

Aaron Esau

Mrs. Latimer

IB Literature 12, HL

November 14, 2019

Act III Scene III

Why do some people appreciate some art more than others? Art is simply a frame; that is, viewers have the opportunity to use the art and apply their own background and experiences to it. How someone interprets art is unique to them. The less the information a piece of art provides, the more opportunity it is for viewers to interpret the art differently. In the same way, because William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* does not contain detailed stage directions, many aspects of the play—such as the setting or ambiance—are open to interpretation. As play directors have the opportunity to create scenes in a way that they see fit, naturally, some renditions of *Hamlet* contain scenes that fit with the original text of the play than others. Kenneth Branagh's interpretation of Act III scene III of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example, is more effective at communicating Claudius' guilt and lack of forgiveness to the audience through the camera, lighting, setting, and speed of speech than Gregory Doran's rendition is.

In filmed plays, the director controls the position of the camera and can thus force the audience to view the play from a certain perspective. In Doran's rendition of *Hamlet*, the camera moves higher and looks downward as Claudius prays, giving the impression that God listened and forgave Claudius because of his prayer. The motion of the camera toward heaven places the audience in the perspective of God. And, because Claudius' prayers appear genuine, regretful, and desperate, the audience, who is in the position of God, is more inclined to feel bad for or

forgiving of Claudius. However, despite Claudius' attempts at asking for forgiveness for the murder, God cannot forgive him because he is "still possess'd of those effects for which [he] did the murder" (3.3.54)—namely, his crown and his wife—and he is unwilling to give them up. Branagh is more realistic and keeps the camera level with Claudius' face in his version of the play. Doran's rendition also uses a heavenly light that shines down from above on Claudius while he prays. Light has connotations of goodness and change. The audience's original opinion of Claudius is likely that he is an evil character for murdering his father. So, the heavenly light shining down implies that Claudius is a better, changed person and that he is forgiven because of his prayer. However, he is not. Whereas Doran impresses an incorrect opinion that Claudius is forgiven upon the audience, Branagh does not use lighting in the same way for manipulation.

Choosing the appropriate setting is also an effective way for directors to indirectly communicate with the audience about the play. In Doran's rendition of *Hamlet*, Claudius presents his soliloquy loudly and in the center of a large and open room. The setting in Doran's rendition does not give the audience the impression that Claudius is ashamed of his actions as effectively as Branagh's rendition—where Claudius cowers in the corner of a room, inside of a small confessional, and confesses. The confessional is not in the play's stage directions; Branagh added it to his rendition of the play because it reinforces the fact that Claudius feels guilty and desires forgiveness. Branagh's Claudius also talks more quietly and quickly than Doran's Claudius. Typically people talk quietly when they do not want to be heard—when they are ashamed or guilty. And, as it should, Branagh's Claudius' soliloquy seems closer to an emotional outpouring than a self-analysis soliloquy because of the speed at which Claudius delivers it. Doran's Claudius' soliloquy does not feel as authentic because he speaks at a much slower pace.

So, because Doran's rendition of *Hamlet* uses camera and lighting techniques that incorrectly imply that Claudius is forgiven, and because Branagh's rendition correctly chooses a setting that reinforces Claudius' guilt, it is reasonable to argue that Branagh's version of Act III scene III of *Hamlet* is more effective at fitting with the rest of the play. Although Branagh's version is more effective, it is not necessarily better. The rendition is simply one person's interpretation of the art, and what is considered good work by one person is not necessarily the same as another; it is subjective.