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BAKHTINIAN INTERTEXTUALITY AND CONTEXTUALITY IN ADAPTATION STUDIES: KENNETH BRANAGH AND MICHAEL ALMEREYDA'S DIALOGUES WITH WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

Abstract

Ever since its advent in the late nineteenth century, cinema has been closely intertwined with literary works. The filmmakers soon realized that literature could provide them with just the right material to attract a large number of viewers. Despite the early hostile attacks on adaptations by those who regarded them as inferior to their sources, adapted movies have managed to reach an unprecedented number of audiences. The value of these adaptations, however, lies in the extent of similarity they shared with their sources. This trend, known as “fidelity criticism,” dismissed as irrelevant the adaptations that sought to situate the text in a new context. In recent years, however, this approach has been given reconsideration as every adaptation is viewed as an independent discourse that constantly influences and is influenced by other discourses, including the source text. In other words, this network of re-

lation is, in Bakhtinian terms, “dialogic.” The paper thus suggests that engagement with the Bakhtinian matrix of ideas, including heteroglossia and chronotope, will enhance our understanding of the rationale behind two different adaptations of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1609). Within the Bakhtinian framework, the paper notes, Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet* (1996) and Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000) treat their source text differently as they highlight intertextuality and contextuality in their relations with Shakespeare’s text, respectively. Despite their differences, intertextuality and contextuality stress that the Bakhtinian approach can provide new points of access into some of the major issues of adaptation studies.

Keywords: Adaptation studies, Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogism, intertextuality, contextuality, *Hamlet*

Introduction

With the advent of cinema in 1895, literature was challenged by an unprecedented, invincible enemy. Immediately after the birth of cinema, movies “reached audiences on a size and scale that literature could never dream of” (MacCabe 15). The hostility between literature and cinema continued as the proponents of the former, viewing cinema as the embodiment of mass culture, sought to distance literature, stylistically and thematically, from the reach of the ordinary people. Had it not been for the role of the literary adaptations, we would have probably ended up with two alienated realms.

Although literary adaptations bridged the gap between literature and cinema, they inadvertently directed this relation in a path where the extent of affinities between formal features of a film with those of its source text determined the success or failure of an adaptation. In other words, what linked these two modes of expression was how the adapted movie remained loyal to its source text. However, as new studies and perceptions appeared in literary criticism, more people started questioning the legitimacy of “fidelity criticism” in evaluating a work of adaptation. Robert Stam, for instance, voiced his disapproval of the trend in his “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation.” He rejected the essentialist view of literature, describing, instead, the literary text as “not a closed, but an open structure . . . to be reworked by a boundless context” (57). Stam was influenced by the ideas of the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), whose theory of dialogism has contributed to the key debates of adaptation studies. Dialogism includes a wide range of Bakhtinian thoughts and concepts,

including heteroglossia, polyphony, chronotope, and unfinalizability. What all these dialogic elements have in common is their emphasis on the constant interaction between various texts as autonomous discourses. In other words, every text is situated in a network of discursive powers that shape its overall signification and understanding.

Extending Bakhtin's dialogism to the study of literary adaptations can answer some of the fundamental questions about the relation between a literary text and its cinematic version: How do contemporary cinematic adaptations, for instance, represent and reshape the power structures of contemporary life, or how can a cinematic adaptation address the heteroglossia of its source text while representing power relations between different social, political, and cultural discourses?

This paper sets to study two cinematic adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1609) – Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) – in light of intertextuality and contextuality, as two key aspects of Bakhtinian dialogism, further showing how each director's emphasis on one of these aspects calls upon, revamps, and represents Shakespeare's text in a distinctive manner. The next section addresses a turning point in adaptation studies as it embraces Bakhtinian dialogism to reconsider the relation between literary texts and movie adaptations. The paper further explores Bakhtinian dialogism to establish the analytical path of the discussion. The study will continue with an investigation of Kenneth Branagh and Michael Almereyda's adaptation of *Hamlet* as the former highlights the influence of dialogic intertextuality while the latter stresses the element of contextuality. The last section of the study draws together the key strands of the article, reiterating how Bakhtinian dialogism can contribute to adaptation studies.

1.1. Discourses in Dialogue

The first task of adaptation studies, which have strived to be viewed as a field worthy of critical attention, is, thus, to prove that an adaptation is a discourse constantly interacting with other discourses in a network of intertextual relations. According to Stam, "the text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permuting intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation" (57). Adaptation, thus, is a negotiation between various discourses of past and present. Aragay maintains that the adapted work "negotiates the past/present

divide by re-creating the source text—as well as its author, historical context and, as emphasized below, a series of intertexts—an insight which studies of film adaptation have gradually come to terms with since the early 1990s” (23). This recreation, or reappearance, as suggested by Casetti, “is a new discursive event that locates itself in a certain time and space in society, one that, at the same time, carries within itself the memory of an earlier discursive event” (82).

Aragay’s notion of “negotiation” between past and present discourses, though helpful in showing the setbacks of strict adherence to the source text, falls short of explaining the effects of the interactions between different discourses as in the negotiation process the outcome matters much more than the effects parties can exert on each other. The discourses surrounding a text are not in neutral relations with each other; rather, in most cases, one of the discourses – or elements – overcomes others and determines the direction of the text. In other words, these discourses, regardless of their chronological order, influence each other, or, as Flanagan suggests, enter into a dialogic relation with each other in a matrix “surrounding and interpenetrating all discourses, maintaining in their current form the presence of all their previous speakings and usages and hosting their future renewal” (10). Bakhtin’s key term of “dialogue” has contributed to the field of adaptation studies by showing the manifestations of power structures in cinematic discourses and investigating the effects of various discourses on the outcome of the adaptation process. Bakhtinian dialogism stresses a two-way path between two given discourses, which means that the adapted work and the literary text both can influence each other in a network that redefines inter-relations and intra-connections.

1.2. Bakhtinian Dialogism

Dialogism remained one of Bakhtin’s main concerns and an obvious master key to the assumptions that guided his work throughout his whole career: “Dialogue is present in one way or another throughout the notebooks he kept from his youth to his death at the age of 80” (Holquist 14). Regardless of the names Bakhtin gave to his writings on dialogue, all his writings “are animated and controlled by the principle of dialogue” (Holquist 14). Dialogism indicates the polyphonic play of different voices or discourses, without the assumption of a dominant, monolithic and authorial position or voice in a network of relations. Bakhtin and Voloshinov asserted that “the monologic utterance is, after all, already an abstraction. . . . Any monologic utterance . . . is an inseverable element

of verbal communication. Any utterance – the finished, written utterance not excepted – makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances” (72).

Similarly, the adaptation, as one constituent of this chain of relations, is constantly in contact with several discourses framed in multiple contexts. The ensuing transformation of the text originates from “multiple possible causes of change in the *process* of adapting made by the demands of form, the individual adapter, the particular audience, and now the contexts of reception and creation” (Hutcheon 142, emphasis original).

David Fishelov asserts in his *Dialogues with/and Great Books* that “the dialogic approach emphasizes ongoing processes rather than end-products; a work’s greatness is no longer perceived as a static attribute (a medal given by a ruling hegemony or a by-product of objective aesthetic qualities), but is part of a dynamic relationship between text, readers, authors, artists, and critics” (qtd. in Oz 347). In other words, the more dialogues a work can establish, the greater it will be.

According to Robert Stam, “the word ‘dialogism’ in Bakhtin’s writings progressively accretes meanings and connotations without ever losing this central idea of ‘the relation between the utterance and other utterances’” (208) in a process of “recontextualization” (Casetti 83) or “transculturation” (Hutcheon 146). Stam stresses that the concept of dialogism “refers to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, and which reach the text not only through recognizable influences but also through a subtle process of dissemination” (208).

A key aspect of Bakhtin’s dialogism is his idea of heteroglossia, a reflection of the “fundamental other-languagedness or ‘double-voicedness’ of human experience” (Sandywell 197). Thus, Bakhtin states that

at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. (*Dialogic Imagination* 291)

In a similar way, adaptation is a heteroglot platform, or in Stam's terms, a "mosaic of citations" (208), that represents the relation between the text and various social, historical, religious, and political contexts. Based on Bakhtinian dialogism, this relation "does not envision an absolute separation between existence free of conventions outside texts, and a world comprising only conventions within texts" (Holquist 113). Instead, every adaptation forms a heteroglossic network of relations with its source text as well as other relevant discourses.

The extent of the influence of non-literary discourses or contexts on the interaction between an adaptation and its literary text distinguishes between two different, sometimes opposing, aspects of Bakhtinian dialogism: intertextuality and contextuality. The principles of intertextuality and contextuality separate two groups of literary adaptations: "Some adaptations of a given literary source text are more powerfully characterized by their relationships with the source text; whereas some other adaptations of the given literary source text are defined in terms of their relationships with their contexts" (Oz 348). The study of the first group of adaptations will be more insightful if it focuses on dialogic intertextuality as such a perspective "provides a powerful description of the textual flow that characterizes the cinema" by exposing "the artificiality and permeability of textual 'boundaries,' the intertextual perspective" (Boyd and Palmer 7). However, dialogic contextuality will provide a more comprehensive study of the second group of adaptations since these works "are adapted in an enormous range of cultural contexts" (Fischlin and Fortier 8).

As Kenneth Branagh's main concern is to be as close to Shakespeare's text as possible, our discussion of his adaptation of *Hamlet* primarily focuses on its textual construction through similarities and departures from Shakespeare's play. Thus, the section on Branagh's *Hamlet*, "whose four-hour length bespeaks its determination to avoid the usual cuts in the play" (Leitch 96), presents a reading that is based on the Bakhtinian idea of dialogic intertextuality. However, since Michael Almereyda's adaptation indulges itself with its historical and social context more categorically than it does with Shakespeare's text, the discussion of his adaptation can be regarded as an attempt to shed light on what Seda Oz calls "Bakhtinian contextuality" (346) in this particular American adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy.

2.1. Intertextuality and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*

The term “intertextuality” was coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s as a part of her groundbreaking study of Mikhail Bakhtin who was almost unknown to the Western audiences back then. Kristeva states in her famous “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” that “Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to another structure” (35-36; emphasis original). She maintains that Bakhtin’s emphasis on dialogue changes the stance that every text is a “point (a fixed meaning)” (35-36). Based on the principle of intertextuality, a text is a place – not a point – where, as J. Feral says, “various textual surfaces and networks . . . cross” (qtd. in Mai 33). A literary adaptation, thus, finds itself within a network of cross-references where different texts and contexts are constantly at work. Studying adaptations with regard to the concept of intertextuality has the benefit of “debunking the original/copy binary pair which lay at the basis of traditional adaptation studies” (Aragay 25). Moreover, the intertextual approach suggests “to treat film and literature not as ‘original’ and its ‘adaptation,’ but as equal partners, existing in a complex and unstable web of relationships with other texts” (Mazierska 16).

The study of cinematic adaptations has in the last decades witnessed what Robert Stam describes as the move from text to intertext (60). Central to this significant change is “Bakhtin’s central observation about language: namely that every utterance, in ways too innumerable to anatomize, responds to those that have come before, even as it is answered, in turn, by those that follow” (Boyd and Palmer 7).

As mentioned earlier, Kenneth Branagh’s adaptation of *Hamlet* (1996) is a premeditated attempt on the part of the director to present a full text adaptation of Shakespeare’s play, which lasts for four hours and echoes “a reverential, pedagogical, and Anglophilic dispensation toward the Bard” (Albanese 8). Although some critics have taken strong positions against Branagh’s movie – like Quentin Curtis, who claims that Branagh’s adaptation is “not a great *Hamlet* or even a great film . . . but a great undertaking” (qtd. in Nicholas 38) – others have hailed him for struggling to make Shakespeare accessible to the public: “Kenneth Branagh has always conceived of his mission as a popularizing one, bringing Shakespeare to those who may not otherwise encounter the work” (Maerz 128).

The presence of Russell Jackson as the text consultant in the film's crew indicates Branagh's firm intention to present an immaculate adaptation of Shakespeare's play, "to make an appeal to educational validity, whilst still providing the audience with the quality of verse and the set-piece speeches they would expect from a full text" (French 88). Branagh's mission to create a Shakespeare-like aura for his film is clear from the outset of the movie. His movie begins with its name HAMLET carved in a plinth as the tracking camera moves slowly to show the bleak, snowy Elsinore. This strategy very soon reveals that the director seeks to create contexts that resemble those of Shakespeare's text to boost the intertextual relation between his cinematic discourse and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Here, we focus on two of these contexts, political and religious, to further analyze this dialogic relation.

Set in an unspecified period of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Branagh's film is "dominated by its political resonances," rendering "Denmark as a militaristic state" and not dithering "to demonstrate the extent to which Denmark's power is dependent upon the cooperation of a gallery of soldierly underlings" (Burnett, "Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*" 78). The insistence on the political context of the play is manifest in the director's attempt to highlight the state of the troubled Denmark by an unprecedented prominence he bestows upon the role of the Norwegian prince Fortinbras, whose determination to act counteracts Hamlet's endless hesitation (Walton 37). Thus, the decision to approach the political features of Shakespeare's play more than any previous film version is yet another strategy to deepen the viewers' understanding of the Bard's multi-layered play. Branagh's *Hamlet* reminds us repeatedly that the "situation involving the struggle of a thwarted son to assert himself is not confined to the Danish royal family" (Hindle 192). Furthermore, his detailed adaptation has the benefit of avoiding the usual oversimplification of the play's characters, reducing Hamlet to a weak, doubtful mourner and Claudius to a wicked King who easily fools other people. Hindle states that the full version allows more space for Claudius' skillful manipulation of Laertes into a plot to revenge his father's death, thus showing a richer portrait of the King than the usual oversimplified representations of him as a conventional villain (192).

Another important context created in Branagh's version of *Hamlet* is the religious one. This context, which focuses on "Hamlet's continuing uncertainties about life, death and the afterlife in the play," was "entirely missing in Zaffirelli's 'action' *Hamlet*, where the Ghost is virtually left out" (Hindle 194). In Branagh's

adaptation, however, religion prevents Hamlet from taking revenge on his uncle in a scene where he is secretly listening to Claudius's confession. Hamlet thinks murdering Claudius will purge his sins and send him to heaven where his own father had already been dispatched. These uncertainties about life after death are mainly the sources of his hesitation.

The issue of “point of view” is an indispensable part of any discussion of Branagh's cinematic version of *Hamlet*. According to Hindle, “the delivery of a full text and no less than 45 (silent) visual interpolations to ‘illustrate’ various elements of the story mean that Hamlet's point of view in the drama is no longer distinctly privileged over the viewpoints of other key characters” (193). The multiplicity of point of view in Branagh's *Hamlet* and the camera's reluctance to take any single POV is yet another intertext between the movie and Shakespeare's polyphonic play where every character, even minor one, has his/her own voice without being silenced by any domineering one. The role of the Ghost, for instance, has received more attention in this version of the play as, early in the movie, the camera assumes the POV of the Ghost, a move never observed in any previous *Hamlet* film. This polyphonic feature also helps Branagh's movie sustain its viewer's attention throughout its four-hour run. Furthermore, the director's choice of 70mm high-resolution film gauge for motion picture photography is a technical strategy to preserve this attention as “the higher resolution of 70mm allows closer reading of faces in the middle distance, reducing the need for the conventional cutting in for a close-up to support the spoken word with visually communicated emotion” (Cook 106–7). Also, this cinematographic solution allows Branagh “to film long stretches of dialogue in a single take without sacrificing the appeal of the orienting response, which camera movements can provide in calibrated fashion” (Cook 107).

Unlike some Shakespeare's adaptations in which even major characters are omitted, Branagh not only keeps all Shakespeare's characters but he also gives them the opportunity to have their own voices. And that is why Branagh has selected famous movie stars even for minor characters in his film. In addition to Kenneth Branagh, Julie Christie, Derek Jacobi, and Kate Winslet, who play the major roles in the movie, Branagh has chosen Billy Crystal, Jack Lemmon, and Robin Williams to play the roles of the gravedigger, Marcellus, and Osric, respectively. This meticulousness of the director's choice of characters well indicates his overall strategy to approach Shakespeare's plays as his adaptation “features much fine acting, making the full text utterly accessible and providing a

dramatic delivery in settings that uniquely reveal on film a coherent wide-arc plot at the same time as multiple thematic resonances are repeatedly exposed” (Hindle 197).

Branagh also draws some analogies between stage and screen in a metacine-matic endeavor to further approach Shakespeare’s play. In the play-within-the-play scene, Branagh as Hamlet constantly enters and exits from the world of the play and the world of the movie by changing his position between the stage and audience, drawing attention to his role as the director of the play.

This scene also further exemplifies the polyphonic nature of the adapted film as the camera rapidly shifts focus from the stage to the implied addressee, and then to the character who is watching the reactions of the addressee. Branagh’s insistence to show every participant in this scene is indicative of his mindset to avoid missing not only Shakespeare’s words but also his characters’ moods and reactions. This, however, does not suggest that Branagh’s aesthetic vision has been sacrificed to his meticulous reworking of Shakespeare’s text. Branagh’s use of flashbacks in the narrative exploits a filmic temporality while his choice of a late-nineteenth-century castle revamps the elements of spatiality in the story.

2.2. Contextuality and Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet*

Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000) presents a very different version of Shakespeare’s play. Unlike Branagh, Almereyda seeks to show from the very beginning that his *Hamlet* is situated in different contexts compared to Shakespeare’s play. He begins his movie with a series of statements that disclose the background of the story in a taciturn, direct way:

- New York City, 2000
- The King and CEO of Denmark Corporation is dead.
- The king’s widow has hastily remarried his younger brother.
- The King’s son, Hamlet, returns from school, suspecting foul play.

These statements prepare the audience for a *Hamlet* that will violate their expectations. Almereyda’s *Hamlet* well stresses, as James Naremore emphasizes, “the need for adaptation studies to definitely move away from formalistic concerns and study adaptations in the light of contextual (economic, cultural, political, commercial, industrial, educational) and intertextual factors” (qtd. in

Aragay 25). A distinctive feature of Bakhtinian dialogism is also “its sensitivity to context” (Flanagan 8). Literature, as well as the cinema, must be comprehended within what Bakhtin calls the “differentiated unity of the epoch’s entire culture” (*Speech Genres* 5) or “the ideological horizon” (Bakhtin and Medvedev 126) of an epoch as, in a heteroglossic network of relations, “meanings are irreducibly dependent on the contexts generated by particular readers and reading situations” (Leitch 16).

Adaptations are creative products and examples of an interpretative process that mirror the interplay of different discourses. Hence, it is necessary to situate adaptations “within a broader framework, relating to political, economic and legal circumstances, and defining the participants contributing to the adaptations: the ‘adapters,’ the audience and the cultural context” (Bruhn, Gjelsvik, and Hanssen 10). In Bakhtin’s terms, “language is something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development, a process teeming with future and former languages” (*Dialogic Imagination* 356).

The number and significance of contextual factors in Almereyda’s adaptation highlight its aptness to be studied via Bakhtinian contextuality as the concept can lead to productive investigations of the texts “that are defined more on the basis of their contextual dialogues than by their intertextual dialogues, even though both dialogues are simultaneously constitutive of the adaptations” (Oz 347–48). That is to say, Almereyda’s tragedy “is dependent upon its host – Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* – for its existence, yet it is simultaneously engaged in a struggle to differentiate itself from it and so establish a separate identity for itself” (Fedderson and Richardson 153), which needs to be defined in some new contexts. Shakespeare’s tragedies, especially his *Hamlet*, can easily accommodate various social, political, and cultural components due to the comprehensiveness of their stories, which include such themes as greed for power, murder, revenge, love, and unfaithfulness. These “heteroglot texts” emphasize “the fact that every text offers itself as an invitation to be rewritten” (Leitch16).

Dennis Cutchins “criticizes the tendency among scholars attempting theorisation to mention only the intertextual relationship between texts while disregarding other complex and detailed models” (qtd. in Oz 346). This tendency limits our understanding of the adaptation because “not only the meaning of the utterance but also the very fact of its performance is of historical and social significance, as, in general, is the fact of its realization in the here and now, in

given circumstances, at a certain historical moment, under the conditions of the given social situation” (Bakhtin and Medvedev 156). For instance, the absence of historical and social power structures in the critical evaluation of Almereyda’s movie clouds the director’s aim to “address an end-of-millennium anxiety regarding the collapse of human relationships and the growth of personal alienation in a media-driven world of hi-tech communications” (Abbate 82).

The significance of social and historical contexts lies not only in their presence but also in the way they communicate with each other: “What matters here is not the mere presence of specific language styles, social dialects, and so forth, a presence established by purely linguistic criteria; what matters is the dialogic angle at which these styles and dialects are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 182). In this regard, Cutchins emphasizes the significance of the transformation of the context in the process of adaptation. He notes that scholars of adaptation need to “strive to understand not the text or the context, but the way interrelated texts and contexts work together or against each other at their boundaries” (qtd. in Oz 347). The interactions between different contexts create a communicative situation that, according to Cassetti, does not just involve a text and its surroundings, but, more significantly, it suggests the interaction between different elements and “the way in which they, together, bend the text one way or another” (84). Almereyda’s *Hamlet*, an “utterance” in the Bakhtinian sense, can be viewed as a product of the interaction between major historical and cultural contexts, or a “Tower-of-Babel” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 278), mixing different contexts shaped around the text.

The interaction between these contexts is entailed in Bakhtin’s idea of heteroglossia since this concept “accounts for the simultaneous circulation and interaction of representational discourses (the text) and other socio-cultural discourses beyond representation (the context)” (Pribram 156). As Stam maintains, heteroglossia is “a notion of competing languages and discourses applying equally to ‘text’ and ‘context.’ The role of the artistic text, within a Bakhtinian perspective, is not to represent real life ‘existents’ but to stage the conflicts, the coincidences and competitions of languages and discourses, inherent in heteroglossia” (qtd. in Pribram 155–56).

Almereyda’s *Hamlet* finds himself entrapped among competing representations of two contrasting visual viewpoints. Hamlet’s POV and his extremely personal world are depicted through the black and white images of his Pixel-

vision camera's video diary a play within a play becomes a video within a film here. These Pixelvision camera's images compete with the colored images of "a cultural landscape of hostile corporate takeovers, Blockbuster Videos, and the commercial products of relentless digitization (Ko 19). Hamlet's "camera eye in its adversarial act of retelling, disclosure, and dissent critiques official and commercial imagemaking, and potentially disrupts the smooth public relations display of corporate power" (Harrison 119). Moreover, placing Almereyda's cinematic discourse "in the context of Pixelvision's mixed status as child's toy and avant-garde instrument" symbolizes the growing concern of many contemporary filmmakers, including Almereyda, to make movies "that are more direct extensions and continuations of childhood and amateur media experiences" (Donaldson 222–23), sharply contrasting lavish and costly productions of movies such as Branagh's *Hamlet*.

One of the significant scenes in the movie that highlights the competition among visual representations of the heteroglossic world is when Hamlet's mother urges him not to go to Wittenberg. The scene shows Gertrude in the car who rolls down the window half-way, and the images of Hamlet and Claudius as well as the tall buildings behind them are reflected in the window. These visual representations, as part of the broader technological context, permeate the movie. Even when Hamlet dies, "a jumbo jet takes off into the sky. Even his departing soul, rather than being attended by 'flights of angels' (5:2:354), flies up to heaven in an aircraft: it is technological ascension" (Abbate 87).

Almereyda's version of *Hamlet* is situated "in a matrix of cultural discursivity" (Bhaskar 391) that manifests itself in the network of interactions between the text and the contexts surrounding it. Bakhtin contends that "a narrative text cannot be understood without a decoding of the cultural meanings that are embedded, and have accrued over centuries, in the strata of popular languages, in the forms of cultural expressions, and in the 'forms of thinking' that are specific to a particular culture and which the text has woven together into patterns of cultural signification" (qtd. in Bhaskar 391). For the first time in a *Hamlet* film version, the role of the Danish prince was played by an actor in his twenties. The 27-year-old Ethan Hawke was modeled after melancholic American heroes like James Dean and Kurt Cobain who could not reconcile themselves with the American corporate culture: "He is a bright young man struggling deeply with his identity, his moral code, his relationship to his parents and with his entire surrounding community. Hamlet was always much more like Kurt Cobain or

Holden Caulfield than Sir Laurence Olivier” (Almeryda xiv). Also, the idea of placing an electronic wire on Ophelia’s body to listen to her conversation with Hamlet came “originating from and symmetrically reversing Monica Lewinski’s phone-tapping of intimate conversations with President Bill Clinton” (Almeryda xi). The character of Ophelia, as revisited by Almeryda, suits the movie’s newly defined contexts too. The film “avoids the unabashed sublimation of Ophelia’s appearance, madness, and death found in the likes of the popularized films of Olivier, Zeffirelli, and Branagh” (Rooks 476). Unlike Branagh’s Ophelia, who is “a pawn of all the men in her life” (Teker 117), Almeryda shows a disrespectful and defiant Ophelia played by the youthful Julia Stiles. Compared with Branagh’s version, in which “Ophelia has 1,233 words and is on screen for thirty-five minutes, more than in any other film of the play” (Leonard 58), Stiles’ appearance is shorter, but by no means less significant.

These perceptions may explain “why this skillfully cut-down but cleverly shot film delivers such a rich visual and aural translation of Shakespeare’s language for a modern film audience” (Hindle 204). Almeryda’s millennial utterance “introduces us to the remarkable complexities” (Cook 166) of the young Hamlet who embodies the confusion and alienation mostly associated with the young generation targeted by the filmmaker. The characteristics and requirements of the youthful audience are the main determining forces in specifying the reception context of Almeryda’s movie, a context that includes “elements of presentation and reception, such as the amount and kind of ‘hype’ an adaptation gets: its advertising, press coverage, and reviews. The celebrity status of the director or stars is also an important element of its reception context” (Hutcheon 143). The dialogic relation between the adaptation and its reception context suggests that the movie also directs its audience as it impels his viewers “to engage with other aspects of social experience and other members of the interpretative community, generating a network of ‘creative perception’ and dialogic participation” (Flanagan 10). By inviting his audience to this dialogic participation, Almeryda seeks to defy one of the key beliefs of film adaptation theory, namely “that audiences are more demanding of fidelity when dealing with classics” (Hutcheon 29).

As Almeryda’s *Hamlet* indulges itself mainly with its contemporary contexts, or blends “period and contemporary markers” (Leitch 100), the director needs to replace the major context(s) of the play with new ones suitable for the requirements of his text and his intended audience. As mentioned earlier, Bran-

agh created a religious context, similar to Shakespeare's play, to explain Hamlet's hesitation to take revenge on Claudius, especially when his uncle is confessing his crime. Almereyda's recontextualization process entails the replacement of "the religious piety motivating Hamlet's delay with the confusing and overwhelming allure of capitalism as the cause of indecision and passivity" (Harrison 118). Almereyda's use of Thich Nhat Hanh's Buddhist terms "to inter-be" instead of "to be" further shows the director's insistence to distance his adapted work from the pious Christian context. Within this framework, Hamlet's use of a camera finds a political dimension as "he uses this puny and inadequate technology to intervene in the politics of power. He records the cameramen filming his uncle's press conference announcing the new CEO of the Danish Corporation" (Harrison 119). The politically defeated Hamlet finds himself shattered to a point that he even cannot brand his own sense of revenge as valid.

An important question that arises here is why the language of the characters, unlike almost every element of the movie, has not been modernized. The answer lies in Almereyda's belief in the ability of Shakespeare's language to convey even the most intricate ideas laconically. Almereyda "had no wish to illustrate the text, but to focus it, building a visual structure to accommodate Shakespeare's imagery and ideas" (x). He sought to create a movie with "clarity and momentum" and found Shakespeare's language "lavish enough" to serve him well: "If a director can offer imaginative visual translations of Shakespeare's verbal text to communicate its meaning well enough, there may be less of a need for this text to be spoken in full: a little of Shakespeare's rich poetic language may go a long way on screen" (Almereyda vii). The rich, poetic language of Shakespeare allowed the 106-minute adaptation of Almereyda to convey what the director had in mind. Had the language of the film been modernized, the director would not have been able to express his intended meanings and codes with cinematic economy.

Bakhtin's concept of literary chronotope is useful in discerning the temporal-spatial shifts that occur in adaptations, especially the ones such as Almereyda's, that situate the source text in new contexts. Bakhtin defines chronotope as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (*Dialogic Imagination* 84). A change in the temporal-spatial relationships in the adapted versions of a story can, as Tara Collington contends, "reflect different cultural preoccupations" (qtd. in Oz 349). Almereyda's change of chronotope – reshaping Shakespeare's dramatic

text within a vividly elaborated representation of contemporary New York City – together with his insistence to use Shakespeare’s language in the film, enable him to draw his viewers’ attention to the contrast between “Shakespeare’s distant stage lines and the mostly inaudible modern speech inferred from the urban setting,” which in turn stress “[t]he film’s atmospherics of alienation” (Harrison 115). While the play *Hamlet* has castle chronotope as its dominant setting, Almereyda’s film “re-utters Shakespeare’s words amidst a profusion of often discordant images that signify the dissolving future. Taking place in the world’s financial centre—where new data at an accelerating rate displaces and renders obsolete the previous moment’s— Almereyda’s *Hamlet* often cannot avoid conferring on Shakespeare’s words an antique presence” (Harrison 115).

Early in the film, and even before the name of the movie, HAMLET, appears in white on a red background, Hawke is shown as saying lines from Hamlet’s famous monologue: “What a piece of work is man, How noble in reason, How infinite in faculty, in form and moving, How express and admirable in action, How like an Angel in apprehension, How like a god?” (2.2.307–10). A grotesque footage accompanying Hamlet’s monologue helps the director fulfill his objective even before the title character gets to the last part of the monologue when he denounces human beings and expresses his indifference to them. Therefore, Almereyda’s use of not-updated language for his updated film serves his quest for brevity and, simultaneously, manifests the detachment of his characters to the ubiquitous modern milieu as two main features of life in the digital culture.

Hamlet, as directed by Michael Almereyda, stresses Bakhtin’s idea that “at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of [among other things] socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past” (*Dialogic Imagination* 291). The movie sets the counterpoint between “corporate and adversarial youth cultures” (Ko 23), stressing that it is necessary for these contradictions to “wash over a culture’s awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naive absence of conflict” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 368).

Almereyda’s choice of the major chronotope for his movie gives him the freedom to highlight such contextual contradictions. The references to kings and queens come with the eruption of fast-moving images, skyscrapers, and several electronic devices, and New York City’s traffic sounds that drown out

Hamlet's whispering voice. These socio-ideological contradictions enriched by contextual factors play the role of what Bakhtin calls "the centripetal and centrifugal forces" (*Dialogic Imagination* 272) that shape the heteroglossic relations between different discourses. We can think of the director's choice to preserve Shakespeare's language as the centripetal force, while the use of "sound bites, flashbacks, and the chrome-and-glass aesthetic of slick Manhattan businesses" (Leonard 26) shows centrifugal forces at play. Almereyda's adaptation, in other words, "participates in the 'unitary language' [centripetal forces] and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia [centrifugal forces]" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 272).

Conclusion

Bakhtinian dialogism has been an influential contributor to adaptation studies ever since critics like Robert Stam pointed to its potentiality to address new requirements of the field. The idea "is characterized by a reciprocal, two-way relationship between semantic positions" (Flanagan 6), which moves beyond the reductionism associated with the fidelity model of adaptation. In the case of literary adaptation, dialogism suggests a constant relation which takes into account the significance of the contexts in modifying the meaning of the text. This perception is the underlying thought behind the notion of intertextuality in adaptation studies, which "suggests that meanings, including those generated by adaptations, are negotiated in complex webs of intended and unintended meanings" (Cutchins 44).

Kenneth Branagh and Michael Almereyda's adaptations of *Hamlet* are both engaged in a dialogic relation with Shakespeare's text. However, while Branagh seeks to situate his film in contexts similar to Shakespeare's play and deliver Shakespeare's text as uncut as possible, "Almereyda brings his own distinctive preoccupations – a fascination with generational alienation, an attention to the effects of urban existence, and a yearning for an unadulterated and authentic subjectivity" (Burnett, "Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*" 48). Thus, Branagh's adaptation stresses the intertextuality element of Bakhtin's dialogism while Almereyda renders an adaptation which recontextualizes Shakespeare's play in a new time and place, or, in Bakhtinian terms, a new chronotope. This does not suggest any strict categorization of the movies; rather, the analysis shows that each director approaches and represents power structures of the drama in his unique way.

Both adaptations form heteroglossic relations with their source text. Based on the polyphonic nature of heteroglossia, neither the text nor any of the contexts active in the process of adaptation are silenced or left unattended. However, the source text is only one element of the film's intertextuality, "an element of varying importance to viewers depending on how well or little they know or care about the precursor text" (McFarlane 27). If the viewers, as well as the director and screenwriter, feel obliged and committed to establish relations between the adaptation and its source text – as Branagh does, intertextuality becomes the dominant element of the dialogic relation. However, if the adaptation redefines the text based on its contact with new contexts – as Almereyda's film does, Bakhtinian contextuality will better represent the dynamics of power structures and socio-political discourses in the cinematic work.

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BAHTINOVSKA INTERTEKSTUALNOST I KONTEKSTUALNOST U ADAPTACIJSKIM STUDIJIMA: DIJALOZI KENNETHA BRANAGHA I MICHAELA ALMEREYDE S *HAMLETOM* WILLIAMA SHAKESPEAREA

Sažetak

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Od svojeg osvita na kraju devetnaestog stoljeća film je usko povezan s književnim djelima. Filmski redatelji ubrzo su shvatili da im književnost može pružiti materijal pogodan za privlačenje velikog broja gledatelja. Usprkos prvotnim ostrim kritikama adaptacija i pripisivanju slabije kvalitete u odnosu na izvornike, filmske adaptacije doprle su do publike u dotad neviđenim razmjerima. Međutim, vrijednost tih adaptacija odražava se u omjeru sličnosti s izvornim predlošcima. Takav trend, poznat kao „kritika vjernosti“, odriče vrijednost adaptacijama koje tekstu nastoje dati nov kontekst. Ipak, u novije vrijeme taj pristup iznova se razmatra jer se svaka adaptacija promatra kao neovisan diskurs koji neprestano utječe na druge diskurse, ali i podliježe njihovoj utjecaju – uključujući izvorni tekst. Drugim riječima, ta je mreža utjecaja, Bahtinovim riječima, „dijaloške“ prirode. U skladu s time, rad ima za cilj pokazati da primjena bahtinovske matrice ideja, uključujući heteroglosiju i kronotop, može unaprijediti naše razumijevanje različitih adaptacija Shakespeareova *Hamleta* (1609). Unutar bahtinovskog okvira, tvrdi se, *Hamlet* Kennetha Branagha (1996.) i onaj Michaela Almereyde (2000.) različito pristupaju izvorniku tako što prva adaptacija naglašava intertekstualnost, a druga

kontekstualnost u odnosu na Shakespeareovo djelo. No, usprkos različitosti pristupa, i intertekstualnost i kontekstualnost ukazuju na nove mogućnosti sagledavanja glavnih pitanja adaptacijskih studija koje otvara bahtinovski model.

Ključne riječi: Adaptacijski studiji, Mihail Bahtin, dijalogizam, intertekstualnost, kontekstualnost, *Hamlet*