

Casper Altmann Franck

The Tragedy of Hamlet

An analysis of the cinematic adaptations from
Kenneth Branagh and Laurence Olivier

Bacheloroppgave i Filmvitenskap

Veileder: Anne Gjelsvik

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Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet
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Institutt for kunst- og medievitenskap



Kunnskap for en bedre verden

Preface

This assignment has taken me places I didn't really expect, I have gained an intimate relationship with the play and both cinematic adaptations. Originally, I chose Hamlet because I googled tragic heroes and he was the first option that came up, but through my analysis and readings of the play I have gained a massive appreciation for the original text and the subsequent cinematic adaptations. When I first sat down and watched Kenneth Branagh's film I didn't understand the dialogue or its significance in the broader literary impact. Then when I watched Laurence Olivier's version I understood more of the big picture and how difficult it is to successfully adapt the play to the big screen. Both cinematic adaptations provide parts of a greater picture, and both do admirable attempts to adapt the famous play to the big screen. I feel as though both fail to successfully adapt the play faithfully and given that I haven't been lucky enough to watch the real thing on a stage I feel as my journey with Hamlet is far from over. This text is far from a complete analysis of Hamlet, and in some ways it can never be complete.

Hamlet is immensely complex, even my summary of the story went on for a lot longer than I expected when I first started writing it. Originally, I wanted to do a psychoanalysis of the characters within the play, but with the constant change within the field this quickly proved impossible, Hamlet is a play that has been analysed a lot and I disagreed with everything I read from different psychiatrists. Hamlet isn't reluctant to commit murder on his uncle because of his repressed sexual feeling towards his mother, he is reluctant to commit murder because of the philosophical repercussions behind it. I don't want to claim that I know better than some of history's most revered psychiatrists, but I don't have to agree with them either. I felt as though I didn't have the necessary knowledge to perform such a study of the characters, so I stuck to what I know best, film analysis.

This text wouldn't be possible without help from my peers, my study group that I spent all my time writing this with has helped me immensely. Even if none of them read my text and I didn't read theirs, their presence and comradery was enough to keep me going. My sister, for helping me a lot through the process, reading my text and offering feedback on structure and planning. My mother and father for offering up both emotional and financial support through the long hours spent on campus. Thank you so much.

Summary

I denne teksten gjør jeg rede for historien om Hamlet, jeg analyserer to filmatiske adaptasjoner av teaterstykket med henhold til deres fremvisning av Hamlet sin syke. Jeg gjør en analyse av utvalgte scener fra begge filmene før jeg gjør et dypdykk inn i monologen til Hamlet som forekommer i akt 3 scene 1, og analyserer hvordan de to filmatiske adaptasjonene har valgt å endre eller beholde deler av den originale teksten. Mot slutten gjør jeg en sammenligning av de to filmatiske verkene, hvordan er de forskjellige fra hverandre og hvordan er de like. Til slutt gjør jeg også en analyse av hvordan de filmatiske verkene reflekterer den originale teksten.

In this text will I first give a brief summary of the play Hamlet to establish context, I will analyse two cinematic adaptations of the play with focus on their portrayal of Hamlet's psyche. I will analyse some individual scenes from both movies before doing a deep dive into Hamlet's soliloquy from act 3 scene 1. And analyse how the two cinematic adaptations have chosen to change or keep aspects of the original text. Towards the end will I do a comparison between the two cinematic works, how so they differ from each other and how do they coincide. Finally I will do an analysis of how the cinematic works reflect the original text.

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A brief summary.

Hamlet, written by William Shakespeare between 1604 and 1605 is one of the most popular stage-plays ever written, it features the young prince of Denmark Hamlet after the untimely death of his father, Hamlet the king of Denmark. The play begins shortly after the king's death, it opens with two guards outside the Danish royal castle as they encounter what seems to be the ghost of the late king. The ghost doesn't speak, but nonetheless they are spooked and report this sighting to the young prince. The next night the young prince Hamlet goes out to meet this ghost where he tells him he didn't die naturally but was murdered by his brother, the now reigning king Claudius. Hamlet is devastated by the news of his uncle's betrayal, he was already unhappy with the hastened wedding between his mother and his uncle, and with this new information swears revenge over his father's murder. Hamlet devises a plan to act in madness and convince the members of the royal court of his madness to make his actual moves towards Claudius obscure and undetected. Hamlet is still not completely convinced of the ghost's words and devises a plan to affirm the ghost's story and confirms the king's guilt, Hamlet commissions a play showing the events of his father's murder. He intends to study the king's reaction to the play to determine his guilt, after the king's strong reaction to the play Hamlet constitutes his guilt and follows him. Hamlet finds Claudius praying, in his prayer he confesses the murder of his brother. Hamlet is close to killing him there and then but refrains from doing so, as to murder him while he prays would send him to heaven and Hamlet sees this as unjust revenge. Hamlet goes to see his distraught mother after the play, while confronting his mother of her sins, such as marrying his uncle so shortly after his father's demise, she misinterprets his accusations and thinks her life in danger and calls for help. Polonius, a close advisor to the king who had hidden in her room also calls for help, Hamlet believing this voice behind the curtain to be his uncle stabs the man to death. After this interaction Hamlet takes the body of Polonius and leaves his mother's chamber, his mother rushes out in the hall to relay what has happened to the king. Later when Hamlet is confronted by the king of Polonius' location Hamlet continues to act in madness and gives him insincere answers. The king fearing for his life sends Hamlet to England, accompanied by two companions, he gives his companions a letter to the king of England with instructions to kill Hamlet. Ophelia the love interest of Hamlet, daughter to Polonius is devastated by both the rejection by Hamlet and the death of her father, falls into madness. Her brother Laertes returns from France at the news of his father's death and storms the castle to bring the king to justice,

the king manipulates Laertes into believing he is of no blame and all the blame is on the young prince Hamlet, together they devise a plan to kill the young prince using a poison tipped sword in a duel between Laertes and Hamlet, and if that were to fail Claudius would offer Hamlet a glass of poisoned wine. Hamlet returns to Denmark and is reunited with his friend Horatio in a cemetery where they observe a gravedigger in action, they ponder over his nonchalant behaviour to his work as he tosses aside human skulls. Hamlet speaks to the gravedigger and learns the grave is for a woman, the king and queen arrives with an entourage of pallbearers carrying a coffin, also with them is Laertes. As the funeral starts Hamlet discovers that the funeral is for Ophelia and enters the scene professing his grief over the young woman's untimely death. Laertes and Hamlet engage in a scuffle, they are separated, and the king assures Laertes that his revenge will come in due time. After everyone has returned to the castle, Osric, a castle guard comes to Hamlet and informs him of the dual between him and Laertes, Hamlet accepts. The dual starts and Laertes and Hamlet go head-to-head, Hamlet wins the first and second bout and to celebrate her son's victory the Queen Gertrude toasts to her son and drinks from the poisoned cup. During the third bout Laertes manages to slash Hamlet with the poisoned blade, in the ensuing scuffle Laertes and Hamlet switch swords and Hamlet is able to slash Laertes back. The Queen collapses and in her dying moments announces she has been poisoned. Laertes in his dying moments reconciles with Hamlet and reveals the plot to kill him and that the king was the perpetrator behind the ploy. Hamlet rushes at the king and kills him as well. In his dying moments Hamlet begs Horatio to live, tell his story to anyone that will listen, and just before his death Hamlet names the young Norwegian prince Fortinbras to be his successor. The play ends with the Norwegian army entering the castle, Fortinbras taking the crown for himself and ordering a military funeral to honour Hamlet.

Introduction

The tragedy of hamlet, Prince of Denmark is one of the most known, influential, and discussed pieces of fiction in the modern age, it has been analysed from countless different perspectives, but arguably the most prominent is the perspective of mental illness displayed by the characters within the play.

Hamlet, the protagonist of the play is riddled with discourse around his mental state throughout the play, from his reaction to the ghost in the very start of the play, to him acting mad through out to throw off his adversaries. The mental state of Hamlet has been widely discussed to not only be him acting, but him turning mad. Towards the end of the play at the funeral of Ophelia he expresses love towards her, not acknowledging his guilt in her suicide.

Ophelia, also being a very prominent character when discussing mental illness in the play, going mad after the death of her father and the rejection from Hamlet kills herself just before the last act of the play. With a play that is this old and still so relevant in our age, there has been unsurprisingly a lot of adaptations of this play in different mediums, from the stage to the small and big screens. Different directors both on the stage and on the screen have interpreted the play in many different ways.

I will offer up an analysis and comparison of the two versions from Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh from 1948 and 1996 respectively. Firstly, I go into both movies individually, analyse how they tackle the topic of mental illness through the different cinematic techniques, I will get into the narrative structure, what they chose to change or not change from the original text and how that influences the story. Mostly I will focus on one scene, namely the scene with the famous “Too be or not too be” soliloquy from act three, scene one. Then I will go into a comparison between the two cinematic adaptations and compare what they do similar and what they do different and how this influences how we perceive them as cinematic works.

Lastly, I will tie the changes of each cinematic adaptation together and analyse how they use their cinematic techniques to forward the mental state of Hamlet in the respective scenes. I will give my own thoughts on the decisions made by the filmmakers and how they used different approaches to tell the story of Hamlet on the big screen.

I will focus on the cinematic techniques like cinematography and mise-en-scene to analyse the scenes used to express Hamlet's state of mind. Also, I will touch on adaptation theory to compare the cinematic works and how they relate to the source material.

Kenneth Branagh

Hamlet (Branagh 1996) is the cinematic adaptation of the play to stay most true to the source material, Branagh doesn't change anything when it comes to dialogue and even ends up adding more scenes of flashbacks not featured in the original text. This does help to bring out subtle details from the play not present in other cinematic adaptations by offering a peak at Hamlet's inner thoughts in a situation. It does however come at one major detriment, namely the runtime and subsequently the pacing of the narrative.

Another burden brought forth by this narrative choice is the language, being unchanged from Shakespear's original text it struggles to properly hook newer audience not intimately familiar with the play. Nonetheless the film offers up what can be considered the most accurate cinematic adaptation of the play and has been praised for offering up an understanding of Shakespear's words not seen in other adaptations; one critic wrote at the end of his review "At the end of this "Hamlet," I felt at last as if I was getting a handle on the play"(Ebert 1997).

The biggest change from the source material is the age it is set in, the original play, although it is some discussion around this topic, is set around the thirteenth century, while Branagh places his cinematic adaptation in the nineteenth century. This is notable for two reasons, firstly the costume being updated allows Branagh to use colours to convey the emotions and mind-sets of the characters without a single line of dialogue. In the first scene we see Hamlet in act one scene two during the wedding of his uncle and his recently widowed mother (Branagh 1996, 00:14:35). We start the scene by watching the king and queen and a packed throne room celebrating the union of Claudius and Gertrude in light coloured clothes before we cut to a corner to see Hamlet dressed in an all-black formal attire. This juxtaposition of attire display to the audience his split from the rest of the ceremony, for those who are familiar with the play it is clear already now, his dismay with his mother for her hastened re-marrying to his uncle, and for those who are not as familiar with the story will see this as an indication of his continued grief for his late father. This juxtaposition becomes even more

clear later in the scene when the king and queen leave to a rain fall of white flower petals with Hamlet standing isolated in all-black in the middle of the shot (Branagh 1996, 00:18:50).

The second reason the time-shift is significant comes to light in the famous soliloquy in act three scene one, the famous “to be or not too be” soliloquy is pivotal to establish Hamlet’s mental state during the heaviest part of the play. The reason the time-shift becomes significant during this scene is who Hamlet addresses. A soliloquy is by definition a monologue directed at oneself, but in this cinematic adaptation it can be interpreted as a direct monologue directed at Claudius and Polonius. When the scene starts, we see Hamlet enter the open, seemingly empty throne room, the camera follows him closely until he stops and turns to one of the mirrors and starts his famous soliloquy (Branagh 1996, 01:33:20). The camera points towards the mirror reflection of Hamlet, he stands there in silence for a moment, we cut to behind the mirror with Claudius and Polonius watching in secret. The camera cuts behind Hamlet and the soliloquy begins as Hamlet slowly walks towards the mirror Claudius and Polonius is standing behind, when Hamlet arrives upon the part in his soliloquy that reads “When he himself might his quietus make, With a bare bodkin” he unsheathes his blade and points it towards the mirror, and by extension towards the king and his advisor. This can be interpreted in two ways, mostly complementing each other as well, firstly obviously it is an action to his words, contemplating suicide, and the simpleness of ending ones suffering with a swift action of his dagger, this speaks to his mental state as well and we’ll touch on that later.

Secondly it can be seen as a threat towards the king, this goes slightly up to interpretation of his actions, but considering Hamlet’s mannerisms as he turns towards the mirror to begin his soliloquy, we can extrapolate his suspicions of an audience and his motives to act out his speech for the king. In the original text Hamlet’s contemplation of suicide in the soliloquy is clear. Is the suffering of life’s trials and tribulations worth everything we sacrifice, but when we take into account the situation Hamlet finds himself in and the context leading up to this moment, we can extrapolate a new meaning in his monologue. When we assume Hamlet knows of his audience his words take on a new meaning, namely that of a threat. Hamlet’s reflection on suicide and the afterlife in the monologue isn’t only directed at himself, but at the king. When Hamlet begins contemplating these topics of consequences of taking one’s life and the repercussions in the afterlife, he unsheathes his dagger, to begin with he holds the dagger up to his own face to symbolize his own life before pointing the dagger at the mirror. Considering that we know, and presumably Hamlet knows of the presence of the king right on

the other side of the mirror we can interpret this as a cleverly disguised threat made towards the king.

The importance of the afterlife comes up again later in the text and more importantly in this cinematic adaptation, after *The Mousetrap*, the play Hamlet puts on for the royal court to flush out the king's guilt, Hamlet finds the king praying and confessing his sins, including the murder of his brother. Hamlet here is very close to enacting his revenge but hesitates as his thoughts again go to the afterlife. In this scene in Branagh's version, Hamlet hears the entire confession from Claudius (Branagh 1996, 02:09:00), Hamlet is very close to enacting his revenge there and then, but ultimately decides against it, he reasons that killing a man when he is praying would send him to heaven and leaves before hearing the end of the king's prayer.

Laurence Olivier

Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* from 1948 takes a different approach to the source material, where Branagh tried to replicate the play with the upmost accuracy Olivier went for a different approach. Olivier's *Hamlet* cuts out massive parts from the source material to rather focus on the core characters and their struggle with each other. For example, the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet's friends from school and the two companions set to escort Hamlet to England at the end of act four scene three, are completely cut from Olivier's cinematic adaptation. They are replaced in this scene by two nameless guards instead (Olivier 1948, 01:40:00).

Olivier's decision to cut substantial parts of the story works in his favour in a few different aspects, I will get closer into the aspect of runtime and pacing later in the text but for now I will focus on the characters. Olivier gives more thought into the mannerisms of Hamlet; his Hamlet is less energetic and more conniving. In the scene when Polonius tells the king his plan to eavesdrop on Hamlet as he encounters Ophelia, the camera cuts to a wider shot to reveal Hamlet eavesdropping on their conversation and then go back into character as the mad prince.

With this scene in mind both the next scene of Hamlet interacting with Polonius and the scene after with Hamlet and Ophelias interaction underlines the theme of Hamlet acting his illness.

In the scene when Hamlet and Polonius interact, it is clear that Hamlet is acting to fool Polonius, this is clear in the source material as well, but where we stray from the source material is firstly and primarily with the context established in the previous scene when we see Hamlet eavesdrop on the king and Polonius.

Secondly Olivier decides to move Hamlet's famous soliloquy to after the scene with Ophelia and have Hamlet be completely isolated during this scene. Both these changes can be interpreted to arise from the same deviation from the source material, the fact that Hamlet knows of the king and Polonius' plans makes his interaction with Ophelia just another performance for the benefit of the king and Polonius, at the end of this interaction we can clearly see Hamlet's affection towards Ophelia and his desire to keep her out of his feud with the royal court (Olivier 1948, 00:59:30).

After this scene we move into the famous soliloquy, the camera, focused on Ophelia as she lays on the stairs, devastated by Hamlet's behaviour in the previous scene glides up the stairs, keeping Ophelia in the centre before it cuts. We cut to a set of winding stairs, we follow them up slowly, then again, faster this time. We pan over a window showing us the previous scene of Ophelia laying on the stairs before we go back to the winding stairs which we follow even faster this time; we get shown these stairs a couple more times in faster and faster succession before we are shot up into the sky as the music swells and then calms down. We pan down to reveal Hamlet sitting alone at the edge of the castle walls, overlooking the ocean as he starts his soliloquy.

This drawn-out transition can be interpreted in number of ways, firstly it is important to note that this isn't unlike the cinematic style of the rest of the movie, it is more drawn-out and prominent here, but it is in line with Olivier's style throughout the film. Primarily this establishes distance both physically and emotionally between the previous and current scene, Hamlet has left Ophelia to shelter her from his schemes and for him to ascend to the level he needs to be at to accomplish his goals he cannot be restrained by his love of Ophelia.

Secondarily we can see this literal ascent as both a metaphysical ascent and a mental ascent into Hamlet's mind as we enter his inner thoughts and prepare for his soliloquy, this is underlined as we start the shot looking over Hamlet's shoulder before we zoom in to the back of his head and fade into his POV as he starts his soliloquy (Olivier 1948, 01:02:05).

In the original text Hamlet's soliloquy is placed before his interaction with Ophelia; Olivier chooses to place his monologue after Hamlet has rejected Ophelia and with that choice the

monologue takes on a new interpretation. In the original text, the discourse of suicide in Hamlet's soliloquy is apparent, but the struggles underlying Hamlet's contemplation is not as obvious, we can extrapolate in the original text that his contemplation comes from his father's death, his mother's indifference, and her hastened marriage as well as heartbreak. In Olivier's version however, placing the soliloquy directly after Hamlet's interaction with Ophelia, the topic of heartbreak becomes much more prevalent.

The monologue begins within Hamlet's POV, we are looking down the height of the tower Hamlet sits perched upon, "Too be or not too be, that is the question", we get through the famous start of Hamlet's soliloquy before cutting away from the POV shot. We cut to put Hamlet in the centre of the shot, he fills the entire shot as he continues his soliloquy. Hamlet overlooks the ocean and continues his sombre reflection on death, we get a little further into the soliloquy and Hamlet recites "take arms against the sea of troubles and by opposing end them", when Hamlet arrives at this call to action, he unsheathes his dagger and point it at himself, the monologue turns internal diegetic (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2020, 291) as a voice-over continues his soliloquy and Hamlet closes his eyes, ready to take action. Hamlet recites "to die, to sleep – to sleep", the camera moves closer and closer towards Hamlet's face before the music swells and we cut further back, putting Hamlet's entire body in frame again as Hamlet ponders the afterlife, "perchance to dream", he puts his dagger down from his throat and carry on with his pondering.

Hamlet returns to simplicity of suicide, to end all his suffering "with a bare bodkin", but again is moved away from it with the pondering of the afterlife "the undiscover'd country, from whose bourn no travellers return, puzzles the will.", Hamlet's indecisiveness takes his choice away from him, in his pondering on life, death and suffering he drops his dagger down the side of the tower and into the sea. After his choice is taken from him, he continues with his soliloquy "Thus conscience makes cowards of us all", Hamlet rises from his position and walks along the edge before exiting the scene through a wall of fog.

This indecisiveness in Hamlet's actions comes into light in a later scene, the scene when Hamlet finds the king praying after Hamlet's play is another example of Hamlet's inability to enact his plans on grounds of philosophical discourse. In Olivier's adaptation Hamlet doesn't hear his uncle's prayer or by extension his confession, he finds him rather randomly on his way to see his mother after his play. Hamlet considers his uncle's reaction to his play as proof enough of his guilt but decides against slaying a praying man because it would send him to heaven, therefore not being a fitting revenge for his father (Olivier 1948, 01:26:00).

Comparison

The two cinematic adaptations of Hamlet by Kenneth Branagh and Laurence Olivier offer up two very different takes on the original play by William Shakespeare. Branagh's version doesn't cut a single line of dialogue and even adds flashbacks on top of it, this results in an adaptation that stays extremely true to the source material. He does sacrifice a lot of potential viewers however, with a runtime of a whopping 242 minutes. Branagh stated in an interview from 1997 that he considers the play to be paced well enough to warrant such a substantial runtime (Rose 1997).

Olivier on the other hand does things a little differently, as mentioned earlier Olivier cuts down on major parts of the narrative to put the focus closer onto Hamlet. The whole subplot of Fortinbras and the war with Norway is cut from the narrative in Olivier's adaptation, as mentioned earlier as well, the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are cut from Olivier's adaptation, only supplied replacements in one scene. Cutting substantial parts of the narrative helps with the runtime of Olivier's adaptation, pushing it down to 153 minutes, shaving off about 90 minutes when compared to Branagh's version.

Olivier doesn't just cut out parts of the narrative, he also chooses to flip around on the order of the scenes. As I discussed at length earlier, he switched the places of Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia and Hamlet's famous soliloquy, making the soliloquy have a different mood altogether, making us as the audience believe more in Hamlet's love for Ophelia. Olivier does these changes to make the narrative work better in a cinematic form and it was praised as such (Groves 2018, 42). The original text isn't suitable for the big screen, the text was obviously written for the stage, the lines are meant to be projected and exaggerated, on stage that is somewhat mandatory, but for a cinematic production the performances become more subdued.

Olivier cleverly adapts the original text to the screen not only by cutting and rearranging the scenes from the source material but also by using clever camera movements to glide from scene to scene. Earlier I mentioned the transition from Hamlet's interaction with Ophelia to the famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy, but his cinematic style is prevalent in the rest of his cinematic adaptation as well, in an earlier scene when we transfer from Hamlet to Ophelia

(Olivier 1948, 00:19:30), instead of cutting to Ophelia's room the camera slides across the floor, down the hallway and into Ophelia's room, this establishes the relation between Ophelia's room and the great hall where Hamlet is sitting. This relationship between the rooms is important for us as the audience to feel familiar with Elsinore as more than just a set of different rooms. Olivier does this constantly through-out the film so at the end of the movie we as an audience feel as we know the castle very well. Branagh has certain scenes where we follow characters through the castle, but they are often heavy with dialogue and we as the audience don't have the ability to pay too much attention to the spatial relations of the rooms, so the sense of familiarity within the castle is lost.

Earlier I mentioned and commented on the significance of Branagh changing the time-period of his cinematic adaptation, the colouration of the costume design and the technological upgrades are used as narrative devices. Olivier doesn't change the time-period, where Branagh uses colour to establish narrative elements, Olivier's adaptation is in black and white and rely more on set design, stage direction and complex camera movements to extrapolate the meanings of the scenes instead.

The main scene I have focused on during the analysis of these two movies is the famous soliloquy performed by Hamlet in act three, scene two. Hamlet's soliloquy is one of the most famous monologues in English literature, it is a monologue that has been replicated countless times in all different forms of media and its importance in the narrative has been discussed thoroughly from a lot of different perspectives. The two different cinematic adaptations each change the soliloquy slightly, none of them change the words spoken in the monologue, but both change the context in which the monologue is spoken.

Branagh uses his updated time-setting to twist Hamlet's words from a soliloquy to a monologue directed at the king, Branagh's Hamlet speaks to both himself and his watchers of death and the afterlife, and his words come out as a threat directed at the king and anyone that stand against him. Olivier places the soliloquy after Hamlet has rejected Ophelia and uses it in that context to make us feel more remorse for Hamlet's actions towards his love-interest.

Conclusion

Hamlet is a timeless story immortalized by one of, if not the greatest author to ever live, it has been dramatized on everything from the stage to the screen, Currently there are over 50 cinematic adaptations of Hamlet, and there are countless more inspired by the original text, examples such as *The Lion King* (Allers and Minkoff 1994) are loosely adapted from the story of Hamlet. The two cinematic adaptations from Kenneth Branagh and Laurence Olivier are praised for being the two best adaptations of Hamlet put to film either through strictly sticking to Shakespeare's words or by cutting it down and focusing on filmmaking and acting over script loyalty.

Hamlet's mental state throughout the original text is somewhat concealed, Hamlet puts on a performance of madness to throw off his adversaries to his true intentions, but in doing so his madness grows and takes form. To successfully portray this can be very difficult, and to convince an audience in a film can't rely on acting alone, it must be accompanied by cinematic techniques as well.

Olivier does this very well, showing us Hamlet's conniving nature and his dedication to his schemes. He gives us a more tender and affectionate Hamlet in his portrayal. A Hamlet that regrets what his schemes does to the people around him, but simultaneously a Hamlet that will stop at nothing to enact his revenge.

Branagh on the other hand keeps strictly to the source material, a Hamlet that doesn't just act mad, but seems completely gone very early in his development. From the scene when Hamlet meets the ghost and learns of his uncle's betrayal, he is already erratic. Later in the scene with Hamlet and Ophelia's interaction in the throne room, granted I have interpreted that Hamlet knows he is being observed in this scene, Hamlet shows little to no remorse for his actions towards Ophelia. When we get to the scene of Ophelia's funeral, Hamlet again shows no remorse for his actions towards her and his part in her suicide. These scenes speak to Hamlet's deteriorated mental state with his distorted view of his actions and their consequences.

Olivier's Hamlet acts saner through the narrative, in his interaction with Ophelia we can see his active remorse in the final moments of their confrontation. He kneels and kisses Ophelia's hair in affection, knowing this the only act of affection he can perform with the king and Polonius catching on to his schemes. So, when Hamlet appears at Ophelia's funeral and proclaims his love and affection for her, we get a sense of sincerity in his words, he never meant for her to be a part of the feud between him and the king.

These two adaptations each have their own merits and faults. Branagh's Hamlet doesn't seem sane at any part of the narrative, even when the character is meant to act calm and collected, he seems either annoyed or erratic. His cinematic adaptation is loyal to the source material but lacks a personal touch to make his Hamlet its own character. Olivier's Hamlet acts a lot more compassionate and regretful of his actions, he regrets Ophelia's involvement in his schemes. He is a lot more conniving, sneaking around the castle, eavesdropping on the king, and a lot more introspective when compared to Branagh's performance. Olivier's Hamlet seems to reflect on his actions when performing his famous soliloquy at the top of the tower and not use it as another ploy in his plot against the king.

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