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A doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Professor Jacek Fabiszak from Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

“Film portraits of Ophelia in the context of the metamorphoses of the image of a woman”

Summary

The dissertation centres on the changes that the filmic portrayal of the character of Ophelia has undergone in selected seven movie adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The main thesis rests on the assumption that the manner in which Ophelia has been interpreted results from the way in which the woman, her role in the society and culture, has been seen in the given period. The dissertation is comprised of three parts which, respectively, discuss the critical, cultural and filmic perspectives.

The first chapter, “Ophelias: A critical approach”, presents a brief history of critical perspectives on the representation of Ophelia in film adaptations. Film artists have interpreted the image of a female character in general, and Ophelia in particular across the decades. The metamorphoses which this image has undergone, have been manifested on the diegetic level (in the number of scenes in which the heroine has been appearing, the dialogues she has been given, changes in the original storyline and particular lines, etc.) on the one hand, and the manner of shooting her, framing her body as well as casting, on the other. Ethical and moral changes, the sexualization of the female body in film (and theatre) as well as the growing opposition to the objectivization of the female character in mainstream cinema in recent years (and not only) have significantly affected the manner of shooting women. The few available studies of Ophelia on screen analyse the character from a variety of critical perspectives, mainly feminist, rather than focusing on the filmic techniques which not only reflect novel ways of perceiving Ophelia, but also shape them.

The second chapter, “Ophelias: A cultural approach”, centres on the following issues: the presence of Ophelia in Shakespeare’s play, images of Ophelia in worldwide theatre, painting and literature (as a necessary context for showing this character in films), the presence of Ophelia in other media (video games, video clips, comic books, etc.); and, finally, a brief history of *Hamlet* in world cinema.

The third chapter, “Ophelias: A filmic approach”, presents a discussion of seven films inspired by *Hamlet*. The research concerns an analysis of the film version of Ophelia against a hundred years old history of filming Shakespeare, from the years 1920 to 2018. The films selected for the analysis have made a significant impact on reception and represent a variety of approaches to film adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, especially *Hamlet*; as a result, they include both ‘classical’ adaptations of the play as well as spin-offs, which belong to the so-called multiverse and which develop subplots and marginalized figures and motifs. Thus, the criteria included: the historical development of film, variety of different cultures and social

aggregates (German, Swedish, British, French, American) as well as the directors (auteurs) who significantly contributed to Shakespeare film. I have scrutinized whole films, paying particular attention to 8 scenes from Shakespeare's tragedy in which Ophelia appears as a speaking character; a present, yet silent, figure; or a character described (spoken of) by other characters, e.g. Gertrude's reporting on the circumstances of her death or her funeral). It is the ultimate aim of the present dissertation to provide an in-depth interpretation of how these scenes have been modified by the film directors by cutting the original text, adding and shifting lines, which helped shape the filmic image of Ophelia in the complex web of her relations with other figures.

List of films under scrutiny:

1. *Hamlet: The Drama of Vengeance*, dir. Sven Gade and Heinz Schall, 1920, Germany;
2. *Hamlet*, dir. Laurence Olivier, 1948, Great Britain;
3. *Ophélie*, dir. Claude Chabrol, 1963, France;
4. *Hamlet*, dir. Franco Zeffirelli, 1990, France, USA and Great Britain;
5. *Hamlet*, dir. Kenneth Branagh, 1996, USA and Great Britain;
6. *Hamlet*, dir. Michael Almereyda, 2000, USA;
7. *Ophelia*, dir. Claire McCarthy, 2018, USA.