



Eastern Shakespeare: Macbeth, Hamlet, and Othello and Their Modern Film Adaptations in the East

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Abstract

Shakespearean reinterpretation of the Aristotelian tragic hero prioritises psychological truthfulness, moral complexity, and existential nuance, producing a basis for enduring relevance in different cultures and media. In *Macbeth*, rash ambition overcomes restraints of morality; *Hamlet* considers inaction in terms of intellectual and moral analysis; and *Othello* lays bare vulnerability in trust under love, jealousy, and racial dislocation. All the heroes demonstrate a departure from classical determinism, prioritising Renaissance humanist ideals of inner conflict. Contemporary Eastern film adaptations have revived these plays by cultural transposition and visual imagination. Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* transposes *Macbeth* to feudal Japan's samurai world, using Noh aesthetics to explore existential despair. Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* projects *Hamlet* into Kashmir's politics of conflict, portraying an intertwining of individual loss and collective trauma. *Omkara*, his *Othello*, transposes racial tension into caste-based dislocation in Indian social hierarchies. These films preserve Shakespeare's thematic core, ambition, identity, and betrayal, while shifting the tragic hero to new historical and sociopolitical contexts. The adaptations affirm the tragic hero as a lasting signifier of moral degeneration and human vulnerability, provoking modern viewers to consider recurring concerns about power, morality, and identity in changing contexts.

Keywords: Ambition, Culture, Eastern Adaptation, Shakespeare, Tragedy

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Introduction

Tragedy, as a dramatic and literary form, has encapsulated the essence of human conflict, suffering, and moral inquiry across centuries. From its ritualistic roots in ancient Greece to its Elizabethan transformation and subsequent reimagining in modern cinema, tragedy continues to probe humanity's fraught relationship with destiny, ethics and agency. The word tragedy comes from the Greek word *tragōidia*, or "goat song", a term which arose from the choral performances and sacrificial rituals of Dionysian festivals. In its earliest forms, tragedy served both a ritualistic and didactic purpose, evolving into a sophisticated dramatic genre during the classical period. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, defined tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude", designed to elicit catharsis, a purgation of pity and fear (Laird 152). M. H. Abrams describes tragedy as "a profound engagement with the human condition, exploring the moral and existential dilemmas inherent in suffering" (128). The double aim of emotional response and intellectual investigation has helped tragedy survive the barriers of culture and time. The roots of tragedy can be traced to the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, who explored themes of divine justice, moral conflict and human fallibility. These Greek dramatists established conventions that defined the genre, including the hamartia (tragic flaw), the inevitability of fate and the cathartic resolution. For instance, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is a representation of the classical tragic model, where the protagonist's downfall is both inevitable and tied to his moral and intellectual errors. The Roman playwrights, Seneca in particular, assimilated Greek tragedy through infusions of rhetorical grandeur and Stoic philosophy. It was this variant of tragedy that heavily influenced the Renaissance English dramatists to intermingle principles from antiquity with those from the medieval morality play, eventually creating a distinctive form of Elizabethan tragedy. Harry Blamires states, "Elizabethan tragedy combined the formalism of classical

tragedy with the self-exploratory tendencies of medieval allegory, contributing thus to the emphasis of the Renaissance on individualism and moral investigation” (Blamires 91). Shakespeare alone redefined the genre as infused with psychological depth and complex characterisations and formed the quintessence of an Elizabethan dramatic innovation. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the tragic hero is identified as a noble person whose downfall is brought on by a hamartia or mistake in judgment. It is a classic archetype meant to create pity and fear in the reader or observer so that the dramatic effect of catharsis may be achieved. Against the determinism of Greek tragedy, the Elizabethan tragic hero is seen within the Renaissance’s theme of personal responsibility and moral dimension. Shakespeare’s protagonists, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Othello, evolve from the Aristotelian model; not just victims of fate but an active party to their downfall, they confront ambition, doubt, and jealousy. Harold Bloom states, these characters “map the internal landscapes of modern man, portraying the conflicts of self-awareness, morality, and destiny” (54). Their human struggles cross borders of their times to reveal universal insights into human nature.

In the cinematic adaptations of Shakespearean tragedies, the tragic hero is reimagined to resonate with contemporary audiences. Directors reinterpret these classic works by employing modern settings, visual storytelling, and innovative narrative techniques. For instance, Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* (1957), Roman Polanski’s *Macbeth* (1971), and Justin Kurzel’s *Macbeth* (2015) emphasise the psychological deterioration of the protagonist through atmospheric tension and symbolic imagery. Similarly, Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet* (1996) exploits the cinema space for the existential predicament of the protagonist; on the other hand, Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Haider* (2014) offers compelling interpretations of this archetype, based within the Indian cultural milieu. Oliver Parker’s *Othello* (1995) uses this expansiveness of cinema to underline the racial and

emotional dimension of the play, while Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara* (2006) is another adaptation of *Othello*, set in the contemporary context of rural India. Andrew Laird notes that modern adaptations "transpose the moral and emotional core of Elizabethan tragedies into contemporary contexts, creating new pathways for understanding the timeless themes of ambition, jealousy, and existential despair" (152). These adaptations, then, not only preserve the very essence of Shakespearean tragedy but also demonstrate the adaptability of the genre, with themes and characters remaining timeless. Still a metaphor for human nature, the tragic hero as posited by Aristotle and reinterpreted through Shakespeare, is the axis around which this study has unfolded the history of tragedy, from its origins in classical tragedy to its Elizabethan resolution and reinterpretation in contemporary films.

The Tragic Hero in the Texts of *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*.

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the tragic hero emerges as a complex figure moulded by ambition, external manipulations, and moral introspection. The play is about the intertwining of fate and free will and places Macbeth as a man of enormous potential whose flaws are the source of his destruction. The first prophecy made by the witches in Act I Scene III of *Macbeth* defines the direction of Macbeth's tragic path: "All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis! Thane of Cawdor! That shalt be king hereafter!" (Line 49–51). Initially wary, he asks, "Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?" (Line 108), implying discomfort with unearned titles. But his aside later in the same scene reveals the stirrings of ambition: "If good, why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair" (Line 134–35). Here, Shakespeare contrasts Macbeth's latent ambition with his moral hesitation. According to Wilson Knight, this marks the starting point of Macbeth's inner conflict: the prophecy is "acting as a mirror in which his hidden desires echo" (Knight 162). The

soliloquy of the “dagger scene” in Act II Scene I [“Is this a dagger which I see before me?” (Line 44)], delineates Macbeth’s fragmenting psyche. The visionary dagger symbolises both fortune and his will to kill. Critics such as Michael Neill highlight how Shakespeare uses this moment to externalise the inner turmoil of Macbeth, which is a pivotal moment where ambition has outstripped morality (437). Knight continues by relating the imagery of blood and violence to the growing obsession of Macbeth, arguing that the soliloquy shows a “metaphysical struggle between his conscience and his overpowering ambition” (164). Macbeth’s encounter with Banquo’s ghost during the banquet exposes his unravelling. While he previously navigated his ambition in secret, in Act III Scene IV his guilt now manifests publicly: “Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake / Thy gory locks at me!” (Line 50–51). This pivotal scene marks Macbeth’s transformation into a tyrant whose paranoia alienates allies and solidifies his isolation. According to Claire McEachern, the ghost is an expression of Macbeth’s guilt: he cannot reconcile what he does with his conscience (67). In Act V Scene V, when he hears of the death of Lady Macbeth, Macbeth makes one of Shakespeare’s most moving observations on the futility of life: “Out, out brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow” (Line 23–28). This soliloquy shows that Macbeth has finally reached the anagnorisis, i.e., “awareness”, that his ambition has only brought destruction. Knight says this is the “moment when Macbeth fully confronts the emptiness of his pursuits, achieving a tragic awareness that resonates universally” (166). Unlike classical tragic heroes such as Oedipus, whose downfall is predominantly shaped by fate, Macbeth embodies the Renaissance notion of human agency. The witches act as instigators rather than controllers, leaving Macbeth to navigate his path. His moral decline, shaped by ambition and manipulation, aligns with the Elizabethan belief in the corrupting influence of power; Claire McEachern notes,

“Macbeth’s tragedy lies not in his ignorance of fate but in his conscious decisions to pursue power, even at the cost of his humanity” (69). In contrast to conventional Elizabethan tragic heroes like Marlowe’s Tamburlaine, who embrace ambition without introspection, Macbeth’s downfall is marked by his acute moral awareness. This deviation underscores Shakespeare’s psychological realism, offering a nuanced critique of unchecked ambition. Macbeth by Shakespeare is distinct for the exploration of moral ambiguity and psychological depth. Macbeth is both the perpetrator of ghastly acts and the victim of his conscience. According to Michael Neill, “Shakespeare’s genius lies in presenting Macbeth as both villain and victim, forcing the audience to grapple with the complexities of human ambition” (440). Knight further emphasises the interplay of time and fate in Macbeth’s tragedy, pointing out that the imagery of blood and darkness transcends the narrative to symbolise the universal consequences of moral corruption (163).

Shakespeare’s Hamlet is a tragic hero characterised by introspection, moral dilemma, and intellectual complexity. Unlike the traditional tragic heroes who are motivated by extrinsic forces or impulsive passions, Hamlet’s tragedy is highly internalised around his indecision and questioning philosophies. In his first soliloquy [Act I Scene II of Hamlet], “O, that this too too solid flesh would melt” (Line 129), Hamlet reveals his deep sorrow and disillusionment. Fighting with his mother’s speedy remarriage and his father’s death, he laments the “weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable” state of the world (Line 133). This scene establishes his introspective nature and moral idealism, both hallmarks of his character. G. Wilson Knight interprets Hamlet’s melancholy as more than personal sorrow, viewing it as “the burden of universal disillusionment” (17). By linking Hamlet’s grief to existential despair, Shakespeare elevates his tragedy beyond the individual. Hamlet’s famous lines in Act II Scene II, “What a piece of work is man! How

noble in reason, how infinite in faculty” (Line 303–4), articulate his dual admiration for humanity’s potential and his disappointment in its failures. This scene underlines the intellectualism of Hamlet and the struggle between thought and action. Michael Neill writes, “Hamlet’s internal conflict constitutes a ‘metaphysical rebellion against the expectations of revenge tragedy’” (390). The “To be or not to be” soliloquy captures the existential crisis that faces Hamlet as he deals with the fear of the unknown after death. His question in Act III Scene I, “To die, to sleep – / To sleep, perchance to dream” (Line 64–65), reveals his paralysis in the face of mortality. Catherine Belsey observes that this moment “distinguishes Hamlet as a modern tragic hero, whose conflict is rooted in psychological depth rather than external adversity” (qtd. in McEachern 124). In the climactic duel in Act V Scene II, Hamlet displays the shift from paralysis towards accepting: “There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (Line 233). He reaches a point that suggests acceptance of fate and mortality in life, based on the Aristotelian anagnorisis approach. According to G. Wilson Knight, Hamlet’s last act is a “gesture of tragic dignity affirming the inevitability of fate” (338).

Aristotelian tragic heroes, like Oedipus, suffer due to hamartia or mostly by fate. Hamlet diverges from this model by embodying a distinctly Elizabethan concern with introspection and moral ambiguity. His hesitation, rather than hubris or ignorance, drives the plot, reflecting the Renaissance fascination with the complexity of human thought. McEachern observes, “Hamlet’s delay is less a plot device than an observation on the conflict of action and contemplation” (69). This transformation reconfigures the classical model to fit the heroic introspect. As was often the case with tragedy in Elizabethan England, Hamlet’s problem centres on external conflict but gets internalised. The play’s emphasis on soliloquies and philosophical discourse distinguishes it from contemporaries like Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, where revenge is pursued with

relentless determination. Shakespeare's Hamlet is unparalleled in its depth and complexity. His soliloquies provide a window into his psyche, revealing a character simultaneously grappling with personal grief, moral dilemmas, and existential questions. Catherine Belsey emphasises that "Hamlet's tragedy lies in his heightened awareness of human fallibility, making his journey as much philosophical as emotional" (122). Unlike the traditional revenge heroes, Hamlet is well aware of the moral consequences of his actions, and hence his tragic end is more pathetic. Knight points out that this self-awareness makes Hamlet a symbol of the human condition, torn between reason and emotion (22). Shakespeare brings out a tragic hero whose downfall is the result of vulnerabilities both from himself and external exploitation. In Othello, a man of godly nobility and achievement succumbed to jealousy and insecurity, to catastrophic ends. The opening scenes of Othello establish the character in a dignified and moral context. His eloquent speech before the Venetian Senate, in Act I Scene III where he details how he wooed Desdemona ["She loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them" (Line 167–68)], reflects the moral character of the individual and the mutual respect with which he approaches his wife. G. Wilson Knight writes, "Othello's speech lifts him into the rank of the Aristotelian tragic hero, whose greatness of character and high station make it all the more dreadful that he shall fall" (109). In this scene, another issue related to Othello's racial identity that was already prevailing in the society is presented, suggesting what vulnerabilities Iago will seize on later. In this critical scene, Iago instils seeds of distrust in Othello's mind about Desdemona's fidelity. Othello's initial resistance in Act III Scene III ["No, Iago; I'll see before I doubt" (Line 190)] gives way to torture as Iago plays him on the strings of suggestion. The demand for "ocular proof" in Act III Scene III (Line 360) means Othello's moving from reason to passion and marks the beginning of his psychological fall. This is where, according to

Michael Neill, the play reaches a “point of crisis” where “Othello’s nobility is undermined by his inability to reconcile his love for Desdemona with his growing suspicion” (405). The “handkerchief” has turned into a physical representation of trust and betrayal. Iago has managed to enmesh Othello deeper into his web with the symbolic handkerchief. His downfall accelerates during this scene because Iago continues pushing him to a public show of anger. His loss of composure and striking of Desdemona as “Devil!” in Act IV Scene I (Line 244), is in stark contrast with the dignity he exhibited earlier in the play. According to Claire McEachern, this is the moment when Othello’s “internal conflict finds external expression as he transmutes into a jealousy-ridden human being” (104). Othello’s final act was one of misplaced justice and deep regret. Having strangled Desdemona, his revelation of her innocence in Act V Scene II [“O cursed, cursed slave! Whip me, ye devils” (Line 275)] completes the Aristotelian action of anagnorisis. His suicide in the same scene is at once punishment and vindication, “I took by the throat the circumcised dog, / And smote him thus” (Line 352–53). This makes his death a tragic reconciliation with identity and, in the final words spoken, a desire to replace the nobility lost because of his deeds (Knight 113).

Most traits of the Aristotelian tragic hero are possessed by Othello: high birth, a flaw that caused his downfall-jealousy, and tragic fallibility that evokes pity and fear. However, his tragedy differs from classical norms in that it integrates issues of race and cultural alienation. His status as an outsider heightens his vulnerability to Iago’s manipulations and adds a sociopolitical dimension to his tragedy. Ian Smith emphasises the fact that “Othello’s racial identity transforms him into a tragic figure whose greatness and fall are inextricably tied to societal prejudices” (qtd. in Neill 406). This integration of race into the tragic framework is a departure from the classical model. Unlike other tragic heroes of Elizabethan plays, Othello’s defect is not due to an ambition or moral weakness but because of his

emotional vulnerability compounded by his alienation. His willingness to accept Iago's trust shows him to be noble yet unable to envision evil: that is his difference from his contemporaries, like Macbeth, whose crimes are deliberate. Shakespeare's Othello is special in its treatment of themes like jealousy, love, and racial identity. So, while Othello is noble, his fragility adds poignancy to the fall. Michael Neill outlines the duality of tragic focus within the play, between personal and societal tragedy, thereby pointing out that Othello's downfall is as much a failing of himself as it is of others in terms of bias (407). He underscores the poetic intensity of Othello's speeches and their reflection on the hero's emotional extremes. The juxtaposition of love and jealousy in Othello's character creates a tension that drives the tragedy (Knight 111).

In all three plays, Shakespeare infuses his tragic heroes with a fatal flaw that sparks their downfall. Macbeth's unbridled ambition, Hamlet's paralysing indecision, and Othello's corrosive jealousy are the driving forces behind their narratives. However, Shakespeare takes these flaws beyond character defects to psychological and existential dimensions. As observed by Wilson Knight, soliloquies from every hero reveal windows to the soul where not only are the weaknesses exposed, but profound self-awareness of fates also exists (162, 338, 113). An essential aspect of such tragedies is the progressive isolation of the protagonist. Macbeth's paranoia alienates him from his wife and allies, Hamlet's philosophical musings isolate him from court and family, and Othello's jealousy distances him from Desdemona and his Venetian peers. This alienation deepens their tragedies, as their inner conflicts become mirrored by their estrangement from the external world. That this was a trajectory from admired, victorious warrior to nihilistic despot is the very paradigm for the perils of unchecked ambition - his moral awareness puts the play's villain beyond standard depictions of evil and places within us a horror where once there was pity. Claire McEachern suggests that Macbeth represents a

“cautionary tale about the psychological costs of power” (69), whereas Hamlet’s problem lies in his intellectualising and inability to reconcile his actions with his thoughts. Shakespeare deviates from classical revenge tragedy conventions, providing a hero whose interior conflict is the greater struggle than exterior forces. According to Catherine Belsey, Hamlet is a “modern tragic figure whose downfall reflects the complexities of human thought and morality” (qtd. in McEachern 124). Othello’s fall differs in combining personal weaknesses with societal preconceptions. He has outsider status; as a ‘Moor’ in Venetian society, he is a vulnerable figure who becomes susceptible to Iago’s manipulations. Smith says that the tragic downfall of Othello shows sociopolitical facets, with Ian Smith stating that “his greatness and downfall are deeply intertwined with racial and cultural tensions” (qtd. in Neill 405). Shakespeare redefines the tragic hero by fusing classical archetypes with Renaissance individuality. His heroes are not mere victims of fate but active participants in their downfall, struggling with moral dilemmas and existential questions. Michael Neill describes this innovation as a shift toward psychological realism, where the tragic hero’s internal conflict becomes the central focus (437). In addition, Shakespeare’s use of language enhances the emotional and philosophical depth of his characters. The soliloquies in Macbeth, Hamlet, and Othello reveal insights into the human condition that cannot be rivalled, thereby making these tragedies timeless and universal. Although each hero has different characteristics and themes, their stories together explore the fragility of human grandeur. Macbeth’s ambition, Hamlet’s indecision, and Othello’s jealousy highlight the destructive power of human flaws if not checked. At the same time, their self-awareness and final recognition of their failures make their tragedies significant to all mankind. Their journeys invite audiences to confront fundamental questions about power, morality, and identity.

The Tragic Hero in Eastern Modern Film Adaptations.

Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957), a cinematic masterpiece, restyles Shakespeare's *Macbeth* within the samurai ethos of feudal Japan. The film, titled *Kumonosu-jō jō* (Jap. "Spider's Web Castle"), translates the Bard's tale of unchecked ambition and inevitable downfall into a haunting exploration of human entrapment and existential futility. In using Noh theatre aesthetics, Kurosawa depicts Washizu as a tragic hero caught in the web of fate and ambition. Through intricate symbolism, evocative visuals, and cultural recontextualization, *Throne of Blood* offers a fresh yet profoundly Shakespearean interpretation (Watson 7-8). In comparison, Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) offers a starkly different vision, blending Shakespeare's original text with a gritty realism reflective of the turbulent era in which it was produced. Polanski's adaptation underscores the raw brutality and nihilism of *Macbeth*'s ambition, diverging from Kurosawa's more stylised, fate-driven narrative (Henderson 177). The tragic arc of Washizu is heavily reliant on Kurosawa's visual storytelling and stark settings. The opening scene situates viewers in a desolate, mist-enshrouded landscape, where the ruins of Spider's Web Castle evoke impermanence and futility, encapsulating Washizu's doomed pursuit of power. The film opens with a chorus chanting about the folly of human ambition, setting a sombre tone that echoes Buddhist notions of *mujōkan* (impermanence). Similarly, the Polanski version also starts with a bleak, wind-swept beach in which the "Weird Sisters" enact their incantations. This setting transports the audience to a world under the control of dark supernatural powers, much like the theme of fate and predestination in Kurosawa. Washizu's fateful encounter with the "Forest Spirit", an analogy of Shakespeare's "Weird Sisters", underscores his susceptibility to ambition and prophecy. The enigmatic warnings by the Spirit are given in a hauntingly sparse setting, a thatched hut merging into the forest. The contrast between the prophecy scene, where there is no elaborate theatricality, and

Shakespeare's verbose witches highlights nature's nonchalance about human struggle. When Washizu rides through the labyrinthine forest, Kurosawa juxtaposes dynamic tracking shots with static images of the encroaching wilderness as a metaphor for Washizu's entanglement in the web of destiny (Watson 9-13).

Kurosawa's adaptation is far removed from Shakespeare's text, focusing more on existential entrapment than on theological determinism. Washizu's world does not have divine morality or an order of redemption. Rather, he is trapped in an indifferent natural world—a world of impenetrable tangles and relentless mist. The film replaces the verbal introspection of Macbeth with stark visual cues—the rigid posture and mask-like expressions of Washizu, inspired by Noh performance (Watson 14-16). Conversely, in Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015), one can see a psychological depth of character that unfolds Macbeth's mental unravelling through the visceral, war-torn landscapes and hallucinatory sequences. Kurzel's work combines elements of realism and surrealism, emphasising the internal conflict of Macbeth and the destructive power of unchecked ambition. What stands out in *Throne of Blood* is how it unifies Shakespearean themes with Japanese culture in its adaptation. The eerie, ritualistic quality comes from Kurosawa's use of Noh theatre techniques, such as stylised movements, symbolic props, and minimal dialogue. The climactic duel is replaced by a very harrowing scene in which Washizu is pierced by arrows from his soldiers, reminiscent of Macbeth. This sequence, with Washizu thrashing about desperately and then collapsing, epitomises the futility of his ambition and underlines his dehumanisation. The forest, a recurring motif, symbolises the omnipotence of nature and its ultimate victory over human desires. Anchoring the story in Sengoku, a period of social uprisings and *gekokuujō* (overthrow of higher-ups), *Throne of Blood* draws parallels between Washizu's fall and the cyclical nature of history. Noël Burch describes it as Kurosawa's "finest achievement", while T.

S. Eliot reportedly admired its portrayal of Lady Macbeth (Asaji), who epitomises restrained malevolence through her Noh-inspired demeanour (qtd. in Watson 25-27). However, some critics, such as Judith Buchanan, argue that the film's emphasis on destiny diminishes the moral complexity of Shakespeare's tragedy. Yet such criticisms notwithstanding, *Throne of Blood* is a landmark in both Shakespearean cinema and Japanese film, offering an impressionistic reflection on the themes of ambition, fate, and humanity at large (Buchanan 45).

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* (2014) is an Indian reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, weaving the tragic elements of the original play with the sociopolitical realities of conflict-ridden Kashmir in the 1990s. The protagonist, Haider Meer, is a young man grappling with existential crises, familial betrayal, and the moral ambiguities of vengeance. Bhardwaj retains the essence of Shakespeare's tragic hero but enriches it with a context where the narrative is contextualised in a region marked by violence, oppression, and fractured identities (Javed 2). In contrast, Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) takes on a more traditional, full-length adaptation that highlights the psychological profundity and complexity of characters in a historical setting which still holds the grandeur of the original Danish court. The transformation of *Hamlet* to *Haider* is seen in the scenes that echo doubt, betrayal, and revenge themes. After the disappearance of his father, Dr. Hilaal Meer, Haider returns to Kashmir to find himself at Elsinore. The opening sequence brings forth the serene façade of the valley with its undertones of violence. Haider's disappointment becomes even more profound when he finds his mother, Ghazala, in a celebratory mood, apparently unconcerned about her husband's fate. This scene defines the central conflict of filial and moral responsibility. The ghost in Shakespeare's play is reimagined through Roohdaar, a militant who reveals the truth about Hilaal's betrayal by Khurram. The scene where Haider meets Roohdaar is pivotal as it transforms Haider from a grieving son

into a vengeful force. Roohdaar's cryptic dialogue: "Revenge. Vengeance from the serpent of a murderer", echoes the ghost's command to Hamlet, grounding Haider's internal conflict in the political landscape of Kashmir (Javed 3-5). Haider's famous soliloquy in the ruins of his home serves as a cinematic counterpart to Hamlet's "To be or not to be". Here, Haider contemplates the futility of vengeance amidst the tragedy of Kashmir. Bhardwaj emphasises Haider's psychological unravelling through fragmented editing and haunting visuals, blurring the line between madness and calculated defiance. The film's climactic confrontation between Haider and Khurram (Claudius) departs from Shakespeare's original by foregrounding the personal cost of vengeance. Unlike Hamlet, who succumbs to his tragic flaw, Haider chooses to break the cycle of violence, leaving Khurram to face divine justice. This subversion of the revenge trope reflects Bhardwaj's critique of Kashmir's perpetual bloodshed (Ibid. 7-9).

Unlike Hamlet's existential ruminations on mortality, Haider's tragedy is rooted in the tangible horrors of war and betrayal. In Branagh's *Hamlet*, the introspective soliloquies and moral dilemmas of the protagonist are highlighted by the film's lush cinematography and meticulous period details in contrast to Bhardwaj's gritty, contemporary portrayal of Haider's struggle in a war-torn landscape. It also redefines family relationships. Ghazala (Gertrude) is portrayed with greater agency and complexity. In short, it is not only an act of betrayal but a strategy to survive within the oppressive environment. This makes the character go beyond the passive subalternity often attached to Shakespeare's women. Her setting for Haider in Kashmir is something that lends political depth to her narrative: Kashmir has gone through decades of insurgency and military rule. The state of Kashmir itself is an allegorical representation of the corruption of Denmark, its decaying social and political fabric mirroring Hamlet's observation, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark". Furthermore, Haider's transformation

from a grieving son to a revolutionary figure symbolises the struggle for identity and justice in Kashmir. This enables Bhardwaj to condemn not only personal greed but also the institutional violence that arises through nationalistic and separatist ideals. The cinematography of the movie and its soundtrack set it apart from other regular adaptations. The song “Bismil”, performed in a folk-theatre tradition, serves as a “play within a play”, recreating the scene of how Haider accuses Khurram, thereby capturing the communal anguish of Kashmir. This innovative blending of Shakespearean and Kashmiri storytelling traditions underscores the universality of the tragic hero’s plight. In contrast, Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000), the protagonist returns to a modern, corporate New York, emphasising the pervasive corruption and moral decay in modern society, it uses modern technology and settings to reflect the protagonist’s alienation in a contemporary urban environment, illustrating how the timeless themes of Shakespeare’s play can be adapted to different cultural and temporal contexts. *Haider* has been celebrated as a landmark in Indian cinema for its bold exploration of political and personal tragedies. Fatimah Javed praises Bhardwaj’s ability to “amalgamate the 16th-century characters with the current scenario of Kashmir”, emphasising the film’s nuanced portrayal of Haider’s psychological and moral struggles (4). Yet, politically charged controversy surrounds the movie due to the perceived political bias of the movie. Bhardwaj’s sympathy with Kashmiri separatism outweighs the complexities in the context of the Kashmiri conflict.

Another of Vishal Bhardwaj’s adaptations, *Omkara* (2006), reimagines Shakespeare’s *Othello* within the sociopolitical landscape of rural Uttar Pradesh, India. The themes of jealousy, betrayal, and honour in *Othello* are transformed by Bhardwaj into a tale of caste politics, personal ambition, and loyalty, within which the tragedy is reframed. *Omkara* Shukla is a tragic hero who rises to power and becomes undone by his

vulnerability to manipulation and self-doubt. In comparison, Oliver Parker's *Othello* (1995) features a more traditional approach, staying close to Shakespeare's text while exploring the racial dynamics and psychological depth of the characters within a historical Venetian setting. The plot of *Omkara* follows the tragic structure set by Shakespeare but infuses characteristics of an Indian setting. The movie opens with Langda Tyagi, the Iago-like figure, attacking a wedding procession as an expression of the lawless environment *Omkara* exists in. Omkara's first appearance as a powerful man establishes his character as a leader who is respected for his power and feared for his cruelty. This opening scene is a direct reflection of *Othello*'s position in Venice as a man of power and respect. In contrast, Orson Welles' *Othello* (1952) begins with a dramatic, expressionist scene of *Othello*'s funeral procession, immediately establishing the tragic end of the protagonist and setting a sombre tone for the film (Henderson 198). This crucial moment arises when Omkara chooses Kesu over Langda as the one to be his successor, which sets Langda on his manipulative ways. Saif Ali Khan, as Langda Tyagi, projects hurt pride and scheming intent, which he uses to take advantage of Omkara's insecurities about his relationship with Dolly (Desdemona). His susceptibility to the insinuations of Langda is already set into the pattern of his trusting relationship with loyalty (Henderson 38). Desdemona's handkerchief takes the form of a kamarbandh (waist chain), which becomes the key symbolic object that precipitates Omkara's descent into jealousy. He schemed its disappearance by planting it in Kesu and fabricated Dolly's adultery. It was the kamarbandh, a family heirloom as well as a token of love, that made the situation so emotionally charged, and Omkara's distrust more believable and devastating. And all this climaxed when it was shot in such isolation that Omkara goes with Dolly to find some truths about her alleged deception, and, like *Othello* killing Desdemona, his inner turmoil kills the innocent Dolly. Stark and dark shadowed lighting and close-ups

create a strong scene, emphasising emotional intensity. In the case of Omkara, the moment of enlightenment comes too late, leaving him a tragic hero fallen to his weakness (Henderson 39).

Although Bhardwaj retained the basic themes of Othello from Shakespeare, he moulded them according to the socio-cultural context in which he set up the tale of Omkara. This film translates racial dynamics in the play to caste-based hierarchies. Omkara is a half-caste, hence, is placed in an ambivalent position within his political and social circle. This shift positions Othello's alienation within India's rigid systems of hierarchy, making Omkara's insecurities both culturally specific and universally relatable. Parker's Othello, however, places attention on the racial tensions and prejudices within Venetian society, as Othello fights to maintain his honour and dignity amidst such general discrimination. Dolly (Desdemona) is a far more empowered character than her Shakespearean counterpart. Her eloping with Omkara against the wishes of her family shows her strength of character. However, the ultimate end that awaits her, death at the hands of Omkara, highlights the tragic inevitability of their story, underlining the restrictions placed on women in both Shakespearean and Indian contexts. Langda Tyagi is a multi-dimensional villain whose motivations go beyond personal ambition. Saif Ali Khan's nuanced performance catches up with Langda's resentment and his desire to exact revenge on Omkara. Unlike Iago, this character is not always described as an evil-doing man, but his interests get deeply involved with societal place and personal grievances. In Omkara, through the corrupt political system of Uttar Pradesh, Bhardwaj explores the nexus of power, loyalty, and betrayal. The rustic Hindi dialogues in the film add to the authenticity and emotional value of the story. A line like "*Bahubali, aurat ke charitra ko kabhi mat bhoolna*" or "Never forget the treacherous nature of women" echoes Othello's internal conflict while grounding it in Indian patriarchal attitudes. At the climax, when Omkara confronts Langda, this adaptation strays from

Shakespeare by not specifying the fate of Langda. The undefined ending of the film mirrors the message of Bhardwaj, that systemic corruption and violence can never end.

Conclusion

Eastern Modern adaptations, like *Throne of Blood*, *Haider*, and *Omkara*, by transposing Shakespeare's tragedies into culturally specific but universally resonant frameworks, redefine the tragic hero for today's audiences. They keep the heart of the originals but further endow Shakespeare with new cultural, political, and social dimensions. Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* changes *Macbeth* into an existential exploration of human entrapment within the samurai ethos of feudal Japan by highlighting existential futility using the aesthetics of Noh theatre. Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* brings *Hamlet* to a very charged political landscape: Kashmir, and weaves in a story of personal as well as collective suffering. Similarly, Bhardwaj's *Omkara* recasts *Othello* in the context of caste politics and personal ambition in rural Uttar Pradesh, India, highlighting the intersections of power, loyalty, and societal pressures. Each of these adaptations provides a new reading of Shakespeare's themes, yet each one is very connected to the source material. *Throne of Blood* and *Haider* both foreground the inescapability of fate and the destructive force of ambition, but in two distinct cultural contexts, Japanese samurai culture and the Kashmiri conflict, respectively. *Omkara* focuses on the destructive power of jealousy and betrayal within the framework of rural India, transforming racial dynamics into caste issues. While Kurosawa uses minimal dialogue and stark visual elements to convey the theme of *Macbeth*, the dialogues and settings in the films *Haider* and *Omkara* by Bhardwaj are rich and local, making Shakespeare's narrative relevant to contemporary Indian concerns. Both *Haider* and *Omkara* deviate from mainstream Shakespearean adaptations with modern political contexts, allowing a contemporary approach to issues such as revenge,

ambition, and jealousy. Beyond these three major adaptations, numerous other films have successfully reinterpreted Shakespeare's works. Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) and Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015) offer gritty, realistic portrayals of ambition and madness. Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) provide contrasting settings, historical and modern, while exploring Hamlet's existential dilemmas. Future studies could further investigate how Shakespeare's plays continue to be adapted across various cultures and media. Investigating the effect of digital technology on such adaptations, like CGI and modern cinematography, could open deeper insights into the ever-changing nature of Shakespearean cinema. Further, analysis of adaptations from non-English-speaking countries and how they reimagine Shakespeare's themes within their specific cultural contexts could bring a more global scope to his influence. Understanding audience reception and the educational use of these adaptations could also provide potentially valuable insights into the ongoing relevance of Shakespeare's works in modern society.

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