. Overhearing an actor who is unaware of our specific presence—he is aware of a general audience—heightens the dramatic irony of the scene that already has so much. We are led to believe that this Hamlet thinks he is alone, is speaking to himself, and is staring at his own reflection as we are able to stare at both him and his reflection. Even the short cutaway during the speech when we see Claudius and Polonius sharing a frightened and knowing look with each other, we the audience intensify the process by seeing the pair seeing each other, as we quickly see Hamlet seeing himself in the mirror reflection, which itself is a peering inside. It is like a series of mirrors stretching back to infinity that we are privy to.

Branagh's version of the "To be" scene is a deft combination of stage dramatics and movie magic. Furthermore, it is the perfect example of how innovation and preservation can coexist and transcend the sum of their respective parts in a film adaptation of a Shakespeare play. Crowl sees Branagh's directorial handling of the mirror room "To be" soliloquy as "the film's most stunning merger of text and technique and perhaps inspired by Orson Welles's great fun-

house mirror scene at the conclusion of *The Lady from Shanghai*."[172] This Welles comparison is not an afterthought. Remember, Branagh is making multiple films at the same time, and not just from Shakespeare. That Welles' 1947 *film noir* was released one year before Olivier's own *noir*, *Hamlet*. *Lady*'s final scene takes place in a mirrored funhouse and it contemplates death, betrayal, and loneliness in a way that Branagh's own house of mirrors segment contends with those same concepts. However, the *Hamlet* scene balances Shakespeare's play text with verbal imagery and film technique and not just the latter. Hearing Hamlet deliver that famous "To Be" speech while he peers into a multitude of his own reflections and inches forward as the camera provides a closeup, and as the film score rises in the background, and a jump cut of a shocked Claudius enters the frame momentarily like a subliminal message highlights what film can provide that a stage production could never do.[173]

The vast majority of traditional *Hamlet* stage productions have privileged the poetry, following the classic Aristotelian estimation of good theater: text and plot over spectacle in most cases. When the most famous speech in all of Shakespeare, and the entire Western Canon, is being delivered how could it not take center stage? Yet Branagh is able find an equilibrium between sound and seeing that is groundbreaking. Hamlet's advice to the Players is a helpful in seeing what Branagh is doing:

> Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to
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> you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it,

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172. Crowl, "Flamboyant Realist: Kenneth Branagh," 238.

173. Another telling reaction and comparison between Olivier and Branagh is in the former's suggestive holding of his dagger near his crotch during the "To Be" speech whereas Branagh holds his dagger near his temple, a counteraction of the Freudian imagery.

as many of your players do, I had as lief the
town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air
too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently;
for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say,
the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget
a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it
offends me to the soul to hear a robustious
periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to
very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who
for the most part are capable of nothing but
inexplicable dumbshows and noise: I would have such
a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant; it
out-herods Herod: pray you, avoid it.[174]

The actors in Branagh's Shakespeare films refrain from sawing "the air too much," or what is called "signaling" in theatre parlance. Movie actors do not need to gesture too wildly or project their voices like a theatre actor often does in order to be heard.[175] Having attended numerous Shakespeare plays over the years, I have noticed that many directors and actors across the professional spectrum seem quite comfortable pantomiming and signaling Shakespeare's difficult language, or what has not already been edited out to streamline the running time and

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174. *Hamlet*, 3.2.1-14, n.

175. See the initial difficulties Laurence Olivier experienced as a "hammy" stage actor making the transition to film mentioned in Chapter One.

increase the clarity. All of this symbolic sawing for understanding is a symptom of distrusting the language and the abilities of audiences to pay attention and understand. Some might say that Branagh's reliance on movie tricks might be the substitute for theatrical signaling. However, his restoration of many *Hamlet* elements such as using a full text that conflates the Folio and Quarto, period sets and costumes, and the return of Fortinbras as a major subplot err on the side of traditionalism with technique as supplemental.

Does Branagh agree with Hamlet about the groundlings who are "capable of nothing but inexplicable dumbshows and noise"? In many ways, his cinematic creation is the best of both worlds: text and technique. He delivers both words and spectacle and not because of any anxiety about misunderstanding difficult material, or the ever-present worry about making Shakespeare movies palatable. Despite the enduring popularity of summer tentpoles, action movies, and superhero flicks, modern movie-going audiences, especially ones apt to see a Shakespeare adaptation, do not require pandering.[176] It is quite possible, and perhaps a monumental discovery in adapting classics, that there is a large audience out there who enjoy Shakespeare just as much as they love movies, and is not put off by seeing the plays outside of theater either at the multiplex, art house cinema, or even in the comfort of their living rooms.

The standout films of this chapter demonstrate an important aspect of iconoclasm either through their star power, the influence of auteur directors, or by their worldwide distribution into theaters, homes, and importantly, into classrooms. For those above reasons and because of their interconnectedness through their influences on each other, these films display that overriding

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176. Action movie statistics and popularity of Shakespeare fare such as *Shakespeare in Love* winning an Oscar (1999) over *Saving Private Ryan* and resulting box office triumphs.

tension between innovation and preservation inherent in Shakespeare adaptation, which is especially apparent in film versions. As more and more Shakespeare movies are made and the further we move from Olivier's massive influence the more these creations are breaking free from that interpretive shadow and establishing their own, perhaps momentary, tradition.

CHAPTER 3

POST MILLENNIUM PRINCES: HOW FILM AND TELEVISION *HAMLET*S FORGE NEW GROUND

This dissertation focuses on Laurence Olivier's foundational film version of *Hamlet* (1948) and explores other 20th century *Hamlet* films that wrestle with his adaptation by balancing its influence while attempting to explore new territories. We now turn to other worthy films and filmed stage adaptations that also present iconic versions, if even for a moment, of the tragedy in their own right. I will also discuss two recent *Hamlet*s, one starring David Tennant (an RSC production that aired in 2009) and the other featuring Benedict Cumberbatch at the Barbican Theatre simulcast worldwide. The *Hamlet* adaptations in this chapter defy category. Some are mostly traditional stage productions of the play filmed or broadcast in some way, often in pioneering ways. What all these versions of Shakespeare's most iconic tragedy share is that however distanced they are from previously influential iterations of the play either by time, distance, budget, format, or interpretation yet they belong to the continuum and conversation about the tension between innovation and preservation inherent in these adaptations. In other words, that tension endures throughout the existence of the versions.

Beginning in the year 2000, the new millennium would signal a slowing down of major film adaptations of *Hamlet* from the frenetic 1990s and move further and more quickly away from previous iconic iterations. Shakespearean film titans such as Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Richard Burton, Franco Zeffirelli, and Kenneth Branagh would give way to newcomers like Michael Almereyda, Campbell Scott, David Tennant, and Benedict Cumberbatch. Big stage names from the past, auteur directors, and lavish budgets and exotic locales for productions that

tended toward the conventional and traditional would instead become either more postmodern, racially textured and diverse, shifted to Hollywood, or television star-driven.[177] This chapter looks at post-millennial examples of *Hamlet* adaptations that are each unique in their willingness to expand the horizons of filmed interpretations and express their freedom from the influential shadows of former versions. For example, Michael Almereyda's 2000 film *Hamlet* is a focused study in the meta-cinematic.[178] Campbell Scott's *Hamlet* (2001), in which he also stars, hearkens back to the past in its indeterminate timelessness yet looks forward with its diverse casting. The Royal Shakespeare production featuring David Tennant relies on niche cult star power and a return to the stage foundation, and the National Theatre simulcast production in 2015, built around television and film actor Benedict Cumberbatch, breaks records both in the traditional stage theatre and in the modern movie theater. Each of these four distinct "new" *Hamlet*s represent a brave new world of adaptation.

Director Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* is a characteristic example of what a modern Shakespearean film adaptation could look like in the year 2000.[179] It is so far from the stage, and so self-consciously a movie, that it has to belong to a new millennium; the film is such an extreme pendulum swing in the direction of innovation that one hardly feels she is watching a new version of an old play until you hear the actors speaking Shakespeare's iambic pentameter.

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177. Conventional and traditional casts in English-language Shakespeare adaptations have long been predominantly white.

178. See Samuel Crowl's discussion of the meta-cinematic aspects of Almereyda's *Hamlet*. Samuel Crowl, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet*, (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014), 128.

179. Sometimes referred to as *Hamlet 2000*. I will use the terms "Almereyda's *Hamlet*" or "Hawke's *Hamlet*" interchangeably.

Almereyda's technically proficient, postmodern *Hamlet* starring Ethan Hawke as a young slacker prince comes off as fresh in a culture that was rapidly changing how people interacted with entertainment and with each other. A film so populated with bona fide movie stars, although non-Shakespeareans, that is technologically driven both in function and aesthetics, and so claustrophobically arranged, but at the same time accessible, might seem inauthentic to stage or even Shakespeare film tradition at first glance; however, it still retains the spirit of the original play and reveals novel vistas of understanding better suited to a new millennium and new audiences.[180]

There are many ways in which Almereyda's 2000 *Hamlet* movie are innovative, modern, and filmic and yet it still makes nods to a traditional, or at least traditionally American stage ethos. Two-thirds of the text are cut out, but what remains is still Shakespeare's words defiantly delivered in iambic pentameter despite any incongruities between setting, costumes, or actor backgrounds. From the first scene of Almereyda's *Hamlet* it is clear that this is a film with a modern perspective far from the spatially restrictive standards of the stage. The movie begins with an upward tracking shot of a colorful nighttime cityscape through the open moonroof of a moving automobile with the audience's perspective situated backward.[181] It is as if we are looking back at the past but through the lens of the here and now. The words "New York, 2000"

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180. It seems almost quaint now how worried we were about the dangers of losing ourselves to technology in the year 2000. Almereyda's film pointed to those worries that have now become real anxieties in the midst of our media and technology saturation.

181. Beginning the action of *Hamlet* at night is textually accurate ("'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco." 1.1.7.) and often reflected in stage and film versions. Nevertheless, one is struck by both how alive the urban night scenes are in Almereyda's *Hamlet* and how day and night never matter indoors in this version that takes place in "The City That Never Sleeps."

in a simple, contemporary font appear in the opening of the car's roof. The increasing sound of an airliner is heard as the text continues onscreen: "The King and C.E.O. of Denmark Corporation is dead," and "The King's widow has hastily remarried his brother," and "The King's son, Hamlet, has returned from school suspecting foul play"[182] The screen goes black and immediately the pulsing sounds of English electronic band Morcheeba's song "Let Me See" plays as a hipster-garbed Hamlet (Hawke) sulks across Times Square into the Hotel Elsinore, the headquarters of the Denmark Corporation.[183] Right out of the gate, Almereyda establishes the modern look and feel of this *Hamlet* in his use of film effects and technology, urban cityscapes, electronic music, and contemporary and fashionable dress.

The crux of any *Hamlet* adaptation centers on its portrayal of the eponymous prince and even more so in how adaptations can both indelibly etch that iconic character on the popular consciousness and reflect the zeitgeist of when the film was made. Ethan Hawke's appropriately millennial, yet polarizing characterization of Hamlet is both a byproduct of the times and a unique stamp within the ongoing adaptation tradition. Hawke's history as an actor who received minimal classical stage training and instead found success in Generation X movies such as 1989's *Dead Poets Society*, where he got his first big break, *Reality Bites* (1994) and Richard Linklater's 1995 film *Before Sunrise* fits into Almereyda's cinematic forward aesthetic even in a Shakespeare film. Not only is the setting and time for the film modern, its lead is also ultra-hip

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182. *Hamlet*, directed by Michael Almereyda (2000; Los Angeles, CA: Miramax Films, 2001), DVD.

183. "Let Me See" is a pop single on Morcheeba's 1998 album *Big Calm*. Almereyda's use of contemporary music is yet another way he plays with the tension of timeliness and immediacy in his modern film of an ancient play.

and timely. Hawke's Hamlet wears eyeliner, fancies ironic hats, and dons amber-colored eyeglasses like a celebrity rock star. He is a sulky, self-involved slacker who mumbles and trails off more like a surly teenager than a corporate prince. To complete the suitable look of the young man as introspective artist in the year 2000, he also scribbles in his notebook in an all-night diner and seems to always be either on the verge of tears or falling asleep.[184] In Almereyda's *Hamlet*, the prince is a listless scion who out "emos" all previous melancholy Danes, yet another signal that this is a film tragedy very much of its new age.

The character of Hamlet in Almereyda's film is not just introspective in the way that many actors have portrayed him, or directors have interpreted him to be. Hawke as Hamlet is what Kenneth Rothwell calls "An obsessed video freak…[who] narcissistically records a visual autobiography."[185] The young prince is either a film student or his hobby has intensified since his father's death to the point of monomaniacal coexistence between filmmaker and film, often blurring the line between the two. This Hamlet often retreats to his room, which is rife with video editing equipment and monitors where he can (re)construct a narrative that features himself as an existentially bereft victim, an observer who has constant and concrete access to his observations. What his real reality is and what is curated have coalesced on celluloid. As Courtney Lehmann suggests, "the only thing that is real to Hamlet is the reel."[186] She further explains how Hamlet's grasp of reality has been affected by technology: "Indeed, Hamlet's

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184. Hawke claims that "Hamlet was much more like Kurt Cobain or Holden Caulfield than Sir Laurence Olivier" qtd. in Crowl, *Screen Adaptations*, 130.

185. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 257.

186. Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains*, 98.

unnatural, almost umbilical attachment to his handheld camera suggests that he replaced real family relations with reel ones long ago."[187] Hamlet's coping mechanism and even more so, his way of processing reality comes from the technological and the visual. Words are still there, often in voiceover, spoken to a screen, or left on an answering machine; however, image is the real king in this adaptation. Technology is a balm to this prince of his times, but it also serves to isolate him and help him turn even more inward.

One of the more striking examples from Almereyda and Hawke's interpretation is how different the Hamlet character is during the "To be" sequences in the film.[188] Hamlet watches himself onscreen holding a gun to his head and replays the scene over and over again. He finishes the speech later as he strolls listlessly through the "Action" section of a Blockbuster video store.[189] Splitting up the most famous speech of the play and some of the most iconic lines in all of Shakespeare is an unconventional and rarely seen device. Previous versions have "broken up" the speech such as Olivier doing it with camera angles, Branagh touching his hair, or even Mel Gibson by being more Riggs from *Lethal Weapon* than Prince Hamlet. However, Almereyda deconstructs the speech by removing it from the actor's body and returns it to the technological and the cinematic, thus showing how fragmented and disjointed Hamlet's mind is.

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187. Lehmann, 98.

188. The word "sequences" is used to describe the dialogue because Almereyda separates the "To Be" speech and parcels it throughout the film.

189. Modern audiences watching a film which depicts an outdated video rental store is a reverse anachronism. In other words, technology, which may seem cutting edge at the time the film is made risks coloring the film as too much of its specific time and place. Notice too that the movie featured on the video monitors in the store is the 1996 superhero movie *The Crow: City of Angels* which is the sequel to *The Crow* (1994). Both films deal with death of innocents and how the protagonist must exact revenge on the perpetrators.

Linear narrative is substituted by a visually fronted collage that is repeated. Hamlet not only contemplates his existence and the meaning of suicide in the "To Be" speech, but he also literally watches himself mimic the act on video replay. He visually manifests the act of self-obliteration before performing the verbal speech as an act of primacy for the former. This kind of foregrounding the visual is something film is comfortable with that rarely happens onstage during a Shakespeare play. However, a film-conversant Hamlet would have no problem with these types of choices.

Hawke's Hamlet, like much of the rest of the cast except for the notable exceptions of Kyle MacLachlan as Claudius, Live Schreiber as Laertes, and Diane Venora as Gertrude handles his lines in a mumbling, stilting way. This kind of modern naturalism fits in with Almereyda's millennially disaffected aesthetic. Hawke is also apt to avoid eye contact and speak into his chest instead of his fellow actors. Remarking on the awkwardness of the some of the actors' line delivery in the film, especially Hawke's, Michael Anderegg claims that it is "not as problematic as it might otherwise be. Both Hawke's Hamlet and Julia Stiles' Ophelia have difficulty playing the social roles they are expected to play; they are outsiders in the corporate world of Denmark industries."[190] Movie actors, especially of the Generation X variety and ones not grounded in classical stage training were more and more apt to deliver their lines in a conversational, naturalistic manner. In other words, like television and film acting. It is a happy accident that these modern acting styles could also speak to the characters' alienation in a world run by their elders. It also shows the divide between an older generation of actors conversant with stage and

190. Anderegg, *Cinematic Shakespeare*, 179.

tradition and a younger cadre who speak on film more like they would in everyday life to their peers. Furthermore, the film and Hawke's performance in it show that this is a *Hamlet* and Hamlet of their generation and time willing to take chances to say something new.

Almereyda's self-consciously tech-savvy creation signaled a profound departure from previous film versions of *Hamlet*, especially Kenneth Branagh's 1996 text-forward and "complete" movie version of the play. The Almereyda's 2000 *Hamlet* is what Samuel Crowl calls a "Radical Alternative to Branagh's" because the former's film is "meta-cinematic" and "first person,"[191] whereas the latter's is "metatheatrical" and "in the third."[192] In other words, Branagh made a movie that retains its text-based foundations, and most of its stage-pedigreed cast planted in the theatre world; it offers its word-based perspective with a theatre-conversant audience members in mind. On the other hand, Almereyda's *Hamlet* the movie and Hamlet the character both inhabit the cinematic, the introspective, and favors imagery over language.[193] This polar opposite approach by the later film *Hamlet* comes from Almereyda's status as Hollywood director and screenwriter with little experience with theatre as opposed to the stage and Shakespeare pedigree experience of actor-first Branagh. Almereyda's *Hamlet* also signals yet another change in how Shakespeare's plays will be adapted for the screen in a new cinematic era that is becoming more a more defined by its focus and reliance on technology.

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191. Crowl, *Screen Adaptations*, 128.

192. Crowl, 128.

193. Kenneth Branagh's film *Hamlet* famously presents a "full text" version of Shakespeare's play, whereas Almereyda's *Hamlet* retains just a third of the text.

Symptomatic of the aesthetic and interpretive distance Almereyda's *Hamlet* occupies from earlier versions is that his film is more about the director and lead actor's personalities rather than the play or the eponymous character. Crowl likens this change in focus to Orson Welles' Shakespeare adaptations in that they are "more about Welles than Shakespeare" and that it is a "very American cinematic approach to translating Shakespeare from stage to screen."[194] One may be inclined to think that this shift away from the playwright is typical with auteur directors; however, there have been several auteurs who have helmed Shakespeare films such as Olivier, Zeffirelli, and Branagh (all non-Americans) who have still maintained the tradition that the play's the thing. Almereyda could hardly be considered an auteur, especially when he made *Hamlet*, but he is American filmmaker and not from the theatre world. America does not have the same storied theatrical tradition supporting it as England and other European countries do. However, Hollywood's film preeminence and influence have created movies as the default form of popular audience entertainment and artistic expression, and the celebrity star power of its lead actors is what drives the medium.

It is not surprising that a modern, American, and free-from-the stage movie made in the new millennium would emphasize the visual over the verbal with certain proposed advantages yet with a few negatives results. Crowl attributes this visual emphasis on Almereyda's belief that "modern media holds the key to making Shakespeare's language work in a contemporary setting."[195] Even more than that, Almereyda is extending the notion that even from the earliest

194. Crowl, *Screen Adaptations*, 129.

195. Crowl, *Shakespeare and Film: A Norton Guide*, 143.

days of film technology is the key to unlocking modern ways of interacting with and understanding these "old" plays. In other words, the goal should be that by watching a movie with a modern setting and dress, even one with 400-year-old poetry and prose, should be closer to reality and therefore more accessible for audiences than a theatre play or a film made to seem stagey.[196] Although this *Hamlet* movie has a low budget aesthetic with its limited locations and how it was shot in the lower quality Super 16mm, the colorful visuals and confident camera work make the images onscreen pop and the action all the more contemporary.[197]

To emphasize the critical importance of technology as another main character in Almereyda's film, his Hamlet as cinephile and amateur filmmaker interacts almost entirely with the visual and shuns the interpersonal; he is even more turned inward than the cerebral prince in Shakespeare's play or in Olivier's hyper-psychological and internal Hamlet. Almereyda and Hawke take one of Shakespeare's most charming, clever, and verbose characters and transform him into a monomaniacal introvert who is much more comfortable lurking behind the scenes and filming and reediting what he sees. Rothwell affirms this thematic shift in Hamlet's character in Almereyda's movie when he notes that "electronic 'images, images, images' replace the prince's bookish 'words, words, words.'"[198] Take for example the celebratory second scene in Act One at Claudius' court; in Almereyda's film it is designed as a press conference where MacLachlan's Claudius is a king/CEO conducting business. Hawke's Hamlet enters carrying a mini film

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196. Helpful too are Almereyda's use of American Hollywood actors to smooth the transition of Shakespeare's words to the ears of modern movie audiences.

197. The film was later enlarged to 35mm for movie theaters.

198. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*,

camera as if he is just another member of the press corps. Whereas, in Branagh's more traditional take, the film camera looks from behind Hamlet's silent figure. Both figures are distanced from the action at first; however, in Almereyda's film this is how his camera-wielding Hamlet processes his grief and expresses his exclusion.

Technology is not just a coping mechanism for Almereyda and Hawke's Hamlet character; it is his character's true identity. This makes sense when technology at the turn of the century was becoming more and more how individuals interact and even define themselves. Rothwell, however, sees Hamlet's integration with technology as a negative as he notices that:

> Soulless technology suffocates the prince, whose grouchiness and grungy sartorial style, echoing James Dean, has no existence independent of this array of gadgetry: cell telephones, TV monitors, fax machines, camcorders, cameras, laptops, mirrors, intercoms, answering machines, speakerphones, surveillance cameras, snapshots, and video stores chock full of DVDs and cassettes.[199]

It is true that Hawke's Hamlet is much more technology forward compared to other characters in the movie, but he is not an anomaly in the millennial age. He is an early example of the isolated and technology-dependent direction young people in America were/are going, a technologically codependent introvert. This Hamlet and *Hamlet* is a prescient precursor to the ultra-modern world embedded in a modern adaptation of an old work.

Almereyda's *Hamlet* movie uses Shakespeare's play to say something about film technology and how it comes between people and the world and how they deal with this

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199. Rothwell, 256.

existential divide. It is also a modern and technologically conversant *Hamlet* adaptation that is therefore more accessible to contemporary movie audiences accustomed to their fare delivered in such a way. To that point, Almereyda is an effective translator because he approaches this classical material as a relative amateur. He does not come from the theatre or Shakespeare scholar world. Almereyda was inspired to make his *Hamlet* movie after hearing about Orson Welles' characterization of his *Macbeth* adaptation as a rough charcoal sketch of Shakespeare's play and he had "a sharp suspicion that you don't need lavish production values to make a Shakespeare movie that's accessible and alive."[200] Welles' description is akin to Laurence Olivier calling his film an "essay in *Hamlet*."[201] However, both Welles and Olivier were classically trained actors and Shakespeareans justifying their adaptations in light of tradition. Nonetheless, Almereyda's amateur Shakespeare status is not a liability. Quite the contrary, his unfamiliarity works in his favor because his *Hamlet* movie is not burdened by the anxiety of adhering to tradition and seeks instead to speak to a broader audience who themselves are also less beholden to tradition and stagecraft.

Almereyda's technologically-conversant, modern *Hamlet* movie pushes the boundaries in favor of innovation as it eschews theatrical tradition. Nevertheless, another tradition takes the stage's place. Deborah Cartmell contends that his [Almereyda's] "blatant erasure of theatricality" shows that his "film…is more interested in itself as an adaptation of other films of *Hamlet* than

200. Quoted in Michael Anderegg's *Cinematic Shakespeare*, 178.

201. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 54.

as a version of Shakespeare's play."[202] Complete eradication is too strong, but Cartmell is entirely correct that Almereyda's directorial choices riff on movie tradition in general and Shakespeare films in particular. The most recognizable feature of his filmic concentration is how this modern *Hamlet* focuses on its Hollywood movie star lead to the point that many people mistakenly think Ethan Hawke is also the director. Almereyda is no auteur, or was not when he made this film, but Hawke was a bona fide box office draw. The clear movie star emphasis of Almereyda's *Hamlet* and Hamlet is yet another argument in favor that it is a movie much more than an ensemble cast-driven stage play.

One of the more innovative aspects of Almereyda's 2000 *Hamlet* is its embracing of disparate elements, both new and old, to create a patchwork pastiche that is characteristic of the postmodern aesthetic in Shakespeare film adaptations. Not only does the film's soundtrack[203] contain selections from Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Bob Dylan, and Morcheeba—a musical melding of classical and modern, its imagery is similarly edited with little narrative connection. Hawke's Prince Hamlet is an amateur film student who is always creating content, editing, re-editing, taking images from elsewhere, and watching all of it together as a self-created mashup. He stares at a black-and-white image of Gielgud as Hamlet who is staring at Yorick's skull, and there are

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202. Quoted in Crowl's *Screen Adaptations*, 129.

203. Innovative in itself is the fact that this movie has a soundtrack that is more than just incidental classical music, or original instrumental music in the traditional movie score Shakespearean Hollywood movies often do.

interspliced images of oil fields ablaze, stealth bombers, classic clips of James Dean, a porno version of *Hamlet*, a Buddhist monk holding a gun to his head,[204] and Claudius and Gertrude ice-skating. Not only does this curated collection of images point to a postmodern way of consuming entertainment, it also provides a reflection of Hamlet's own disjointed mind. Furthermore, the eschewing of logical narrative in this changing kaleidoscope of imagery allows the viewers to make their own connections, which is an audience-focused nod to postmodern filmmaking.

It is not just the visuals there are juxtaposed and intermixed in a postmodern collage in Almereyda's *Hamlet*. The director also plays fast and loose with what remains of his cut down script. He rearranges scenes and even parts of speeches, particularly Hamlet's. Crowl posits that "by breaking up Hamlet's soliloquies and making them another part of Hamlet's home movie, Almereyda interrupts and thus contains the spontaneous overflow of Hamlet's emotional rhetoric…*Hamlet* and Hamlet emerge as perfect paradigms of postmodernism."[205] In other words, these destabilizing, yet purposeful, interruptions represent another nod to both postmodernism and modern filmmaking. The facile use of movie editing techniques and Hawke's focused performance channeled through the disparate sections of the previous whole are a kind of postmodernist deconstruction in and of itself. All of which embrace modern filmmaking more so than traditional theater.

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204. The video is from a recorded lecture by Thích Nhất Hạnh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, teacher, and poet. In it, he teaches listeners that "you need other people to be" and "it is impossible to be by yourself." Advice that is poignant for the Hawke's introverted prince.

205. Crowl, *Shakespeare and Film: A Norton Guide*, 144.

Actor intertextuality is not new to film; popular actors have made audiences consider previous roles or even the celebrity of their personal lives for as long as there has been theatre.[206] However, modern movies because of their widespread ubiquity and accessibility, and an entertainment press that has grown right along with them, the presence of certain actors takes on even more levels of meaning. The cast of Almereyda's *Hamlet* movie takes advantage of not only the star power of its leads, but their rich intertextual potential. Even as an ensemble, these advantages are limitless. Young independent film actors rub shoulders with cult television and movie actors, megawatt comedic personalities, American theatre legends, and major film starts to create a collective that few might think to cast in a Shakespeare film adaptation, but it works if only to draw audiences because of their appeal or curiosity of how they might attempt something so strange and new with an old play.

Counter to most film adaptations of Shakespeare, even more so than Branagh's mixed bag ensembles, Almereyda's *Hamlet* is uniquely American in its talent pool. Its casting favors Hollywood movie actors—working for scale—over classically trained stage actors.[207] That so many film actors wanted to be involved in this *Hamlet* speaks to the prestige of the material and the opportunity to work with other similarly-talented peers. However, this ensemble aesthetic is much more like theater than film where celebrity, agents, and money take precedence. Another nod to the spirit of theatre is casting the American movie and theatre icon, Sam Shepard as The Ghost. Almereyda even avoids effects in portraying The Ghost, which appeals to the realism of

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206. See Richard Burbage, Benedict Cumberbatch, Judi Dench, Clara Fisher, Vivien Leigh, Will Kemp, Maggie Smith, and William Shakespeare himself to name a few.

207. Never has a Shakespeare movie cast so many high-priced stars with so few dollars ($2 million)." Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 256.

the film.[208] Shepard's shade not only does not look ghostly he also grabs and embraces Hamlet showing another level of reality that highlights Hamlet's potential madness.[209] Finally, casting such an important film, stage, and playwriting figure such as Sam Shepard as The Ghost represents a link to both American theater and film. Just as his character straddles two worlds, Shepard's presence is also a hallmark of the hybridity between stage and screen.

Almereyda casts another important American movie star in his *Hamlet*, but one who operates on the opposite end of the spectrum from the serious literary and theatrical side. Comedic actor Bill Murray plays the unintentionally funny Polonius with enough admirable restraint that it causes its own bit of anticipatory tension. Seeing Murray onscreen, audiences expect the actor to be just as funny as he has been in many previous movie roles. Anderegg opines that the "comedy, always inherent in Shakespeare's conception of Polonius, here stems in part from what Murray, who at any moment seems about to make a joke, does *not* say and does *not* do."[210] Most audiences, even ones only acquainted with theatrical productions of *Hamlet*, would be very familiar with Murray who is known for always being "on" in the comedic sense even in his regular life. When he is not over-the-top funny and plays the role mostly straight, it

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208. Shepard's Ghost haunts a subterranean hallway in the Denmark Corporation high rise near a Pepsi Cola machine, a product placement ploy rarely seen in the theatre but a hallmark of modern movie practices. This kind of advertisement is yet another way that this *Hamlet* is much more a film than a stage adaptation.

209. Rothwell calls Shepard's Ghost "palpable" and "the incarnation of the "Other." Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 256.

210. Anderegg, *Cinematic Shakespeare*, 180.

should swing the focus back on the text; however, Murray's intertextual presence and the tension between expected comedy dominate the role.

One of the more under the radar, yet incisive, actor intertextualities in Almereyda's *Hamlet* is channeled through Diane Venora who plays Gertrude. Venora is a classically-trained Julliard grad with major motion picture credits who has previously played Ophelia and even Hamlet. Later in life she was [Lady] Gloria Capulet in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film, *Romeo + Juliet*. In Almereyda's *Hamlet*, Anderegg calls her a "self-indulgent sensualist who only gradually becomes aware of the extent of Hamlet's difficulties and Claudius's villainy. Her only refuge is in alcohol."[211] She is not just drunk on love, like many versions portray (Branagh's or Gibson's *Hamlet* films) her, but merely intoxicated, and instead drunk on power by her proximity to the charismatic Claudius. If the Freudian remnants of Hamlet and Gertrude's relationship begun in Olivier's 1948 film had been retained in Almereyda's *Hamlet*, an actress who has played so many prominent Shakespearean female roles and even the character of Hamlet might lead to even more meta and claustrophobic aspects of the play/film. In other words, Hamlet would be more interested in seducing himself. However, this Gertrude is too lost in the bottle to care.

Finally, Almereyda's 2000 *Hamlet* is just the kind of film one would expect to launch a new millennium because of its self-aware modernity and deliberate turn away from the stagey tradition of adapting the tragedy. This dissertation seeks to track the arc of film adaptations of *Hamlet* begun with Olivier's 1948 version and how every subsequent iteration is a continuation

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211. Anderegg, 180.

of its predecessors regardless of where it falls on the innovation versus preservation spectrum. What sets Almereyda's take apart from the rest is its willful departure from the norm. Crowl characterizes this movie *Hamlet* as a "radical alternative to Branagh's [*Hamlet* film]" and that Almereyda is "positioning his film and his film aesthetic as far from Branagh's flamboyant realism as possible."[212] Yes, Almereyda's technological take tips the scales in the direction of novelty, yet the contrast of its surface newness only makes the plot of the play and its original language, which are still intact, stand out in even starker relief. Once we get past the jarring juxtaposition of Shakespeare's words set in modern times and his characters embodied by American Hollywood actors, we can begin to appreciate that this "radical" adaptation still belongs among its predecessors.

In the film versus theatre debate the criticisms of the former often land on the isolating nature of its technological aspects. Because of its strong reliance on technology and its exploration of many films within the film of Almereyda's *Hamlet* and Hamlet one might think that audiences would be even more isolated from the live action immediacy that theatre provides. However, similar to what Lehmann argues about how "Hamlet's production of the 'The Mousetrap' reveals only the failure of theatrical representation to accommodate the demands of his mind's eye, signaling a crucial turning point in the development of his cinematic thinking,"[213] Almereyda's film and Hawke are better equipped to speak to modern audiences because these

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212. Crowl, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet*, 128 and 130.

213. Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains*, 99-100.

filmic images, as opposed to theatrical "reality," are much more the language that modern audiences understand.

The absence of the Oedipal, or more specifically the lack of Freudian themes in Almereyda's *Hamlet*, also sets it apart from the many other adaptations that used that traditionally dominating psychological lens to interpret the relationship between the prince and his mother. This "new" non-Freudian interpretive decision began with Branagh but sees its completion here in rejecting the past fifty years plus of *Hamlet* adaptations. The more remote and matronly Julie Christie was cast as Gertrude in Branagh's film, facilitating the non-Freudian transition. Venora's Gertrude in Almereyda's version is vivacious, youthful, and stylish yet Hawke's self-absorbed Hamlet shows no interest in her. In the usually Oedipally-charged closet scene, Hawke is angry and petulant. There is not a whiff of sexual tension within their relationship. Rothwell calls Venora's queen "poised, cool, and meticulously groomed, one of Manhattan's upper east side 'ladies who lunch,' [who] finds Hamlet's ranting, against the 'rank sweat of an enseamed bed' (3.4-93), not just horrifying but, worse yet, in poor taste."[214] This millennial Hamlet is too inward and distanced from others to be attached to his mother, while she is too drunk on love and martinis to dote on her son. That interpretive distance also separates the film from the previous tradition. Removing Oedipal themes is also a return to a previous tradition before Olivier's version, a rebirth of the new begun before.

Almereyda's film *Hamlet* leans into the modern aesthetic as one would expect a movie made in the year 2000 would. It wears its self-conscious slacker and technophilic mentalities

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214. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 256.

proudly. It is decidedly American and non-Shakespearean in director, cast, and setting. It takes some of its interpretive cues from predecessors but primarily breaks new ground in *Hamlet* adaptations. Its future influence on subsequent iterations is minor; however, it is not an outlier in the adaptation continuum. If anything, Almereyda's *Hamlet* is a pendulum swing in the direction of modernity that causes a subsequent swing back to traditionalism in later adaptations.

Film *Hamlet*s represent an interrelated continuum of influence branching out from Olivier's 1948 version, where each movie limb from that seminal tree takes something from its predecessor and expresses its own balance between preservation and innovation. Such syntheses of the old and new often bear different filmic fruits. To that point, debuting the same year as Almereyda's *Hamlet*, Campbell Scott's 2000 made-for-television *Hamlet* movie could not be more different. Whereas Almereyda's film is a modern, cerebral tragedy that captures the unique zeitgeist of the new millennium, Scott's adaptation is sedate, intimate, theatre-like, text-driven, and restrained. In many ways, it is more like a simple, low-budget version of Branagh's film *Hamlet* (1996).

The primary identifying factor of Scott's *Hamlet* film, much like Almereyda's version, is its unabashed Americanness. Whereas the latter embodies its American flavor in the foregrounding of modern technology, metropolitan cityscapes, and the narcissism of its Millennial prince, Scott's *Hamlet* is set in what appears to be a plantation manor of the Antebellum American South. Scott's version uses an all-American cast and does not shy away from its low-budget, made-for-television aesthetic. Scott's adaptation reflects what Samuel Crowl calls "Almereyda's American willingness to experiment boldly with translating

Shakespeare into film."[215] The courage to integrate more novel elements, and shirking tradition, even the fluid tradition of film, speaks to this American filmmaker's avoidance of the hidebound nature of classical Shakespearean theatre.

Scott had been onstage as the Danish prince a few times before he adapted, starred in and directed his *Hamlet* movie; however, this is the first time he has made a filmed version, and he seizes the opportunity to put his own American interpretational stamp on it. He directs this made-for-television version with Eric Simonson and fits it into the other *Hamlet* adaptations made in the 1990s and turn of the century begun with Kenneth Branagh and Michael Almereyda. Scott cements the Americanness of his adaptation by setting it in the near-Civil War South. Most of the action takes place in and around the secluded grounds of a mansion or grand plantation. To add even more to the setting with its many levels of historical and racial import, he casts African-American actors as Polonius (Roscoe Lee Browne), Laertes (Roger Guenveur Smith), and Ophelia (LisaGay Hamilton). This kind of cast diversity, unique at this time of filmed Shakespeare, is intentional, interpretive, and demonstrates Scott's willingness to be bold with his adaptation strategies.

As much as Scott embraces the Americanness of his *Hamlet*, he still owes much to his most immediate Shakespearean filmmaker, Kenneth Branagh and his 1996 film *Hamlet*. The similarities abound: the length of Scott's film, at almost three hours, is most similar to Branagh's "long" Hamlet; Scott's retention and focus on the political aspects of the play—he keeps the Fortinbras subplot, and he forgoes psychological or obvious Oedipal interpretations.

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215. Crowl, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet*, 131.

Furthermore, Scott chooses what Crowl calls the "elevation of the Polonius family into full participation in the play's tragedy."[216] The most crucial similarity between Branagh and Scott is the fact that they are both actors first who also are directing the film and themselves in it. In fact, Scott is the first American to attempt the double role of lead actor and director of a *Hamlet* film begun with Olivier and brought forward by Branagh.[217]

As much as Scott and Branagh's *Hamlet*s resemble each other, there are also stark differences, which again shows how subsequent film versions of Shakespeare's play can diverge. Whereas Scott's *Hamlet* is not a "complete" or full-text version of the play, as the vast majority are not, Branagh's film, as Crowl notes, "trumps it [Scott's] in textual inclusiveness, cinematic dazzle, and star power."[218] Of course, Branagh, unlike Scott, was working with a major film studio budget and had at his disposal whatever cast, location, costumes, film schedule, distribution outlets, and technology he wanted.[219] Most of the differences between Scott and Branagh's *Hamlet*s are in scope rather than kind because they both contain the same spirit of

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216. Crowl, 127.

217. Some critics might quibble that the American actor, Kevin Kline was the first lead actor and director of a film *Hamlet* because of his 1990 New York Shakespeare Festival production televised for PBS' *Great Performances* series. Scott's film *Hamlet* is so obscure that it is rarely included in a list of significant theatrical releases, and Kline's version is even more obscure.

218. Crowl, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet*, 127. See also Rothwell where he calls this film "stagy" and "text-centered." It "achieves the intimacy of a small playing space but lacks almost all of the visual excitement found in a kinetic movie." Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 258.

219. "It [Scott's *Hamlet*] was shown several times on the Oxygen Cable-TV Network and had a limited two-week release at a single movie theatre in New York City." Crowl, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet*, 127.

being text-driven, political, and eschewing too much psychology, especially of the Oedipal variety.[220]

Michael Almereyda's 2000 *Hamlet*, although concurrent, is still a good comparison with Scott's version. The latter is a simple period piece compared to the ultra-modern glitz and glamor of the former,[221] but both films reflect changes begun with Branagh's *Hamlet*, particularly in their move away from Oedipal interpretation. For example, The Closet Scene, where we see the most prolonged interaction between Hamlet and his mother Gertrude, and where many directors beginning with Olivier try to create sexual tension between the two, Scott takes his interpretational clue from Branagh and Almereyda. In Scott's version, Hamlet is acting "crazy" and put out, whereas Gertrude is appropriately concerned and entirely maternal. There is no kissing or rolling around on a bed, and limited embraces are tasteful between mother and son. If anything, Scott's prince is a bit childish when dealing with his mother, much like Hawke's performance as Hamlet except without the millennial surliness.[222]

The film *Hamlet* that Scott has fashioned is a bit of an enigma in the continuum of other *Hamlet* adaptations. It is languid yet focused, episodic yet cohesive, and functions unlike a live

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220. The only extra psychological element involved in the film is the intertextuality of Scott's background, which ties in with the father and son tensions already in the play and might provide yet another reason to focus on the paternal over the maternal. "Scott is working out his own heroic struggle with his famous actor-father noted for his Shakespearean roles for Joseph Papp's New York Public Theater: George C. Scott." Crowl, 133.

221. The problem with being too current or "ultra-modern" is that the film can later seem dated and of only that particular time.

222. "Scott is not a rebellious adolescent after the style of Ethan Hawke, but rather a likeable young man made vulnerable by his own good nature." Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, 258.

play or even a filmed play. Nor is it like a major motion picture, and yet it belongs in the film adaptation conversation because, like the other films considered in this dissertation, it wears its immediate interpretive influences in the open and strikes new ground in its use of cast diversity and its open Americanness.[223] The adaptation is a simple take that blends old and new with inventive vistas and vestiges of the past. However, its enduring influence or even the general knowledge that it exists is miniscule. Its lack of influence and familiarity are due to what Crowl considers the oversaturation of the "Shakespeare on film genre" in the 1990s paired with the lack of visibility of Scott's limited distribution.[224] Even more so, Scott's Hamlet film is too small, defies category, and its unhurried pace, especially without the energy of live theatre, relegates it to more of a footnote in the Shakespeare on film continuum.

In 2008, nearly a decade after Campbell Scott's film *Hamlet*, the Royal Shakespeare Company produced a modern-dress, stage version of *Hamlet* at theatres in Stratford and London, England that would later find its own way to the screen.[225] After a successful stage run, separate performances were filmed for airing on BBC and PBS, and later available as a DVD. Gregory Doran,[226] a well-known director of Shakespeare's plays helms this adaptation of *Hamlet* which contains two famous cult film and television actors who also possess impressive stage credits,

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223. Scott's *Hamlet* is like a television movie more than anything else because of its low budget, limited setting, and lack of real star power.

224. Crowl, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's* *Hamlet*, 127.

225. The 2008 *Hamlet* directed by Gregory Doran will hereafter be referred to interchangeably as either the "Doran *Hamlet*" or more often, the "Tennant *Hamlet* to emphasize the lead actor and follow the marketing of the production both onstage and onscreen.

226. Doran, who is the current Artistic Director of the RSC, previously directed *Macbeth* in 2001 for the company that was later filmed for Channel 4 in London.

Patrick Stewart as Claudius, and David Tennant in the title role. The significance of this television film adaptation is in its signaling a bifurcated return to the stage, if in its restrained aesthetics as a foundation of the play, while at the same time being self-aware of its potential for modern film and television audiences, many of whom might be seeing the play for the first time and are drawn to it because of the cult celebrity of its leads.

The Tennant *Hamlet*, although begun as a traditional stage production, still belongs in the traceable continuum of film *Hamlets* begun with Olivier's version in 1948, especially the post millennium versions. It is much more a stage play that was later filmed for television and DVD audiences as opposed to the 2000 feature film Michael Almereyda *Hamlet*, or even the made-for-television Campbell Scott *Hamlet*. The difference is that Tennant's *Hamlet* is tied to its limited stage space more so than the latter and comes off predictably more constrained and less filmic than even the low budget former. However, this *Hamlet*'s place in the spectrum of *Hamlet* films that all deal with tradition and innovation is clear in both the adaptation's similarities with its immediate predecessors and how its influence segues into later *Hamlet* films, particularly in the similarly celebrity-driven 2009 National Theatre Live adaptation starring Benedict Cumberbatch covered later in this chapter.

In the film adaptation of Tennant's *Hamlet*, Director Gregory Doran foregrounds the staginess of the theatre production yet adds modern, filmic twists. He emphasizes the traditional theatrical nature of the play by rarely straying from the limited acting space of the original stage production.[227] In addition, the film's technology is simplistic and limited: there are few special

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227. The vast majority of the film's action takes place on one central stage-like space except for a few stairway scenes, and a day-time outdoor Gravedigger scene. The Gravedigger

effects, and sometimes shaky and obvious handheld cameras are used by characters. However, there is no audience noise or scene changes as one would expect in a theatre during a live filmed performance. It is as if this *Hamlet* exists in another world that is neither theatre play nor film, but something different. The cast is in modern dress and security guards and soldiers carry swords and guns; however, in a clear nod to theatrical tradition, The Players are all male and don period dress and heavy stage makeup.[228] Its purposefully anachronistic mashup points to the timelessness of the play—how it can inhabit many worlds and times at once—and its hybrid blend of theatre and film elements points to the coming trend of filming live Shakespeare stage plays for worldwide streaming audiences in movie theaters.

The decision to make this particular adaptation of *Hamlet* such an unwieldy mix of mostly theatrical and some filmic elements is interpretive and innovative yet also risky. Aaron Cutler writes in his 2010 *Slant Magazine* review that "Much of the show clearly takes place on a set, and when it tries for special effects (look at the fog! Check out the video cameras!), the results prove downright embarrassing."[229] The technology of the production is intentionally restrained because Doran is comfortable cheating in the direction of the theatrical to emphasize that his *Hamlet* is a stage play first. In the same review, Cutler argues that "this production's emotional intimacy makes it far more subdued, and less flashy, than many of the more

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section in the film comes off as incongruous because it is so out of place compared to the rest of the constrained indoor environments.

228. Female actors were not allowed onstage during Shakespeare's time.

229. Aaron Cutler, "Review: *Hamlet*, Starring David Tennant and Patrick Stewart, on BBC DVD," slantmagazine.com, last modified May 25, 2010, https://www.slantmagazine.com/dvd/ha.

prominent *Hamlet* films; certainly Tennant's terror at the thought of obligation, let alone devotion, stifles itself more than Branagh's flouncing braggadocio or Olivier's overplayed underplaying."[230] However, Tennant's *Hamlet* is purposefully not "flashy," and its simple nature, therefore, makes it more focused and celebrity actor-centered. Nevertheless, what Cutler calls "subdued" and stifling focuses the overall tone to be more psychological and internal while relying on the real draw of the production and film: the famous and bankable intertextual personalities of its pop culture stars.

As similar as the Tennant *Hamlet* is to its immediate predecessors and subsequent films, it still breaks a significant amount of new ground by curating elements from many major *Hamlet* films of the past. Its theatrical-forward nature harkens back to Richard Burton's stage play rehearsal-themed *Hamlet* turned film (1964), yet it points forward to the Benedict Cumberbatch-starring National Theatre Live version in 2015. Furthermore, Tennant's *Hamlet* has the modest budgetary aesthetics of Campbell Scott's television movie production, yet its internal nature and actor forward style is akin to Olivier's pioneering 1948 version. However, it breaks away from that founding filmic icon by following the more recent trend of avoiding Freudian psychology, or any other psychology, to explain the motivations of the young prince.

The three-hour running time of Tennant's *Hamlet* is yet another aspect that points toward its stage foundation where longer lengths are more acceptable than they are in the movie theater. Its length puts it in line with Scott's preceding film *Hamlet*, but quite a bit shorter than the subsequent filmed-live stage production starring Benedict Cumberbatch. The only longer film

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230. Cutler, "Review: *Hamlet*."

version of *Hamlet* than the latter is Kenneth Branagh's complete text version. Nonetheless, Tennant's film is long even without the Fortinbras subplot, which the Branagh and Cumberbatch adaptations retain. That sort of streamlined editing focuses the action within Elsinore; the film fits the play into the limited stage space, and also allows the actors to live in their parts, more like what happens onstage. All of which reinforces the hybrid stage and screen nature of Tennant's *Hamlet*.

The Tennant *Hamlet* also follows the modern trend of dispensing with Freudian psychology, cementing its eradication. Director Doran explains, "We've delved into the psychoanalysis of poisoners, and rejected Freudian analysis of the Oedipal nature of the closet scene."[231] The infamous closet scene, often the most Oedipal of interactions between the prince and his mother in versions that follow that interpretation, is sedate to the point of nonexistent in this film. The scene is fraught with emotion yet devoid of any Oedipal tones of violence, lust, or sexual chemistry between mother and son. The physicality, even when slightly rough, is restrained and nonsexual. Mother and son are slightly and properly affectionate in an embrace after the Ghost departs. This Closet Scene is just a heated conversation between the queen and the prince where he pleads his case against Claudius, the "poisoner." In this version of *Hamlet*, the queen is a symbol of distracted parental failure rather than an object of filial obsession and desire.

The influences of Almereyda's millennial *Hamlet* are rife in Tennant's version. In an aesthetic nod to Almereyda's Queen Gertrude, this disheveled-hair mother (Penny Downie)

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231. Gregory Doran, "Director's Diary," *rsc.org.uk*, accessed October 20, 2022, https://www.rsc.org.uk/hamlet/past-productions/in-focus-gregory-doran-2008.

smokes, drinks, and wears full pajamas, not nightgowns with plunging bodices as in previous Freudian-influenced versions. Tennant's Prince Hamlet resembles an amateur filmmaker at the performance of "The Mousetrap" much like Hawke's Hamlet throughout most of that version.[232] He uses a handheld film camera to capture the action and provides a point-of-view for the audience that is artificially altered—grainy and framed—to appear as if we are watching what he is filming. As we see what Tennant's Hamlet sees, we are trained as the audience to experience what he does, but in a distracting, non-informative, and non-interpretive way.[233] Whereas the technology in Almereyda's millennial *Hamlet* is organic, timely, and insightful, especially as it highlights the isolated observer status of that slacker prince, the forced filmic effects in the Tennant *Hamlet*—more an adaptation creature born of the stage with superfluous effect—comes off like afterthoughts of what the filmmakers think a movie audience expects and wants. The similarities the two films share are characteristic of Shakespeare adaptations that are close in proximity with the later ones incorporating and synthesizing those trending influences while simultaneously trying to fold in its own innovations. Any seeming incongruencies are the normal

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232. Tennant also films himself for the "How all occasions" speech (*Hamlet* 4.4.). In that scene, he is alone and the camera substitutes as a sounding board for his thoughts. In other words, the camera makes interpretive sense here.

233. See the earlier note where Cutler calls the special effects in Tennant's *Hamlet* "embarrassing."

growing pains of an adaptation showing vestiges of its absorbed and proximate influences while making something new.

Both the Tennant and Almereyda *Hamlet*s share an obsession with cameras and what they provide for observed and observer alike.[234] This is not surprising because the early 2000s was a time of both increasing individual access to film technology and heightened cultural anxiety over centralized state surveillance of private citizens. As discussed previously in the section on Almereyda's *Hamlet* film, Hawke's cinephile prince exists solely within in his solipsistic world aided by his portable camera and constant film playback and editing. On the other hand, Tennant's title character, although he plays at a similar type of DIY filming, is more watched by the CCTV cameras of the surveillance state of Denmark than watcher. Elizabeth Klett argues in her article, "The Heart of the Mystery: Surveillance in Michael Almereyda and Gregory Doran's Films of *Hamlet*," that the two princes from both films are as "observed and observers, these Hamlets foreground and interrogate the claim that surveillance can 'find where truth is hid.' Rather than using onscreen cameras to pluck out the heart of Hamlet s mystery, Almereyda and Doran instead emphasize the failure of surveillance to reveal coherence, wholeness, and truth."[235] The tragedy of the play that Almereyda's version emphasizes is

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234. Playing up another aesthetic similarity between Almereyda and Doran's films, and one related to seeing oneself is the use of reflected surfaces. In both versions, Hamlet shoots Polonius with a gun through the mirrored glass the advisor is hiding behind. The Doran *Hamlet* goes a step further by having actors deliver lines to the mirror onstage both whole and later cracked. See also Branagh's famous use of the hall of mirrors in his *Hamlet*, especially during the "To Be" speech.

235. Elizabeth Klett. "The Heart of the Mystery: Surveillance in Michael Almereyda and Gregory Doran's Films of *Hamlet*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2013): pp. 102-115, http://www.jstor.com/stable/43798940. Klett sees "surveillance" as a theme that dominates the play.

Hamlet's extreme, slacker-infused disinterestedness, which is either brought on by his monomaniacal attachment to watching via the camera or as a symptom of his outsider status; it is what makes that young prince flawed and fated for destruction. On the other hand, Tennant's version of Prince Hamlet is rendered powerless in a too powerful state and the constant observation by the Claudius-controlled dictatorship confirms it.[236]

The most unique and original aspects of the Tennant *Hamlet*, and what makes it a film that pushes the boundaries of innovation into a new era of onscreen Shakespeare adaptations, is its use of pop culture actors known by their television work. The high visibility intertextuality of the actors in the Tennant *Hamlet* is the major element in its success. The tradition of celebrity-forward casting in films and stage plays is quite common. However, the easy movement of stars between film and television, especially moving from television to film is a rather recent phenomenon. In a nod to that innovation, by using popular television stars, the Tennant *Hamlet* takes full advantage of the pop culture zeitgeist of its titular actor and the man playing Claudius. Before appearing in the stage and film production of *Hamlet*, Tennant was known for his iconic run (2005-2010) on the British television series *Doctor Who*. His pop culture status was also burnished by appearing in the movie *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005). The Tennant *Hamlet*'s Claudius, Patrick Stewart was also a well-known television actor at the time, if not as much of the immediate moment as Tennant. Stewart was a veteran Shakespearean stage actor

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236. The sense of oppressive surveillance is such a dominant theme in Doran's *Hamlet* that he opens the film using a simulated black-and-white CCTV feed of a dank and dark subterranean hallway of Danish guards. See also when Tennant's Hamlet yanks the surveillance camera off the wall and delivers the line, "Now I am alone." "What a rogue and peasant slave am I!" *Hamlet*, 2.2.382.

long before he starred in movies and television; however, Stewart's run as Captain Jean-Luc Picard on the science-fiction television series *Star Trek: The New Generation* (1987-1994) and several *Star Trek* movies, and his Professor Xavier in the *X-Men* series of movies are what thrust him into the pop culture spotlight. Featuring television megastars who return to a stage production of a Shakespeare play that is subsequently adapted for film marks this *Hamlet* as an important step in the progression of adaptations that balance tradition and innovation while taking influence from its immediate predecessors.

The tension of new and old within the Tennant *Hamlet* adaptation is best expressed in the career trajectories of its two major stars. The younger David Tennant took the traditional route of polishing his classical acting craft onstage by attending the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and appearing in many RSC productions before pivoting to modern roles in television and film. The older Patrick Stewart took a very similar route, if much earlier. Although both actors are a significant part of the pop culture consciousness because of their status as television and movie stars, like many Shakespeare film adaptations, especially British ones, their impressive traditional stage resumes ground them in the traditional sphere of classical theatre. Furthermore, what is new is that in the continuum of post-millennial Shakespeare films these two actors represent the fluidity of new media—a seismic shift that completes a transition from the importance of stage, to that of film, and now to that of consumer-driven television.

Particularly poignant for this new kind of Shakespeare film is the quick and energetic personality within Tennant's portrayal of Prince Hamlet that is often associated with television performances. The physical and verbally expressive actor brings a relatable dynamism and comfortable familiarity, due to his pop culture presence, to a much wider than average

Shakespeare audience. Speaking to the affability of the lead actor, Samuel Crowl writes that "David Tennant—coming to the role from his popularity as BBCTV's most recent Dr. Who—brought a bug-eyed angry intensity to the role that lured the young back to the play."[237] Those young audiences, many of whom may have not been exposed to Shakespeare's plays even in school because of the changing nature of required literature canons, can now connect to an actor well-known for television and feature film roles aimed at youthful consumers. Tennant, and to a lesser extent Stewart, provide a familiarity gateway to *Hamlet* because of the pop culture intertextuality of their previous roles. In a purposeful way, these popular personalities are making Shakespeare cool again.

Tennant's ability to attract new audiences to *Hamlet* resides in his relatability, which is enhanced by a refreshing naturalness he brings to a role and play that often can be perceived as over serious, long, depressing, or even stuffy. Conversely, his Prince Hamlet appears ageless, almost youthful,[238] and his long and lank physicality, non-traditional theatre voice, emotionality, comic sensibility, and tendency to deliver his lines straight into the camera all make him more genuine and modern.[239] David Benedict, London theatre critic for *Variety* writes in his review: "[Tennant's] command of the language is highly distilled. Beautiful but empty savoring of poetry is replaced by unusually dynamic, energized phrasing…His mind works very fast, and he speaks at the speed of thought, keeping audiences absolutely tied to his shifting perspective on Hamlet's

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237. Samuel Crowl, *Screen Adaptations*, 22.

238. David Tennant was thirty-eight-years-old when this film *Hamlet* was originally released.

239. Note the intentional informality of Tennant's "To Be" speech, which he delivers in t-shirt and jeans, spoken directly to the camera.

predicament."[240] Not only is Tennant's performance energizing, in a modern sense, it is appropriate to the shorter attention spans and expectations of young television audiences. It is a similar type of alacrity and verve that Mel Gibson used in his film version of *Hamlet* (1990) that also attracted younger and newer audiences to the tragedy.

The Tennant *Hamlet*, even with all of its hybrid blend of stage and screen warts, fits neatly into the continuum of *Hamlet* film adaptations. It alludes to its most immediate predecessors while pointing to subsequent adaptations. As Cutler argues, "the program [Tennant *Hamlet*] still pulls off a mostly sustained dual consciousness: a strong production of *Hamlet* and *a reference to the phenomenon of it*."[241] It is this latter consciousness of the *Hamlet* phenomenon that not only sets this adaptation apart from previous iterations but provides a segue to future productions that will do the same.

A recent development within the process of adapting *Hamlet* onscreen is the small, yet burgeoning, niche of filmed major theatre productions broadcast to cinemas around the world. On one hand, it is a traditional return of plays back to their onstage roots. However, these new versions of filmed stage plays use the technology of cinemas for filming, distribution, and for the method of viewing. These filmed and widely distributed theatre productions signal either a compromised hybrid that is neither live theatre nor modern movie, or an "experience" of live theatre but with all the advantages that film technology brings, not the least of which is the convenience and comfortability of the cineplex.

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240. David Benedict, "*Hamlet*," *Variety*, last modified August 6, 2008, https://variety.com/2008/legit/reviews/hamlet-19-1200507905/.

241. Aaron Cutler, "Review: *Hamlet*.

The National Theatre (NT) of Great Britain, one of the three major, publicly funded arts venues in the United Kingdom, began broadcasting and partnering with cinemas to show its onstage fare in June of 2009. The NT Live series offers the chance for hundreds of thousands of people to see major theatre productions with top theatre talent and elite motion picture actors at movie theaters throughout the world. The NT Live simulcasts have enjoyed only modest success, primarily in independent or art house cinemas with audiences used to watching artistic films. Even Shakespeare plays brings only a few diehard Bardophiles and art house patrons. However, this all changed in a massive way when beloved movie and television actor Benedict Cumberbatch (*Sherlock Holmes*, *The Imitation Game*) performed as *Hamlet* in 2015 at the National Theatre and broadcast it to cinemas around the world.[242] In quite a departure from NT Live's previous offerings, many movie theaters sold so many tickets to the tragedy that screenings were often moved to larger theaters within the complex. The fortuitous convergence of a popular celebrity actor starring in Shakespeare's most beloved tragedy, and despite, or even because of some negative preview criticisms about set design and the placement of the "To be or not to be," speech, it all came together to create tremendous buzz for this unique production.[243]

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242. Cumberbatch's pop culture status would soon increase even more when he joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe and starred in *Doctor Strange* in 2016.

243. "Originally staged at the Barbican Theatre in August 2015 and broadcast to cinemas in October of that year, this critically-acclaimed production became the fastest selling show in London theatre history for its twelve-week sold-out run in London. It is currently the most-viewed National Theatre Live broadcast to date with a global audience of nearly 800,000 people." "Benedict Cumberbatch's HAMLET Returns to Cinemas this October with National Theatre Live," *broadwayworld.com*, last modified July 5, 2017, https://www.broadwayworld.com/westend/article/Benedict-Cumberbatchs-HAMLET-Returns-to-Cinemas-this-October-with-National-Theatre-Live-20170725.

Director Lyndsey Turner's vision of a modern, dark and nightmarish Denmark is a bit uneven; however, its numerous bright spots transcend most of its blemishes. What saves the production, and what clearly promoted the simulcast event is how Cumberbatch plays the prince. The play opens on a disconsolate Hamlet sitting on the floor of a room empty except for a few wooden crates and an old record player. He is listening to Nat King Cole's "Nature Boy" and looking at photo albums when he is interrupted by his friend, a tattooed hipster Horatio (Leo Bill). Of course, Hamlet is often portrayed as introspective; however, a nostalgic prince adds another layer to why he gets lost in his head. This melancholy depiction is supported by the modern Hamlet's enjoyment of old records, or vinyl. It represents an interpretive return to the analog technology of the past much like watching a filmed stage play of work written hundreds of years ago while in a modern movie theater.

In this staged and broadcast version featuring Cumberbatch, a raging yet controlled, and very funny Hamlet soon replaces the sad, listless Dane of the first few scenes. Given the actor's critically-acclaimed work on the beloved BBC television series *Sherlock* (2010-2017), we know Cumberbatch can deliver a subdued and nuance performance. However, in this *Hamlet* he plays the protagonist as dynamic and manic, but also infused with a hypermodern humanity that does not shy away from sensitivity and nihilism. He is a Hamlet of the moment.

Some critics have quibbled with many of Tyner's unorthodox interpretations, particularly the manifestation of Hamlet's "mania."[244] However, Cumberbatch uses these moments of

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244. "Whimsical absurdity replaces genuine equivocation about Hamlet's state of mind and the effect is not improved by having him later strut about Elsinore in a jacket brazenly adorned on its back with the word "KING". All this is symptomatic of an evening in which the text is not so much savagely cut as badly wounded and yet which crudely italicises what remains. Michael Billington, *Hamlet* review – Benedict Cumberbatch imprisoned in a dismal

dressing up and playing with toy soldiers to showcase his comedy chops, and thematically it highlights the war surrounding Denmark. This Hamlet's madness radiates out to all around him, without ever infecting himself. Cumberbatch's prince is rational, sane and open to constant self-discovery. Nevertheless, at times the actor is too clever—more like his Sherlock character than the Danish prince—but it works.[245] Another controversial decision is to place Hamlet’s "To be" speech earlier in the play than it should be.[246] However, moving major soliloquies around in the action of the play is not uncommon in onstage productions or even film versions. A bridge too far though was the placement, later changed, of the “To Be” speech at the very beginning during preview performances of the play. This on-the-fly alteration of the play is a benefit that live theatre enjoys over film: a fluidity based on finicky audience and critical reaction but a boon nonetheless.

What is a bit odd is that a young, female director in 2015 lets the few women in the production be so flat. Sian Brooke as Ophelia is a quiet observer early in the play: She takes pictures or sits in the background playing the piano. She also starts out as too childlike and faltering, almost touched in her fragility, so her crossing into madness is less a descent and more of a fait accompli. Anastasia Hille as Gertrude emerges a bit more fully formed in the recounting of Ophelia's death, but is mostly a non-presence before and after. Turner stages the Closet Scene

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production,” last modified August 25, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/aug/25/hamlet-barbican-review-benedict-cumberbatch-imprisoned-prince.

245. It is more the case that the extra-diegetic or intertextual elements of Cumberbatch’s celebrity and iconic roles have influenced the audience’s viewing of this Hamlet and *Hamlet*.

246. *Hamlet*, 3.1.56 right after Polonius and Claudius scheme to use Ophelia as a spy, and before she arrives to have Hamlet tell her to “Get thee to a nunnery.”

without a bed, a rarity these days even without Oedipal overtones, but this decision serves only to highlight the complete lack of any kind of chemistry—maternal, Freudian or otherwise—between the queen and her son. One would expect a more modern, feminist take on the women in the play.

Lyndsey Turner was a successful, up-and-coming director with big, critically-acclaimed shows on the West End when she was tapped to direct Cumberbatch in *Hamlet*, her first Shakespearean staging, at the Barbican. Given those conditions, Turner should bring a fresh and modern vision to an old play. However, it seems "vision" was what captured her attention because it is the look of the production—and Cumberbatch's accompanying star power—that are the only things that remain indelible. Her focus on visual aesthetics led many to call the production too cinematic. However, Lyn Gardner, in an October 16, 2015 article for *The Guardian*, disagrees, "its [*Hamlet* at the Barbican] visual swagger, with its indigo hues, comes into its own on the screen."[247] Such a popular production, especially in an age where spectacle often trumps substance, sets a precedent for future filmed stage plays to be more like movies. Even more so, Turner relies on her keen sense of the aesthetic, and rides Cumberbatch's wave of megawatt celebrity in the unfamiliar waters of staging Shakespeare's most challenging play for this populist *Hamlet* hybrid of stage and screen.

The strong emphasis on the visual paired with a popular cult actor, makes this staged production feel more at home at the cinema than onstage in a theatre. It is true that watching a

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247. Lyn Gardner, "Benedict Cumberbatch's Hamlet comes into its own on the screen," last modified October 16, 2015 https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/oct/16/benedict-cumberbatch-hamlet-nt-live-barbican.

play onscreen in a movie theater full of popcorn-munching is not the same as witnessing live actors onstage. However, there is a similar theatrical energy involved. This is either because of the novelty of being able to experience a major theatrical production via simulcast, or the fact that a big Hollywood star is integral, but it still differs from just watching a film made to be a film. A movie broadcast of a play, especially prestigious productions, staged in storied English theatres becomes a strange and new nexus of innovation and preservation. These simulcasts are amalgams of technology and stagecraft that is like having our cake and eating it too; the best of both adaptation worlds. Moving forward, it will be interesting to track whether the pendulum swings back in favor of the stage influencing the silver screen instead of the long dominance of film over the theater during the last century.

The long continuum of films made from Shakespeare *Hamlet* spawned from Laurence Olivier's foundational vision in his own adaptation made in 1948. A long line of films began with that first cinematic transition and translation of a rich stage tradition history. These films were and are defined by their unique ways in which they mix conservation and innovation. *Hamlet* film adaptation now has its own history, as quickly evolving as it is. Film technology facilitated the move away from the stage, and yet similar technology has made the return to the stage and the possibility of much wider audiences a reality. As far in proximity from Olivier's *Hamlet* as the films being made now and even in the future are they still contain a kernel of their originator and the films that preceded them. How they express the synthesis of the old and the new is near inexhaustible and are akin to what Polonius says in Hamlet, "a poem unlimited."[248]

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248. *Hamlet*, 2.2.395-396. The line is delivered as Polonius announces the arrival of the Players and describes the many different genres they can perform.

EPILOGUE

Over the course of this dissertation, I have noticed a few things I would add, or change were I to return to it later. One of the double-edged swords of extended writing is that it often takes finishing the entire work to realize what is missing and could be better. For future changes the inclusion of a full chapter on non-English versions of film *Hamlets* would be the first order of business. Furthermore, the dissertation covers women obliquely; however, I would enlarge the treatment of the characters of Gertrude and Ophelia into a separate focused chapter. In addition, coming back to the dissertation would also mean either turning it into a book and/or mining it for academic articles. Instead of fleshing out the dissertation into a full-fledged academic book, I would opt for transforming it into a work for the general public.

As essential as Shakespeare's plays have been to English-language countries and Western culture, there have more than a few foreign-language films made from his works, especially *Hamlet*. The study of these international film versions of the play is important, especially in the field of adaptation, because the transformation of Shakespeare's "original" words to another language adds an additional layer of remove that potentially frees directors from the anxiety of influence from previous versions. These foreign-language *Hamlets* also allow audiences opportunities to explore the essence of the play beyond its English words. I would move the already-included section on Kozintsev's 1964 Russian-language *Hamlet* into such a chapter and include *Haider*, a Hindi *Hamlet* political action thriller made in 2014, the Chinese period piece *The Banquet* (2006) that is a loose mix of *Hamlet* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*, and Akira Kurosawa's mystery and businessman *noir The Bad Sleep Well* (1960). The focus would not be on Olivier's influence on these films or their influence on each other as much as a detailed conversation about

how these unique international commercial film products filter *Hamlet* through non-English language cultures.

The study of the limited, yet thematically critical, roles women play in *Hamlet* is important because they reflect the rotten and the mostly masculine world of Elsinore by being characters who are mostly acted upon. Queen Gertrude is either a political pawn manipulated by Claudius for his own ends or she is complicit due to her desire for sex. Ophelia's agency is even more limited. She is hemmed in and controlled by both her brother and father and discarded by Hamlet. The women in the play are restricted and relegated to the fringes. Therefore, they provide alternative insights as observers and transferred others. This dissertation, as it stands, includes many interpretational strands about how women are treated in *Hamlet* adaptations, especially in the mother-son relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude. However, a book version would either include more references to the character of Ophelia or a chapter-length reflection on the play's women as a whole. Particularly helpful would be Lisa Jardine's 1996 book *Reading Shakespeare Historically*,[249] in which she looks at the precarious positions of the women in *Hamlet* and the concept of Gertrude's "unlawful marriage." Also, useful in this chapter would be M.G. Aune's article "Ophelia's Space: Characterizing Shakespeare's Women in Popular Film" and the discussion of how certain filmmakers expanded female presences in their film *Hamlets* due to audience demand.[250]

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249. Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utd/detail.action?docID=240565.

250. M.G. Aune, "Ophelia's Space: Characterizing Shakespeare's Women in Popular Film," *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* 47, no. 4 (2019): 198–206.

Finally, in regard to turning the dissertation into a book, I have considered the idea of making the work more suitable for popular consumption. That is to say, a book that that is less strictly a scholarly work and more a theatre and film critic treatise on *Hamlet* films. Doing such allows for wider access and more appreciation for Shakespeare and *Hamlet* film adaptations beyond what readers may are already familiar with in their limited experience. A tertiary consideration is that the work might motivate readers to critically think about what they are seeing and provide context for other versions of *Hamlets* in their lives. The book would still follow the dominant through-line of initial influence begun with Olivier's 1948 version as an anchoring point. Transforming the dissertation into a popular work allows for more early exploration of *Hamlet* films and *Hamlet*-adjacent fare. An opening chapter or expanded introduction would look at the history of shorter *Hamlet* movies or filmed scenes including Sara Bernhardt playing the character of Hamlet herself in 1899. A short section on loose interpretations of *Hamlet*-flavored adaptations could include works such as Disney's *The Lion King* (1994) which builds off of the *Hamlet* elements of revenge and betrayal via an animated children's movie, the Canadian comedy *Strange Brew* (1983) that riffs on Shakespeare's tragedy by using a ghost and an epic quest for justice, and the Shakespeare-themed television show, *Slings and Arrows* (2003-2006), where one season explores meta-aspects of *Hamlet* stage material colliding with characters' real lives and major themes of the play. Particularly useful in this chapter of *Hamlet* offshoots would be Deborah Cartmell's contention that "one way in which Shakespeare is made popular and accessible through film is to impose images from

contemporary popular culture onto the text."[251] In other words, these pop culture refrains help audiences enter the world of Shakespeare via images or even persons they are familiar with.

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251. Deborah Cartmell, "The Shakespeare on Screen Industry," in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013), https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/adaptations/9780415167376/013_9781315006192_chapter3.html. In her discussion of popularizing Shakespeare, she offers the 1993 *The Last Action Hero's* meta-satire of a schoolteacher (Joan Plowright) showing a clip from her real-life husband Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, which sets a young student to daydreaming what a real action star Hamlet (Arnold Schwarzenegger) would do in his version of the movie.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marc Lance Lusk was born in Dallas, Texas. After completing his education at Ford High School in 1988, he served in the United States Navy. He later matriculated at St. John's College, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts in May 2000. Following graduation, he taught Humanities at St. Alcuin School in Dallas. In 2006, he was graduated with a Master of Arts in Politics from the Institute of Philosophical Studies at the University of Dallas. In 2012 he entered into the PhD in Humanities program at The University of Texas at Dallas.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Marc Lance Lusk

EDUCATION

PhD in Humanities, major in Literature, The University of Texas at Dallas (May 2023)

MA in Politics, University Dallas (May 2006)

BA in Liberal Arts, St. John's College (May 2000)

Texas Teaching Certificate in English Language Arts (grades 7-12)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- English Teacher, Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts (August 2022-present)
- English Teacher, Nolan Catholic High School (July 2019-2021)
- Adjunct Instructor, Husson University and Unity College (2017-2019)
- Rhetoric Instructor, University of Texas at Dallas (August 2012-May 2016)
- Middle School Humanities Teacher, St. Alcuin School—Dallas (August 2006-May 2012)

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Early modern (1500-1700) English literature
- Modernist American literature
- Film adaptation and adaptation theory

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- "Thoughts black, hands apt": Looking at Olivier's Freudian *Film Noir* Adaptation of *Hamlet*." Popular/American Culture Association National Conference, New Orleans, LA, April 2015
- "Fortaleza de la Soledad: Nature, Nurture and Knowledge at Ernest Hemingway's Finca Vigía." RAW: Research, Art, Writing Symposium, Richardson, TX, March 2015.
- "'The Palace of Fear': The Meaning of War and What is Worth Fighting for in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*." South Central Modern Language Association Conference, Austin, TX, October 2014.
- "A Modern *Bacchae*: A Translation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*." RAW: Research, Art, Writing Symposium, Richardson, TX, March 2014.

- "Big Beautiful Mess: A Reconsideration of Max Reinhardt's 1935 Film *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." Southwest Popular Culture and American Culture Associations Conference, Albuquerque, NM, February 2014.
- "'Here Let Us Stand': An Investigation of the Chorus in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*." RAW: Research, Art, Writing Symposium, Richardson, TX, March 2013.

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- Betty and Gifford Harris Travel Grant — Spring 2014
- UT Dallas International Education Fund Scholarship — Summer 2013
- Graduate Student Scholarship — 2014 – 2017
  School of Arts and Humanities, University of Texas at Dallas
- Teaching Assistantship — 2012 – 2017
  School of Arts and Humanities, University of Texas at Dallas
- Graduate Student Scholarship — 2004 – 2006
  Institute of Philosophic Studies, University of Dallas

AFFILIATIONS/MEMBERSHIPS

- Drama Editor for *Reunion*: *The Dallas Review* — 2013-2016
- Assistant Drama Editor for *Reunion*: *The Dallas Review* — 2012-2013
- Arts & Humanities Graduate Student Association, UTD — 2012-2016

Languages

- Ancient (Attic) and Homeric Greek
- Modern Standard Arabic – Levantine Dialect
- Latin