

## **HAMLET ON DIFFERENT SCREENS**

FARKLI EKLANLARDA *HAMLET*

**Cansu GÜRCÜ<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

This study discusses Shakespeare's questions and contradictions in *Hamlet*. *Hamlet*, the secrecy of which is agreed by everybody, gains its reputation by the characteristics of incomprehensibility and mystification. Shakespeare's intriguing play, *Hamlet* is such an excellent work that this eternal play can be adapted to the cinema many times owing to the unanswered questions that each character raises. In this study, three cinematic adaptations are concerned. Each adaptation answers the questions and tries to solve the puzzle in different ways. Naturally, the masterpiece has different tastes in the three adaptations. Each adaptation answers the questions and tries to solve the puzzle in different ways. The purpose of this study is to differentiate between the three cinematic adaptations on account of the main character, Hamlet; the two female characters, Gertrude and Ophelia; the two male characters, Claudius and King Hamlet; and the scene of the soliloquy "To be or not to be". This study is an evidence of Shakespeare's contradictions and questions in his works. By analysing and criticizing the three cinematic adaptations, it is proved that Shakespeare's works are timeless and immortal because they are open to interpretation. The *Hamlet* film versions indicate that if thousands of directors adapted *Hamlet*, they would all be disqualified for adapting enigmatic *Hamlet*.

**Keywords:** Hamlet, Gertrude and Ophelia, Claudius and King Hamlet, "To be or not to be", cinematic adaptations

### **Özet**

Bu çalışma Shakespeare'in *Hamlet* adlı eserinde yer alan bilinmezlik ve çelişkileri tartışmaktadır. Gizemi herkesçe kabul edilen *Hamlet* ününü sır dolu ve muğlak olmasından alır. Shakespeare'in merak uyandıran bu oyunu öyle muhteşem bir eserdir ki her bir karakterin neden olduğu cevapsız sorularla sinemaya pek çok kez uyarlanabilir. Bu çalışmada üç sinema uyarlaması ele alınmaktadır. Her uyarlama farklı şekillerde soruları cevaplamakta ve bulmacayı çözmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, ana karakter Hamlet, iki kadın karakter Gertrude ve Ophelia, iki erkek karakter Claudius ve Kral Hamlet ve bir de "Olmak ya da olmamak" tiradının çekildiği sahneler temel alınarak üç sinema uyarlaması arasındaki ayırımı gözetmektir. Bu çalışma Shakespeare'in eserlerinde var olan çelişkilerin ve kuşkuların kanıtı niteliğindedir. Üç sinema uyarlaması çözümlenerek ve eleştirilerek, Shakespeare'in eserlerinin daima yoruma açık olmalarından ötürü belli bir çağa ait olmadığı kanıtlanmaktadır. Bu sinema uyarlamaları, *Hamlet*'in binlerce kez çekilse dahi, muammasının çözülmesinde yetersiz kalacağını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Hamlet, Gertrude ve Ophelia, Claudius ve Kral Hamlet, "Olmak ya da olmamak", sinema uyarlamaları

<sup>1</sup> Arş. Gör. Atatürk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı

## INTRODUCTION

### Background Information

English literature has turned into an abundant field through years. This field yielded various novels, poems, dramas, short stories and so forth. Numerous farmers cultivated it; however, no one could be as excellent as Shakespeare, who was an English playwright and poet. Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 and died in 1616 (Wikipedia). He produced a vast number of works of art. He was the great farmer whose seeds all bore fruit. One of these unique seeds was *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* has been the most popular and well known play of Shakespeare since it took place on the stage. It is a great example of drama as a versatile diversion. *Hamlet* is privileged by the ghost scene, the play-within-the-play scene and the soliloquies. Shakespeare uses both tragedy and comedy together in this play. Death not only scares but also entertains; that is, each concept gains meaning according to the social and universal criteria. *Hamlet* is such a magnetic mystery that it bears undiscovered secrets in all its sentences.

### Statement of the Problem

Shakespeare's masterpiece, *Hamlet* leaves many question marks. The main character, Hamlet is the humankind who both suffers and makes people suffer. His lover, Ophelia is not only innocent and sweet but also the most static and one-dimensional character. His mother, Gertrude causes uncertainty; she is the dark and ambiguous character. Hamlet's uncle and stepfather, Claudius is the major antagonist in the play. As for the King Hamlet's ghost, the question of what the ghost is or where it comes from is never absolutely resolved. These characters are all enigmatic and raise questions. There are some cinematic adaptations of *Hamlet* in which different actors and actresses portray these main characters. In this study, three cinematic adaptations are to be concerned. Each adaptation answers the questions and tries to solve the puzzle in different ways. Naturally, the masterpiece has different tastes in the three adaptations.

### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to differentiate between the three cinematic adaptations on account of the main character, Hamlet; the two female characters, Gertrude and Ophelia; the two male characters, Claudius and King Hamlet; and the scene of the soliloquy "To be or not to be".

In each cinematic adaptation, the following questions are to be answered:

- 1) How is the protagonist, Hamlet portrayed?
- 2) How are the other main characters reflected by the actors and actresses?
- 3) Where is the soliloquy "To be or not to be" shot? How are the leading actors' performances during this scene?
- 4) In what aspects do the directors of the three adaptations contrast with one another?

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, *Hamlet* text version and its three cinematic adaptations are to be the primary instruments. To introduce these three films, they are Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990) and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000). First of all, the literary books and articles upon *Hamlet* are to be searched and read by the researcher of this study. Next, each main character in the text version is to be analysed. Further, the actors and actresses in the film versions are to be criticized and compared with one another. Lastly, the most important scene in the play, "To be or not be" is to be observed in terms of the place, the actor's performance and so on.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Shakespeare and *Hamlet*

Shakespeare has ever been the most excellent master of English literature. Eliot introduces Shakespeare as follows:

We do not understand Shakespeare from a single reading, and certainly not from a single play. There is a relation between the various plays of Shakespeare, taken in order; and it is a work of years to venture even one individual interpretation of the pattern in Shakespeare's carpet. (qtd. in Knights 2)

*Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most labyrinthine and intriguing script. "The play is puzzling and disquieting as is none of the others", remarks Eliot (par. 4). *Hamlet* is the longest of all his plays and presumably the one on which Shakespeare spent most pains; however, it is obvious that he left in the play unnecessary and contradictory scenes (Eliot, par. 4). "On leaving a theatre and being asked what was most remarkable in a performance of *Hamlet*, most people will be likely to speak about one person in the play", states Brown (1). It can be deduced that the play, *Hamlet* revolves the character, Hamlet basically.

The primary problem is the play *Hamlet*; and the character, Hamlet is only secondary (Eliot, par. 1). The reason why the play *Hamlet* keeps its allurements in the audience for ages is the complexity in its simplicity. It is a tragedy; nonetheless, this tragedy sometimes converts into a comedy. While the ghost scene attracts the audience's attention, the soliloquies make them enter melancholy. It is a maze in itself, which has no way out. Eliot interprets Shakespeare's puzzle by stating that "we should have to understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself" (par. 7). As for the protagonist, Hamlet, his characteristic features cannot be described in words. He is like an unsolvable riddle which puzzles the humanity. Jenkins describes Shakespeare's Hamlet in these sentences: "What Shakespeare does is to take us into Hamlet's mind, to intellectualize the character, and, by doing so, transform it. But many of the ideas he gives Hamlet to express belong to the common intellectual currency of his age" (107). The other main characters are almost as enigmatic as Hamlet. To compare the enigmatic aspects of the main characters, it is obvious that Ophelia is the most static and the least enigmatic character. Jenkins explains Ophelia's role with this sentence: "The essential of her story is that she is the woman Hamlet might have married and did not" (149). It is no wonder that such a unique work appears in the silver screen. All the characters from the most enigmatic to the least enigmatic are interpreted distinctively by each director.

### The Main Character: Hamlet

The protagonist, Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark. He is an enigma in many respects. Both life and love which are bound for the disintegration of the grave are branded on Hamlet's mind (Knight 1). An inexpressible emotion dominates Hamlet; his bafflement to his feelings is in fact a prolongation of his creator, Shakespeare due to his artistic problems (Eliot, par. 6). Shakespeare gives Hamlet "an alter ego, a familiar spirit" (Connolly 1: 30). Crawford denotes that Hamlet has the habit of silence, in other words, a habitual secrecy and even mentions his suspicions to himself and that his soliloquies fail to reach his inner thoughts (par. 2). Hamlet's mind writhes in anguish and longs for death as an escape (Wilson 43).

Hamlet's enigma raises the question whether he is insane or not. In response to the contradictory views that Hamlet is insane and that he is pretending to be so, Davie is

of opinion that he is both, owing to his being in the Ganser state<sup>2</sup> (449). Eliot defines Hamlet's madness in the following sentences:

... it is less than madness and more than feigned. The levity of Hamlet, his repetition of phrase, his puns, are not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation, but a form of emotional relief. In the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion which he cannot express in art. (par. 7)

### **Two Female Characters: Gertrude and Ophelia**

Gertrude is the queen of Denmark and Prince Hamlet's mother. She is central to the action of the play. According to Mabillard, Gertrude is the antithesis of her son; that is to say, Hamlet is a scholar who searches for elusive answers about life whereas Gertrude thinks only about her body and external pleasures ("Gertrude" par. 1). Shakespeare's is a play which deals with the influence of a mother's guilt upon her son (Eliot, par. 3). His mother is a criminal who has committed incest, which is an important business (Wilson 39). Hamlet's disgust occasioned by his mother is such a strong emotion that it envelops and exceeds Gertrude (Eliot, par. 6). Furthermore, Eliot alleges "Her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing" (par. 6). In short, Gertrude causes uncertainty.

Who, reading *Hamlet* for the first time, is not disappointed in Hamlet's letter to Ophelia? Who, reading it for the twentieth time, does not retain something of that disappointment, if over the years his mind has not capitulated to the commentators? (Goddard 16: 403)

Ophelia is the daughter of Lord Chamberlain and Hamlet's lover. In her article "Ophelia", Mabillard describes Ophelia as the most static and one-dimensional character in *Hamlet* (par. 1). "Though she is neglected in criticism, Ophelia is probably the most frequently illustrated and cited of Shakespeare's heroines" (Showalter, par. 1). In the words of Dr. Johnson "The mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness" (qtd. in Wagner 14: 94). Ophelia serves two preliminary purposes in her brilliant role; she provides a convenient hinge for Hamlet's analytic scenes and emotional impact for the audience (Wagner 94). In character, Ophelia is a simple figure who is sweet and poor (Wagner 94). However, she suffers from emotional pain of her love for Hamlet. Her desperation drives her crazy. Nosworthy remarks that Ophelia's death is presented as accidental (345). He narrates her death with these sentences: "She tried to climb a tree, the branch snapped, she fell into the brook, was incapable of saving herself, and was consequently drowned" (345).

### **Two Male Characters: Claudius and King Hamlet**

Claudius is the King of Denmark and younger brother of the dead King. He is the major antagonist in the play. In her article "Introduction to Claudius", Mabillard states that Claudius primary role in the play is to expose Hamlet's bafflement and to make him melancholic (par. 1). She also asserts, "While his qualities are not as thoroughly explored as Hamlet's, Shakespeare crafts a whole human being out of the treacherous, usurping King of Denmark" (par. 1). It is obvious that he is not a static character. A central conflict in the play is between Hamlet and his uncle, Claudius: the conflict between Claudius' ambition to be King of Denmark and Hamlet's desire for revenge (Picard et al. 7). Moreover, one of the most bewildering acts in the play takes place in the Prayer Scene. Hamlet is convinced that Claudius is the murderer of his father; he is

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<sup>2</sup> It is a hysterical alteration of consciousness, a hypnoic mechanism, which is on the borderline of malingering, and is characterized by childish theatrical behaviour and rambling talk (Davie 449).

about to kill Claudius who is at prayer; however, Hamlet does not kill him due to the possibility of sending Claudius' soul to heaven (Gottschalk 24: 155).

King Hamlet is merely seen as a ghost in the play. The first act is a play in itself, and the Ghost is the hero of it (Wilson 52). "The Ghost in *Hamlet* is essential to the plot of the play and to an understanding both the problem of Hamlet and his character" denotes Joseph (76: 493). In Shakespeare's works, there are two kinds of ghosts which are the objective and subjective ones; the Ghost in *Hamlet* is objective due to the fact that it is "apparent to several people at the same time" (Whitmore 1915, qtd. in Tiryaki 2013:39). Belief in ghosts is common in Shakespeare's time. It is not known whether Shakespeare believed in ghosts or not. Wilson remarks that as a poet Shakespeare believed in this ghost and had the intention that his audience should believe in it likewise (52). The Ghost has a crucial role in the play since its demand for revenge sets plot. Lastly, Wilson states, "The Ghost is the linchpin of *Hamlet*; remove it and the play falls to pieces" (52).

#### **The Soliloquy: "To be or not to be"**

"To be or not to be" is an important question for Hamlet. Harold Jenkins denotes that Hamlet debates 'to suffer' life's misfortunes or 'to take arms' in a hopeless cause (95). There are three basic approaches to the "To be or not to be" soliloquy: one of these explains the speech as a consideration of either acting or not acting against King Claudius; the second reads the speech as a contemplation of suicide; and the third is a kind of compromise between the first two (Petronella 71: 72).

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **The Main Character: Hamlet**

The main character, Hamlet is portrayed differently with regard to his madness, love and revenge by the three leading men although they have same main features. In Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), Olivier performs Hamlet. Mel Gibson plays the role of Hamlet in Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990). Hamlet is portrayed by Ethan Hawke in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000). To characterize Hamlet briefly, he is the human being who both suffers and makes people suffer. However, he is unwilling to do this, but it is beyond his power. Hamlet's character cannot be described in words. It is as if he said, "Writing your ideas about me is only limiting yourself." His behaviours and reactions are unimagined. His soliloquies bring his susceptible aspects to light; however, they are sometimes insufficient because his character is unsteady. As a matter of fact, his instability is both difficult and simple: he suffers from failing to figure out who he is whereas he can keep up with everyone through his flexibility. Hamlet is the person who quests whether corporeity bears a sense or not. He is the person who wonders whether human being is a demigod or a piece of dust.

How does Laurence Olivier reflect Hamlet? He sets the standard as for how Shakespeare should be done on screen. The film is a straightforward interpretation because Shakespeare himself states that Hamlet's tragedy is the tragedy in which his problem is that he could not make up his mind. Olivier prefers keeping straightforwardness to giving any deeper meaning. Moreover, Olivier's gestures are stunning and unique to him. How does Mel Gibson reflect Hamlet? He portrays Hamlet in the most suitable way for the human nature. His depressing personality is realistic. Furthermore, Hamlet is not merely the man who could not make up his mind. He sometimes feels excited and confident and at other times very depressed. Therefore, he is also manic depressive. It must not be forgotten that Mel Gibson uses his facial expressions in an excellent way. How does Ethan Hawke reflect Hamlet? He is the modern version of Hamlet. However, he succeeds in building a bridge between modern Hamlet and the classical Hamlet. While he uses the original language, he

leads a modern life. This different combination beautifies the film because it gives the essence of the play.

Hamlet's madness in the three cinematic adaptations needs clarification. Hamlet's madness still puzzles the humanity. Actually, Hamlet is in melancholy as well as madness. After his father's mysterious death, Hamlet goes in a deep melancholy. This melancholy is so deep that Hamlet goes mad. Meanwhile, the reason of Hamlet's melancholy is not only his father's mysterious death but also the incestuous marriage of his mother and uncle. More significantly, it is his father's ghost who turns his melancholy into madness. Nevertheless, he is sometimes extremely wise whereas he is sometimes quite mad. Therefore, this question evolves: Does he only pretend to be mad? Hamlet never allows the madness to overcome him. His expressions are so powerful that he cannot be tagged as a crazy man. Still, thinking of his reckless behaviours and reactions, he seems insane. To begin with Olivier, he is the person who controls his madness in the best way. His silence holds the audience captivated. He raises his madness and melancholy inside him. For example, in the ghost scene, Olivier steps up the stairs of the castle and meets the ghost. In this scene, he seems calm and mournful. He utters as follows:

Where wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no further. (1.5.1)

As for Mel Gibson, he gives the convincing portrayal of Hamlet's pretended madness. Also, he shows the desperation of Hamlet in his quiet moments. However, he is quite mad in some scenes although he hinders the madness to overcome him. For instance, he cannot control himself when he meets the ghost. He drops his sword and sticks to the wall. He also behaves crazily among the bookshelves, but his facial expressions are subtle enough to reflect Hamlet's madness as well as Hamlet's melancholy. The modern Hamlet, Ethan Hawke succeeds in reflecting Hamlet's melancholy; however, he is not skilled in reflecting Hamlet's madness. In many scenes, he is pensive and melancholic. He only goes out of his minds when he fires the gun and kills Polonius by mistake.

Another side of Hamlet that needs to be analyzed is his love. Whom does Hamlet love? He loves Ophelia. He loves his mother, Gertrude. He loves neither of them. He loves both of them. Polonius claims that Hamlet goes mad because of his daughter. One goes mad, but it is not Hamlet but Ophelia. She loses her wits because of Hamlet. How is Hamlet's love towards Ophelia? His love is generally passive in the play because Hamlet's only aim is taking his revenge. Therefore, it can be assumed that Hamlet does not love Ophelia. However, Hamlet declares his love to Ophelia at her funeral as follows:

I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her? (5.1.269-271)

Furthermore, the relationship between Hamlet and his mother is like a love affair rather than a blood relation. If they were not mother and son, it would be no doubt that they are in love with each other. In the first two cinematic adaptations, Hamlet's love is portrayed in a similar way. Olivier is in love with Ophelia, but he never behaves like a lover to her. As he pretends madness, he pretends not to love Ophelia. He even rejects her and insults her. He chooses to feign indifference towards her. However, he has an engrossing relationship with her mother. Olivier loses himself in his mother's eyes when they come together. Speaking of Mel Gibson, his love for Ophelia is pure, but it is not fervent. To give an example, he kisses her mother lustfully while he only touches Ophelia gently. Furthermore, in the nunnery scene, Mel Gibson rejects her and delivers the following lines:

“If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.” (3.1.135-140)

As to Ethan Hawke, he is a real lover. He hugs and kisses Ophelia dearly. More importantly, the relationship between Ethan Hawke and his mother is not like a love affair. There is only a blood relation.

Hamlet also needs to be clarified on account of his revenge in the three cinematic adaptations. Revenge plays a critical role in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. After the ghost scene, Hamlet longs for taking his father's revenge. His father's ghost puts him in melancholy and drifts into madness. It is not certain what the ghost is. Hamlet considers that the ghost might be the devil that is sent to deceive him. The fact that the ghost tells the truth and tempts Hamlet into murder is perplexing. Most importantly, the play-within-the-play reveals the murderer. However, Hamlet, who longs for taking his revenge, does not kill Claudius in spite of his reaction to the play since Hamlet finds him praying. He considers that Claudius's soul goes to paradise if he kills Claudius. It is amazing that he cannot tolerate Claudius's soul. Revenge is the driving force behind Olivier. He portrays the most serious Hamlet. After the ghost scene, Olivier is buried in silence. He makes war with his unanswered questions in his mind. In the-play-within-the-play scene, he watches Claudius's reaction to the play silently. Mel Gibson is full of revenge. Indeed, he cannot hide his emotions inside him. He makes clear his thoughts and feelings with facial expressions and behaviours. For example, in the-play-within-the-play scene, Mel Gibson watches Claudius with excitement. He moves continuously to see Claudius's reaction. It can be seen that he carries revenge, anger and hatred in his heart; thus, he reflects these emotions with his behaviours. Ethan Hawke also cannot hide his excitement to Claudius's reaction like Mel Gibson. He experiences the sense of revenge in melancholy. He devotes himself to videos after he meets his father's spirit. In addition, he writes the book The Mousetrap. In the text version, Hamlet explains it as follows:

The Mouse-trap. Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna: Gonzago is the duke's name; his wife, Baptista: you shall see anon; 'tis a knavish piece of work: but what o' that? your majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not: let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung. (3.2.237-243)

### **Two Female Characters: Ophelia and Gertrude**

*Hamlet* differs in the three cinematic adaptations on account of the two female characters, Ophelia and Gertrude. To start with Ophelia, she is the daughter of Lord Chamberlain, Polonius and Laertes's sister. She is not only innocent and sweet but also the most static and one-dimensional character. She confides to her brother that Prince Hamlet declares his love for her. Laertes warns Ophelia not to take Hamlet's love seriously. He also cautions her to guard her virginity:

Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,  
A violet in the youth of primy nature,  
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,  
The perfume and suppliance of a minute; No more. (1.3.5-10)

Therefore, her brother and father believe that Hamlet would use her, that he would take her virginity and throw her away. Yet, Ophelia's heart convinces her that Hamlet loves her. Hamlet causes all of her emotional pain throughout the play. Ophelia's desperation drives her crazy. In Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), Ophelia is portrayed by Jean Simmons. She is only nineteen years old in this adaptation. Simmons is an excellent Ophelia. She is a naive young girl, merely a child, affectionate, light-hearted, playful and exceptionally sensitive. An absolutely charming scene is that of Laertes's departure. Polonius makes his solemn speech, and Ophelia mischievously distracts Laertes's attention. She is also brilliant as the poor lovesick Ophelia. When she drives mad, she sings mournful songs for her father. This scene is heart rending. In Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990), Helena Bonham Carter portrays Ophelia. She is wonderful as the tragic maiden Ophelia. She plays the role of Ophelia in a fairly standard manner. Still, her fear and annoyance towards Hamlet are more than her love in many scenes. Her reaction for her father's death is so convincing. When she goes crazy, she sings bawdy songs as well as mournful songs. In Michael Almercyda's *Hamlet* (2000), Ophelia is portrayed by Julia Stiles. She is modern Ophelia; nevertheless, she also uses original language. She gives a deeply affecting performance as Ophelia. Her suicidal thoughts develop when her father betrays her to Claudius for his own benefits. She begins to walk along the edge of a pool and sees herself jumping into it. It is obvious that she loves Hamlet because she is the strongest lover as Ophelia.

Gertrude is the queen of Denmark. Gertrude is the widow of the late King Hamlet and the mother of Prince Hamlet. She marries her brother-in-law, Claudius. Gertrude is central to the action of the play although she has relatively few lines. Gertrude causes uncertainty. The play raises many questions about Gertrude. Does she know Claudius's plan to commit the murder? Does she love Claudius, or does she marry him to keep her high position? Does she drink the poison intentionally or by mistake? In addition, Gertrude is a very sexual being. In the ghost scene, the ghost gives disturbing information about the Queen:

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,  
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,  
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power  
So to seduce!--won to his shameful lust  
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen: (1.5.42-46)

In Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), Eileen Herlie performs Gertrude. She is involved with Claudius before King Hamlet dies. As a matter of fact, she does not cry at King Hamlet's funeral. Therefore, it can be assumed that she knows Claudius's plan to commit the murder. Furthermore, she drinks the poison by mistake in the last scene. In short, Eileen Herlie portrays Gertrude as a merciless and lustful queen. In Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990), Gertrude is performed by Glenn Close. The film starts with the King's funeral. In this scene, Gertrude mourns and sheds tears for the King. It can be inferred that she does not know Claudius's plan. Moreover, she drinks the poison intentionally to protect his son. She shows great emotion when she confronts Hamlet:

O Hamlet, speak no more:  
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
And there I see such black and grained spots  
As will not leave their tinct. (3.4.88-91)

Meanwhile, Eileen Herlie is too young to perform Mel Gibson's mother. In Michael Almercyda's *Hamlet* (2000), Diane Venora portrays Gertrude. She never suffers from her husband's death in any scenes. However, in the last scene, she understands Claudius's trap and drinks the poison. Also, Diane Venora is old enough to perform Ethan Hawke's mother. To compare Ophelia to Gertrude, young Ophelia is childlike



and naive. Unlike Gertrude, Ophelia has good reason to be unaware of the harsh realities of life.

### **Two Male Characters: Claudius and King Hamlet**

In the three cinematic adaptations, there are minor differences in the matter of two male characters, Claudius and King Hamlet, that is, the Ghost. Claudius is the king of Denmark and brother of the dead King. Claudius kills his brother to gain the throne and marries his brother's wife, Gertrude. He is the major antagonist in the play. Claudius is shrewd and able although he is not moral and honest. Does Claudius kill the elder Hamlet out of love for Gertrude or only to get the throne? This is also one of the questions that the play raises. Hamlet describes his uncle as follows:

With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!  
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!  
O, vengeance! (2.2.580-582)

However, Claudius falls prey to his own desires of power. The ghost also describes him in the following lines:

The serpent that did sting thy father's life  
Now wears his crown. (1.5.39-40)

In Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), Basil Sydney performs Claudius. He is lustful, merciless and ambitious, but his love for Gertrude is sincere. In the film, he is in love with Gertrude before the King dies. Thus, it is certain that his love for Gertrude triggers his foul plans. When he gains the throne, he expresses his grief for his brother and introduces his new wife in the following lines:

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death  
The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe,  
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature  
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,  
The imperial jointress to this warlike state,  
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,  
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,  
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage, (1.2.1-12)

In Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990), Claudius is performed by Alan Bates. He portrays Claudius as a cruel man. In this film, his love for Gertrude is not strong. It can be assumed that he marries Gertrude for his interests. In the last scene, his ambition and cruelty can be seen in his eyes. He offers the poisonous drink to Hamlet gladly by saying:

Set me the stoops of wine upon that table.  
If Hamlet give the first or second hit,  
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,  
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire:  
The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath;  
And in the cup an union shall he throw,  
Richer than that which four successive kings (5.2.267-273)

In Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), Claudius is performed by Kyle MacLachlan. He is the most charismatic Claudius. In this version, Claudius becomes King and the chief executive officer of "Denmark Corporation" after he takes over the firm by killing his

brother. He also portrays Claudius as a cruel man and an ambitious businessman. However, Hamlet shoots him with a pistol and takes his revenge. Unfortunately, he has to say farewell to his desires.

The Ghost is the spirit of Hamlet's deceased father. The ghost claims to have been murdered by Claudius. It orders Hamlet to take his father's revenge. The question of what the ghost is or where it comes from is never absolutely resolved. The Ghost is important because its demand for revenge sets the plot into motion. Belief in ghosts is common in Shakespeare's time. Thus, he also uses them in his other plays as well. He speaks only to Hamlet. Hamlet never doubts the existence of the spirit. He only questions whether he is actually his father and whether its intentions are good or evil. In the following lines, Hamlet expresses his doubt about the ghost:

Play something like the murder of my father  
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks;  
I'll tent him to the quick. If he but blench,  
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen  
May be the devil, and the devil hath power (2.2.596-600)

In Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), the Ghost is performed by an unknown player. Although his name is not included in the cast, he takes place in the most fascinating ghost scene. He is a brilliant ghost in white lights. His huge appearance and creepy voice makes the scene unique. Furthermore, the moments of the murder are shown in the film when the ghost tells the truths. In Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990), Paul Scofield plays the role of the Ghost. Hamlet follows the Ghost in the castle and catches him on the top of it. The ghost scene is dull and simple. It is not impressive although this scene has an important place in the play. In Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), Sam Shepard portrays the Ghost as a mysterious spirit in a black suit. His facial expression proves that he is full of displeasure. Hamlet finds him on the balcony when he wakes up. The ghost scene in this version is also simple and ineffective.

#### **Hamlet's Famous Soliloquy: "To be or not to be"**

Another way in which *Hamlet* is dissimilar in the three adaptations is Hamlet's famous soliloquy "To be or not to be". To analyze the soliloquy briefly, it takes place in act three, scene one. "To be or not to be" is an important question for Hamlet. In this soliloquy, he thinks about life and death. He utters the question:

To be, or not to be: that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, (3.1.56-59)

In the speaking of this soliloquy, Hamlet is not alone on the stage. Ophelia, Polonius and the King are also onstage. In Laurence Olivier's adaptation (1948), Hamlet is on the cliff edge in the scene of this famous soliloquy. Before he begins his soliloquy, the camera comes close to his head and scans its inside. Then, he begins his soliloquy by watching the wavy sea. He takes out his knife and points himself when he utters the following lines:

And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep; (3.1.60-64)

Next, he drops his knife to the sea and turns back. This shows that he quits committing suicide and decides to live and take his revenge. In this scene, the camera works very well. The landscape is in accordance with the soliloquy. In Franco

Zeffirelli's adaptation (1990), Hamlet utters the soliloquy among the sculptures in the basement. Before he begins the soliloquy, the camera rounds the gloomy room from Hamlet's standpoint. He walks around the sculptures until the soliloquy ends. Then, he leaves there by deciding to live. In Michael Almereyda's adaptation (2000), Hamlet is in a video shop. He both wanders in the shop and utters the soliloquy. When he says, "To die, to sleep", an explosion appears on the TV screen in the video shop. His eyes are full of tears in the last two lines:

With this regard their currents turn away,  
And lose the name of action. (3.1.87-88)

Last but not least, Ophelia, Polonius and Claudius are not onstage in all the three adaptations unlike the text version.

### **CONCLUSION**

*Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most realistic and most modern tragedy which is the closest to the spirit and life of his time (Wilson 52). Shakespeare's intriguing play, *Hamlet* is such an excellent work that this peerless play can be adapted to the cinema many times due to the unanswered questions that each character raises. Hamlet is an enigma that still puzzles the humanity. Ophelia is buried with not merely her cold corpse but also her secrets. It is not known whom Gertrude loves. Whether Claudius becomes both a regicide and a fratricide because of his love for Gertrude or his desire of power leaves an unsolved mystery. The Ghost might be the devil. It does not become old thanks to its enigmatic aspects. *Hamlet* can be created again and again by answering its questions differently.

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