

While focus on these  
elements anymore.  
director laurence



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

While Laurence Olivier depicts the story of “ Hamlet”, the original version by William Shakespeare is the most profound. In terms of the ghost, Olivier took Shakespeare’s writings and adapted them to fit his own standards of what the ghost represents to Hamlet. Moreover, Olivier’s version required him to focus on less traditional approaches due to his need to shorten the production and the need to perform a psychological analysis of the characters determine his interpretation of the play “ Hamlet”.

He illustrates this through various scenes, settings and themes in the film. The presentation of the Ghost in the film builds the main theme of revenge and tragedy. It forms the central part story of the play.

For instance, it says, “ I am thy father’s spirit, Doom’d for a certain term to walk the night, and for the day confined to fast in fires, till the foul crimes done in my days of nature...burnt and purged away...I am forbid”

(Shakespeare 1. 5. 9-13). The ghost appears twice as portrayed by Olivier through lots of fog, dim lights and highly filtered voice. This did not clearly pick up the picture implied by Shakespeare in the original text, but they demonstrate the importance of the Ghost in the film. The message, language and imagery the ghost leaves last the entire play.

The ghost builds the play. It is easier to tell that the director wanted to depict his own viewpoint of the play Hamlet by Shakespeare. This, therefore, made the film be all about Hamlet. Therefore, when Hamlet is not in the scene, then his imagination is. As a result, he cut out most part of the original script by Shakespeare.

The Guildenstern, Rosencrantz, and Fortinbras are cut out. All the characters are presented in Hamlet's point of view hence the film is not exactly the reproduction of the play but an interpretation. Olivier shows that the Oedipus complex is a crucial aspect in understanding the play especially the character of Hamlet and his relationship with Claudius, Ophelia, The Ghost and Gertrude. Hamlet is more saddened by his mother's sexuality than news of his father's killing, according to critics. He hates all women and expresses this hate by saying, "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (Shakespeare 1. 5. 8)... Despite the warning from his father's ghost, "Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive / against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven" (Shakespeare 1.

5. 9). Hamlet does not seem to pursue revenge but question his mother's reason for marrying Claudius. In fact, the ghost comes to remind him that he should not be so much fixed on Gertrude. The focal point of the play is engraved in the way it expands from the traditional convention of revenge, tragedy and majorly the Ghost appearance makes the fundamental implication.

The way Olivier presents the ghost has little to talk about yet it is a tremendously significant aspect in the play. When the ghost appears to Prince Hamlet in the original Shakespearean play, he talks about purgatory and his wanderings on earth before describing the details of his death (Shakespeare 1. 3.

14). These same descriptions are not prevalent in the 1948 film. One of the possible reasons for deletions of these lines could be Olivier's need to

remove politics and tradition from this new film. One should note that he designed his previous production to inspire patriotic sentiments among the British people.

The presiding British Prime Minister – Sir Winston Churchill – had instructed him to do so because the country was fighting a war. However, when the war ended, there was no need to focus on these elements anymore. Director Laurence Olivier wanted to dwell on the characters in the play. He did this mostly through the main character Hamlet.

In his version of the play, the ghost of Hamlet's father does not talk about purgatory and other after life issues. Instead, the ghost dwells mostly on the circumstances surrounding his death. During Shakespeare's lifetime, the Catholic Church played a pivotal role in the daily lives of its people.

Therefore, most citizens ascribed to the values and beliefs taught by members of the Catholic Church such as receiving ordinances from the latter and going to heaven. If Olivier had included this part in his 1948 film, then he would have upheld Shakespeare's belief in the traditional. Since he wanted to depart from this, he made the right choice by omitting that scene from the play. The ghost in Shakespeare's play describes most of the incidents surrounding his death verbally. While the same thing takes place in Olivier's 1948 version, something slightly different happens when he adds a flashback (Play within a play) in the film. The director gives the audience a visual summary of the plot surrounding his death. One can see Claudius pouring poison into the dead King's ear (Olivier). This makes the allegations made by the dead King appear logical.

Therefore, when Hamlet refuses to accept these claims, then he appears to be more analytical than he needs to be. Although Shakespeare shows a skeptical Hamlet in the original play, the playwright does not emphasize Hamlet's analytical nature in the play as much as Olivier does. Audiences can see the ghost's narrative visually in the 1948 film. Hamlet now seems like a reasoning man in the film because he does not accept assertions at face value, even when the story seems quite convincing. He chooses to find out for himself the validity behind the assertions. In fact, he is ever asking, "What's the matter now...Whose grave is this now" (Hamlet Olivier). This ghost scene was pivotal in depicting a distinct character in the name of Hamlet. Many writers have interpreted Hamlet in their own way.

Olivier's Hamlet seems deeply distressed though still in firm control of his actions. The ghost gave him a reasonable explanation, but he still chose to investigate whether the information was accurate or not. The actor's reaction to this news conveys his degree of reasonableness (Berardinelli Para. 4). For the most part, he is a man who is distinctly aware of the consequences of his actions. Olivier realized the importance of the ghost's instructions, and this was why he decided to portray that scene with impressive accuracy.

The ghost was the one who gave Prince Hamlet a mission, and he needed to follow those instructions in order to restore honor to the kingdom. Olivier did not want to distort the meaning of the play by eliminating the ghost scene or dramatically altering the words stated by the ghost. It was necessary to make audiences understand the mission that Hamlet received. The ghost's

instructions were the source of trouble in the Shakespearean play as well as the 1948 film. Two values tear Hamlet apart: revenge and his conscious.

Shakespeare does not emphasize this issue in the same manner the film does. The director even starts the film by asserting that this was a story about a man who could not make up his mind (Olivier). Indeed, Olivier depicted a character who cannot decide whether he needs to stop thinking and start acting. The director emphasizes his brooding nature more in this production than in the play. Olivier makes this point through setting and costume design choices in the film. For example, Hamlet was wearing black in most scenes, in the motion picture, yet he had lightly colored skin and hair.

This brought out the dual nature of the ghost scene. It represented Hamlet's struggle with sanity versus insanity or revenge versus his conscious. The ghost told him something that he needed to address. "If thou didst ever thy dear father love...Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (Hamlet Olivier). It was almost as if this director wanted to present to the audience a visual metaphor through these costumes. Additionally, the film emphasizes the dual nature of the ghost scene through the setting, as well. When Hamlet speaks with the ghost, he does this in a gothic-like castle.

The place looks old and horror-like, and this only creates an effect of a brave individual who confronts the ghost without letting his reservations or fears stop him. His surroundings mirror the decisions he must make. The play did not realize these same effects when William Shakespeare wrote it.

Olivier's film starts with the Elsinore battlements where two sentries discuss the Ghost of King Hamlet. This creates a degree of suspense in the film because one wonders whether those speculations are true or not. Eventually, the ghost appears but never gets a chance to speak to the men who see it. That disappearance adds to the gothic nature of the film. One can argue that the director made this choice in order to focus on the issues that led the main character to his predicaments.

Since the film was a two-hour adaptation of the original four-hour long play, it needed to focus on segments of the play that mattered. The ghost scene was a vital determinant of these predicaments hence Olivier needs to include it in the play. Film critics deeply respect Olivier for his ability to bring out psychological concepts in a motion picture, as was the case in this film. These were all elements that were not prevalent in the original Shakespeare.

In the 1600 play, Shakespeare emphasizes how Hamlet's anger stems from his mother's dishonorable acts. She marries her dead husband's brother and jumps into this too quickly (Shakespeare 2. 1. 12). Hamlet feels that his father deserves greater respect; his mother's failure to show this respect led to his distaste for her. Conversely, Olivier interpreted Hamlet's disdain for his mother in a different way. To this director, Hamlet was jealous of King Claudius because he had feelings for his mother. Failure to realize his sexual desires for his mother led him to resent his mother.

The physically dominant Hamlet in the film exemplifies this approach.

Laurence Olivier is a forty-one year old male, and the woman who took Gertrude's role in the movie was twenty-eight years old. Consequently, it

was plausible to envisage a sexual conquest. In psychological circles, experts define this odd relationship as the Oedipus complex, which Freud developed. In his developmental theory, Freud explains that male children secretly long for their mothers and get jealous of their parents' relationship. Conversely, girls feel jealous of their mothers because they secretly long for their fathers. With time, these feelings should wear out, as children tend to outgrow this behavior.

Nonetheless, some adults never get rid of these sentiments, and it can affect their future relationships as well as their perceptions towards their parents. Olivier illustrates this Oedipus complex through a number of scenarios. One such instance was the closet scene. A lot of sexual energy is prevalent in this scene. A Queen's bedroom is an extremely private and personal space. Society would not expect anyone other than a queen's husband to enter her bedroom. However, in Olivier's version of the film, Gertrude calls her son into her room (Olivier).

Hamlet goes to the closet, and this indicates that there might be some erotic connotations in their relationship. Hamlet's lack of respect for her privacy blurs the line between mother and son. For instance, the words, "A bloody deed almost as distressing good mother...As kill a king, and marry with his brother" (Hamlet Olivier) confirm this claim. In addition, Hamlet's treatment of his mother strengthens the Oedipus case even more.

At one point, Hamlet and Gertrude's faces are too close together. When Hamlet has to leave, the two kiss each other on the mouth, and this kiss is quite prolonged; it is something that two lovers would do (Olivier). Even the



center of attention in the scene is indicative of this sexual tension.

Gertrude's bed is quite well lit throughout the closet scene. Hamlet's and Gertrude's shadows fall on the bed as the two characters kiss each other.

At the end of the scene, one sees Gertrude by the bed, and she remains the main area of focus in this instance. The director, therefore, makes his point about the unlikely relationship between the two. This interpretation causes audiences to dwell on other areas other than Gertrude's dishonorable act towards her husband. Therefore, Olivier's film is quite distinct from the Shakespearean version.

One can argue that Olivier oversimplified Hamlet's character through his assertion at the beginning of the play. In this instance, he claims that the film is about a man who could not make up his mind (Olivier). This was quite reductive because the original Shakespearean play had a decidedly versatile 'Hamlet'. The playwright gave audiences the freedom to decide who Hamlet was; he could be mad, angry, undecided, or rash. Shakespeare did not give any thesis about his play as Olivier did. Because Hamlet would face so many challenges, it is possible that he was to become a complex being. Therefore, one can even argue that this was an erroneous deduction of Hamlet's character. In the 1948 film, one realizes that Hamlet eventually makes up his mind.

When he learns about the grand plot that King Claudius had instated against him, he marches towards the King's direction and kills him. Hamlet gained confidence in his fate, which differed tremendously from the thesis made by Olivier, at the beginning of the film. Another grand mistake that Olivier does

in his adaptation of the Shakespearean film is the elimination of Fortinbras, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz.

For a director who wanted to bring out the psychological intensity of his lead character, these characters did not seem to be that significant, however, for someone who wanted to present a well-rounded character, then he should not have eliminated these individuals. In the original Shakespearean play, these individuals were instrumental in highlighting Hamlet's character. When Hamlet continues to display erratic behavior, the King sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to investigate Hamlet's change in behavior. However, Hamlet quickly discerns this. These individuals thus illustrate how sharp the character of Olivier was. Furthermore, Hamlet's uncle tells them to accompany him during the diplomatic mission in order to ascertain that the King accomplishes his evil plans for Hamlet. Their loyalty to the King outweighs their relationship and attachment to Olivier. Guildenstern's and Rosencrantz' flimsy relationship with Olivier contrasted to this Prince's disregard for tradition when it mattered.

Fortinbras was a crucial part of the play because he developed a contrast for Hamlet's character. Fortinbras was interested in conquering Denmark because he wanted to avenge his father's death (Shakespeare 5. 2. 23). He was swift and firm with his decisions. Conversely, Hamlet was hesitant and confused about the necessary actions that needed to be taken.

If Olivier wanted to bring out Hamlet's indecision in his film, he should have introduced Fortinbras in his piece. These characters were crucial to the depiction of a fully developed Hamlet. Olivier sacrificed this component in his

motion picture. Therefore, the 1948 adaptation is not as strong as the original play. The 1948 film is a depiction of how film can limit certain components of an older play. Shakespeare intended to create an all-rounded main character in his 1600 play, and one sees this through the characters that surrounded Hamlet.

Olivier eliminated some of these characters and thus presented a weaker main character than Shakespeare presents. Furthermore, Olivier's focus on the Oedipus complex shifts attention away from Gertrude's dishonorable character, as was the case in Shakespeare's original play. Lastly, Olivier gives a thesis statement of his main character while Shakespeare does not. By doing this, Olivier impedes a viewer's own interpretation of Hamlet. In the original play, one can choose to view Hamlet in one's own way since Shakespeare makes no reductions. Overall, the ghost, as portrayed by Olivier shows that the Old Hamlet Specter neither lives nor rests in peace.

The ghost comes back to haunt the son and confide a terribly disturbing secret in him. The ultimate state of funeral and mourning the king symbolizes suffering and that total separation has been overcome. The ghost connects the living with the unknown place. It says, " Are burnt and purged away...But that I am forbid...To telling the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word" (Shakespeare 1. 5. 14-16). The world is purgatory, or it could be hell itself. Old hamlets ghost is a state in between seeming as a reborn personality seeking revenge and on the verge of going once more into the limbo.

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