

CRÍTICA PRÁCTICA DE LA LITERATURA INGLESA (35334)

QUESTIONNAIRE ON MICHAEL ALMEREYDA'S HAMLET (2000)

Description of the class activity:

As part of the assessment activities related to the study of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, students are asked to watch in class Michael Almereyda's film version of *Hamlet* and answer a series of questions. As this is a contemporary cinematic adaptation and postmodern interpretation of the play, students should be familiarised with postmodernist concepts studied in class.

Learning Objectives:

The activity is designed so that students learn to apply the critical concepts and methods of some of the approaches seen in class to an adaptation of a literary text addressing also issues of intermediality.

Competencias específicas del Grado en Estudios Ingleses evaluadas en esta actividad:

- CB3 Que los estudiantes tengan la capacidad de reunir e interpretar datos relevantes (normalmente dentro de su área de estudio) para emitir juicios que incluyan una reflexión sobre temas relevantes de índole social, científica o ética.

- CE3 Desarrollar la capacidad crítica para explicar textos literarios en inglés e identificar las convenciones estéticas de movimientos, etapas, géneros, autores y obras de las literaturas en lengua inglesa y sus modos de producción.

- CE15 Conocer y aplicar las corrientes y metodologías de la teoría y crítica literarias.

Provide short, concise answers to the following questions.

- 1) In Michael Almereyda's film version of *Hamlet*, at every turn, the director reads Shakespeare's play through the lens of a late-capitalist mindset. How is Elsinore re-imagined in a postmodern way?
- 2) Reflections are a constant motif in the film. Consider the types of surfaces where the characters are reflected. What do they say about the postmodern landscape and context? What do they say about the postmodern "consumption" of the individual? Why would New York be the location of choice for the adaptation?
- 3) According to postmodern theories, the subject is constructed as disoriented, at the mercy of floating signifiers, simulations and imitations. How is this portrayed in the film? Are actual commodities seen?
- 4) Remember the leitmotif that "Denmark is a prison" and the constant friction between what things *seem* and what things *are*. In *Hamlet*, "espionage" and deceit between characters is constant. How is Shakespeare's textual reflection of such surveillance reflected in the film? (In other words, consider the channels and mediums through which characters watch and listen to each other or themselves.) Do you think Almereyda is celebrating postmodern technology or do you think that he is being critical about it? How is the characters' language and ability to express themselves "ventriloquized" by modern technology?
- 5) The 'To be or not to be' soliloquy is anticipated and preceded by a speech on the relational notion of "inter-be" which the Vietnamese Buddhist guru Thich Nhat Hanh explains in a television program. This notion is associated with the realization that there is no independent self – that the perception of self, of "me", of "mine" is an illusion. Awareness that "I" am made of "non-I" elements leads to the understanding of non-self and it is the realization of non-self that brings an end to suffering. However, this scene seems to be more related to the variety of communicative equipment shown in the film and with fact that narration seems to be constantly interrupted by a frenzied portrayal of what Jean Baudrillard calls "the ecstasy of communication". How does it affect our perception of the most famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's play?

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- 6) Think about the space where the “To be or not to be” soliloquy is presented. How does this allude to the postmodern tendency to blur the boundaries between high art and popular culture? In which ways can we reinterpret the meaning of the soliloquy within this context?
- 7) How is the “play-within-the play” reinterpreted in this version of *Hamlet*? In which way is it a typically postmodernist narrative? Do you think that the conventions of parody or pastiche simply recreate the postmodern (dystopian) landscape or can they be interpreted as enacting potentialities of dissent? (Because postmodernism relies so much on fragmentation and relativism, consider the extent to which, in the film, Hamlet’s montage of “The Mousetrap” may or may not be unequivocal in terms of interpretation. In other words, provide your own interpretation of the multiple images presented in “The Mousetrap” and why you think they would be included in the montage.)
- 8) Analyze the figure of Ophelia as presented in the film and consider the following questions. How is her relationship to male figures portrayed (in particular in relation to Polonius and Laertes)? What does her style (her clothing, hair) say about her character? To what sort of iconography does Almereyda associate her? The flowers she gives away in her state of madness are mediated in the film and presented in a different format; what does this say about feminist critique and postmodern theory?
- 9) Recall that in very broad terms, feminist critique aims at advocating women’s agency and subjectivity, at the same time that critics take the opportunity to “rewrite” the story of female archetypes. Compare the two versions of Ophelia that you have seen in both films. In your opinion, which is more victimized? Which is more infantilized? Which is more independent? Do you believe the directors provide them with a story of their own or, as Showalter points out regarding traditional criticism and adaptations of the character, they only “exist” because of and “through” Hamlet?