

Movie Essays - Oedipal Hamlet in Film

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Oedipal Hamlet on Film

It has commonly been suggested by such disciples of Sigmund Freud as Ernest Jones that Shakespeare's character of Hamlet is the victim of an Oedipus complex. While any reading of the play Hamlet, Prince of Denmark that focuses on the text and not the psychoanalytical fads of the current age disproves any notion of Hamlet's oedipal nature, many film artists have followed popular psychology and have adopted this theory for the screen. Whether out of precedent, pressure, or some need to [discover](#) some complex in Hamlet, this has become a very popular trend for filmmakers. Seeing as how it is impossible to do a production of Hamlet without addressing Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude, Hamlet, Sr., and Claudius, the following will be a discussion of several filmic Hamlets, and the presence, or absence of these Freudian notions.

While certainly not the first production of Hamlet for the big screen, Laurence Olivier's 1948 adaptation is the first full length commercial version, and is still highly regarded today. In this film Gertrude looks at Hamlet more like a lover than a mother, gazing at him lustfully whenever he is present. Gertrude's affection is not limited to these gazes, however, as upon Hamlet's agreement to remain at Elsinore she kisses him deep and long

on the lips, like a lover.

Olivier's Hamlet is initially aggressive toward Gertrude during the closet scene, but after the visit from the ghost he becomes as affectionate as Gertrude is in the beginning. Hamlet speaks to Gertrude tenderly, and she responds accordingly. He then gives her a deep long kiss to [seal](#) their [pact](#) against Claudius. Taken out of context the scene would appear to be a conversation and love-pact between two ...

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...ed complexes and have given us Hamlets free of supposed incestuous wishes and confused notions. This reverence for the script and lack of supposition give the viewer a more accurate view of Hamlet that is more in keeping with the complex mind Shakespeare offered his audience.

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