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# Castle to condo, country to corporation: what becomes of Hamlet in Almereyda's modern world

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CASTLE TO CONDO, COUNTRY TO CORPORATION:  
WHAT BECOMES OF *HAMLET*  
IN ALMEREYDA'S MODERN WORLD

A Thesis

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Louisiana State University and the  
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in

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## ABSTRACT

This paper looks into the inner workings of Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000). Even though Almereyda updates the setting and cuts many of the lines, sometimes entire scenes, from the source text, he is able to convey some of the themes through his use of technology and media. While some themes do transfer into the postmodern setting, the places of discord are most interesting. Of particular interest is his use of modern technologies to display the corruption found in Shakespeare's play. These technologies, including speakerphone, surveillance equipment, wiring devices, handheld camcorders, and still photography, create an atmosphere of both continual connection to and continual isolation from others. Another theme continued in this filmic version is the problems associated with memory. Because of the constant bombardment of video and still images, Hamlet, Ophelia, and Gertrude all encounter difficulties remembering the past; for Hamlet, the repetition of images eventually causes him to forget the very things he was trying to remember. By the end of the film, we, the critics, become like Hamlet. In search for the truth behind the film, we mimic his editing techniques.

## INTRODUCTION

“Shakespeare is not, and never will be, film material. You will never make screen entertainment out of blank verse. It has nothing to do with cinema, which is primarily a visual form.”

-- The Daily Express, October 11, 1935 (qtd. in Jackson)

The earliest appearances of *Hamlet* on film date back to the very beginning of the medium. In 1920, Svend Gade and Heinz Schall released the silent *Hamlet, the Drama of Vengeance* in Germany. Asta Nielsen plays Hamlet, a female child forced to pretend to be male due to her family's lack of a male heir. Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), shot in black and white, is one of the most influential adaptations of the play. Olivier places emphasis on Hamlet's psychological state, using dramatic camera angles and lighting to represent the corrupted and ever-watchful state and cutting the source text down dramatically. *Hamlet* (1990), directed by Franco Zeffirelli, focuses on the sexual tension between Hamlet (Mel Gibson) and Gertrude (Glenn Close). Zeffirelli's version alludes to Olivier's through the heightened tension between mother and son and the cutting of lines and even characters from the source text, while he departs from Olivier through his camera technique (short, stable shots). Gertrude and Ophelia are given more power and more screen time than in any other version of the film. Both Olivier and Zeffirelli cut Fortinbras and his story of revenge, moving the focus from the political to the familial aspects of the source text. In 1996, Kenneth Branagh released a four-hour, complete text *Hamlet*; all lines and characters are kept intact. He pays homage to the Olivier through his blond hair and more importantly his fluid and constantly moving camera style. He does, however, decide to use 70mm format, emphasizing the epic qualities of the film. In addition to these

adaptations, there have been many transformations and offshoots, including *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), *In the Bleak Midwinter* (1996), and *The Lion King* (1994).

Even with a film tradition that dates back to film itself, there is little consensus among critics and directors alike as to how Shakespeare should be handled when moved from the stage to the screen, as seen in the variations presented above. Some of the concerns are the same when dealing with either medium. Should the language be updated? Should the text be cut due to time constraints and/or focus of the director? When moving the play to film, however, the director faces challenges unique to the medium. Directors must make decisions as to what type of camera to use and what angle to use each shot. The viewer can only see what the director allows, emphasizing the difference and importance of the use of close- and wide-angle shots. Should the film focus on one aspect of the source text, or several? One of the most important decisions that the director faces is how to reach the modern audience—an audience that will make or break the financial success of the project.

While the directors grapple with a multitude of choices, critics are grappling with how to evaluate the directorial decisions. What is it that happens when the source text is taken from the stage and moved onto the screen? A common vocabulary for film production based on plays is being formed, but it is still loose and uncentered. Critics use a range of words to describe the movement from play to film, such as adaptation, appropriation, translation, and transformation. But these words all have different meanings, each addressing the issue in a slightly different way. As Michèle Willems clearly points out, “each medium is governed by its own codes, and [...] the languages used to translate a Shakespeare play into a stage production or into a film or teleplay cannot be studied with the same grammar” (37). Because of the unstable vocabulary, it the critic needs to clearly define how she views the movement to screen before analyzing a film

in order for the reader to have a base for understanding her argument. In this case, I will be looking at the placement of Shakespeare on film as *appropriation*. I have chosen this term in order to place emphasis that the directors often deliberately change the themes and ideas of the source text.

The renewed critical interest in Shakespeare on film is due both to the flurry of productions that have been filmed in the past fifteen years and to the impact that the availability of film has made on the teaching of Shakespeare. The films, each of which interprets the plays in a unique and sometimes radical way, have proliferated and filled the big and, more frequently, the small screen. There are many reasons for this boom in all things Shakespearian; critic Douglas Lanier believes that it is “fundamentally a matter of bringing a particular middlebrow literary canon in line with what has become the *lingua franca* of global capitalism: the codes, practices, and ideologies of contemporary mass media” (Lanier 162). As he goes on to point out, *Hamlet* in particular is a good vehicle for making Shakespeare a part of our mass-produced culture; for example, the corruption of Denmark the country can be translated into the corruption of Denmark the corporation, the closest postmodern equivalent to ruling power. This does not mean that the translation is seamless. No one film of *Hamlet* can capture the entirety of the play; even those that come close fail, for we cannot fully understand the layers upon layers of meaning in the source text as we are too far removed from Shakespeare to understand how his original audience thought. Even so, directors continue to bring their vision of *Hamlet* to the screen, and one of the latest in this line of *Hamlets* on film is Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet*, produced in 2000.

The movie begins by making the audience aware of the updated setting through a series of text shots—“New York City, 2000 / The King and C.E.O. of Denmark Corporation is dead /

The king's widow has hastily remarried his younger brother. / The King's son, Hamlet, returns from school, suspecting foul play." These words are centered on a moving view of New York's skyscrapers; the shot appears to be taken through the sunroof of a limousine. The New York setting creates a perfect atmosphere for the decay, corruption, and death in Denmark. The setting also helps shift *Hamlet* into the postmodern world, characterized by the importance of mass media and corporate capital. As Mark Burnett has noted, "not only had the city, a structure-and-skin extravaganza of 'signature buildings,' coned towers and disconnected historical references, become associated with anonymity, melancholia, and madness, it has been tarnished with dissimulating and inauthentic characteristics" (48). An "inauthentic" city is the ideal setting for a cast comprised of inauthentic corporate leaders.

But the changes in setting are not the only ones made to the source text; very many of the lines have been cut because of the inability to translate them into this postmodern setting; for example, the players are entirely cut from the film in order to emphasize Hamlet's isolation. Commenting on Almereyda's decision to cut so many lines, film reviewer Stanley Kauffmann feels that "to rip out great chunks because they do not fit a director's design is like altering a giant's robe for a pygmy. To mash the language as an obstacle that must be cleared away for the modern audience is to cheat that audience" (26). Critic Ace G. Pilkington is equally concerned about Almereyda's vision:

It is, I think, legitimate to ask why Hamlet should be moved to New York, transformed into the heir of the Denmark Corporation, and made to wear a Peruvian woollen hat. If the answer is in order to illuminate the nature and meaning of the play, to show Shakespeare's universality, and to make a clear connection to the modern world, then the experiment will have been justified. If, however, as seems to be the case here, the purpose was to make an unintelligible classic available to the uneducated and unintelligent by turning it into something simpler and trendier, then the experiment will not only be a failure in itself, but also the breeding ground for other and larger failures. (63).



Putting aside the slashing of the text and the mediocre performances by some of the actors and actresses, I believe that both Kauffmann and Pilkington are overly harsh. Even though the themes of the source text are modified through Almereyda's adaptation of the play, he makes what he believes to be the main themes available to the postmodern audience. Reflected in the sleek high-rise towers is the corruption of the Danish court; reflected in the camera lenses and television screens is the interiority that *Hamlet* articulates so powerfully in the early modern world. Almereyda is not the first, nor the last, to take an existing text and make it his own; Shakespeare did this himself, taking much of his material from history, folklore, and literature.

Due to the very nature of appropriations, Almereyda's adaptation is not seamless. It can be argued that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the beginning of modernity; Almereyda's *Hamlet* is the *Hamlet* of postmodernity. It is in the "bumps," or distortions, of the source text that we see Almereyda's vision of the postmodern individual, and it is these slight but distinct changes in meaning that deserve our attention. Almereyda utilizes our knowledge of the powers, both good and bad, of technology, forcing us to see ourselves in the very introverted, fractured lives of the characters. Because of our dependence on technology and our ever-increasing solitude from others around us (why visit when you can call, why call when you can email), we are not unlike Almereyda's Hamlet. Not only Hamlet, but also the other characters in this film have problems remembering people both in the past and the present because of the reluctance to engage in direct, in person communication. Almereyda's postmodern *Hamlet*, filled with paranoia and digital dependence, allows audiences to see Hamlet as an isolated individual. Just as Shakespeare re-imagined the legend of *Hamlet* for his audience, Almereyda attempts to give us a *Hamlet* in which we can see our society's problems and concerns, inevitably losing and changing much of the source text, but gaining an undoubtedly postmodern perspective of the source text.

## CHAPTER 1: SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK

The desire for knowledge plays a key role in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; more precisely, the desire to know what other characters know, think, and feel, the need to know why other characters have acted a certain way or how they will act in the future, drives the play and everyone in it. From the very first line, "Who's there?" the play moves around a string of never-ending questions and distrust (1.1.1). Even though Almereyda chooses to cut the opening scene of Shakespeare's play, he retains the idea that everyone questions everything; in fact, Almereyda's postmodern chrome and glass techno-driven setting provides the perfect landscape to emphasize the corruption and lack of trust that engulfs the Denmark Corporation. In an interview given by Almereyda, he commented on the lack of privacy due to technology both in Denmark and the modern world:

A lot of the play is about people spying on each other and being watched and playing parts and being aware of themselves playing parts. And that corresponds to contemporary reality where cameras are [omnipresent] and images within images are [omnipresent], at least in the city. So [...using surveillance technologies] seemed like a natural way of mirroring things that were going on in Shakespeare's text. (par. 21)

While technology has created new ways for people to communicate, it has also created new ways of separating and isolating people, both in reality and in the movie. The technology helps to underscore the corruption and disease found throughout the source text; the corruption, found in the trope of the ear in the source text, becomes linked in Almereyda's film to the eye. Digital media feeds the desire for complete knowledge, giving the top executives the impression of unlimited and ultimate power. Such power gives the false impression of being above the law, which, in turn, encourages the decay of the top figures of the Denmark Corporation. The characters in Almereyda's *Hamlet* might use technology in an attempt to get closer to each other

or to get closer to the truth, but their plans backfire in that the lack of trust isolates each character from another, mirroring the isolation that critics of contemporary society see in technology-driven communities.

After the prologue and title shot, we enter the world of Elsinore and the Denmark Corporation; Claudius and Gertrude are giving a press conference to a room full of media anchors and close acquaintances. While a majority of the differences between this scene and the one in the source text are obvious, there is one difference that is not as clear. In Shakespeare's text, the king sends out information through messengers, both oral and written. Even though the king could seal a written message with his signet ring, knowledge that traveled through and out of the country by word of mouth could easily become distorted. This would have been both good and bad for the king; he would have the opportunity to simply say the message was not true, as the people had no way to prove that it was, but the message might become so twisted that the people could lose trust in him. There would be no record of the speech to bind him, either positively or negatively, to his words. Yet in the film, the words of Claudius are sent out directly from his own mouth to the city of New York, the people of the United States, and even citizens of other countries. His words are not only for the elite, but also for the masses—non-reputable news sources that cater to those who desire gossip are present at the conference, as is evidenced by the “E! Entertainment” microphone alongside those of more reputable news sources. Rather than just hearing the message, people not physically present at the conference can see the message through any one of the media outlets present to record the event. Hamlet arrives late, and we see that he carries his own camera. Ironically, Hamlet is more interested in recording the recorders, for when he first enters, he films the media rather than Claudius and Gertrude. By filming the media, he attempts to capture the whole picture—the truth—which, to him, is that

both Claudius and Gertrude feed off of the media's attention. Hamlet's decision as to whom to film is seen by Douglas Lanier as an attempt to turn "the technological apparatus of media culture back on itself in an effort to expose its complicity with corporate corruption" (174). The media, in its drive to cover those people who are most interesting to the public, are aware of, perhaps even encourage, the corruption of large corporations; corruption makes the news story all that more interesting to the viewers.

This is not the only instance of media accessing Claudius and Gertrude for the entertainment of society. After the press conference, Claudius and Gertrude entreat Hamlet "to remain [in New York], in the care and comfort of [their eyes]" (1.2.115-6). Their eyes, however, do not always seem to be watching, for when they are in the limelight, all else fades away. Before Hamlet has his encounter with the ghost of his father, he arrives at a red-carpet event with his mother and Claudius (one critic has argued that the event they are attending is Broadway's *The Lion King*, itself an appropriation of the Hamlet story). The media is there, and amid flash bulbs and microphones, the king and queen enter the event. Hamlet stops on the carpet to watch the media watch Claudius and Gertrude; almost none are interested in Hamlet himself.



Figure 1.1: The Red Carpet

Claudius and Gertrude repeatedly use the media to get the message out to the nation that they are happy and powerful, a constant warning to Fortinbras and others like him not to attempt to take over the Denmark Corporation. Hamlet, upset with the way the couple presents themselves to the world, turns and leaves, apparently unnoticed by either Claudius or his mother. It seems they have temporarily forgotten the reason they asked him to stay.

Robert N. Watson, commenting on Claudius's desire in the source text for Hamlet to put away his mourning attire, says, "Claudius's depredations [...] seek to disguise themselves as something orderly and acceptable, something controllable by a finite period of grievous memory" (205). This theory can be easily applied to Almereyda's film, for everything that Claudius does is orderly and acceptable, and he uses media to achieve this. When he is being viewed by the public through the lenses of the media, he presents the image of being composed. Both the scenes in which Claudius and Gertrude interact with the media have been appropriated from the source text by Almereyda in interesting ways; these subtitle differences help to make the film a postmodern reflection on *Hamlet*. In the source text, Claudius spreads the poison, the corruption, to the entire state through his language; as Hatchuel says, "misinformation is troped in the recurrent image of the ear. The symbolic ear of the Danish people has been intoxicated by Claudius's lie" (30). The people believe that all is well with the state when they hear that it is so from a messenger or from the king himself. Almereyda's Claudius, however, has to say very little. He uses the media to send out the visual image that all is well. This becomes even more noticeable when Gertrude and Claudius walk the red carpet. We, the audience of *Hamlet*, become the audience watching the red carpet event; the words that the king and queen speak to the press are unimportant, as is displayed by the absence of dialogue. What is important is their

image—the clothes they wear, how well they look—and we are expected, possibly conditioned, to see this as reflective of the health of the corporation as a whole.

Claudius is very aware that he and his wife are entertainment for the masses, as he makes a dramatic show of tearing the *USA Today* newspaper with Fortinbras's picture on the cover during the opening press conference; this image will in turn make the front page of *USA Today*. The knowledge of his entertainment value, however, comes back to haunt him when he plans to send Hamlet to England. As he rides in the limousine and talks on the car phone to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Claudius watches television. An image of a skeleton drinking coffee is followed by footage of President Clinton meeting with important people. These images situate Claudius within the outside world; the skeleton emphasizes that he will eventually die, while the footage of the president points to the fact that Claudius does not have all of the power. In fact, compared to President Clinton, Claudius's power is weak and irrelevant; he is not the head of the most powerful country and the free world, but simply of the Denmark Corporation. Claudius is pushed farther into realizing his own mortality by the squealing tires from the near-accident due to Hamlet's driving; in this production, the near accident and the images spur him to attempt confession. He is being forced to realize what he did; as Jess points out, "Claudius [covers the] TV monitor with his hand, indicating he reluctance to see, or to remember" (92). As the scene continues, his request for forgiveness for having committed the "foul murder" is backed by a shot of a volcano erupting, reflecting in image the disruption that his act has caused the entire corporation (3.3.52). Claudius thinks he controls the media, but media haunts him with his crime and its results.

Like Claudius and Gertrude, the Ghost of Hamlet Sr. uses media to his advantage, making his presence known through the security cameras of Elsinore Hotel. He is filmed in the

elevator using an above shot, and the picture is in black and white and of poor quality, the very opposite of the smooth and sleek image created by the media of Claudius and Gertrude. Horatio, Marcella, (Marcellus has become Horatio's girlfriend), and Bernardo, the security guard, approach the ghost, an event we see later in the film through flashback; this scene is significant because of where it takes place. The ghost and the security team meet in person in one of the service areas of the hotel; unlike the reflective surfaces of the public spaces of Elsinore, this private space shows the grungy underbelly of the hotel, filled with old mattresses, cleaning supplies, and exposed pipes. After Horatio asks the ghost to speak, the ghost disappears into a Pepsi vending machine. I will not go into the plethora of reasons offered by critics to explain why the Pepsi machine is used; I will, however, venture to supply one of my own. Like the other items in the space, such as the cleaning supplies, the Pepsi machine represents the people who occupy that space. The area is for the workers of the hotel—most probably the cleaning crew. The space is likely used as a break room, evidenced by the lockers for personal storage. Unlike Claudius, Gertrude, and the other upper class characters, whom we do not see drinking Pepsi, the workers would consume this drink on a regular basis due to the low cost of the soda. The company is looked upon favorably by the employees for providing easy access to the beverages. Yet the very fact that the machine is there suggests the omnipresence of corporate culture. The owners of the hotel have found another way to make money, taking it from the very people who work to keep the hotel in pristine condition; there is not a refrigerator for free drinks for the employees—they must buy the drinks themselves from a vending machine. The appearance of the ghost in the service hallway reminds the audience that there is another side to sleek corporate power; without the roughness of places such as the service hallway, the corporation could not run smoothly, if at all.

When Hamlet sees his father's ghost for the first time, however, the setting is not in the back halls of the hotel, but in his own apartment. The television in the background shows burning oil wells. The fire visually connects the words of the ghost to the topic he discusses: he is "for the day confined to fast in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in [his] days of nature / Are burnt and purged away" (1.5.12-4). Although the ghost explains that the horrors of purgatory are not meant to be heard by the living, these horrors might be suitable for the modern eye; the footage of the fire in the background indicates that in Hamlet's modern society, even the most horrific information is seen by everyone. Visual media images are everywhere in this film and its world. The burning oil wells are also the first incarnation of a repeated visual motif, connecting Hamlet to fire. This will come up again when Hamlet is walking down the "Action" aisle at Blockbuster while reciting some of the lines of the "To be or not to be" speech; on the monitors in the background are explosion scenes from *The Crow II: City of Angels* (a movie about revenge from beyond the grave). Ophelia will later burn a picture of Hamlet. This motif makes Hamlet the opposite of Ophelia, who is always connected to the element of water: the fountain that she waits by and drowns in, the fountain at the entrance to Hamlet's apartment, the liquid photographic solution.

Televisions playing in the background, taking the idea presented in words and turning it into images, are not the only way technology is used to relay a message or idea. Claudius and Laertes learn of Hamlet's return from England and Hamlet learns of Laertes's desire for a duel not through messenger but through fax. Reports from Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are delivered by speakerphone, and the order for Hamlet to be put to death in England is sent by computer rather than hand-written letter. These technologies emphasize the emotional distance between the message, the sender, and the receiver. For example, Hamlet does not have to take



the time to rewrite and seal the letter ordering the murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; instead, he simply has to type over the words of Claudius: Abbate points out that “this murder-at-a-distance is even easier for Almereyda’s Hamlet: for him, in fact, assignation is merely a matter of typing. And there is no question of failure: on computer, all handwriting is identical” (87). The loss of personalization of correspondence enhances Almereyda’s appropriation of *Hamlet*, further connecting Hamlet with the isolated postmodern individual. While technological advances, such as phone and fax, make communication easier, faster, and generally more convenient, the advances also remove any personal connection that face-to-face or hand-written communication could build. The characters in the movie lose some of their humanity, becoming part of the technology that they use.

Even with this technological separation between the characters, the very same technology makes it impossible ever to be alone. From the first minutes of the movie, we are overwhelmed by noise—the background music, the sounds of New York, the squeal of an internet modem coming to life, and most important, the ever ringing telephone. During Hamlet’s opening speech, his phone rings, cutting him off mid-sentence and stopping the upward movement of his voice and excitement. Later in the film, as Claudius is speaking to Laertes, the phone rings incessantly in the background; one of these calls brings the news of Ophelia’s drowning. Also, almost every time we see Hamlet, there is some form of digital media with him: either he is in his room with the television playing or he is carrying his handheld screen as he walks around—so much so that, according to Kenneth Rothwell, “soulless technology suffocates the prince, whose grouchiness and grungy sartorial style, echoing James Dean [almost literally, as James Dean makes an appearance in the film via video], has no existence independent of his array of gadgetry” (256).

Technology changes the way the ear, an image that appears frequently throughout Shakespeare's body of work, is seen in Almereyda's *Hamlet*. As Mark Robson points out, "the ear, unlike the eye, is always open, always ready to receive, and can only be closed with difficulty [...] the openness of the ear can be viewed as an asset to those who wish to persuade, but it can also be seen as a threat, since it may be penetrated for good or ill" (par. 14). Claudius kills Hamlet Sr. by putting poison in his ear, and then poisons the whole of Denmark by telling everyone that the king was killed by a bite from a serpent. The ear continues to play a significant role in Almereyda's film, but it is far surpassed by the image of the eyes. When Hamlet is watching his video footage, we are often given close-ups of his eyes (I will discuss this further in the next chapter). Ophelia imagines herself jumping into the swimming pool at Elsinore to escape the embarrassment of the exposed love letter, and once under the water, she does not cover her ears to block out the words of her father, who has allowed his own family to be corrupted; instead, she covers her eyes. When Polonius is shot while hiding in Gertrude's closet behind a mirrored door, he is shot by Hamlet in the eye—very fitting since it is partially his spying, his need to see and know all, that has caused him to hide in the closet in the first place. Burnett points out that the shooting of Polonius through the mirror is "the one occasion in *Hamlet* in which a surface shatters and is seen to be vulnerable" (52). Finally, Hamlet is able to change the directions for his murder in the laptop, putting his "friends" to death instead of himself, because Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have both closed their eyes and fallen asleep (one of them is even wearing an eye mask).

The movement from the ear to the eye continues in that Hamlet's world is structured by the screen and images, but seldom by language; the "words, words, words" of Shakespeare's play become Almereyda's "images, images, images." Hamlet's home movies rarely contain any

dialogue. If the videos do contain speaking, we hear a voiceover. Although Hamlet's television is always playing, rarely does it have sound; such is the case when he first speaks with the ghost of his father. Even when the sound is on, Hamlet completely ignores it: Almereyda, according to Robert Wood, "has systematically transformed his protagonist from a man obsessed with words to a man obsessed with the visual images of a world in which physical existence seems almost to evaporate before its own image" (par. 3). For example, as Hamlet gazes at a video of Ophelia, Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk, discusses what it means 'to be':

We have the word "to be," but what I propose is the word "to inter-be" inter-be. Because it's not possible to be alone, to be by yourself. You need other people in order to be. You need other beings in order to be. Not only do you need mother, father, but also uncle, brother, sister, society. But you also need sunshine, river, air, trees, birds, elephants, and so on. So it is impossible to be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with everyone and everything else. And therefore "to be" means "to inter-be."

This speech, so central to many of the questions posed by the play, could possibly have helped Hamlet in his quest for answers. Although it is clear that most of Hamlet's attention is directed towards the image of Ophelia, it may be possible that he gains something from the monk's speech, as the following scene shows Hamlet attempting to connect to Ophelia through a written love letter, only to be interrupted in her apartment by the appearance of her father. Not only can Hamlet (and many other characters in the film) not inter-be, as I will discuss below, but also he is oblivious to many of the most recognizable forms of life around him. The recording of Thich Nhat Hanh is visually appealing; a light coming from somewhere behind him enhances the colors of gold and blue and make him appear to glow with positive energy. In contrast, Hamlet prefers to watch the video of Ophelia, who, in the black and white graininess of the pixel video, with pale skin and darkly rimmed eyes, appears to be the very opposite of life.

Life also seems absent in the bar that Hamlet goes to with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. There is an eerie green glow, casting a very sickly color onto the people in the club. The

association of the color green with disease is deepened by the fact that no one in the club has very much life in them. Everyone appears to be wearing black. The people dancing are doing so individually and out of time with the music; with the exception of one or two people, those club-goers sitting on what appears to be a bench are not talking or even looking at each other. The isolation and disease of the technologically obsessed corporate world have so infiltrated the culture of Hamlet's peers that even social events are isolating. The club is not a place to gather and spend time with friends, but rather it is yet another place in which to be alone. The lack of communication between the clubbers is a reflection of the lack of communication between Hamlet and his college friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; try as they might, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot get Hamlet to tell them the reasons for his madness.

As seen in the bar scene, Almereyda's Hamlet has a very obvious problem interacting with other people, a condition enhanced by his obsession with the video screen. Instead of meeting Ophelia at the RCA Building fountain as planned, he chooses to be with her digital representation. The Ophelia he is comfortable with is the one captured in the screen, not the one of reality. She is not a real person to him; as Abbate points out, "Hamlet treats Ophelia as a thing, a shot and a frame—something he can cut and paste with his editing gadgets" (Abbate 85). The same can be said about Ophelia. As Laertes lectures her about her relationship with Hamlet, she stares at a picture of him, and after she and Hamlet end their relationship, she burns his picture. Even the way that Hamlet and Ophelia communicate with each other is based on the visual. There is very little dialogue between them, excluding the scene in which her father forces her to talk to Hamlet. When she does want to communicate with Hamlet, she does so through pictures—she plans the meeting at the fountain by drawing a fountain with the time written above it.

Rather than turn to his friends and family during difficult social situations, he turns away from them, which is largely due to his inability to trust anyone around him; when he turns away, he often uses technology to serve as a means to communicate. When Hamlet realizes that Ophelia is spying on him, he ends his face-to-face conversation with her and leaves the remainder of the “get thee to a nunnery” speech on her answering machine. After killing Polonius, he leaves his mother’s apartment abruptly and finishes his discussion with her on the telephone. In both instances, Hamlet seems to be losing control of the face-to-face conversation, allowing his passion and anger to overwhelm him. But by using the telephone, distancing himself from the situation and the person he is hurting, he regains power—his volume of speech steadies, his attitude becomes more commanding, his words more instructing. As Hodgdon points out:

In this intensely retinal, powerfully televisual world, saturated by empty images of late capitalism, relations between human beings are displaced into and conveyed by machines: communication is by telephone, answer-phone, speaker-phone, camera and cam-corder, video monitor, photograph, surveillance camera—sophisticated technologies of information and disinformation delivery, sources of paranoia in postmodern culture. (202)

By using media to stay in touch with both his digitally created memories of the past and those people around him in the present, Hamlet is actually losing touch with those around him and society as a whole. A perfect example of how awkward Hamlet is in personal situations occurs during the duel scene. Before Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup, she runs to Hamlet, asking him to wipe his brow. She does this in order to prevent Hamlet from drinking from the cup; of course he does not realize this and looks off to the side, as if frustrated with and embarrassed by her. After she drinks from the cup, Gertrude asks for him to let her wipe his face. This time, however, her desperation is evident both in her voice and facial expression. When she runs to him the second time, he tries unsuccessfully to push her away, obviously uncomfortable with this

public display of affection. She manages to hug him briefly, upon which he pushes her away and calls to Laertes. He is more comfortable behind the fencing mask and hooked up to the electronically controlled harness than he is when he embraces his mother. This scene of Gertrude's suicide emphasizes Hamlet's failure to respond emotionally to a human presence.

Almeryda's choice in changing the play-within-a-play to a film-within-a-film serves as another key indication not only of the impact of media on society but also of Hamlet's troubled relationships. It is clear in the language of the source text that Hamlet admires and respects the players, and he works with them to create *The Murder of Gonzago*:

HAMLET

Dost thou hear me, old friend? Can you play *The Murder of Gonzago*?

FIRST PLAYER

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

We'll ha 't tomorrow night. You could, for a need, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines which I would set down and insert in 't, could you not?

FIRST PLAYER

Ay, my lord. (2.2.537-44)

While Hamlet does have the players add some lines to the play, *The Murder of Gonzago* is the creation of someone else, brought to life not by Hamlet but by the players. Hamlet must work with and through the players to achieve his goal. However, in Almeryda's version, Hamlet's film is his sole creation; he works with no one to help him "catch the conscience of the King" (2.2.606). In the source text, Hamlet's interactions with the players and his passion for acting make him more human, more real, to the audience; the change is fitting for Almeryda as it increases the isolation in his postmodern adaptation. Also, *The Murder of Gonzago*, like *Hamlet* itself, would have reached Shakespeare's original audience and the on-stage audience through both the ears and the eyes; the dumb show that precedes the play targets the audience's eyes, while the play targets both the eyes and the ears. Hamlet's film, with only a soundtrack and no

dialogue whatsoever, merges the dumb show and the play into one. The lack of dialogue makes the film more of a dumb show, while the soundtrack replaces the dialogue and sets the emotional tone. While Almereyda's Hamlet might be the one who creates *The Mousetrap*, he does not use any of his own footage; instead, he takes clips from a variety of sources. Additionally, because of the way the film was created, it provokes everyone; "the video's style is [...] calculated to offend: pointedly crude, homemade, disjointed, campy, with its overwrought Tchaikovsky soundtrack, it roundly rejects the standards of bourgeois realism and high-gloss production" (Lanier 175). By using images from a range of video genres, including animation, pornography, the B-film, and possibly footage from his own home videos, Hamlet creates a medium that connects to the cultural memory of Claudius and Gertrude in different ways. Claudius is most upset over the animation of the poisoned ear and the taking of the crown, while Gertrude is visibly shaken by the porn scene (in which the actress resembles the queen).

The montage that is Hamlet's film *The Mousetrap* connects to the idea of the commonplace book of Renaissance England, creating a very interesting link to the source text. Thomas Dean discusses the work of Mary Thomas Crane in relation to the Shakespeare's references of the commonplace book in the source text: "as a gatherer, the writer [of a commonplace book] does not produce his own matter; instead he supplements his natural ability with fragments borrowed from existing literature. These fragments are in turn supplemented by acts of selection, rearrangement, and assimilation" (Quoted from Crane, in Deans 234). One example of commonplace book quotes in the source text, as Deans then goes on to point out, is how the advice given by Polonius to Laertes sounds as if it has been lifted from the pages of such a book. In Almereyda's *Hamlet*, these ideas can be carried to Hamlet's film. Like the composer of a commonplace book, Hamlet takes from various sources to create a unified whole. He

rearranges a group of unconnected clips from a variety of genres to make a single, cohesive piece. Due to the collaborative nature of the commonplace book (for any book, for that matter), each person who would read it would take something different from it. The same goes for Hamlet's movie; each character makes his or her own connections to the clips in the film. The difference between the commonplace book and the montage is that fragments of written works were placed into a commonplace book to aid in the owner's memory of them. Hamlet, on the other hand, does not pick the clips to aid in memory but rather to aid in his search for the truth.

The viewing of *The Mousetrap* as a film instead of a play changes the way Claudius interprets its message. The scene is often set as a viewing of the play by the entire court, such as in both Branagh and Zeffirelli's *Hamlets*, where the viewing audience is quite large. Almereyda chooses, however, to show the film to a very small audience, an audience which is made very aware that they are attending a film made by Hamlet, as announced both on the invitations and in the opening credits: the audience is not all of the members of the court, but a selected few. As critic Robert E. Wood concisely points out:

Hamlet displays this film in a private screening room, a setting fundamentally different [from] a public court where a king and queen are as much a spectacle as the performance. The *Mousetrap* is consequently experienced by Claudius not as public exposure, but as private nightmare. His call for light is all the more urgent because light serves both to exorcise nightmare and to negate the projected image. (par. 9)

In this small screening room, Claudius does not fear being exposed to the entire court, people who may or may not have been close to the king; instead, he fears being recognized for what he is by the small group of Hamlet's invitees, and probably more specifically Hamlet and the queen. Not only does the film convince Hamlet of Claudius's guilt, but also in this setting, there is no chance that the performance is only a coincidence. The film is entirely Hamlet's proclaimed



creation, with no intermediary actors; Claudius cannot doubt that Hamlet knows the true details of his father's death.

Not all of the characters are as consumed by media as Claudius and Hamlet; Polonius is one of the only characters in the film who does not use media as his most common form of communication. As in the source text, he chooses language as the means by which to get his point across, and this decision fails him miserably. His speeches are long-winded and awkward, mainly because he tries to sound all-knowing and important; his word choice and presentation backfire as few of the people he talks to pay him any attention. Almereyda makes the clash between the source text and his adaptation of it most clear through Polonius's interactions with the other characters. After the opening press conference, Claudius and Gertrude approach Laertes to discuss his return to France. When Polonius begins speaking, Gertrude turns away from him, rolling her eyes and laughing. Later, Polonius give Laertes advice on how to act while in France, only to have Laertes attempt to ignore him by packing. Ophelia reacts in much the same way; when Polonius confronts her with directions as to how to act around Hamlet, she ignores him by toying with a shadow box. Polonius finally grabs it from her, receiving attention only through physical aggression. Finally, when he brings the love letter to the king and queen, they both react to his "art" with looks of frustration and aggravation. The characters in the film are not accustomed to explanations given in lengthy personal conversation; Polonius fails mainly because he chooses a form of communication that no one in the film can relate to. His lack of technological awareness makes Polonius seem old-fashioned and irrelevant.

I have previously discussed the isolation that media can cause, but there are other consequences of living in a world that is saturated with technology. Even as media seems to be isolating people from each other, it simultaneously works to keep everyone more informed as to

what everyone else is doing. The buildings have constant video surveillance; the ghost is first seen through such technology. Polonius's asides during his "fishmonger" conversation with Hamlet are given looking into a surveillance camera, and we watch him on the black and white monitor, making it clear that in this world one can rarely be alone. Later, when Polonius and Claudius spy on Hamlet through Ophelia, they do not hide behind something and listen; instead, they strap a listening device to her. The element of recording connects all of these forms of spying together and causes a break from the source text. Surveillance cameras and listening devices are almost always hooked up to machines that record everything. Whereas, in the source text, there is no real record of the event, in Almereyda's version, there is. The paranoia that many members of our postmodern society feel knowing that there is a "big brother" who sees all is evident in this film; the characters seem always to be aware of the placement of surveillance equipment.

The architectural elements Almereyda chooses for the film also enhance the feeling that there are eyes and ears everywhere. Almost every shot is in a building that is in some way open to all who pass: the walls of Hamlet's and Polonius's apartments have floor to ceiling windows with no drapes, the office building where Claudius works is full of windows, the museum where Ophelia goes mad has a open center around which the floors spiral. Even the duel takes place on the roof, open to the elements. The floor plans of the apartments for the main characters replicate this. Both Hamlet and Gertrude and Claudius's rooms in the Elsinore Hotel are set up the same way: the door from the hallway opens into a sitting area, and behind a partial wall is the sleeping area. There are no doors and solid walls to separate the two spaces. Therefore, when Claudius meets with Laertes at Elsinore to discuss the death of Hamlet, he must be careful how loudly he speaks, for Gertrude is right around the corner in the sleeping area. Similarly,

Polonius's apartment is almost entirely glass and features a very open floor plan. When Ophelia and Laertes are discussing Hamlet, they view their father's approach from above through the glass that divides the two levels of the apartment. When Polonius follows Laertes down a floor to give him advice, Ophelia is able to watch (and listen and photograph) from the open loft above. These architectural elements make privacy impossible to find.

Hamlet is not the only character who struggles against post modern culture in the film; Ophelia is continuously pulled between opposing sides and coerced into a childlike state due to the lack of power she is given over her own life – she becomes a commodity to be passed around. After the opening press conference, she is motioned aside by Hamlet so they can talk. As soon as she walks away, her father brings her back to him. Hamlet follows, grabs her arm and pulls her away again. This time her brother goes to retrieve her. She is literally being torn between two opposing groups—both of which want power over her. She is forced to choose between her father (and brother) and Hamlet in a world where the only choice she can make is to do as her father orders. Another instance of the physical power that men try to exert over her occurs later in the film, when Laertes is leaving for France. He removes a clip from her hair: “the gesture might be sentimental (taking a keepsake) but seems patriarchal (an exercise in power)” (Jones 125). This gives us, from the opening of the film and throughout her other appearances, a very visual representation of her life, which is subsequently verbalized through the language of those around her.

Laertes, Hamlet, and Polonius all trap Ophelia in “double binds”—they give her two opposing directions or ideals at once, creating a situation where it is impossible for her to know what to do. Laertes is the least guilty of this; he lectures her on not giving in to Hamlet's desires, to which Ophelia responds

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep  
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,  
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,  
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,  
Whiles like a puffed and reckless libertine  
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,  
And recks not his own rede. (1.3.45-51)

Ophelia implies that her brother is doing the very activities that he warns her about; if these activities are so bad, then he should not participate in them either. Hamlet's double binds are much more to the point; when Ophelia returns the tokens Hamlet has given her, within two breaths (made even closer due to Almereyda's editing of the scene) he makes contradictory pronouncements:

HAMLET

I did love you once.

OPHELIA

Indeed, you made me believe so,

HAMLET

You should not have believed me. I loved you not. (3.1.116-20)

How can Ophelia possibly know which is true, whether he loved her or not. During the viewing of the mousetrap, Hamlet's double-binds become even more serious. As Anna Nardo points out, when Hamlet asks to lie his head in her lap, Ophelia "will be punished regardless of her answer, and she is punished for understanding his meaning" (193). Her father, however, is the most direct in his double orders to her. Upon learning that Laertes and Ophelia have talked in private, Polonius orders Ophelia to tell him what she and Laertes were discussing. Polonius desires to know everything; the corruption of corporate culture has infected and will ultimately destroy his family. After she tells him that she spoke with her brother about Hamlet, Polonius gives her his own advice. Even in the much cut-down and rearranged version of the text that Almereyda uses for his screenplay, the double binds are still clear. First, he instructs her to "tender [herself] more dearly," to "be something scatter of [her] maiden presence," and to "set [her] entreatments at a

higher rate / Than a command to parle”—in other words, she is to “play hard to get” and make Hamlet work a little harder to speak with her (1.3.108, 122, 123-4). The language of the source text fits perfectly into this scene; the words Polonius use to get the message across all center around the idea of money and currency, very fitting in the world of the corporation, a place where everything is about money. Polonius then contradicts his first set of instructions to Ophelia by telling her not to spend any more time with him:

I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth  
Have you so slander any moment leisure  
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.  
Look to 't, I charge you. (1.4.131-4)

Here Ophelia must decide whether what Polonius really wants is for her to make it more difficult, yet still possible, for Hamlet to be with her or if he wants her to cut off all ties with him. As Nardo points out, “in his repeated imagery of buying and selling, and in his later willingness to use his daughter as bait to catch Hamlet, Polonius becomes in truth what Hamlet calls him in jest—“a fishmonger,” a bawd. His language and actions implicitly convey to Ophelia the message that she should be a whore, while at the same time he explicitly warns her to remain pure” (192). While she does want to obey the wishes of her father, Ophelia does not know what to do, evidenced by the earlier line “I do not know, my lord, what I should think” (1.4.105). After Polonius’s words, Almereyda chooses to omit the line where Ophelia says that she will obey, further emphasizing that Ophelia, at this moment in the film, truly does not know what order it is that she should obey.

Ophelia’s apartment, although structurally very different from the living spaces of the other characters, works in many of the same ways as the glass apartments of Polonius, Hamlet, and Claudius and Gertrude and also serves as another form of the double bind. From the appearance of the apartment, one would think that, unlike Shakespeare’s Ophelia, Almereyda’s

Ophelia has independence. The apartment is not steel and glass; in fact, it is the very opposite. The door on the outside the building has graffiti on it and there is litter in the street; the paint on the inside is chipping away, revealing the plaster. The stairway is made of wood and there is only one small window, almost entirely covered by a shade. When considering the difference between the corporate high-rises and Ophelia's apartment, we see that the apartment connects Ophelia with nature, an association that is strained and incomplete due to the saturation of corporate culture throughout the urban setting. In addition to forging a weak bond between Ophelia and nature, her flat also associates her with femininity: the use of the space as a darkroom "creates a specifically modern association with water (a trope connected to the female body and bodily fluids)" (Jones 116). From the looks of Polonius's apartment and the fact that he is friends with the king and queen, it is obvious the family has money. Polonius could easily afford to pay Ophelia's rent on a much nicer place; it is probable, due to the condition of her apartment, that Ophelia is paying for it herself and this is all she could afford, making her even more independent. However, this appearance of independence is quickly broken, for Hamlet is able to enter the apartment without knocking, evidenced by the fact that she is surprised to see him. Her father is able to get in the same way, for he surprises both Hamlet and Ophelia. It seems that in order for this to happen, either both Hamlet and Polonius would have to have keys or Ophelia naively left the door open. Both scenarios show that she is not independent enough to survive on her own.

The scene in the Guggenheim Museum where Ophelia goes mad continues the themes of decay and visually covering up the corruption of the corporation. We first see Ophelia as she begins at the bottom of the spiraling walkway, looking over the edge to the above levels; this spiral mimics the red and white spiral on the box that she carries, the revolving doors of the

Elsinore Hotel used in the opening sequence, and the revolving drum of the washing machine that Hamlet uses to wash away the blood of Polonius, her father; these spirals all suggest her descent into madness. The low- and high-angle shots used in this scene, such as when we see the king and queen looking down or Ophelia looking up, create a feeling of having to look up to find the leaders of the corporation, placing them above everyone else. Ophelia is dressed in a long, black coat with a feathered collar (this image will be repeated in the hat that Gertrude wears to her funeral). When she approaches Gertrude, Gertrude takes her by the arm and leads her away from the people she was entertaining, motioning to Claudius and the security guard. When Claudius asks her, “How do you pretty lady?” Ophelia responds by saying, “Pray, let’s have no more words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this” (4.5.41, 46-7). Instead of continuing with a song as in the source text, Ophelia breaks into an ear-piercing scream, which results in everyone looking up over the edges of the spiral to see what is happening on the upper levels: according to Jones, “her success in drawing the attention to the corruption and injustice at the heart of the body politic (or corporation) is evidenced through a low-angle cut showing Ophelia above, reaching out to all levels below” (135). Claudius quickly covers her mouth, and Gertrude looks over the edge, trying to cover the incident with a smile. Both Claudius’s covering of Ophelia’s mouth and Gertrude’s weak smile are attempts to hide the decay of the corporation with the visual appearance of happiness. Gertrude, by her angry demeanor after Ophelia is taken away, makes it clear that this smooth façade is becoming harder and harder to maintain.

While the characters in the play are seldom alone but always lonely due to the technology of modern day New York, the impact of this sense of surveillance and isolation changed dramatically after September 11, 2001. In the article “Hamlet 9/11: Sound, Noise, and Fury in

Almereyda's *Hamlet*," Kim Fedderson and J. Michael Richardson look into how the significance of the setting of New York changed after the attacks on the World Trade Centers. Audiences now see the threat of spying and of attack from an outside source, as much more real; we become nervous as we watch Hamlet walk down the eerily empty streets of the city with the skyscrapers towering above him: As Fedderson and Richardson say, "after the attacks, the significance of the cityscape shifts. What has been a symbol of inviolable and unassailable triumph, an invulnerability buttressed by a previous failed attack is now the very emblem of transgression and violation. The landscape has become, despite the designs of the director, proleptic" (161). The paranoia felt by the characters in the film is felt by the audience in their everyday lives and becomes heightened while watching the film.

While the events of September 11, 2001, do change the intensity of the paranoia felt in the film, we must not forget that the paranoia was in the film prior to the attacks; we must also remember that it is in the source text. Just as the play's atmosphere of paranoia is translated in the film, so are other major themes from Shakespeare's play. Speakerphones, cameras, and surveillance equipment all help to enhance the feeling of isolation and paranoia. However, creating these feelings is not all that the technology does; technology in the film also plays an important role in the effectiveness of memory. In fact, it can be said that in this film, the characters' memories are much more degraded than in the source text as the repetition of images dulls the mind (and heart) to the past.



## CHAPTER 2: CREATING REMEMBRANCES

“Remember me”—no other words said by the ghost have been so turned over, so studied, as these. Critics have argued about the origin and meaning of the line, with attributions ranging from required religious practices to Renaissance mimetic devices. In many ways, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* itself has become a cultural memory, something that everyone knows but that no living person has actually experienced; the Shakespeare that we see today is not the Shakespeare of Renaissance England, and our *Hamlet* is undoubtedly much different than the *Hamlet* presented at the beginning of the seventeenth-century. Common and most often incorrect notions of Shakespeare’s theatre dominate what the general public thinks of both him and his works. Like us, Hamlet must face false memories if he wants to find the truth; in addition to this, the Hamlet of 2000 is plagued by all pervasive technology, which affects his ability to remember clearly. Almereyda certainly remembers the importance of memory to the play and uses technology to signify the problems of memory that Hamlet and the other characters must face.

In her article “‘Remember Me’: Technologies of Memory in Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet*,” Katherine Rowe looks into how the film handles the problems of memory, especially memory in a technology-driven world. In order to understand Almereyda’s technique, one must first have knowledge of Renaissance memory arts. Drawing from John Willis’s 1621 *The Art of Memory*, Rowe explains that memory was often facilitated through the use of representation and storage, writing and theater: “for Willis, writing and *mise-en-scene* are not just metaphors for cognitive activities but practical constraints on such activity” (40). Ideas or occurrences that one needed to remember were placed in the mental theater, hung on a mental wall, or written in mental tablets. While these are very different means of remembering, one of the constants is

size: the pictures and writing must all be of a size that is easily visible from a distance, and when items are too large to fit into a given space or too small to be visible, they must be resized.

One of the most striking aspects of Willis's work is the number of details that he puts into his memory arts. He begins by detailing the structure of the building one creates in which to house memories: "a building of the best Cane stone to stand before vs, the inside whereof is in length twelve yards, in bredth sixe yards, & in height seven yards, and the rooffe thereof flat" (Willis 2). This building has three walls for hanging memories and a stage for placing other memories on. There are a total of eighteen "Repositories," nine with one pillar and nine with two. The pillars are given a designated color and memories placed on the stage and surrounding walls must in some way correspond to that color. The work, when translated from Latin to English, became accessible to the common man and was seen as a tool designed to aid in the remembering of artificial memories—those memories which a man might use to impress others and gain social, political, or economical advancement. The key here is that such repositories were not for natural memories, such as memories of one's family and friends, which should not have to be forced upon the brain.

As Rowe points out, whether or not memory arts work becomes a problem in Shakespeare's play. Hamlet seems most concerned about this issue when he discusses his own memory tables:

...Remember thee?  
Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws and books, all forms, all pressures past  
That youth and observation copied there,  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!

O most pernicious woman!  
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain.  
My tables—meet it is I set it down  
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain. (1.5.96-106)

By saying that he will erase both natural and artificial memories and remember only the ghost's commandment, then abruptly moving to thoughts of his mother, Hamlet emphasizes how such a clean slate would be difficult to achieve. Also, Hamlet's reference to both the tables, books, and other forms of memory (such as the distracted globe, a possible reference to theatrical repositories like those presented by Willis) indicate that he may have used multiple memory arts to help him store the past: Rowe sees Hamlet as "groping through a variety of storage forms here, seeking the one that best serves the functions of sorting and reordering the matter of the past. Judging by the force of spontaneous recollections that follow [...] the attempt is at best a partial success" (43). But these tools are all ways of recording artificial memories; Hamlet's memories of his family should not be remembered this way since they are natural memories.

Why would the ghost bother telling Hamlet to remember him, when it seems such a ludicrous idea for one to forget his recently murdered father? As Stephen Greenblatt points out, "Hamlet's reiterated question precisely picks up on what seems to him the absurdity of the Ghost's injunction" (207). However, there is evidence from the text that perhaps the ghost had reason to remind Hamlet to remember: there is no evidence that when Hamlet does remember the past his remembrances are accurate and not clouded by his perception. In Hamlet's first soliloquy, spoken before his exchange with the ghost, he remembers both the recent and distant past:

But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two.  
So excellent a king, that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,

Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on, and yet within a month—  
Let me not think on 't; frailty, thy name is woman! (1.2.136-46)

Here, Hamlet presents the picture of a perfect and faultless king married to an ever-loving queen, memories which he wishes he had the power to erase. But are these memories accurate? There are many instances in the text that point to the possibility that they are false. First, we learn from Claudius and Gertrude that Hamlet has been away at school. This would not be considered uncommon, but it does severely lessen the amount of time that Hamlet would have actually been around his mother and father and reduces his ability to see them interact. Second, the speech itself emphasizes the limits of Hamlet's memory when he has trouble remembering how much time has elapsed since his father's passing and the subsequent wedding (something which will recur in his discussion with Ophelia in the Mousetrap scene). Lastly, and most importantly, these memories are broken to pieces by the ghost of his father, who paints a very different picture of himself and his queen: he explains in detail that he was killed not in a state of an excellent king, but rather "in the blossoms of [his] sin, / Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled, / No reckoning made, but sent to [his] account / With all [his] imperfections on [his] head" (1.5.77-80). Gertrude, not the virtuous wife, is presented as an adulteress who, although "seeming-virtuous," was won by Claudius through the use of trivial gifts and lust even before Hamlet Sr.'s death (1.5.47). These possible misconceptions by Hamlet emphasize the fact that the mind can only remember what one allows, what one has access to. While Hamlet may have seen his parents' relationship as stable, he only had limited access to them and may have purposefully distorted some memories. Also supporting the idea that Hamlet has problems with remembrances, Hamlet's response to the ghost's orders to "remember me" is to wipe away all other memories and only remember his "commandments," thereby already forgetting part of his

father, and, in essence, the ghost's commandments. Finally, there is the fact that the ghost must appear again later in the play to remind Hamlet to "leave [his mother] to heaven" and instead focus on revenge against Claudius (1.5.87).

Almereyda's *Hamlet* does not ignore the problems of memory; in fact, through the use of technology, the film brings these problems to the forefront. According to Rowe, both Baz Luhrmann and Almereyda "subscribe to the non-nostalgic notion of memory as a cognitive and social techné. Acts of memory, for them, serve as opportunities to assess the adequacy of different technologies in relation to present needs, not to past actualities" (43). In Almereyda's *Hamlet*, the technologies do not necessarily have to be cutting edge; Claudius uses a floppy disk to transmit the order for Hamlet's death when an email would have been faster, more accurate, and more in-tune with the world of 2000 (of course, it would have worked against the story rather than with it, creating a situation where Hamlet could not intervene). Likewise, neither Hamlet nor Ophelia use the latest digital equipment to capture images through photography and videography.

For Hamlet, of all the media available to him, video creates the closest link to the past. The movie begins with shots of the New York skyline and the Hotel Elsinore. Central to these shots is the use of chrome, glass, and light; everything is smooth, lit, and technologically very advanced. The film abruptly cuts to Hamlet, opening the movie with a soliloquy, and in "the ensuing sequence," as Hodgdon describes it, "Hamlet constructs himself, proposes 'character' through the image-repertoire of video—a more intimate, personal form of memory-making than cinema, hand-held, ever-ready" (200). It is clear that the image is a recorded one, but in contrast to the advanced architectural technology of New York, Hamlet's technology is much older. The images were filmed using a Pixelvision camera and are grainy, distorted, and out of focus. Also,

the movement of the shot seems to mimic that of a handheld camera, giving the viewer the impression that while this is to look like a soliloquy (with the camera on a tripod or other stable surface), it is only so in appearance; someone must have been on the other side of the camera. There are indications as to who this person(s) might be. The lines are taken from much later in the play, Act 2 Scene 2, when Hamlet is talking with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In the movie, this meeting takes place in a bar, where all three are drinking. Just before the scene cuts off, we see Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern toast not with beer bottles, from which they had been drinking, but with glasses—the same type of glass Hamlet waves in front of the camera during this opening sequence. If we are to think that at least part of the opening footage of Hamlet was filmed at the bar, an idea supported by Hamlet's waving of the drink in front of the camera and the possibility of a second cameraman, then the opening footage backing the lines of the "soliloquy" would actually have been filmed at a point much later in the chronology of the movie.

In this scene, and in others throughout the film, Hamlet's watching of his personal footage serves as a chance to look back at the past, much like a flashback in a movie. What is interesting is that the other images in the video montage also serve as a form of flashback. More precisely, they are flashbacks to the process of human evolution. The first image is that of a dinosaur skeleton and a human skeleton, making direct reference to biological evolution. Next is a small section of Giotto's Lamentation scene from the Arena Chapel followed by a sequence of fighter jets and explosions, pointing to the idea held by some that the human race has not evolved to a higher form, but rather has "fallen" from a people driven by the thirst for knowledge and arts to a people driven by the need for power.



Figure 2.1: Images from Hamlet's first video montage

Interjected into this sequence of explosions is a clip of a Godzilla-like cartoon creature. Considering that the montage follows Hamlet's discussion of how men can be god-like, the cartoon, combined with the clips of war, point to the current idea that humans are trying to play God by creating and destroying life. Rowe believes that "what Hamlet seeks in his video is not history but a connection between collective experience and his own loss" (47). Yet the images, while they are connected to the idea of loss, are even more related to the ideas of power and supremacy. Even the first clip of the skeletons supports the idea of the ever-powerful human overcoming the larger, yet somehow weaker, animal and surviving. And this view coincides more with Hamlet's language of the almost unlimited power of man, spoken during the montage: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!" (2.2.304-8).

Does looking at this sequence as a flashback affect issues of remembrance in the movie? Let us assume that this footage of Hamlet watching the soliloquy occurs at some point between his meeting with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the bar and the swordfight at the end of the movie. As he edits the film, then, he is editing his memory of the events and connecting his memory with the footage of human evolution. By starting the movie with memories, Almereyda places the act of memory center stage. The placement also brings into question the impact of these lines. If viewers are to see this as a soliloquy, then they are to impart to it the qualities of

one, viewing the soliloquy as a time when the character, since only he hears the speech, is opening up and revealing his innermost thoughts. If we view the opening sequence as a soliloquy, then we must consider the ideas presented as Hamlet's true thoughts. However, one cannot forget that the lines are taken from a scene where Hamlet is supposed to be feigning madness to throw off the attempts of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to uncover his real concerns. In Almereyda's version there is no doubt about whether Hamlet is truly mad or simply acting; according to Almereyda, he is most definitely acting: "We [the cast and crew] kind of dropped the ball on the madness issue. Hamlet wasn't mad, he was feigning madness" (par. 15). If we view the opening sequence as film from his time in the bar and not as soliloquy, his editing of the footage becomes more than just a viewing of his memory. Rather, he is watching himself as actor, as acting out the part of the madman. Memory and acting, then, blur into one.

This connection can be pursued further. Because of how Almereyda turns *The Mousetrap* into a movie created entirely by Hamlet rather than a play performed by an acting troupe, the interaction between Hamlet and the players is lost. We lose most of the wonderful soliloquy by Hamlet about the power of the actor, the ability to be moved by characters who are unfamiliar and distant, whereas he cannot even be moved by real life:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Could force his soul so to his own conceit  
That from her working all his visage waned,  
Tears in his eyes, [...]  
    and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing! For Hecuba!  
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? [...]  
    Yet I,  
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak  
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,  
And can say nothing— (2.2.551-68)



Almeryda makes up for this loss by connecting Hamlet's own acting skills with the power of creation from the very opening of the movie, as discussed above. These ideas are repeated when he is on the plane taking him to his supposed death, as the pictures he looks at continue the idea presented in the opening montage.



Figure 2.2: Photographs Hamlet views while traveling on plane.

Similar to the opening sequence, this scene also features human creation from a variety of times: the airplane of the current era (in which Hamlet flies to his death), the “Reclining Nude” by the eighteenth-century artist Watteau, and a piece of ancient carving. One difference in this sequence is that Hamlet looks at them in the order of most recent to most distant—the exact opposite of the previous sequence. Another is that here they are in focus and in color, whereas before the images were not. These differences may reflect the increasing clarity on both his family and his past, a clarity that Hamlet has achieved through his own role as actor. By acting out the role of madman, Hamlet finds out the truth behind his father's murder. As Almeryda points out, it is not only Hamlet who has had to act a part; “a lot of *Hamlet* is about people caught in roles, either as the King and the Queen playing out their state functions, or in contemporary terms, their corporate functions, or Polonius trying to be a father, Hamlet trying to be the good son, and Laertes mirroring that same struggle in a more crude way” (par. 27). The acting abilities of the characters, especially Claudius, make it possible for the truth about the death of Hamlet Sr. to remain hidden. At the same time, it is acting that allows Hamlet to uncover the truth.

Hamlet's second soliloquy also has deep connections to video editing and memory. Directly before he begins, we see Ophelia waiting at the fountain for their 3:30 meeting. We then enter Hamlet's apartment; the medium shot begins facing Hamlet, then slowly pans so that the viewer can see the entirety of his work area, cluttered with monitors, computers, editing hardware, books, and pictures. As the scene continues, the camera zooms in closer and closer to Hamlet, until we are left with only his eyes, creating the illusion that we are seeing inside of him. However, this zoom is spliced with the images that play on the monitors that surround him—images of his father and mother. As Hodgdon reads this scene, “scanning images of his father and mother into his computer editing deck, [Hamlet] attempts to reconstruct his ruptured family by reproducing and reinscribing bygone patterns that define and dominate his thought, deconstructing the very notion of the self” (201). Twice we are given shots of his hands working the editing equipment; in this scene he uses the equipment to view the movie at high speeds. Suddenly the home movie is no longer of his parents, but of Ophelia's face. The digital Ophelia is replaced by a close shot of Ophelia at the fountain, still waiting for Hamlet.

Like the video images from his first soliloquy, these images are grainy and distorted, often not centered on the screen and out of focus. Rowe looks at this soliloquy as driven by the editorial process: “There is no possibility of knowing the past in this film except through captured images processed by the self. [...] Hamlet forges an authentic connection to the past, if not a perfect one” (48). While I can agree that Hamlet is connecting with a past, the quality of that past must be called into question. First, the quality of the images points to the disease and distortion that runs through Denmark under the surface of love and happiness presented by Hamlet Sr. and Gertrude. Almereyda's Hamlet is the son of the leaders of one of the most powerful corporations, heir to an unlimited pool of funds, yet his equipment is old and outdated.

One must wonder if he chose such equipment to signify that things were not as they seemed. Using a pixel camera allows Hamlet to capture more truthfully his vision of the corruption of Denmark beneath the glossy surface; the poor image quality mimics the corruption of the state. The repeated viewing of these low-quality images, according to Owens, “only ends up further alienating him from the events and people they represent” (24). Second, all three people in the video—Hamlet Sr., Gertrude, and Ophelia—were aware that they were being filmed. One cannot overlook that part of what is recorded is their acting for the camera; they are presenting the image that they want to be stored in Hamlet’s memory. When Hamlet films his father smoking, an image the king might have not wanted remembered, Hamlet Sr. covers the camera in an attempt to stop the action from being captured and thus remembered. Carolyn Jess takes this idea one step further by connecting this action to the idea of the present: “Hamlet’s footage shows Old Hamlet shyly covering the camera lens with his hand, as if not wanting to be seen, conveying his desire to remain in the present. Representing an instrument of memory in its recording of events of the immediate and distant past for replay in the future, the camera is rejected by Old Hamlet in life” (92). Hamlet himself takes steps to insure that certain events are not remembered through media—during the opening press conference, as soon as Claudius and Gertrude openly announce their marriage and kiss, Hamlet turns off his camera and closes his hand-held editing screen.

As a technology-driven society, we have come to place truth values on images we see that are captured by media. When we make home movies, we do not question the reliability of what we see, thinking that what is captured on film is what actually occurred. This assumption presents problems for Hamlet’s home movies; putting aside issues of quality, Hamlet distorts the images in yet another mode—time. As the shots of his hands show, he is using editing

equipment to alter the speed of the movie, at times making the “actors” move more slowly, at times faster. This editing creates the stop-and-go feel of the film. It also emphasizes the fact that Hamlet sees what he wants to see and pushes everything else aside: “this quintessentially post modern Hamlet seems to operate under the assumption that by playing back these primal scenes, he can edit and, ultimately, master them, as he zooms in on particular frames—freezing and manipulating them in time and space” (qtd. in Hatchuel 100). Hamlet lingers on scenes he wants to remember and fast forwards over those that he is unconcerned with. So rather than film media being used as a tool to capture undiluted truth, it is used to interpret the past, and even in some ways, the present. W. B. Worthen points out, “Almeryda is more interested in the metaphorical, even epistemological force of video, the way it reflects, injects, and projects a subject and a world...Hamlet is often in dialogue with his recordings, a subject created by recorded performances as much as he creates them” (112). These videos create both the past that Hamlet so desires to remember but also create Hamlet’s character; the videos alter the way Hamlet thinks and feels.

In Shakespeare’s play, it is unclear if Hamlet ever succeeds in wiping the tablets of his memory clean. Almeryda’s Hamlet, however, does reach a turning point where he seems to be successful in clearing his memory. After Horatio receives the fax concerning the duel between Hamlet and Laertes, Hamlet looks towards the door and sees his father’s ghost. Of course, this appearance of the ghost is not from Shakespeare’s play, but rather it is an addition by Almeryda to serve as a final warning to Hamlet—now is the time to act. This final appearance reminds Hamlet of his promise; he originally told the ghost he would wipe all slates clean and remember only him. After a close shot of Claudius’ hands putting the poison into Hamlet’s drink, we see Hamlet fulfilling his promise. Just as Renaissance memory arts instructed people to hang

pictures they wished to remember on the walls of the repository, Hamlet has hung pictures and passages from books on the wall above his own repository: his editing table. Now, however, he must push all of his memories aside; before Horatio enters the apartment to bring Hamlet to the duel, we see Hamlet taking down photographs and pictures from books. The typed passages seen in previous scenes have also been taken down. Hamlet, by removing the pictures from the wall, is wiping his memory tablet clean in order to focus all of his energy on his task: remembering only that he must take action against the king.

But at the end of the duel scene, we see Hamlet's memory come flooding back to him. As he lies dying, recent events flood his mind's eye, a point made clear to the audience by the close shot of the iris of his eye. The images include him and Ophelia together, his father, his mother, his fight in the washroom, his discussions with Laertes—his story. When Hamlet instructs Horatio to go and tell his story, these images represent the events that he wants told. Yet these images are again those captured by his camera; they are grainy and distorted. Also, none of the images comes from further in the past, such as from his childhood. They are only from the very recent past. Hamlet's memory, then, is our own—like Hamlet, we can only remember those events in his life that have been told to us through the course of the play (or rather, movie). Even in death Hamlet does not see life as it is; he only sees it as the Pixel camera presents it, which is the only way he can see his life.

Hamlet is not the only character who uses media to try to capture the past; Ophelia uses still pictures to connect to both the present and the past. When we first see her, she is attempting, despite her brother's and father's disapproval, to set up a meeting place and time with Hamlet. But rather than ask him, or send him some form of written communication, she gives him a package with a picture of the meeting place drawn onto it—the fountain at the RCA building.

Later, when Laertes speaks to her about Hamlet's love, she gazes at a picture, most likely taken by her, of Hamlet in what appears to be a closet. In the same scene, as Laertes packs and Polonius lectures him, Ophelia records their last moments together with her camera from the loft; she does not simply take one picture, but rather she takes multiple ones, not wanting to miss the perfect shot or to lose a single moment to forgetfulness.

When Ophelia is in her apartment developing film, we see how closely her obsession with still shots follows that of Hamlet's with video. Ophelia surrounds herself with her photographs; they hang in the kitchen and throughout the living area. Some of the pictures are even of herself; like Hamlet, she is never alone, allowing others to record her with her camera for her own viewing pleasure. After Hamlet rejects her because of her part in the attempts to spy on him, Ophelia is shown burning the photographs of him. Just as Hamlet wipes his slate clean by removing the pictures off the wall, so too does Ophelia; in burning her pictures, Ophelia tries to wipe her own memory clean.

The use of photography by Almereyda's Ophelia directly connects to the overall image we have of her in this film; she is portrayed as being stuck, perhaps even forced, into an eternal pre-pubescent state. Physically she often reflects youth. Her wardrobe is not sophisticated – baggy pants, large jackets, and tennis shoes – her hair is always in pigtails or buns, never let down. Her body posture is that of someone who has not yet grown up; she is often chewing gum and rolling her eyes, and she rides a bike with a front basket. While Laertes confronts her about Hamlet, her “impatient fidgeting and pacing indicate” to Fedderson and Richardson “that she clearly does not want the unsolicited and somewhat condescending advice” (154). And Burnett points out that during this scene, “the visual association of Ophelia with a set of small figures on display in her father's apartment” enhances the theme of childhood (55). Her father helps to keep

her in this childish state. When he talks to her about her relationship with Hamlet, he ties her shoe. Later, he brings her helium balloons and what appears to be a package from a bakery, as if he were attending the celebration of a small child. One of the “remembrances” that Ophelia returns to Hamlet is a plastic rubber ducky. There are even children in Halloween costumes running through the graveyard during her funeral. In the source text, Gertrude and Ophelia are the only women in the play, a fact which creates a bond between them. This bond is enhanced by the monologue given by Gertrude when reporting Ophelia’s death to Laertes. Almereyda chooses to cut this speech, and this deletion, combined with the difference in levels of sophistication of the two women, prevents any connection between Ophelia and Gertrude. Ophelia has no maternal figure to look up to, and her father wishes to keep her forever a child. Ophelia’s use of photographs enhances the representation of arrested development. She wishes to stop time at the moment of childhood. Unlike Hamlet, she does not seek truth in the moving image; she freezes the fluidity of time in an image, as she has been stunted.

There are, however, indications that on some level Ophelia rebels against her childlike status. For example, she is never seen without the color red, either as part of her clothing or as part of the scenery around her. The use of red, often associated with passion, conflicts with the impression that she is entirely childlike. Ophelia’s desire to have nature in her life and her desire to fight her childlike oppression are shown when she toys with the diorama of a path in the woods; her father, however, rips the box out of her hands. Another instance of the connection between nature and Ophelia occurs in Ophelia’s flower scene. After her father is killed, Ophelia goes mad; in Almereyda’s production, she is holding what appear to be pictures of flowers and other plant life, such as trees. Maria Jones points out that traditionally Ophelia is presented as one who “brings what is outside into the body politic” (115). But in New York, the outside is as

concrete as the inside; Ophelia must rely on technology to create an outside for her to carry. The pictures represent her desire to have time stand still; photographs of flowers do not fade and die as real flowers do, as her father did: the photographs are “a chilling deflection of the organic world of life and death” (Wood). But she gives these flowers away, attempting to place the frozen world of the child behind her. She is forced to deal with her father’s death as an adult; the pressure of this is too much, and she goes mad.

The greatest difference in this scene from the original text is the way the lines are arranged. In Almereyda’s script, the lines of the exchange between Laertes and Ophelia concerning remembrances are as follows:

LAERTES

O rose of May!  
Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!  
Hadst thou thy wits and didst persuade revenge,  
It could not move thus.  
Is it possible an old maid’s wits  
Should be as mortal as an old man’s life?

OPHELIA

There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrances;  
I pray you, love, remember.

This is a much shorter and rearranged version of the original, and the placement of the lines changes the gravity of Ophelia’s desire for her brother to remember. In this version, directly before she mentions remembrances, Laertes comments on her madness being the ultimate persuasion for revenge. By cutting out the song Ophelia sings in the source text, Almereyda emphasizes the idea of remembrance. Ophelia’s lines become for Laertes what the ghost’s lines were for Hamlet—a command to remember and revenge.

In many productions of Hamlet, both on stage and screen, Ophelia is connected throughout with flowers. In some productions, this connection goes so far as having her wear floral-print clothing and having her room decorated with floral wallpaper. When producers



choose to do this, Ophelia is inextricably connected with the earth. The drowning as presented by Gertrude in the source text makes this connection even more clear; while hanging floral wreaths in a willow, Ophelia falls to her death in a muddy lake and drowns. Almereyda's Ophelia, however, must sacrifice all of her connections to nature due to the conditions of New York; she cannot have real flowers, so she has pictures. Even her lake is transformed into something unnatural and man-made; she drowns in a chrome water fountain and the description given by Gertrude is cut.

Ophelia's funeral is one the few scenes that takes place outdoors, and it is the only one that is removed from the city. Just as her apartment connects her to nature yet is dirty and dilapidated, so too is the nature of the graveyard. The leaves are falling from the trees, covering the ground in brown rather than green and starkly contrasting with the fake green turf that edges the opening of Ophelia's grave and the flowers on the two standing arrangements (both of which, interestingly enough, are artificial, overly perfect, man-made representations of nature). The mausoleums shown when Hamlet first arrives are cracked and covered in weeds, and none of the tombstones where Ophelia is placed appears new. This worn graveyard will replace her apartment, both serving as a refuge against the cold chrome and glass of New York's high-rises. Ophelia battles against her family and her environment in order to constitute and hold on to memories; even though she loses this battle, in death she finds the nature she missed during her life.

Hamlet and Ophelia are not the only characters in Almereyda's *Hamlet* that must confront their memory. Gertrude must also face what happens when a distorted memory is made clear, and to understand how Almereyda accomplished realization, we must first look at Shakespeare's play. In the source text, there is no direct evidence that Gertrude did not know

about Claudius' plan for murder, yet many directors stage the closet scene in such a way as to remove implication that she was aware of how her first husband died. Almercyda makes the directorial decision to follow tradition by removing any ambiguity. It is clear from Gertrude's tone and body language in the scene, set in the bedroom section of her apartment, that she was unaware of the plot to kill Hamlet Sr., especially when she says, "Kill a king?" From this point forward, she becomes more aware of the actions of others around her and believes what Hamlet has said about the murder. By the time we next see Gertrude, as she and Claudius drop Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern off at the airport, it is clear that she no longer has trust in Claudius. After she drunkenly stumbles back to the car, Claudius puts his arm around her; she follows the movement of his hand with a look of disbelief and horror, for she knows that she is letting a murderer be with her—but she must follow Hamlet's directions to act as she always has. When she is entertaining at the museum, she continues to play the part as her laughter covers her inner feelings, which are made available to the viewer through voiceover. Almercyda treats both Gertrude and Hamlet with the same loss and gain of memory. Just as Hamlet is forced to remove all remembrances of a happy childhood and think only of an act he did not see firsthand, so too must Gertrude push aside loving thoughts for Claudius and think only of what he did to Hamlet Sr.

Frequently, productions use alcohol to signify the corruption of the court, especially the corruption of Claudius and Gertrude. Almercyda chooses to follow this tradition; however, in this production, Gertrude does not fall into a completely drunken stupor in order to block out the realization that Claudius killed her husband. Instead, Almercyda's Gertrude becomes more aware, more watchful, than others around her. For example, Almercyda chooses to make Gertrude aware that the cup of wine at the duel is poisoned. After Hamlet's first hit, Claudius

offers the glass to Hamlet to drink. Hamlet refuses, and Claudius sets the glass down. By using a close shot of Gertrude's face, centered on her eyes, which move rapidly back and forth in the motion of recognition, Almereyda lets the audience know that Gertrude is aware of Claudius' plan. Once Hamlet has made another hit, Claudius tries again to get him to drink. Gertrude quickly knocks the glass away, and then, with a look of testing determination, drinks from the glass, a directorial decision made by Almereyda that follows the one made by Olivier. She knows that should Claudius react, then the glass is poisoned; Claudius, of course, motions for her not to drink, confirming both her fears and thoughts about the murder of her first husband.

In many of the instances described above, Almereyda does not stray very far from the source text, such as the way Gertrude comes to realize that her husband was murdered. However, one aspect of the way that Almereyda treats memory that is very different from the concept of memory that Shakespeare understood is that he gives all of the characters the ability to see themselves in motion. Shakespeare's audience did not have cameras or other ways of "capturing" the likeness of a person, place, or situation; paintings and mirrors (not to be confused with modern mirrors, as mirrors from the early modern period contained more distortion) provided the only glimpses of one's image. Depending on quality of either the painter or the glass, both could be very expensive—a luxury afforded to only the upper class. Even then, the very wealthy did not have a troop of painters following them around, capturing their every move; the brain had to work to remember events. In Almereyda's *Hamlet*, however, the characters are able to watch themselves and even, as in the case of Hamlet, critique themselves through the use of modern media. They are able to watch as they interact with others.

Most productions that include the full text of the closet scene have Hamlet compare a miniature of Hamlet Sr., often worn around Hamlet's neck, to a miniature of Claudius, worn

around Gertrude's. The miniature was often worn (or displayed) as a way to remember someone, and in Shakespeare's time, the upper class often had miniatures painted for special occasions such as a wedding. This is an important scene, as Hamlet forces his mother to remember his father and compare him to the man with whom she is now married. Interestingly enough, Almereyda chooses to cut these very significant lines from his version of the play. However, considering the context, setting, and modern beliefs concerning memory, his choice was well made. Drawing from Freud, Nouri Ganna argues that while memory might help a person get over his loss, it can have negative side effects:

remembering might technically help us "come to terms" with our painful memories as much as it can go awry—in the direction of compulsive repeating and /or melancholia [...] a work of mourning predicated on an unstinting—ultimately, plural and repetitive—effort at remembering tends to be paradoxically debilitated and flattened by too much thought attended to the lost (person, object, idea) and becomes therefore burdensome, mechanical, and dull before it freezes gradually into indifference. (pars. 4-7)

If viewing media (either video or still photograph) is in Almereyda's version of the play memory, as I have argued above, then looking on images of her past and present husband would serve no purpose for Gertrude—she sees these images everyday. In the opening press conference, there is a very large, very prominent picture of Hamlet Sr. hanging on the wall, directly above where Hamlet stands. It is likely that such pictures are not uncommon throughout the office complex. Pictures of Claudius are also everywhere, from the television to the covers of newspapers. In the modern environment of New York, Gertrude does not need to look on the images of both her late and current husbands to remember; in fact, it is probable that frequently seeing images of him has dulled her to her loss. This theory can also be applied to Hamlet; the ghost has to keep reminding him to revenge the murder, but the obsessive viewing of his home movies keeps getting in the way.

The ability to repeatedly view an event, whether still or moving, may be overwhelming for Hamlet and Ophelia, as neither chooses to use the most modern of technology. Ophelia bases her memory on still pictures, and while they are visually accurate, they are only snapshots of one second. Her choice of medium by which to capture the past encourages her (and her family's) desire for her to remain innocent; like a young child, she wishes to freeze time and to hold onto individual seconds of her life. Hamlet, although his choice of media captures the movement of the characters, also avoids perfect representation by using an outdated camera that presents a grainy and distorted visual; in many ways, this distorted image shows the disease and corruption of the Denmark Corporation concealed by the glossy images captured by the advanced cameras of the ever-present television media, and at the same time allows Hamlet to make an attempt at creating a happy past. These choices in medium are deliberate—they are used because both Hamlet and Ophelia, possibly subconsciously, do not want to see the truth. Even with every possible outlet available to them, Hamlet and Ophelia cannot, either through their minds or their media, capture the past.

## CONCLUSION

The movie ends with a newscast reporting on the events that led to the appointment of Fortinbras as the new head of the Denmark Corporation; the anchor uses the lines of three different characters from the source text. Unlike Olivier and Zeffirelli, who completely remove Fortinbras from their appropriations, Almereyda chooses to retain part of Fortinbras's story. Even though Fortinbras remains in the film, his appearances are never in person; we see him only through the eye of the media. Fortinbras appears in the movie a total of three times—once on the cover of a newspaper and twice as the topic of a televised news story. Burnett presents a concise explanation of his non-presence: “the absence of Fortinbras notwithstanding, he still survives in *Hamlet* in television inserts of price indexes and newspaper headlines; as a disembodied sign of corporate materialism, he is excellently qualified to be Claudius's successor. Ultimately, then, the New York landmark embodies the slick transition from one order to another” (64). We see Fortinbras the same way that the rest of the world saw Claudius. By presenting Fortinbras to us only through the media, Almereyda creates a fitting replacement for Claudius in a world saturated with technology. The closing newscast then fades to a black screen with the words “from the play by William Shakespeare.” After this screen is a short shot of the teleprompter used in the newscast; the ending lines are just rolling off the screen.

But what becomes of our relationship with Hamlet, both the character and the play? I would like to take a moment to discuss an issue pointed out by Rowe. Early on in her essay she brings up the issue of the non-cinematic quality of Almereyda's *Hamlet*. She points out that “most readers of this essay will have watched the film—if they have at all—on VHS or DVD, forms that begin to simulate something like a print-based experience that allows for non-linear reading, replay, and even (in the case of DVD) delivers the text in chapters” (39). Many other

critics and theorist have brought up the same concerns about the small screen. Viewing the play as a film, either in the cinema or on the television, does not replicate the experience of viewing the play in the theater. Film tends, in most cases, to deliver a much more fragmented experience than a stage presentation.

What is lacking in Rowe's description of how people watch media is the new surge of having personal computers, laptops and desktops alike, equipped with a DVD player. Not only can we watch the text in a non-linear fashion, but we can move quickly from the film to the page of our text, our paper. By watching the film in this way—fast-forwarding, rewinding, jumping through scenes, repeating scenes—we become Hamlet. His digital editing station is our keyboard and mouse; his search for the truth about his family is our search for the truth behind the film and ultimately Shakespeare's play. As the repetition of key scenes of his life proves destructive for him, so too might these scenes be destructive for us in that we lose the larger picture of the film as a whole; ironically, our attempt at reworking our cultural past that is bound up with the play may be hindered by our use of the advanced features of DVD technology.

Why is any of this important? Almereyda is neither the first nor the last to film *Hamlet*, neither the first nor the last to change the setting, delivery, and source text. Even Branagh's four-hour epic all-inclusive *Hamlet* strays from the source text when he chooses to make certain key decisions for the viewer, such as showing Ophelia and Hamlet in bed together. One key reason Almereyda's film is important is simply because it exists. Almereyda's directorial decisions, including but not limited to the content of the screenplay, the setting, and the casting, allows the viewer to see *Hamlet* in the new millennium. While Olivier's *Hamlet* is created for the post-Freud era and Zeffirelli thoroughly sexualizes his *Hamlet* through the casting and the adaptation of the source text, Almereyda's film gives viewers and critics alike a postmodern

appropriation of *Hamlet*, an appropriation that, through Shakespeare's play, points out and confronts our own fears of technology, relationships, and memory.



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