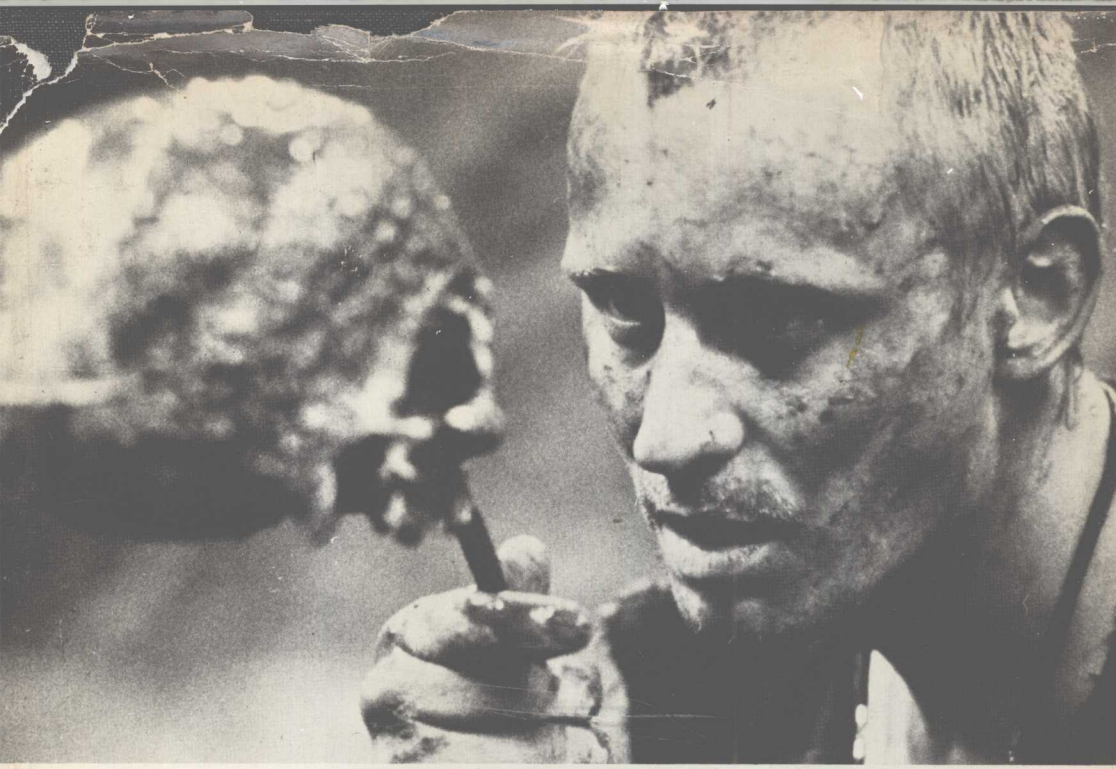

Hamlet

Film, Television, and Audio Performance

Bernice W. Kliman

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汉姆雷特

(英剧)

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Preface

This book is for Shakespeare fans, people who not only go to every stage performance they can find but who also stay up until 4:00 A.M. to see even a cut version of Olivier's *Hamlet* on television, and who would be willing to walk any number of miles to see Kozintsev's *Hamlet*—people who love to talk and think about Shakespeare. I would also like to woo Shakespeareans who perhaps feel standoffish toward moving images (film, television, videotape) and sound recordings: the literary scholars who prefer close readings of the text to any production; performance critics who do not value nonstage versions; and media critics who do not consider Shakespeare on film worthy of serious concern as film. To the first, I would like to say that media performances can be a way to get into the text; to the second that these performances share many qualities with stage presentations and often are the only record we have of some very great stage productions; to the third that the best Shakespeare media versions have been notable for their form as well as for their matter, and that the others can nevertheless yield much of interest about form as well as matter. Since, however, I am more likely to be addressing fans, it is to them that I principally speak.

A Note on the Illustrations

I shot all the stills with a Nikon FG directly from television, film, or Steenbeck screens. They illustrate particular moments in the productions better than do publicity stills, which most often are not taken from films but are shot separately by still cameras for publicity purposes. Often, such stills bear only a family resemblance to shots from the film. The quality of stills taken from productions varies considerably because some of the works have already deteriorated significantly, particularly the silent films, but also some of the videotapes and sound films. My stills capture these fragile works at a particular moment in time. I appreciate the advice of Jack J. Jorgens, who also used stills taken from films rather than publicity stills in his book *Shakespeare on Film*.

To my family

Acknowledgments

This work builds on the work of many others—scholars and teachers in Shakespeare, film, and theater studies. I am grateful to those who produced the body of work on Shakespeare films that has preceded mine, to Robert Hamilton Ball, who brought filmed Shakespeare into the mainstream of modern scholarship with his monumental history of *Shakespeare on Silent Film* (1968), to Roger Manvell, who in *Shakespeare and the Film* (1971) showed that discussions of films could usefully combine insightful description with revelations from behind the scenes and who produced a most readable general history, and to Jack J. Jorgens, whose dictum in *Shakespeare on Film* (1977) I have tried to follow: "We ought," he says, "to remain open to as many different kinds of excellence in Shakespeare films as possible" (15). My work differs from theirs both in narrowing the focus to one play and in broadening the scope to more than one medium, including television and audio recordings as well as both silent and sound films. Moreover, my purpose—to demonstrate the connectedness among theater, moving image, and sound recordings—led me to select for examination details somewhat different from theirs and to use those details in different ways.

"Shakespeare on film" is a discipline not only because of the efforts of Ball, Manvell, and Jorgens but also because of other scholars such as Thomas L. Erskine and James M. Welsh, whose *Literature/Film Quarterly* encouraged many to turn to the scholarly examination of Shakespeare on film; Harry M. Geduld, whose *Filmguide to Henry V* (1973) first demonstrated what could be accomplished by meticulous attention to a film's details; and others, such as Lillian Wilds and Jay Halio, who wrote important early articles.

Like so many, I am grateful to Charles Shattuck for his *The Shakespeare Promptbooks*, which led me to the riches at the Folger and other libraries. I appreciate the libraries where I read promptbooks and scripts as well as screened films on Steenbeck editors and listened to sound recordings:

first in fact and affection, the Folger Shakespeare Library, whose Shakespeare Collection and Film Archives are unmatched; also the Library of Congress Moving Picture and Recorded Sound Division, the UCLA Theater Collection and the UCLA/ATAS Film Archives, the Huntington Library, the Library of the British Film Institute, the film archives at The Museum of Modern Art, The Museum of Broadcasting, the Furness Library at the University of Pennsylvania, the Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, and the Library at Nassau Community College, which supplied me with all the secondary sources I needed. Candace Bothwell, the film archivist at the Folger, and Sam Brylawski, the audio archivist at the Library of Congress, deserve special mention among the many helpful professionals who assisted me.

My personal thanks to Coleman O. Parsons, who several years ago guided my doctoral dissertation and who kindly read and commented on an early manuscript of the present work, and to Marion Perret, whose comments and suggestions at various stages have been unfailingly helpful. I wish also to thank my colleagues in the writing group at Nassau Community College who have listened and responded to various parts of this work.

I am grateful also for the friendship of Kenneth S. Rothwell whose early articles on Shakespeare films in the *Literature/Film Quarterly* inspired our collaboration on the *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter*, which we co-founded in 1976 and continue to co-edit. I wish also to thank Michael Mullin, who nurtured my fledgling effort in the field, for the seminar at MLA he chaired in December 1976; and Davenport College, Yale University, for opportunities to teach "Film from Fiction" and "Shakespeare on Film" in the college seminar program.

I also thank the State University of New York for a summer research grant that enabled me to visit libraries and archives in Washington and California and the National Endowment for the Humanities for the summer fellowship to attend the Institute on Shakespeare in Performance at the Folger Library, led by Bernard Beckerman. My thanks also to Nassau Community College for the sabbatical leave that allowed me to begin the manuscript.

Though I have used many texts in conjunction with my examination of the various productions—generally for each production a different pocket text on which I could indicate cuts, tone, business, and from which I quote for those films, I am especially indebted to Vietor's *Hamlet Parallel Texts*, whose version of F1 I have quoted wherever convenient, and several helpful editions, such as *The Riverside Shakespeare*, the Norton *Hamlet*, and the Craig/Bevington *Shakespeare*.

I have, in the notes, indicated my indebtedness to the many works to which I refer. Still I know that many people who have influenced my thinking over the last ten years are omitted because their work has so

become part of the fabric of my mind that I cannot recollect the particular debts I owe them; I am certain that works I have not cited were nevertheless models for my efforts. One I can mention here with appreciation is Maynard Mack's essay "The World of Hamlet," which helpd form my perceptions of the play. I regret any omissions.

Harry Keyishian of Fairleigh Dickinson Press, the kindest and most patient of editors, helped me sort out many tangles; the text is clearer than it would have been without him. All remaining muddles are my own. Film study is particularly chastening because one has memory and notes but often not the artifact itself. I know that at times I have recollected details that are not there. I hope I have caught most of these.

Finally I come to my husband, Merwin, who did not type the manuscript but who helped me choose a word processor on which I could type it, who was willing to read bits and pieces of the work in progress and provide his refreshing layman's view, and whose support and love encourages me always.

Portions of chapters have previously been published in different forms:

"The BBC *Hamlet*, a Television Production," *Hamlet Studies* 4 (1982): 99–105.

"Kozintsev's *Hamlet*, A Flawed Masterpiece," *Hamlet Studies* 1.2 (1979): 117–28.

"Olivier's *Hamlet*: A Film Infused Play," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 5.4 (1977): 305–14.

"The Setting in Early Television: Maurice Evans' Shakespeare Productions." In *Shakespeare and the Arts: A Collection of Essays from the Ohio Shakespeare Conference, 1981 Wright State University*, edited by Cecile Williamson Cary and Henry S. Limouze. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982.

"The Spiral of Influence: One Defect in *Hamlet*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 11:3 (1983): 159–66.

I wish to thank the editors of *Literature/Film Quarterly* and *Hamlet Studies* and the University Press of America for permission to use this material.

Introduction

The first *Hamlet* I saw was Olivier's on film when I was fifteen years old. I went to see it four or five times. It descended to subliminal levels, and when I studied *Hamlet* later, I "knew" certain truths about it deep in my being. I knew that "To be" had to precede the players' arrival; it made sense only that way, because how could Hamlet move from the exuberant joy of "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" to the despair of "To be, or not to be"? I also "knew" that Hamlet loved Ophelia but that she, weak and immature, disappointed him; that a queer sort of relationship between Hamlet and his mother was at the root of Hamlet's problem; that Horatio was a noble fellow, fit to be king after Hamlet; that Polonius was awfully silly, a little senile, in fact; that the ghost was to be pitied.

I no longer "know" these things in the same way. I see all of Olivier's interpretations as choices, not textual givens. Now I realize, for example, that exuberant joy is just one of Hamlet's possible reactions to "The Mousetrap" idea. On the contrary, Hamlet could be aware that Claudius, perceiving him to know of the poisoning, might kill him before he can avenge his father. Hamlet's awareness could evoke not despair but a reasoned philosophical meditation on death—such as some find in the "To be" soliloquy. Though I recognize many more choices than I did when I was fifteen, fondness for Olivier's work inspires this study of performances of *Hamlet*, which will examine the texts for the choices they afford in production and media performances for those they have made. By "texts," singular or plural, I mean those printed versions that performances use as scripts.

Hamlet is an ideal focus for a study of media performances, both because what is true for this play will apply to others as well and because *Hamlet* presents deliciously knotty puzzles—to which there can be no final solutions but to which each production offers its own temporary answers. Since so many productions have been mounted in the last

eighty years, including many moving-image productions since 1948, *Hamlet* offers a complex and varied body of performance samples. All its fabricators—on stage, on screen, on radio, and on recordings—make choices. But no set of choices can reconcile all inconsistencies. Such a proliferation of explanations as has grown up for *Hamlet* suggests there is no tidy explanation. By making choices possible for readers, playgoers, viewers and listeners, *Hamlet*'s open-endedness inspires the collaborative imagination and stimulates investigation.

I choose to study media productions of *Hamlet* not only because of their inherent appeal to one who teethed on them but also because film and television, that is, moving images, more and more are the media of presentation for Shakespeare's plays. While theatrical performances are also alive and well, more people will see a particular audio-visual production than will attend a whole run of a theatrical production—in which one may often detect influences from film and television. People raised in our milieu of audio-visual media have been influenced by that contact, and this includes stage directors.

Significantly, it is also true that most moving-image directors of Shakespeare plays have had stage experience, sometimes extensive and primary experience. While modern stage productions make allusions to moving images as well as to previous stage productions, the converse is also true: audio-visual media depend on stage as well as on previous audio-visual productions. Audio-visual performances, as well as modern stage performances, can connect us to the stage tradition that has nurtured both. This is true regardless of the differences among the performance vehicles: stage, moving image, and sound recording. Productions of Shakespeare's texts in all media demonstrate conventional cuts, business, and characterizations; theatrical conventions, for good and ill, inform media productions. Though each performance, with its many unique elements, has autonomy, just as each human being is unique in spite of genetic resemblances to forebears, it is illuminating to explore the links among these performance forms. Since Professor Arthur Colby Sprague has already detailed much of traditional stage business up to the early twentieth century, I will limit my references to stage productions contemporaneous with the twentieth-century media that have been and remain viable.

While productions can be studied, of course, independently of tradition and independently of the texts, they yield more when studied in conjunction with both. The makers (actors, directors, and set designers) interpret the texts by choosing some of the text's possibilities and rejecting others. Examining many different performances, I can see many more of the choices that the texts offer than I would see if I were to examine the texts alone. Even when a performance reshapes a text—perhaps distorting it, perhaps delving for an essential "truth" in the

text—it can lead me to question why Shakespeare did not make that choice and thus to approach Shakespeare's intention or meaning. Whatever a production does, Shakespeare remains inviolable; the texts are there for anyone to read and interpret.

But to look at performances only to see what they tell us about Shakespeare would be unfair to the artistic integrity of the makers. They create works that have value in themselves, as is evident from the fact that audiences that have had no contact with Shakespeare's text go to see productions, such as Olivier's *Hamlet*, and respond to them as independent works of art. Just as it would be limiting to read *Hamlet* only as a tool for clarifying its source *Amleth*, so too it would be limiting to use modern productions only to look backwards. While no Shakespeare users have transcended their source as he transcended *his* sources, respect must be paid. Every change that directors make from the text helps to clarify their intentions.

Texts, moreover, being blueprints for performance, are, of course, in themselves incomplete. Performance choices point up that incompleteness, which otherwise might be unnoticed as readers unconsciously fill in the gaps without realizing that they are doing so. The texts, for example, determine that Ophelia is distracted, but directors and actors can choose just how this madness will be expressed. Her clothes may be in disarray or inappropriate, echoing Hamlet's method of show-

The Olivier *Hamlet*. Ophelia says, "Pray you, love, remember" as she places an herb on Hamlet's chair. *(Still courtesy Janus Films.)*

ing his pretended or real madness, or they may be ripped, presaging violence, as in the 1982 Papp production. She may be strident or sweetly pathetic or matter-of-fact, wispy or harsh, sad or happy, openly sexual or demure. She may have flashes of sanity or be totally insane. We have only Laertes's clue that she makes madness pretty—in the second mad scene, not the first. Her action in this scene should, most feel, correlate with her demeanor in other scenes. The shot that has Jean Simmons, for example, say "Pray you, love, remember" (4.5.175) most touchingly as she places a dried weed on the arm of Hamlet's chair—clear-minded for a brief moment—establishes, in Olivier's *Hamlet*, Ophelia's love for Hamlet as the probable cause of her madness, softens our perception of her earlier betrayal of him, and deepens the irony of Hamlet's emotional display at the graveside scene.

Performances offer possibilities for closure, completeness, and definiteness as the texts cannot. They *anchor* the text. Performances seldom obfuscate because the velocity of concomitant forces blurs the many choices into singleness—like twenty-four frames per second coalescing into one vision. But no performance is an archetype of the *Hamlet* Shakespeare intended, any more than a performance can be the embodiment of the conception in the director's mind: too many factors fall out of control. Only in broad outline can a performance be deemed an incarnation of an ideal. Performance-centered criticism helps us avoid arbitrarily freezing an indeterminate text by reminding us that the texts contain an infinity of performances.

Not all interpretations can coexist, but if the director-juggler can keep several balls in the air at once, we feel he or she reflects something close to the complexity of the texts. The reader has little difficulty doing this juggling act; this is one of the factors that, for some, makes the theater of the mind more satisfying than live performances. In its relation to the texts, a fully saturated performance, one that reveals a plenitude of possible interpretations, can compete with this mental theater. A production can, for example, suggest that Hamlet and Ophelia are lovers and yet withhold final confirmation.

In the performance of the mind, one almost always shapes a unified work of art by subordinating recalcitrant aspects, for *Hamlet* is, in truth, not a unified work. The eighteenth-century resurgence of classicism gave rise to a desire for unity that still exists today. Much of what is in *Hamlet*, however, has little to do with the tragic action, but is an amplification to demonstrate "the atmosphere, the situation, and the prehistory of the characters" (Auerbach, 281). When seeing a performance, I hope for unity and yet recognize that there are irreconcilable discrepancies in the play. The great thing is seeing how many facets of the text performances can sandblast into clarity. What a performance chooses to clarify is in itself significant.