

# THEATRICAL SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN GREGORY DORAN'S *HAMLET* (2009)

VÍCTOR HUERTAS MARTÍN  
UNED  
vhuertas10@alumno.uned.es

## SUMMARY

This article deals with the metatheatrical concerns in Gregory Doran's *Hamlet* (2009). This film derives from an RSC stage production presented at the Courtyard Theatre (Stratford-upon-Avon) and the Novello Theatre (London).<sup>1</sup> In opposition to the standing prejudices against the possibility of filming plays on the small screen, Doran and the creative team of Illuminations Media embrace the opposed natures of theatre and film. The result of such creative decision is materialized in the form of a hybrid television performance. The film has been shot in a type of location that has been re-furnished to purposefully evoke its stage origins. In this sense, the collision between these two languages —theatre and film— precisely constitutes the highest point of interest in the film far beyond its mere formal implications. In fact, David Tennant's approach to performing Hamlet in this film consistently operates on the idea of the eponymous hero trying to fight his frustrations through dramatic art. However, Hamlet does not reconcile the playful nature of drama with its other more rigorous aspects. As a consequence, the hero toys with film, thus overcomplicating his artistic drive. Hamlet's inability to handle either of these codes derives into worsening the character's perceptions of himself. The nature of Hamlet's failure is not necessarily in the choosing of drama as a means of self-preservation but the ways through which he engages in dramatic activity.

KEY WORDS: Theatre; Cinema; Self-reflexivity; Doran's *Hamlet*

## RESUMEN

Este artículo tratará sobre la meta-teatralidad en la película *Hamlet* de Gregory Doran (2009). Esta película está basada en una producción escénica de la Royal Shakespeare Company presentada en el Courtyard Theatre (Stratford-upon-Avon) y el Novello Theatre (Londres). Contra los permanentes prejuicios que critican la fusión entre la puesta teatral y la pequeña pantalla, Doran y el equipo creativo de Illuminations Media optan por sacar

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<sup>1</sup> RSC: Royal Shakespeare Company.

partido de las naturalezas opuestas de las artes teatrales y cinematográficas. Los resultados de esta decisión creativa se manifiestan en forma de representación híbrida para televisión. La película se ha rodado en un espacio acondicionado con el propósito de evocar los orígenes teatrales de la propuesta. De este modo, la colisión entre estos dos lenguajes —teatro y cine— es precisamente lo que constituye el elemento de mayor interés en la película mucho más allá de lo que pueda significar a nivel formal. De hecho, la aproximación de David Tennant al personaje de Hamlet en esta película implica que el héroe epónimo trate de enfrentarse a sus frustraciones a través del arte dramático. Sin embargo, Hamlet no concilia la naturaleza lúdica del teatro con sus otros más rigurosos aspectos. Como consecuencia, el héroe flirtea con el lenguaje del cine, sobrecargando así su impulso artístico. La incapacidad de Hamlet para emplear estos códigos provoca el empeoramiento de las propias percepciones del personaje. La naturaleza del error de Hamlet no necesariamente radica en la elección que hace del drama para su propia salvación sino en la forma que tiene de comprometerse con la actividad dramática.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Teatro; Cine; Auto-reflexividad; *Hamlet* de Doran

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After finishing his work as Marcellus in Doran's production of *Hamlet* in the stage version as well as the film version, actor, musician, singer and blogger Keith Osborn writes:

«When will I be back? Will I ever be back? Will I ever work like this ever again? The ambiguous answer to this is always «... maybe never... maybe never! (sic) This terrible prospect chills my soul and I grimace involuntarily. «Nonsense, you most probably will' reassures the angel on my right shoulder, instantly reminding me of the inevitable cycle of an actor's life. Who knows when or in what capacity I'll be playing my trade next? (...) *the readiness is all...*»<sup>2</sup>

Osborn's appropriation of Hamlet's line refers to his own anxieties at the inevitable sways in the actor's professional trajectory. After one season of work at the Royal Shakespeare Company, Osborn returns to his real job at the London City. This sad return constitutes a kind of tragic price to pay for the pleasure of having taken part in one of the most prestigious *Hamlet* productions ever. The angel on the right shoulder Osborn writes about has its opposite evil angel, who undermines the artist's confidence once he returns to his ordinary life combining ordinary jobs with auditions. This problematic actor's self-confidence is dealt with in Stanislavski's work. In his book *Building a Character*, the Russian teacher, actor and director shares his experiences at the pseudo-fictional Tortsov's drama school and accounts for Kostya's celebrated characterisation of the Critic, an abject creature who inhabits the actor's skin, thus torturing him and making his life miserable.<sup>3</sup> All this comes to confirm what the self-obsessive artist's plight can be. As Berry explains, the artist's lack of self-confidence

<sup>2</sup> Osborn, Keith (2010): *Something's Written in the State of Denmark (An Actor's Year with the Royal Shakespeare Company)*, London, Oberon Books, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> Stanislavski, Constantin (2016): *Building a Character*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, London and New York, Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 13-14.

can lead to self-destruction derived from an excess of self-judgement produced by the inner critic.<sup>4</sup> In the previously mentioned book, Tortsov —perhaps standing as Stanislavski's alter ego— argues that «[u]nless the theatre can ennoble you, make you a better person, you should flee from it».<sup>5</sup> In fact, when David Tennant —playing Hamlet— enters the main acting space in Doran's film, while delivering the «To be or not to be...» speech, the implicit conceit seems to be that suicide relates to Hamlet's indecision on whether it is worth risking his entrance into the meta-theatrical acting space created for the film. Such space is framed as a small television studio theatre that, at the same time, is controlled by CCTV cameras. As Shakespeare criticism has demonstrated, *Hamlet* is strongly pervaded by a component of metadrama. Therefore, could we go further than this and analyze Hamlet's frustration in this film by associating him to an actor who has not altogether learned to handle his craft and whose under-trained theatrical eagerness is conducive to his own death drive? In this very film, it seems, Hamlet's degeneration is manifested through the misuse of dramatic and filmic skills.

What I intend to demonstrate in this article is that Doran's film adaptation of *Hamlet* is productively articulated around meta-theatre within the special confines of a simulated television studio performance shot on a real location: the church in St. Joseph's College in Mill Hill. Specifically, the source of this Hamlet's pain and ultimate self-slaughter are seen in the hero's eagerness to be accomplished as an actor. By extension, he wants to be an auteur who toys with theatre acting and with filming, both of them dramatic manifestations colliding in the film. In this sense, Hamlet's toying with rather than engaging in any of the two arts confuses the character and, at the same time, works as a source of self-reflexive irony on the film itself. As we will see later, the film did not at all intend to be a film in the purest sense and yet the creative team yearned for an adjustment between the stage production and the visual language of television film. Thus, the self-reflexive patterns in the play, together with the uncanny hybridity of theatre and television film, relate to Hamlet's own collapse due to his own mishandling of the two linguistic codes.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Berry, William (2011): «How Recognizing Your Death Drive May Save You», *Psychology Today*, available in <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-second-noble-truth/201110/how-recognizing-your-death-drive-may-save-you>.

<sup>5</sup> Stanislavski, p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> Doran has directed three Shakespeare films in which the languages of television film and theatre deliberately intermingle with each other. I am not referring to the live cinema productions of *Richard II* (2014), *Henry IV Part 1* (2015), *Henry IV Part 2* (2015), nor *Henry V* (2016), which have been released on cinemas and on DVD over this present decade. I am referring to *Macbeth* (2001), *Hamlet* (2009), and *Julius Caesar* (2012). The difference between these two groups of films is that the films in the former series have been recorded as stage-cinema hybrids, whereas the latter consists of television film-stage hybrid recordings. This means that the second group of films have been conceived explicitly for the language and the medium of television. Rather than trying to simply do additional archive recordings of these prestigious productions, as Doran says when referring to *Hamlet* —although the principle has been applied to the three films—, the purpose of this type of work is reconceiving them for the television screen language (See *Making of Hamlet* within the special features in the DVD edition, 2009). In this sense, not only do these films not agonize about the standing prejudice that the television screen is not adequate to convey the grandeur of Shakespeare's language, but the creators seize the possibilities of television for that purpose. Furthermore, they even embrace the standing oppositions between both media in to find challenging, creative and surprising ways to situate the production in the small screen.

The approach I intend to follow is concerned with the application of intertextual psychoanalysis to the relationship between the languages of cinema and drama in this television film. For this purpose, I draw the relationship between psychoanalysis and language from Julia Kristeva's *The Revolution in the Poetic Language* (1974), although the work by other psychoanalytical scholars will be helpful contributions to apply Kristeva's theory to the contingencies of the film. In this way, Kristeva's psychoanalytic concepts on language maps out the relationship between the characters. Moreover, given this linguistic and psychoanalytical orientation, specific attention will be paid to how Hamlet tries to attain language proficiency in both drama and film in to overcome his initial anxieties.

Regarding *Hamlet*, some critics have approached it on film and performance from a psychoanalytical point of view.<sup>7</sup> Yet, so far nobody has examined how this production presents the hero —and, by extension, other characters— as performers. If performing is regarded as a language that needs to be learned, I intend to relate what Freud and Kristeva respectively referred to as the pre-Oedipal-Oedipal and the semiotic-symbolic dichotomies to concepts related to the development of acting skills.<sup>8</sup> The rationale behind this association is grounded on the fact that drama follows a similar process to that of language learning. Following this idea, the performer needs to learn how to discover the playful possibilities of artistic creativity and, afterwards, learn how to polish his rough talents through the acting craft. Likewise, both the human language and the language of drama cannot be separated from the social contexts where they take place. Thus, in this film language and dramatic proficiency will be intrinsically connected to the coming to terms with the contingencies of this confined world that surrounds Hamlet.

<sup>7</sup> Tyrone Guthrie's staging of the play explored the Oedipal elements in the Hamlet. This performance was an inspiration for Laurence Olivier, whose film, in 1948, did not only feature a Gertrude much younger than Olivier himself but also employed a range of visual signifiers to convey Hamlet's primeval Oedipal desires to replace his father. The reader may find more information about this in the following works: Rothwell, Kenneth S (1999): *A History of Shakespeare on Screen (A Century of Film and Television)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Taylor, Neil (1994): «The Films of Hamlet», Stanley Wells and Anthony Davies, *Shakespeare and the Moving Image (The Plays on Film and Television)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 180-195; Jorgens, Jack J (1991): *Shakespeare on Film*, Indiana, University Press of America; Kliman, Bernice W (1983): «The Spiral of Influence: "One Defect in Hamlet"», *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 11, pp. 159-166; Asworth, John (May 1949): «Olivier, Freud and Hamlet», *Atlantic Monthly*, 183, p. 30; Halio, Jay (1973): «Three Filmed Hamlets», *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 1, p. 317. Also, Zeffirelli's 1990 film transforms the hesitant prince into a masculinised Hamlet who grabs a sword as an epic hero and rides a horse as in an Elsinore where Gertrude is the adored prima donna casting spells over everyone around her, especially her own son. See: Howlett, Kathy M (2000): *Framing Shakespeare on Film*, Athens, Ohio University Press; Rothwell, Kenneth S (1999); Quinn, Edward (April 1991): «Zeffirelli's Hamlet», *SFNL* 15.2, p. 1; Lupton, Julia R. and Kenneth Reinhard (1993): *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis*, Ithaca and New York, Cornell University Press; Crowl, Samuel (2003): *Shakespeare at the Cineplex (The Kenneth Branagh Era)*, Athens and Ohio, Ohio University Press; Pilkington, Ace G (1994): «Zeffirelli's Shakespeare», Davies, Anthony, *Shakespeare and the Moving Image (The Plays on Film and Television)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 163-179, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Freud, Sigmund (1918 [1974]): «From the History of an Infantile Neurosis», Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, trans. James Strachey, London, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, pp. 3-122; Kristeva, Julia (1974 [1984]): *The Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, New York, Columbia University Press; Kristeva, Julia (1980): *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press.

As the reader familiarized with literary psychoanalysis surely knows, for Kristeva, roughly speaking, the semiotic stage, a female-dominated and more liberating stage, precedes the symbolic stage, a male-dominated world where language must conform to notions of regularity and patriarchal correctness.<sup>9</sup> Freud and Lacan orient their approaches to language and growth in a similar manner that, roughly speaking, acknowledges a previous stage in which language is not determined, freer and spontaneous. Arguably, after a while, the child renounces his attachment to the mother to acknowledge the patriarchal and objective rules of the male world.<sup>10</sup> The discipline required for acting works in a similar way to identity construction and language learning in the sense that certain codes must be learned and incorporated, but the rigour, the systematicity and the discipline of the performer should never be a stoppage to embracing the language of paradox, the liberation of the body, and the unlocking of the imagination. Therefore, drama resembles the richness of human language, which considers the poetic function as possible in real exchanges. The difference here is that the very language of drama embraces the paradoxes involved in harmonizing rational and systematic rigour with the liberating creativity of the artist who goes back to a second childhood.

This return to a second childhood must be inevitably connected to the effect produced by the actor's block. It is frequent that experienced theatre directors and instructors speak about the actor's need to get over the dreadful effect of the actor's block. In fact, for Donnellan, actors should not be evaluated on their talent but on their capacity for being more blocked or less blocked.<sup>11</sup> In similar terms, Fo refers to children's education as a systematic process of destruction of freedom, which annihilates their possibilities to perceive and see things from divergent views. Thus, he refers to the actor's need to recover the child's capacity to embrace paradox.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Fo also speaks about the need to overcome block. In many ways, such blocking, which has been consistently built up through adolescence, needs to be broken down through its training by the actor who wants to feel the liberating freedom of performance. Therefore, acting techniques —at least, *good* acting techniques— are not means to constrain the performer, but to empower his performance.

As Donnellan indicates, the best technique vanishes and is not perceptible in the performer.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, theatre theoreticians like Donnellan, Stanislavski, Brook, Michael Chekhov, Robert Hethmon and many others emphasize hard work and almost the total transformation of the self when it comes to engage in proficient acting training. So to speak, technique makes technique disappear in execution. Patsy Rodenburg, ex-voice coach to

<sup>9</sup> Kristeva, 1980.

<sup>10</sup> Freud; Lacan, Jacques (1977 [2001]): *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London, Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Donnellan, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Fo, Dario (1987 [1998]): *Manual Mínimo del Actor*, trans. Carla Matteini, Hondarribia, Argitaletxe Hiru, S.L., p. 99. In his book, Fo does not fully explain what he means by «paradox». Yet, theatrical practice and theatrical imagination simply suggest that dramatic paradoxes refer to the performer's capacity to enact an imaginary situation which he/she consciously knows to be unreal. This paradox vertebrates through all dramatic art. Particularly, it points at the actor's need to search within himself feelings, desires, emotions, resentments, and various definable states of mind with which he does not need to feel identified. Yet, the emotions are imagined inside and by the performer himself.

<sup>13</sup> Donnellan, Declan (2005): *The Actor and the Target*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2005 Target, London, Nick Hern Books, p. 3.

the RSC, clarifies that «to act Shakespeare, you have to be a complete human athlete – not just a footballer or a philosopher, but both».<sup>14</sup> In this respect, Stanislavski goes as far as to encourage conscious and specific technical work on every body muscle and every single sound of the language. What constitutes an additional paradox is that this ideal fashioning of the player as a sort of Renaissance person is in the end a way to discover what we must regard as the disenterment of the artist's interred nature.<sup>15</sup> This nature is the one that was presumably lost over the mirror stage in which the child started to try to overcome his childish condition. Nevertheless, the finding of one-self as an artist is *necessarily* to be reconciled with the acquisition of features of characters who may exist in our imagination or in real life.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, as we will see, in this film Hamlet's self-discovery will be filtered through the acting craft.

In the first section I will deal with how hybridity is configured by the film setting. Secondly, I will examine how the social relationships between characters are, from the very beginning, mapped out in dramatic terms and how Hamlet's frustrations quickly take a dramatic form. In the following section, I will explain how Hamlet engages with dramatic art and how his artistic block is revealed through interaction with other players. After this, I will analyze how Hamlet tries his chances with a different language —cinema— to discover the truth about Claudius's crime. However, we will discover through Hamlet's filmic impetus that the camera will reveal rather uncomfortable suspicions related to the Queen. In the next scene, we will examine how such uncomfortable suspicions will be confirmed through his encounter with Gertrude. The last section will focus on how the last sequences will be presenting the turning of drama and film into disruptive forces at the Danish state.

## 2. FROM STAGE TO FILM

The metatheatrical effect of Doran's *Hamlet* is complicated as it comes from an RSC stage production. This production was subsequently translated to the television film screen in collaboration between Illuminations Media, the BBC and the RSC. According to John Wyver, the film's producer and head of Illuminations Media:

[i]t was very important to the BBC to be able to say to the audience, the press, and to their stakeholders that they were bringing the RSC's *Hamlet* with David Tennant to television, and to a wider audience.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Rodenburgh, Patsy (2002): *Speaking Shakespeare*, New York, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 13-14.

<sup>15</sup> In a workshop with John Barton, Ben Kingsley indicates that performers need to remember that they «must be rooted in nature for the emotions to be contagious and real» – quoted from Barton, John (1984): *Playing Shakespeare*, London, Methuen, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Beyond the requirements of acting as a professional discipline, Donnellan argues that «[w]e develop our sense of self by practising roles we see our parents play and expand our identities further by copying characters we see played by elder brothers, sisters, friends, rivals, teachers, enemies or heroes». See Donnellan, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Hindle, Maurice (2015): *Shakespeare on Film* (2dn edition), London, Palgrave, p. 281.

What is clear, Wyver confirms in another interview, is that neither BBC nor Illuminations Media nor Doran wanted to do a film in the strictest sense of the word.<sup>18</sup> It is a hybrid form in which film and studio theatre are combined.

This fact complicates the relationship of Hamlet's character with theatre in several ways. Firstly, following suit with Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), Tennant's Hamlet recurs to the language of film and uses a hand-held camera to record short video diary extracts and parts of the play-within-the-play. The difference between both films —Doran's and Almereyda's— is that Doran, consciously or not, embraces the clash between theatre and film by way of making these two elements interact and indirectly parody the prejudices against television recorded theatre. This intermedial paradox is ironically transferred to Tennant's work on the eponymous hero. When he is not capable of succeeding in the theatre, he tries filming with his hand-held camera. The grandeur of Tennant as a character who behaves as an artist within the play is in his impetus to be in command of all the dramatic resources available, i.e. his sense of identity and wholeness is intrinsically connected to his masterdom of the symbolic systems of film and theatre.

The above-mentioned hybridity is well reflected in the filmscape created by Doran and Chris Sieger —the Director of Photography—. As mentioned above, the film was shot at St. Joseph's College at Mill Hill. The chapel, the cloister and several other corners of the place were used to fashion a small studio theatre, which self-reflexively alluded to the theatrical origins of the production. For a start, most of the scenes take place in the nave of St. Joseph's chapel. Even the cellarage scene was recorded in this space. Some other scenes were recorded in the cloister and others outside the college. Despite the evident lack of resources to finance a more lavish location, following suit with Donnellan's suggestions on space, the smallness of the area can become an actual advantage for an actor.<sup>19</sup> This is precisely what the metonymic economy of theatre allows to do in this film production. The setting and the acting are meant to stimulate the viewer's theatrical imagination. Apart from this, the black curtains of the nave ostentatiously allude to the wings of a studio television theatre, and actors double up with different parts as they would do in a stage performance. In short, the film, with its very few resources, intends to appeal to the audience's imagination as they would such performance.

Nevertheless, the translation to the screen involves a reconception of the signifiers in the original production. Set designer Rob Jones needed to translate the massive mirror effect of the original to the screen to avoid the problematic relationship between mirrors and cameras in one studio set. To that end, Jones painted the walls, the pillars and the floor of St. Joseph's chapel in marble fañon. This produced the same mirror effect of the stage performance without reflecting images with the same intensity as a mirror would.

The DoP's major contribution to the film is that the characters constantly see themselves in mirrors in very contained close-ups. The massive mirrors in the original did not leave much room for such an introspective approach. Gertrude, Claudius, and Hamlet see

<sup>18</sup> Wyver, John (2015): «John Wyver in Conversation with Víctor Huertas Martín», London, Unpublished.

<sup>19</sup> Donnellan, p. 128.

themselves in broken mirrors and thus confront their disfigured identities at a cinematic level, which points to the fact that the characters' attempts to fit in the symbolic patriarchal world are futile. It also points out at how their fantasies on their ideal egos appear broken through these fractured visions of themselves.

This concept is complicated by the inclusion of CCTV cameras within the acting space. These cameras, following Sébastien Lefait, create a sense of Brechtian detachment.<sup>20</sup> Yet, they also expand the mirror effect as Hamlet knows himself watched by these cameras. Right after Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and the Players leave him, he rips one of the CCTV cameras of the wall and declares: «Now I am alone» (2.2.484).<sup>21</sup> Curiously, Hamlet's source of rebellious strength to tear this state of vigilance apart precisely stems from the knowledge that he is being watched in a recording. Far from restraining him, this ignites his desire to improve his theatrical and cinematic skills. All in all, the space provides a filmic realm in which characters know that they are acting in front of cameras but they are playing parts in their own lives.

### 3. THE PATRIARCHAL ORDER AND THE DRAMATIC ENERGIZING OF FRUSTRATION

As already established, one of the essential premises for dramatic art is that proficiency in performance involves the combination of two aspects. Firstly, the performer needs to rejoice in the pleasures of the semiotic power of creativity. Secondly, he needs to be able to structuring his drive to achieve the discipline of acting. The paradox in performing is that one needs to be disciplined to be free. Any first-year drama student will need to work hard to recover his capacity of harmonizing these two natures.

In agreement with this premise, Tennant's work reflects Hamlet's theatrical efforts to explore his relationship with what the political transition has turned his family into. His acting skills, teenage posturing —he dresses up like a skinny and dated James Dean and as an apish Lord of Misrule with an oversized crown after the play-within-the-play—, and tomfoolery are masks intending to respond to the ruthlessness and small-mindedness of the patriarchal world. Not only does the mask work as a perfect antidote against block but it also liberates the actor to do things forbidden.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Tennant uses a muscular T-shirt and lets his hair go spiky, acting at times as a sort of Puck, to display his «antic disposition». At other times, he poses as a «smiley villain» while he maniacally rejoices in close-up at the discovery of his father's murder by Claudius. When he acts as «King of the Apes» —acting literally like an enthroned apish monarch— he visualizes the image of the monarch keeping subjects «like

<sup>20</sup> Lefait, Sébastien (Fall 2013-Winter 2014): «This same strict and most observant watch» (1.1.71): Gregory Doran's Hamlet as Surveillance Adaptation», Christy Desmet and Sujata Yyengar, Borrowers and Lenders (The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation), Volume III 2.

<sup>21</sup> All the references to the text of Hamlet used in this article are taken from: Shakespeare, William (2006): Hamlet (3rd edition), Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, London, Arden Shakespeare.

<sup>22</sup> Donellan, p. 110-111.

an ape in the corner of his jaw» (4.2.16-17).<sup>23</sup> The King portrayed as an ape doubtless alludes to the contempt Hamlet feels for his uncle and, by extension, for his father. In addition, portraying himself as an ape, ironically, also refers to the misdemeanour of the mediocre actor who contents himself with the aping of gestures without having really incorporated any inner life in his acting.

Unhappy with the part written for him in the succession, Tennant's Hamlet certainly begins as a blocked character in this production. A reaction shot shows Tennant observing Gertrude (Penny Downie) and Claudius (Sir Patrick Stewart) kissing at the wedding reception. This self-pleased and cheerful Claudius does not miss a chance to humiliate his nephew as, in a mid over-the-shoulder shot, turning his cheerfulness into spiteful reproach, he attacks Hamlet for his «unmanly grief» (1.2.94). How Claudius ostentatiously gives precedence to Laertes (Edward Bennett) before his nephew does not escape Hamlet either. In this specific approach, Laertes willingly lends himself to repeating the script Polonius (Oliver Ford-Davies) has written down for him. Yet, Laertes is so under-trained in public speaking that Polonius needs to whisper the lines to his inexperienced son. The irony here is that Laertes' clearly clumsier discourse is preferred to Hamlet's by Claudius, who, under Stewart's cheerful smile, rather favours people ready to play the parts he wants them to, no matter how these favourites might be.

Other than that, being performed by Stewart, Claudius presents a formidable masculine opponent to Hamlet. His Sean Connery-like demeanours and seductive voice bring on the charisma and the leading qualities of the sophisticated macho leader in a patriarchal order.<sup>24</sup> In fact, in this scene we can find two actors with a life outside this frame. The film features Stewart, the RSC veteran and *Star Trek* hero. Yet, Stewart's victorious self-pleasing grin in an over-the-shoulder shot, when he patronizingly pats Hamlet on the back so he feels «as ourselves in Denmark» (1.2.122) leaves no doubt that he is a positively charming villain.

After this, as we know, Hamlet is separated from his mother, who leaves the scene hand in hand with Claudius. The application of the traumatic separation of Hamlet from his mother is articulated within the social context of the film. Even though surrounded by the court, the camera reveals Gertrude and Claudius's affection is real. She is shown as beautiful, shiny, radiant, evoking the sensual power of Glen Close's Gertrude in Zeffielli's film. Instantly, Tennant recognises his plight in dramatic terms and feels «that within which passes show»

<sup>23</sup> Doran finds this metaphor particularly striking and, as we will see, makes extensive use of it over the film. See Doran, Gregory (2008): «Rehearsal Scrapbook».

<sup>24</sup> Stewart has an existence apart from this film production which situates him somewhere between the respectable and culture effort-based background of the RSC and the popularity that his charisma as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek* has generated. One of the premises of his specific charisma is that, despite being in his seventies, Stewart is still quite a masculine-voiced and attractive English actor. In the sixth episode of the first season of the series *Extras* (BBC), Stewart plays himself and parodies this specific persona that fans and popular culture have built around him. Thus, he plays himself as a scriptwriter who plays a hero with special powers, a «James Bond figure», whose speciality consists of making ladies' clothes fall off so he sees everything. After this, he speaks on the phone to the female protagonist alluding to his own sensual qualities: «This is Patrick Stewart here. And the reason you're hearing my rich, sexy voice is that Andy is not man enough to apologise himself».

(1.2.85). He gazes at Claudius and Gertrude and a series of reaction shots present how he resents having been delayed.

The background in the shots featuring Tennant show the wings of the improvised studio theatre, thus indicating that the Prince has been left waiting in the wings of the play which is run by his uncle, who occupies the stage centre. Whereas Hamlet's position is eminently that of someone waiting to come on stage—and this idea is again clarified right before the «To be or not to be...» speech, beginning precisely in the wings of the improvised studio theatre—, Claudius and Gertrude are already emceeing a spectacle that seems somewhat laboured.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Gertrude collaborates in scripting the performance. Nevertheless, there are minor improvisations in the show. She seems shocked when Claudius gives precedence to Laertes. Very likely, the reason for this shock is that they have not agreed on such overlooking of court protocols. Yet, Gertrude is still conscious of the part she has to play and, willingly, whispers to Claudius the name of Hamlet's university when he is incapable of remembering it. Later on, Gertrude approaches Hamlet and the camera leaves them face-to-face in an over-the-shoulder shot. All in all, the scene leaves an unspoken pain, which connects mother and son. Gertrude shares Hamlet's frustration, although she seems too trapped under Claudius's power on her to try a re-union with her son.

Tennant's collapse at the beginning of his first soliloquy reflects how his inner child has been removed from all the pleasures of totality. At the same time, it anticipates what will be Hamlet's inadequacy at acting. The very first thing he does as he is left alone is to fall on his knees and dedicate some good ten seconds to weeping before beginning the speech. Any drama teacher at the Actor's Studio would have ridiculed him for such an over-explicatory and cheap demonstration of pain, especially in someone who has just sworn having «that within which passes show». Nevertheless, very quickly Tennant's Hamlet assumes a more puritanical and stern position. The speech begins in wide shot leaving the Prince isolated within the larger court context. Progressively, Tennant's approaches to the camera indicate his eagerness for theatrical presence. He aims for the imaginary integrated self-image that the infant expects to experience with his own body. Thus, he searches for the camera maximizing his presence in close-up. His first attempts to fight frustration occur in filmic terms. Yet, rather than applying voice-over techniques to this piece, Doran decides to follow suit with Branagh's approach and lets the character deliver the whole speech in an exercise of theatrical expertise.

In fact, as Hamlet grows more formidable in this scene, we discover that his puritanism is quite akin to the patriarchal order he so much hates, particularly in how Tennant ironizes the dexterity with which Gertrude runs to «incestuous sheets' (1.2.156). This situates him in direct rivalry with his masculine role models in their stance for the rigorous rules of the symbolic world. Doran literally follows Ernest Jones' interpretation, which claims that Hamlet feels the need to destroy his father as well as his uncle<sup>26</sup>. Not surprisingly, the viewer

<sup>25</sup> For some reason, the guests in this film find Claudius' paradoxes on «mirth' and «dirge' extremely funny as they cannot help laughing at the King's occurrences. Yet, this effect reinforces the fact that everyone in Claudius' court needs to play a part which satisfies the King's eagerness to be loved and trusted.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, Ernest (1949 [1968]): «Hamlet and Oedipus», John Hump, Shakespeare: Hamlet, London, Macmillan Press LTD, pp. 51-63.

finds in the first scene that the actor who has played the Ghost is no other than Stewart. This situates father and uncle within the same human signifier. It also redoubles the iconic presence of the patriarchal figure that impedes Hamlet's bliss in unison with Gertrude. The Ghost violently manhandles his grovelling son when he appeals to his nature to prevent the «royal bed of Denmark» to become «a couch for luxury and damned incest» (1.5.82-83). Like his brother, this Ghost scorns and despises unmanly attitudes. Yet, this unpredictable patriarch also suddenly caresses Hamlet while asking him not to taint his mind. This comes to prove the arbitrary weakness of a patriarchal system upholding rules that are neither stable nor permanent nor reliable. Hamlet's rancor will be then manifested in that same scene as he wonderfully rejoices in the already mentioned close-up displaying his devilish smile at the discovery of Claudius' guilt. In fact, Hamlet manifests hatred toward his uncle-father in the most theatrical terms. In a subsequent scene, as he is just about to kill him with a switchblade, he returns to the wings, and, slightly acquires the shape of a hunch-backed teeth-clasping pantomime Vice, voraciously and murderously gazing at Claudius.

#### 4. HAMLET'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE ACTOR'S BLOCK

The court of Denmark is arranged as a studio theatre in which CCTV cameras register everything that takes place in the main hall. Within this space, characters come and go and seem to be trying to handle the script that has been written for them. This film frame takes the level of identification that occurs between characters into account. The characters in the film do not simply perform but also evaluate each other's performance. Plus, some of these performances are recorded, as I have already indicated, by CCTV cameras, a fact that, in this filmic context, resembles the voyeuristic fascination of *Big Brother*. Thence, the characters are qualified by their acting skills in a symbolic world where everyone controls each other and where CCTV cameras register all the movements made by characters. However, the CCTV cameras do not constrain Hamlet's eagerness to perform but rather stimulate it.

As I have been suggesting, people's sense of belonging is, in this specific performance, measured by their dramatic skills. It is not simply that Hamlet's identity is constructed in dramatic terms. The rules of this dramatic game apply to the rest of the characters, who somehow need to manage themselves in this hybrid space. This is clearly established from the wedding scene and continues when Laertes and Ophelia (Mariah Gale) are interrupted by Polonius in the steps of their entrance hall. Ophelia's boredom at being lectured is even more justified when she displays the contents of Laertes' suitcase: contraceptives for his trip back to France. Clearly, Laertes has been delivering lines to her and his credibility has been completely undermined. In addition, Polonius' domestic iron rule in this film is clear in how he stage-manages the siblings' actions. The two siblings are forced to repeat part of Polonius' litany on how to carry oneself in life. Thus, the three characters appear in a wide shot repeating the chant («Neither a borrower not a lender, boy ...», 1.3.74) that Laertes must have repeated hundreds of times. However, in subsequent scenes, Polonius does not quite manage to say his lines properly. Polonius' way of delivering his lectures seems at times rusty and hesitant. He gets stuck in the middle of an argument when speaking to Reynaldo.

Later on, his explanation on Hamlet's madness is longer, more hesitant and awkward than it usually is when delivered by other actors. Polonius is too senile to continue his public service and, nonetheless, he struggles to stage-manage the court of Denmark.

Also, Rosencrantz (Sam Alexander) and Guildenstern (Tom Davey) appear as two young men who have rehearsed their speeches. Firstly, they have done it on their own. Secondly, Polonius clearly has indicated them how to speak to the monarchs. Rosencrantz is a supposed street-wise leather-jacketed fellow with a pretentious worldly pose, which contrasts with the more serious and preppy guise of Guildenstern. Funnily enough, it is Rosencrantz who whispers lines to Guildenstern as he tries very hard to impress the monarchs with his courtly discourse. Again, the old joke that Claudius does not distinguish between the two is played upon, which portrays Claudius as slightly careless of apparently insignificant details. Nevertheless, this defect works wonderfully with Gertrude, who willingly corrects Claudius' mistake. Who knows whether Claudius is not even pretending not to know to show Gertrude how essential she is for him?

Yet, despite Claudius' skills at pretending, this preparation to Hamlet's entrance has all the traces of being a sitcom in which second-rate actors memorize their parts on the night before shooting. Therefore, all in all, the patriarchal system evaluated on the grounds of symbolic competence —by extension, public use of language and dramatic proficiency— does not actually amount to much real value. On his behalf, Hamlet's part in this house is to display his «antic disposition' in the nastiest possible way. He is conscious of the fact that the CCTV cameras watch him all over the scenes where he meets Ophelia and Polonius. Therefore, he spends much of his time acting for the camera, challenging it, and exercising his talent for parody and excessive posturing or moving and walking like a zombie. As I have already said, knowing he is being watched increases his desire to further his «antic disposition'.

Yet, Hamlet confronts his own plight as soon as the Players arrive. Not only does the interaction between Hamlet and the Players acquire the features of a studio television RSC workshop but we witness how the Prince's difficulties to be in command of the language of theatre are contrasted with the team-based spirit of the Players. The Player King is portrayed by the veteran John Woodwine, himself a potential parental signifier as he is an RSC senior member. At this instant in the play, Hamlet's theatrical ego is stricken as his preconceptions shatter when trying Phyrrus' speech out. He discovers here what the difference is between ranting in solitude and belonging to an ensemble of actors like those of, for example, the RSC. It is never as clear as in Hamlet's attempts to be the great actor that his delusive search for truth proves futile. He discovers that he is actually incapable of properly delivering Phyrrus' lines. His speech is full of crampy and jerky generalized feeling which cannot truly get to the inner truths of the piece. This manifests a hard truth: no matter how much one may like drama, one needs to *be able* to do it. It is not simply, as Hamlet interprets, a «dream of passion» (2.2.500) and letting oneself go with the flow of some hocus pocus inspiration.

In this respect, Doran seems to be making a point on acting and what acting represents for the RSC. As Donnellan mentions, misery comes to the acting work when the performer pushes and shouts emotions out loud, a fact which indicates nothing else but precisely that: mere

shouting and generalized feeling.<sup>27</sup> Yet, Hamlet, a few hours after his embarrassing rendition of Phyrros' lines, patronizingly lectures the Players on how to deliver their own speeches. «Beware of Jargon», says John Barton to this contradictory behaviour, «It can lead to talking about acting taking the place of actually doing it».<sup>28</sup> Hamlet's experimenting with theatre is resulting into a rather unpleasant and painful experience.

Doran highlights the team playing skills needed to engage in ensemble rehearsals, a principle he applies in his productions. However, at the same time, failing to embrace this is precisely where Tennant's grandeur as Hamlet resides. This proves the point that Hamlet's confusion lies in his inadequacy to find his way within the semiotic as well as within the symbolic realms. The other actors whisper the lines to him. Yet, he does not even look at them. He is incapable of being fueled by the Players' patient support. As Donnellan points out, the actor's block and fear are always manifested in an aggressive attitude against other factors like the script, fellow actors or the stage.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, rather than following Branagh's paternalistic approach in the speech to the Players, Tennant's Hamlet rages against them after they have shown him sympathy. So his response to his inability as an actor is precisely to act as the commanding impresario and furiously thunders at the clown who enjoys himself while he delivers his lecture. As Kostya says when embodying the Critic, «[i]gnoramuses are the ones who do criticize most».<sup>30</sup> Tennant embodies a Hamlet who has proven incapable of truly engaging in the craft of drama. Consequently, he will now turn to filmmaking, with equally disastrous results.

## 5. UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

In this production, again, Doran follows suit with Almereyda's *Hamlet* in the sense that a hand-held camera is involved in the *Mousetrap*. Nevertheless, what Doran does is to stage the *Dumb Show* and *The Mousetrap* and puts Tennant as Hamlet to record both performances with his hand-held camera. Thus, the film offers to the spectators a double perspective: one directorial vision and the vision Hamlet has of the play-within-the-play.

Contrarily to what occurs in other productions, Doran turns the *Dumb Show* into one of the jewels of this production thanks to Michael Ashcroft's choreography. The show is presented as a little *variété* piece in which the monarchs are anthropomorphic animals. The King is a little chimpanzee who, when dead, runs away covered in a white sheet like a cartoon ghost. The Queen is an overweight crossing of a panda bear with a lascivious gorilla. Judging from this, it appears that Hamlet has not just written a dozen lines for the *Mousetrap*. I would even suggest that Tennant's Hamlet may have staged the *Dumb Show* himself. Much of this representation relates to how Hamlet intends to reduce his father and trivialize his presence. The Queen in the *Dumb Show* bounces her man boobs —the Queen in the *Dumb Show* is played by the male company clown— on Polonius and other members of the audience and unapologetically parades

<sup>27</sup> Donnellan, p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Barton, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Donnellan, pp. 5-6.

<sup>30</sup> Stanislavski, p. 14.

as an oversized royal oversexed creature. However, this is not enough for Hamlet. A black actor playing the part of Luciano stereotypically acts as the black man with a large coiled penis and, if this racist detail does not suffice, follows the rhythm of drums in an inviting and unambiguous sexual posturing. The Queen shies away from him until he unleashes a plastic extra-large coiled penis. All in all, Hamlet's frustration at the monarchs' sexuality seems written on the performance. This nasty racism and overt rejoice in disgust may be offensive but tremendously useful to clarify Hamlet's repulse at his mother's sexual relationship with the King.

However, as *The Mousetrap* begins, he carefully studies the Player Queen (Ryan Gage) with his hand-held camera. We are invited to participate in Hamlet's gazing at the Queen. Why would Hamlet suddenly pay so much attention to the Player Queen? Is he trying to discover in drama the sense of truth he cannot discover in life? He deconstructs Gertrude into two different personas taking into account his high ideal expectations on her through the stylized vision of the Queen performed in contrast with the grotesque mock Queen used in the Dumb Show. Gage's delicate features manage to bring all the abstract beauty of a court masque. Hamlet's camera shows this Gertrude in low angle and enhances his high expectations on the Queen's promises. However, seen in a wide shot through Hamlet's hand-held camera, Gertrude challenges such notion: «The lady doth protest too much methinks» (3.2.224).<sup>31</sup> The hard reality Hamlet needs to confront here is that, after all, the real Gertrude perhaps never really promised anything to Old Hamlet.

After Gertrude's sarcasm, Gage turns and shares his contempt with us in close-up. This actor's reaction in many ways brings his frustration at the lack of understanding Gertrude seems to be showing here. This might be the kind of feeling the grand actor feels when a member of the audience does not distinguish between fact and fiction. However, Gertrude is not ready to embrace such refinements and truly understands who is behind all this nonsense in the performance. Yet Tennant accepts Gertrude's challenge from the other side of the improvised stage and sarcastically encourages her to believe that the promise of fidelity will be kept. In the television frame, we are given the chance to participate in this tennis match between Gertrude and Hamlet. What Gertrude does is to show black and white visions of the Queen. In discovering the hidden multi-faceted nature of the real Gertrude, he demonstrates that, after all, the source of his frustration is not connected with his uncle but with her. This is the bitter truth which cinema has led him to. Yet, the fact that his vision is developed in theatrical and filmic terms complicates his own notions on Gertrude. In both cases, the filmed Gertrude and the theatrical Gertrude are confusing and incomplete accounts of the character.

## 6. THE CLOSET SCENE

In the stage production, Doran and the team decided not to go for the psychoanalytical reading of the closet scene.<sup>32</sup> As Osborn suggested, the fact that mirrors were displayed on

<sup>31</sup> It is a typical Gertrude's straightforward message, very much corresponding to Heilbrun's commentary on the character in the play and how her economy of discourse situates her. See Heilbrun, Carolyn G (1990): *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women*, London, Ballantine Books, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Doran.

stage had much more to do with the *theatrum mundi* metaphor than with any attempt to read from a psychoanalytical point of view.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, in the television production, Tennant's Hamlet roughs up and aggressively reproaches Downie's Gertrude within her own intimate space in bed. He is momentarily seen as the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* when (Wolf Man) who rages against his mother for having been seen at sexual intercourse with the Wolf Man's father. The eroticism of the scene is manifested in the Prince's bullying and even physical aggression to the Queen. All possible sexual desire is inevitably mingled with Hamlet's brutish reaction against his mother, who drinks alcohol, removes her hair extensions and takes pills to calm her nerves before seeing Hamlet.

When the Ghost enters the room and discovers mother and son hotly messing up on their couch —Downie's nipples observable through her night gown, her body exposed to Hamlet's gaze— Hamlet feels busted as if he had been caught sneaking into his mother's bed. His delay is clearly scorned by Stewart playing the Ghost, who quickly intervenes and recovers his space on the frame beside Gertrude. The Ghost strokes Gertrude's hair tenderly without her noticing, which shows how insignificant the memory of her husband must be to her. She is now unreachable for him. At the same time, both of them are unreachable figures to Hamlet, who sees them in low angle, their heads joined together in a shot that brings on the uncanny picture of his momentarily reconstructed fractured family.

In this sequence, we see that Hamlet's strategies with his mother from now on are far more overtly sincere and even devilishly charming. What is more dreadful is that he seems to be enjoying it as a dramatic exercise. He invites Gertrude to share in his plans to «blow»Rosencrantz and Guildenstern «at the moon» (3.4.210) while she embraces and cuddles him. This happens in what seems the most ambiguous contact between mother and son. It proves much more suggestive and intimate than Zeffirelli's approach as it channels the rough-and-tumble in bed to a much more subtle and tender train of physicality. This proves psychologically dangerous for these two deranged minds. Momentarily, they seem to be reaching that happy comfort of the semiotic phase in which mother and son do not tell each other apart. Gertrude strokes Hamlet's head and leans on his back, her fingers make progress into Tennant's hair. This remains truly strange and not altogether shaped up by any sense of recognition. Suddenly, Tennant at once escapes Gertrude's cuddling and then moves out to pick Polonius up. He rejects female tenderness and returns to the absolute rules of the patriarchal order.

However, Hamlet's pain will be much deeper after Gertrude's laughter, a coup de grâce in this approach to the scene. When he dictates to his mother to «throw away the worser part» (3.4.155) of her heart, she bursts into laughter. The deep uncanny subversion of feminine resistance to patriarchal rule brings a blow to Hamlet's desire for control on his mother's actions. This apparently trifling moment certainly informs about the state of affairs. The Queen is ready to embrace her son but not to make concessions such as abandoning her husband. This is a harder truth than Hamlet can swallow. Right before leaving the room, he approaches Gertrude and kisses her on the lips. This «Good night, mother' kiss brings about the deadly confirmation that Hamlet is a madman, a notion his mother clearly has not

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<sup>33</sup> Osborn, p. 27.

accepted whenever informed by other characters. The kiss is stale, deadly, dispassionate, narcissistic, deflated, somewhere between the withered sexual desire and the slight scorn toward a re-married mother. This dry erotic intimacy is not further exploited in the film. Doubtless, this means that Hamlet has renounced his mother's bodily warmth and presence. His bloody thoughts turn to his video diary as he perceives the Fortinbras' army's taking-off in helicopters. Tragically, the Prince's perception is not sharp enough to perceive Gertrude as a complex human being, who, after all, still loves her son. Therefore, although she knows —as a close-up clarifies that she suddenly realizes Claudius' trick— that the cup is poisoned, she fully drinks it to spare the Prince.

## 7. THE BROKEN MIRROR AND THE THEATRICAL DISLOCATION OF THE STATE

Unexpectedly, the atmosphere of the film becomes more eminently noir and less hybridical in terms of mediality. The familiar court of Denmark becomes now a stale and deadly place. Unfamiliar angles and canted framings explore new perspectives that so far have not been considered. Femininity, as we will see, has been shattered. Ophelia is now the abject creature, locked up and insane. Gertrude has been left out of management. At the same time, we are approaching the territory of the abject. Hamlet himself becomes the abject figure that knows too much.

From the expansive studio theatre, which precedes the play-within-the-play, we move towards a much starker and noir-like type of filming which brings out the darker sides of most characters. Claudius' guards capture Hamlet and bring him into a cellar for an enquiry on Polonius' death. With the utmost speed, Polonius has been replaced by Young Osric. Folder in hand, the young man accompanies Claudius at the interrogation. As Doran says, «he'll be running the country soon».<sup>34</sup> Contrarily to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, this Osric knows how to keep up with his part without losing control, no matter how fake and pompous his foppish presence seems to Hamlet. Played again by Gage, Osric's fake smile recalls Tim Curry's sinister grin when impersonating devilish villains. As he turns his back to Hamlet, a close-up shows him undoing his self-complacent smile and a grimace of contempt replaces it. This moment of *déjà vu* recalls the same Gesture Gage did to the Queen at the Mousetrap scene. This perfidious youth can act within the symbolic system and his uncanny presence acquires the status of a murderous double who, consciously, exchanges glances with Laertes when choosing the foils. Osric is a double-faced character and a poisonous animal.

At the interrogation scene, Hamlet shown in low angle is presented as a figure totally subject to the authority of the dismal Claudius' figure. The King, who rules the symbolic order, now lectures the performer who has tried to oppose him through his antics. When Claudius uses his thundering voice —by the way, Stewart's thundering voice— to demand where Polonius is, Hamlet mimicks such thundering: «In Heaven!.' His mockery is reaching dangerous proportions. Yet, such mocking will be repeated by Ophelia in madness as soon as

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See Doran's commentary in the DVD edition of *Hamlet* (2009).

she listens to the King's commanding voice trying to gain authority over the situation. This proves that his patriarchal rule is overtly slighted by repeated provocations by abject vassals' horseplay. This sinister Bakhtinian use of the carnivalesque theatricality slightly indicates how drama in this noir framing acquires tones of subversion, danger, and even physical aggression. The theatrical and the filming frames in combination have acquired damagingly dangerous tones.

As I said before, a plethora of different angles present the space in different, darker and more fragmentary lights. Gertrude sees her own image deformed in front of the broken mirror. Suddenly and without much explanation, all the mirrors at Elsinore seem to be breaking apart. When Claudius and Laertes plot the killing of Hamlet, they are approached by a different camera angle, which destabilizes the harmonious sense of order and decorum searched for in the initial scenes.

The area has become a factory of havoc. Death pervades the ambience, especially after Gale's Ophelia pays a small visit from the river shore, where her skin has been scarred and stained by thorns and mud. She appears in this scene as the feminine Other, half-naked, covered in branches, a vampiric doll. Ophelia's madness is manifested in purely theatrical terms as she appears in the main space where all the courtly performances have been taking place. In fact, she indulges in more horseplay, doubling Hamlet's previous amateurish outbursts of dramatic impetus, jumping, dancing and even yelling. She manifestly threatens and bumps Claudius' chest. Even to the point of ridicule, Stewart's dominant pose is unmasked as he looks and reacts with fear at Gale's assaults.

The deranged Ophelia has incorporated Hamlet's tools of subversion as dramatic performance. It is with her song and slapstick that she begins her intervention in this madness scene. In this way, Gale's approach unashamedly advocates for simply being and acting mad rather than engaging into complicated readings on the scene. The subversive power of the uncanny manifested in Ophelia's feminine force demonstrates how the power of drama can break the narrow confines of the tight and controlling state of Denmark watched by CCTV cameras. Also, Ophelia is the character that most suffers the mutilations produced by the symbolic order. Her madness breaks out and all sense of rationality disappears from the television frame. Sympathetic to Gertrude and aggressive to Claudius, she acts as if her intuition informed of the King's villainy.

After that scene, the film frame seems more driven to the idea of death and all traces of dramatic art start disappearing. In the original stage production, when Hamlet shoots Polonius, the big mirror cracks and collapses, thus indicating the crumbling of the Danish state. The collapse of the mirror facilitates the audiences' view of Fortinbras' army advancing. However, when this idea is transferred to television, as I suggested earlier, Doran has certainly brought upon an amount of signifiers that may lead to interpreting the metatheatrical power of *Hamlet* in unison with a psychoanalytical reading of this television film production. Rather than the larger state of Denmark, the broken image corresponds to Hamlet and others' Lacanian ideal ego. More specifically, it refers to the fragmentation and shattering of this ideal ego. As Hamlet kills for the first time, the metaphor of the broken mirror becomes a recurrent film noir metaphor, which generally works as a recurrent conceit standing for the distorted personalities of the inhabitants of an oppressive world. In this

way, the film responds to Jones' reading of Hamlet as a hero who cannot avoid fighting his enemies without destroying himself and his own self-image.

As Hindle points out, Tennant's final mirror shot offers «a kind of background visual metonymic (sic) in the remaining hall scenes, telling witness of the disintegration of Denmark's court, right up to the final moments of duelling and death'.<sup>35</sup> For Hamlet, self-realisation occurs in the last scenes as he envisages himself through the looking glass right after young Osric has come to mediate in Laertes' challenge. The «readiness' of Hamlet in that section dwelves in the idea that the end is approaching.

Hamlet toys with this idea as he serenely contemplates and gently bounces Yorick's skull, which is shown in close-up between his hands, passing from one to the other. In this way, Doran's camera underlines the quotidianity of death and the ultimate irrelevance of our demise. Tennant even comically refers to the smell of the skull and carelessly throws it to the dung heap as Ophelia's funeral procession arrives. Very quickly, Tennant learns to imitate the triviality with which the Gravedigger treats the dead bones. Is he rehearsing his own death or toying with the idea that his place is within a tomb? He has come to terms with the notion that in the end there are no absolutes.

One of the ironies in the film is that the Gravedigger (Mark Hadfield) is the working class «good old chap' who, as an example of slightly incompetent acting within the play, laughs at his own jokes, one of the worst sins committed by the second-rate comedian. In this case, Doran's film seems convincing in stating that misusing drama can turn one's life into what at best can be regarded as a poor joke. Curiously, Hamlet is at his most serene state when he stops trying to be an actor. Ironically, his performances become clearer, more calmed and reflective. In fact, during the graveyard scene, he heavily mocks Laertes' alleged overreaction for Ophelia's death and mimicks the deranged brother's desire to jump onto the grave with the utmost contempt and venomous parody. Doctor Who, even in his last moments, even after returning from exile, cannot restrain his shenanigans. That is so even when he wants to pinpoint that mismanaging theatre is futile. Yet, as soon as he sees himself in the mirror, accepting that «readiness is all', Tennant looks much nobler than ever in the film. He has decided, after all, not to perform at all anymore. Ironically, this realization takes place when Hamlet gets ready to visit the «undiscovered country.'

## 8. CONCLUSION

What seems to me one of the highest strengths in this production is that, rather than being put off by the current prejudice against screen Shakespeare, Doran and the Illuminations Media team embrace the opposed natures of theatre and film. It is more than clear that the two media are as different from each other as chalk and cheese. Yet, this is not a reason not to bring Shakespeare to the television screen. The narrative space of television and its flexibility to include all the codes of realism, stylized performance, studio performance, newsreels, or television film itself constitute the perfect space so that the contradictory

<sup>35</sup> Hindle, p. 270.

natures of film and theatre can encounter each other in a narrative of this kind. It is precisely in this confusion of languages that a televisual psychoanalytical reading of this film seems relevant.

The media of film and theatre present their own codes, which need to be learnt before they are put into practice. Following the main theoretical corpus provided by Kristeva's psychoanalysis and drama studies, we will observe that the semiotic and the symbolic worlds are confronted as the television frame deals with the relationships between characters. Identification occurs at multiple levels, which certainly distorts our perception of one single character. For this reason, the irruption of the languages of film and theatre help underlying the complex dynamics in this television studio theatre where characters have been given lines to learn and deliver in public.

Not only is Doran obliged to reconcile —or revel in— the clashes between film and studio theatre, but the theatrical self-reflexivity of the play is here revised. Self-reflexivity is visible in the fact that the opposition of theatre and film becomes precisely the paradox that Hamlet needs to handle. Because he uses drama as a means of struggling for his own peace of mind, his mishandling of the theatrical and filmic medicines produces more damage to himself. Hamlet's real plight is that, in this film, deep inside, he does not feel the quasi-religious veneration for the acting craft of the kind that is preached by Stanislavski. His attempt to reach self-liberation through death intermingles here with his desire to abandon all sorts of engagement with theatre and film.

