

HAMLET'S "MOUSETRAP" AND *HAIDER*'S "BISMIL":
A PLAY-WITHIN-A-PLAY/FILM,
AUDIENCE RESPONSE, AND CULTURAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

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Hamlet's plan to "catch the conscience of the king" through performance – through players enacting the "ghost story" he earlier heard about his father's death in "The Mousetrap" – reveals the significance of theatre's effects within Shakespeare's play. Scholarly discussion around this critical moment has largely focused on structure and Claudius' viewing of both "dumb show" and *The Murder of Gonzago*, and this thesis adds to this discussion but focuses on audience response at a different magnitude by applying Brecht's ideas behind theatre, specifically the "alienation effect" to re-visualize this self-reflexive scene. This larger focus includes the reaction and perception of Gertrude, Ophelia, and members of the court, as well as the audience of *Hamlet* viewing this play-within-a-play. I also apply this method to an analysis of the cultural politics of "The Mousetrap" scene of Vishal Bhardwaj's Bollywood film adaptation, *Haider* (2014), which further complicates our understanding of audience response by contextualizing it within politics and history. In *Haider*, the audience is bigger than Claudius; the audience now includes the people of Kashmir and India, and the viewer of the film, and the message is not merely a condemnation of a murder, but a critique on the current political climate and a call to critically engage with the issues of the "disappeared" in Kashmir. Looking at *Hamlet* and *Haider* through these lenses informs our understanding of thematic conflicts between action and acting, and between performance and reality, and it helps us rethink modern concerns like the surveillance state and the intersection of art, reality, and politics within our own lives.

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INTRODUCTION: CATCHING THE CONSCIENCE OF THE KING

“The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King” says Hamlet at the end of Act 2 (2.2.539-540). Up until this moment, Hamlet has been “delaying” (or so purports the popular perception of Shakespeare’s play), but now, our protagonist has a plan. A few lines inserted into *The Murder of Gonzago* (a “known” play), and a quick performance will be enough to rouse Claudius and ultimately prove once and for all that the new king is the murderer of old king Hamlet. But why deploy such a complicated plan with a performance and an audience? Why not confront Claudius directly? Hamlet chooses to present “The Mousetrap” before the court because he believes in the effective power of theatre and performance. This performance attempts to stage the hidden guilt of Claudius as well as Gertrude; when the “guilty” Claudius and Gertrude view the embodied actors re-enacting past events and when they listen to the actors speaking about sensitive and significant topics like re-marriage, they will make the connections that these characters resemble them and that these events seem familiar.

This might seem like an overly-complicated plan, but at the same time, it has subtlety in that viewers without a guilty conscience would presumably not “make the connections” and react. Furthermore, the courtly audience serves as a “witness” to these reactions, potentially preventing Hamlet from having to present his ideas about Claudius’ guilt without evidence. And, Hamlet gets the desired effect of a call for “Lights, lights, lights” (3.2.262) from Claudius and the court. Claudius wants to end this drama, but we as an audience of scholars and critics want the drama of *Hamlet* to continue.

Thus, countless performances, dozens of film adaptations, famous and controversial scholarly debates¹ and considerable critical analysis all suggest that *Hamlet* has/will remain(ed) present and relevant within the continuing scholarly and performance history and within many cultural contexts. Much of this relevance can be attributed to *Hamlet*'s adaptability, its many brilliant soliloquies, and its structure overall, but I believe its unique and sustained moments of self-reflexivity are what make it stand out amongst other Shakespeare plays. When using the term "self-reflexivity," I am referring to formal and stylistic elements that make the viewer of *Hamlet* the play reflect on theatre and the play itself. A paper of this length and scope would not be able to look at all of its moments of self-reflexivity, so I focus largely on one of the most important moments: "The Mousetrap."

In doing so, I aim to add to this history of the play by analyzing "The Mousetrap" and audience response by deploying a revitalized view of the "alienation" effect from German theater director and theorist, Bertolt Brecht. A simple definition of Brecht's "alienation" effect is that it is the employment of structural and stylistic elements to indeed "alienate" the audience from the characters and thereby allow the audience to escape from the "reality" of the play and to view the subject of the play politically – plays like Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* use actual signs and other theatrical techniques to make audiences intellectually engage with the devastating effects of war (as opposed to personally identify with Mother Courage as a character). I want to explore how Shakespeare's play-within-a-play can function in a similar way, or more so, how it uses self-reflexivity to perhaps not directly engage its audience politically, but to nonetheless "distance" them and take them "outside" of the drama. Thus,

¹ While I will do a brief literary review of criticism later, I want to note that even after a general "consensus" on the great merits of the drama, T.S. Eliot in "Hamlet and His Problems" invigorated scholarly discussion with his famous idea of the "objective correlative," he argued in 1919 that, "far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure" (90).

Shakespeare (and Hamlet's) use of the "dumb show" and the idea of the "play-within-a-play" functions to a certain extent as an alienation technique to both the audience "within" and outside of *Hamlet* which brings to attention the line between performance and reality.

To further complicate and explore these ideas, particularly the thematic concerns of performance and reality in relation to cultural politics and audience response, I apply them to a recent Bollywood film adaptation, Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* (2014). As Ajay Gehlawat explains in the introduction to *Reframing Bollywood: Theories of Popular Hindi Cinema*, the term "Bollywood" has many meanings and interpretations: a "condescending or trivializing" term, an epithet or mimicry that is at the same time a response and dismissal, shorthand for the Hindi film industry, a hybrid element that celebrates its difference, etc. (xii). Ultimately, I use the term, like Gehlawat, to refer only to popular Hindi cinema that blends "theatrical and cinematic elements as well as First World and Third World cinema methodologies" (xiii). Indeed, *Haider*, blends theatrical and cinematic elements, and it places *Hamlet* in an embattled Kashmir in 1995. In the film, the titular character Haider (Hamlet) returns to Kashmir to investigate the death of his father, and soon learns that his father is just one of the many "disappeared." The film mostly follows the arcs of the major characters within the original play, but the political issues in *Hamlet* (the impending threat of Fortinbras and Claudius surveillance) are transferred to the complex politics of Kashmir. Denmark as a prison is transposed to Kashmir as a prison. Gehlwat also notes that theorists of Bollywood have "consistently dismissed the possibility of a Brechtian interpretation of the Bollywood film due to various reasons, including the alleged lack of such an intention on the filmmakers' part," but I believe that applying this interpretation and revealing how *Haider* twists and complicates it can be important in understanding the film's complex cultural politics (xiii). Whether or not it was intended, the film and the play lend themselves to a

Brechtian reading, whereby the distancing or alienation of audiences (at several levels) is crucial to understanding the thematic conflicts between action and acting, and between performance and reality.

The adaptation of “The Mousetrap” within the film as a Bollywood dance number with dancers, singers, puppets, and metaphorical verses uniquely blends alienation with identification and ultimately (literally and figuratively) expands the intended audience/viewers of this performance. Now, the audience is Claudius/Khurram, Gertrude/Ghazala, the people outside the “court,” citizens of India and Kashmir, and indeed, all of us who have now witnessed the civilian disappearances. Thus, in using these techniques that blend alienation and identification that employ and complicate Brecht’s “distancing effect,” *Haider* forces us to confront the cultural politics of its moment and it reveals that Shakespeare can be a distant and yet still close lens to view geopolitical conflicts like terror, violence, and surveillance. Furthermore, *Haider* deploys Brecht’s suggestion through time displacement: staging an “earlier” play in a “modern” context. Bhardwaj’s cultural translation complicates the original Shakespearean text by making us rethink its politics, and while it also puts much of its main focus on “The Mousetrap” scene, the reaction of a laugh from Claudius/Khurram makes us rethink the power relations between the characters. This context makes visible the surveillance state and prison that is Denmark in which Hamlet is being watched and manipulated, and it emphasizes the blurry line between action and acting.

There is a reason that we continue to return to *Hamlet* in both criticism and performance, and in this paper, I aim to examine both in three parts: (1) a critical history of the play and an analysis of “The Mousetrap” within criticism and within *Hamlet* itself; (2) a discussion of theatre’s a/effects and audience response within and outside of the play, focusing on Brecht’s alienation theory; (3) an evaluation of Shakespeare on film as a field of study, and a close

reading of “The Mousetrap” scene (the song and dance number, “Bismil”) in *Haider*. Within the context of performance and criticism, I will show how Brecht’s ideas of “alienation” (particularly a complication of these ideas) allow us to revitalize our analysis of the audience’s responses to *Hamlet*. A focus on the formalistic, self-reflexive elements of “The Mousetrap” scene within the original play and within the film adaptation will show how both texts invite the characters and the audience to evaluate meanings and power politics inside and outside the play/film itself. The layers and juxtaposition of familiarity and unfamiliarity – closeness and distance – within “The Mousetrap” scene provide a key to understanding the play and its intricacies. Ultimately, this paper puts Bhardwaj’s *Haider* into conversation with other scholarly criticism on *Hamlet* and it shows how adaptations in general and “Shakespeare on film” in particular can help us to engage with other cultures, to reexamine and rethink the original Shakespearean text in terms of power relations and action/acting, and to examine the intersection of art, reality, and performance in our own lives.

“THE MOUSETRAP” AND CRITICAL HISTORIES OF *HAMLET*

The time is indeed “out of joint” for *Hamlet* inside and outside of the play since creative and scholarly attention to the play continues to be popular today. To a certain extent, the critical history of “The Mousetrap” reflects the overall trend in literary scholarship of *Hamlet*, especially in terms of the reliance on in-depth character analysis and continuing critical debates. Overall, critical approaches to Shakespeare’s play have shifted with the times, and, as David Bevington argues in *Murder Most Foul*, the staging and criticism of the play go hand in hand, presenting *Hamlet* as “a kind of mirror, a touchstone, a key, to understanding the collective and individual self” (viii). In other words, *Hamlet* criticism reflects trends in literary criticism more broadly, and these literary trends reflect the self. Thus, during the Enlightenment, *Hamlet* became a way to think about morality. For example, in 1775, Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith wrote an entire book, *The Morality of Shakespeare’s Drama Illustrated*, discussing key scenes from Shakespeare’s plays, including comments like, “*Shakespeare* not only affords documents to real life, but supplies them even to the mimic one; as may be seen in the Scene, where he makes *Hamlet* give instructions to Actors how they should perform their parts. But as there is no moral to be extracted from the passage, I shall not quote it here” (510). While Griffith wants to discuss the role of acting, performance, and “mimic” arts, she can only make this quick note because passages that can teach the reader lessons on morality are the only ones worthy of extensive quoting and discussion.

In the Romantic era, *Hamlet* became the melancholic, philosophic Romantic hero, a figure who continues to inhabit many popular conceptions of the play. Samuel Taylor Coleridge argued that *Hamlet* had an “overbalance of imagination” that is seen in his “inward brooding,” and that his “mind, unseated from its healthy balance, is forever occupied with the world within

him and abstracted from external things” (qtd in Ellis and Mills 249). This idea of “inwardness” continued but shifted around the turn of the 20th century when Hamlet became psychoanalyzed. Critics like Ernest Jones in *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1955), admits that in his argument, he will “pretend that Hamlet was a living person” and then explain that Hamlet has a “tortured conscience” that causes him to delay in killing Claudius (19, 57). Within this specific critical practice, Jones believes that he can indeed psychoanalyze Hamlet like a patient.

While the perception of the play has been deeply influenced by these moments of “inwardness” in the 18th and 19th centuries, other more recent criticism has focused on a diverse set of interests, proving that *Hamlet* continues to be relevant today. Many look at *Hamlet* in terms of feminism, focusing on the agency (or lack thereof) of Ophelia and the importance of Gertrude within the drama². Others, like Stephen Greenblatt analyze the religious elements of the play and the importance of purgatory, sin, and even alchemy³. Within the past 50 years, scholars have also applied *Hamlet* to modern concerns and knowledge including corporate culture⁴ and cognitive science⁵.

Finally, scholars like Margaret Litvin and Tracey Sedinger analyze *Hamlet* in the Middle East and the re-historicization of the play⁶, respectively. Litvin and others look to plays like

² For example, Elaine Showalter’s “Representing Ophelia,” Carolyn Heilbrun’s “The Character of Hamlet’s Mother,” Janet Adelman’s *Suffocating Mothers*, and Carol Thomas Neely’s *Distracted Subjects* all look at the play from a feminist theoretical perspective.

³ Of course, Stephen Greenblatt’s *Hamlet in Purgatory* looked at the play through religion, as did John Gillies in “The Question of Original Sin in *Hamlet*” and Katherine Eggert’s “Hamlet’s Alchemy: Transubstantiation, Modernity, Belief.”

⁴ Douglas Lanier discusses Almereyda’s *Hamlet* in terms of corporate culture in “Shakescorp Noir” and other absurdities like Norman Augustine and Kenneth’s Adelman’s instructional book, *Shakespeare in Charge*, shows how to apply *Hamlet* to business culture and office politics.

⁵ Amy Cook’s “Staging Nothing: *Hamlet* and Cognitive Science”

⁶ Margaret Litvin writes about the influence of the play in Middle East in *Hamlet’s Arab Journey: Shakespeare’s Prince and Nasser’s Ghost*. Tracey Sedinger’s “Theory Terminable and Interminable: On Presentism, Historicism, and the Problem of *Hamlet*” focuses on re-historization, as do Margreta de Grazia’s *Hamlet without Hamlet* and Stephen Greenblatt’s “The Mousetrap” within *Practicing New Historicism*.

Sulayman Al-Basam's *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, for example, to look at adaptations that focus on non-western political contexts. *The Al-Hamlet Summit* adapts *Hamlet* and places it in an unidentified modern Middle Eastern country in order to reflect on the politics of the Arab world, and to explore the politics involved in dictatorship, arms deals, and Islamic extremism. To some extent, these types of adaptations use the "name" and cultural capital of *Hamlet* to gain attention and a larger audience, but with this larger audience, they are able to use the original political themes of the Shakespearean play and adapt them to reflect on important modern concerns.

Thus while much of the recent criticism around *Hamlet* more broadly focuses on these more contemporary concerns, much of the scholarly attention around "The Mousetrap" more specifically remains within debates about whether or not Claudius sees the dumb show. Claudius' request to "Give me some light, away" comes after both the dumb show and the many lines of the altered *Murder of Gonzago* (3.2.261), and thus, we have the following questions: why does Hamlet (and Shakespeare) present such a disparate "Mousetrap" with a dumb show and altered *Murder of Gonzago* (with a beginning section that focuses on dialogue about love and re-marriage and a second section that introduces the character of Lucianus)? Why does Claudius not react after he sees the dumb show? It would seem like only one would be necessary, and the pantomime of the dumb show certainly mirrors the ghost story we get about old King Hamlet's death. Some, like John Dover Wilson in *What Happens in Hamlet* insists that Claudius did not actually see the dumb show, or others, like Harley Granville-Barker and Thomas Caldecott interpret the dumb show and "The Mousetrap" as a "double test," or, as others call it, the "second tooth theory."⁷ This "double test" suggests either an insecurity in Hamlet or a dire

⁷ Charles Edelman in "The very cunning of the scene': Claudius and the mousetrap" also discusses a history of theories behind "The Mousetrap" and the response of Claudius.

need to find the truth by deploying multiple traps⁸. Other scholars like Sara Ruth Watson believe that evidence about Elizabethan theatrical practices can help us find the answer. She argues that based on performative practices of *Twelfth Night*, “there [can] be no question whether or not the king sees and understands the dumb-show. He is amazed, dumbfounded...and then tries to conceal his emotions” (478). While Watson writes confidently, the deep character analysis of Claudius appears unfounded, or at the very least reaching⁹.

A few scholars deviate from this “problem” and instead focus on the form and effectiveness of “The Mousetrap.” Michael Shurgot presents a hypothetical staging of “The Mousetrap” that emphasizes multiple perspectives which “would have created an inner play intricately related to the larger play” (5); Steve Roth makes the bold claim that nearly everyone has “both assumed and concluded that the mousetrap gives Hamlet proof and certain knowledge of Claudius’ guilt,” but in reality, “the mousetrap doesn’t work” and no one learns anything from it; instead, he argues that the dumb show’s purpose is actually to “reveal Hamlet’s knowledge to Claudius” (Roth). Both of these papers seek to move us out of the tired argument, either by focusing on something practical like staging, or by looking at the scene in a somewhat new way.

I want to build on these ideas about the form and effectiveness of “The Mousetrap,” but I think a helpful focus for this argument is to look at Hamlet as an adaptor and improviser (his manipulation of form, and his intents in adaptation) alongside the audience response. If we view Hamlet as adaptor, we might say that he struggles to keep enough plot of the “source material”

⁸ Other critics try to explain Claudius seeing both the “dumb show” and the spoken-part of “The Mousetrap” in unusual ways. Alfred Mollin argues that Claudius’ “misplaced silence” is what ultimately reveals his guilt to Hamlet (367). Thus, Claudius remaining silent during the “dumb show” actually proves his guilt.

⁹ Watson claims that “recent discoveries of Dr. Leslie Hotson concerning the use of the theatre-in-the-round or arena stage for the first performance of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*...have significance for the staging and interpretation of the play scene in *Hamlet*” (477-478).

and so adds the dumb show to make his point clearer. He is preoccupied with action and acting, (in relation of “to be or not to be”) so it is not surprising that he chooses this performative mimicry to pry open Claudius’ guilt. The repetition of both dumb show and spoken-word play may be necessary to spur Claudius, but another explanation, is that words *combined* with action are the most effective “manner” of presentation, and Shakespeare is emphasizing this fact during “The Mousetrap.” Only when both words and embodied actions combine to closely approximate the ghost’s story – when Lucianus speaks and pours poison in the King’s ear – does Claudius finally react. A close reading of this scene will show that analyzing the audience response and formalistic elements of the scene can refocus and revitalize this tired conversation around “The Mousetrap”

Within *Hamlet*, “The Mousetrap” functions as an adaptation and as a moment of self-reflexivity. The play-within-the-play is commonly thought of as two separate parts: the dumb show and the *Murder of Gonzago* which are both adapted from the spoken “ghost story” of Hamlet’s father. The latter includes the spoken-word exchange between the Player King and Player Queen which problematizes the re-marriage of the Queen, and Lucianus’ sudden entrance with his murderous intentions, seems outside of this earlier exchange about love. Cumulatively they are adapted from the spoken “ghost story” of Hamlet’s father which tells the tale of how Claudius “won the will” of Gertrude (old King Hamlet’s wife), and that while he the king was sleeping in his orchard, Claudius poured poison in his ear, killed him, and dispatched him “of life, of crown, [and] of queen” (1.5.75). The story is relatively simple, but the inclusion of both dumb show and *Murder of Gonzago* in the “adaptation” of “The Mousetrap” reveals how Shakespeare uses this structural element of the play-within-the-play to take the audience “out” of *Hamlet*.

Both Hamlet and Shakespeare create/present a performance that forces the audience – “audience” here meaning both us as readers/viewers and Claudius and court within the play – to meta-reflect on their experience. For Claudius, this reflection is supposed to occur when he realizes that both the show and the play are commentary on his own actions and life. In the dumb show, the stage directions reveal that there is a pseudo-pantomime of Claudius’ story (and indeed the “ghost story” that we as audience heard from old King Hamlet):

Enter [Players as] a king and a queen, the queen embracing him and he her. He takes her up and declines his head upon her neck. He lies him down upon a bank of flowers. She seeing him asleep leaves him. Anon come in [a Player as] another man, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper’s ears and leaves him. The queen returns, finds the king dead, makes passionate action. The poisoner with some three or four [Players] come in again, seem to condole with her. The dead body is carried away. The poisoner woos the queen with gifts. She seems harsh awhile but in the end accepts love. (3.2.128[1-11])

Specific objects and calculated actions make it difficult to *not* interpret this performance as the embodied ghost story of old King Hamlet’s death: crowns upon heads denote royalty, embraces suggest love, the “bank of flowers” resembles an orchard, poison being poured into the sleeper’s ear reveal the unique circumstances of death, and the gifts bought denote possible “false” love. In all, these ten lines of stage direction¹⁰ succinctly present the ghost’s backstory, and suggest that Hamlet wants Claudius to see these connections. Then again, without direct words/verse, this performance can also be interpreted as nonetheless “removed” from the original story and a looser adaptation. Thus there is the possibility of familiarity and identification, but it relies on

¹⁰ Being stage directions, it is unlikely that these lines are the exact phrasing of Shakespeare, but this then uniquely proves that the “dumb show” that audiences saw in the early modern period simply and effectively (through gestures and symbols) conveyed the ghost story for the audience. Whoever added the language of the stage direction understood its intent and thus in performance, it was clear. Furthermore, Eric Rasmussen notes that “recent studies of extant dramatic manuscripts have established that stage directions are much more likely to be authorial [more broadly conceived as that of the theater and playwright] than additions by playhouse personnel” (226). He argues that “stage directions have a claim to textual authority simply by virtue of the fact that they appear in the early Quarto and Folio texts” (227).

interpretation of gestures, purposefully allowing Claudius and Gertrude to only react in a “guilty” way if they in some way identify or connect with what has been enacted.

There is little evidence of how this the dumb show affects Claudius, Gertrude, or the court since we only get the response of Hamlet and Ophelia:

OPHELIA: What means this, my lord?

HAMLET: Marry, this munching mallico! It means mischief.

OPHELIA: Belike this how imports the argument of the play. (3.2.129-133)

Then again, “only” is too reductive because it is important to note that we get a verbal reaction at all. Ophelia’s initial response reveals confusion – either confusion over the contents of the “show” or confusion over Hamlet’s intents. Hamlet’s alliterative response of “munching mallico” and “mischief” reveals that the show is not an innocent act. Ophelia’s response to this vague explanation suggests that she (and perhaps other audience members of the court) would interpret the show as a condensed “argument” of the play. In some ways she is right, but the second “part” of “The Mousetrap” is not as tightly tied to the first.

As the audience of *Hamlet* sees it, the dumb show uniquely and transparently shows the process of adaptation; it takes us “out” of the play but also alters our sense of time, forcing us to move back in the narrative. As the scene begins, we see people watching a play – indeed, something we are also doing. Then we see a pantomime that clearly enacts the ghost story that we earlier heard, so we are taken back to the lines where the ghost revealed the details of his murder. We are pushed back even further, however, to imagine this happening in “real time” and thus are transported back even earlier in time before the beginning of the play. Thus, our experience is not linear, but fluid as we easily slip into different moments. There are traces of the

old, and moments of familiarity, but seeing the ghost story in pantomime also condenses serious actions in potential silly frivolity. In this way, both the audience and Claudius are invited to see moments of similarity and difference, and to question the moments and purpose of this beginning “dumb show.” With the audience “primed” to this unusual moment of performance reflecting earlier moments (actual actions for Claudius and earlier stories for the audience of *Hamlet*), Shakespeare and Hamlet then present us with the adapted *Murder of Gonzago*.

The spoken-word part of the play (*The Murder of Gonzago* with additional lines from *Hamlet*) starring the Player King and Player Queen in the beginning, and Lucianus near the end, also causes the “audience” of *Hamlet* to meta-reflect, but in different ways that add more layers to the kaleidoscopic experience of the play; we repeatedly move between similarity and difference, closeness and distance. Stylistically, this second section of “The Mousetrap” moves away from the normal iambic pentameter of *Hamlet*; the rhyming couplets frequently deviate from the original rhythm, and they open with allusions to Greek mythology. Generally, the selection of *The Murder of Gonzago* that we actually get to hear (before Polonius yells, “lights”), consists of long speeches about love and marriage interspersed with (seemingly) over-dramatic moments like the Queen proclaiming, “O, confound the rest! / Such love must needs be treason in my breast” (3.2.171-172). Thus, for the audience of *Hamlet*, the lines in this second part of “The Mousetrap” not only stand out as play-within-the-play, but also as formal, over-dramatic play-within-a-play. The format of rhyming couplets and the inclusion of dramatic lines take the audience “out” of the drama since the differentiation between *Hamlet* and “The Mousetrap” is quite distinct. All of these elements distance the audience of *Hamlet* from the play, and they present an opportunity for the audience to meta-reflect on *Hamlet* and theatre since we so clearly see this very “different” play-within-a-play.

The second part of “The Mousetrap” also has clear intentions for the audience within *Hamlet*; specifically, it has two different audiences in mind: Gertrude and Claudius. The first part with the Player King and Player Queen with the opening lines of “Full thirty times hath Phoebus’ cart gone round...Since love our hearts...Unite commutual in most sacred bonds” leave both Claudius and the audience of *Hamlet* with minimal connections with the “ghost story” (3.2.148,152,153). The following dialogue on love and marriage, however, focuses its audience on Gertrude. An attentive and “guilty” ear may notice how lines like “In second husband let me be accurst. / None wed the second but who killed the first” can be interpreted as commentary about remarriage – rather than on the “sins” of Claudius (3.2.173-179). This reveals Hamlet’s clear desire to direct and control the interpretation of the play, and here as it concerns his mother. Lucianus’s sudden entrance and brief speech with magical/murderous intents (that seems quite different from the previous dialogue about love and marriage) shifts the audience to Claudius. In viewing *Hamlet* as an adaptor, we can see how he separates “The Mousetrap” into sections that are aimed to implicate and gain reactions from both Claudius and Gertrude. It might seem a bit reaching to say that Hamlet has carefully planned this structure and its effects, but we do know that he has inserted a few lines and guided the players earlier, so it is reasonable to infer that at quite a few aspects were intentional.

Like the “dumb show” there is commentary from the court about the performance, and this commentary reveals Hamlet’s excitement as well as Claudius and Gertrude’s uncertainty. Hamlet makes interjections like “That’s wormwood!” and “If she should break it now!” that show his deep investment in the drama (3.2.175, 218). Gertrude’s famous “The Lady doth protest too much” (3.2.224) can be interpreted in many ways (as the editors of the Arden edition explain in the notes, this line can “be played so as to indicate her discomfort, her self-control, or her

innocence” [313]). The King’s commentary (questions of “Have you heard the argument?” Is there no offense in’t?”) suggests that he now has interest in the play, perhaps because he is beginning to make connections (3.2.226-227).

Thus, by interspersing commentary from Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius, and Gertrude, Shakespeare again presents moments where we as viewing/reading audience are signaled to notice that we are watching a play and that our experience of this play may inform how we perceive the current drama of *Hamlet*. Hamlet’s line of “the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge” is a moment of intertextuality that references *Richard III*, which again disrupts the viewing experience of the audience. Thus, in different ways, Claudius, Gertrude, and audience uniquely experience “The Mousetrap” as a performance begging for further reflection – in content, dialogue, and action, Claudius can see parallels with his own past wrongdoings, and in form and style the audience of *Hamlet* meta-reflect on *Hamlet* the play, theatre, and created representations of art.

“The Mousetrap” stands out as a clear moment in *Hamlet* where Shakespeare and Hamlet want the audience to reflect on the play, but there are many other moments where the a/effects of theatre and performance are emphasized. Earlier in the play, Hamlet puts on an “affection” of madness – his “antic disposition” – after he hears the ghost story (1.5.170). As the audience sees it, Hamlet tells Horatio that he is going to “put on” this disposition, and thus in the later scenes, (when we hear from Ophelia that Hamlet “raised a sigh so piteous and profound” and when we hear Hamlet himself respond to Polonius’ question of “Do you know me, my lord” with “Excellent well, you are a fishmonger,”) we know that Hamlet is actually performing (2.1.91, 2.2.170-171). He is putting on an act. The audience can thus meta-reflect on acting as well as the blurred line between a created fantasy of art and a lived reality.

Hamlet’s obsession with instructing the players functions as a similar self-reflexive moment when he, acting as director and adapter tells the players to, “not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness” (3.2.4-8). Hamlet is instructing the players to not “over-act” because that would be unrealistic and less believable. This suggests that he prefers more “realistic” theatre. Interestingly, “realistic theatre” usually has the virtues of being potentially more immersive since the audience would be seeing a reflection of “real life,” but for us as audience of *Hamlet*, this moment breaks the immersive experience. We see Hamlet acting like a director, and Hamlet’s concerns about the actions of the players primes us for not only their later performance, but also for the performance of the other characters within *Hamlet* the play. Now, we will be see if the players “saw the air,” but we might also see if the characters within *Hamlet* “saw the air” as well.

One might then expect that Hamlet would guide the players in a play selection that allows them to display their refined acting, but despite these earlier instructions, Hamlet has the players perform “The Mousetrap,” complete with the “dumb show” that almost begets overacting; with only pantomime and movement, the queen character is supposed to make “passionate action” (3.2.128[.7]). Without the use of words, “saw[ing] the air” might be need to happen. Furthermore, the “unnatural” rhyming couplets as well as the long speeches about love within the second section of “The Mousetrap” with the Player King and Player Queen also suggest “over-acting.” Thus, these formal elements of “The Mousetrap,” harken back to Hamlet’s earlier instructions and we as audience ultimately see the artificial and stylized forms of theatre. The next step would be to ask: how does this relate to Claudius’ experience and Hamlet’s aim to “catch the conscience of the king”? Why focus on these formal and stylistic elements of the play? The debate on whether “The Mousetrap” is a success or failure informs the answer; if the play-within-the-play is “unsuccessful” then we can potentially attribute this to the overacting, but if it is “successful” then there must be something more happening here. As I suggested earlier, Shakespeare wants to emphasize the importance of both word and action. It is not until Lucianus, the “Claudius” equivalent within “The Mousetrap,” enters *and* speaks that Claudius reacts. The effects of theatre within *Hamlet*, however, move beyond “catching consciences.”

Shakespeare often displays how theatre can affect both the body and mind. For example, Hamlet believes he will affect Claudius’ mind *and* body and indicates that he has heard how “guilty creatures sitting at a play” have – just by the mere viewing of the drama – been so affected as to “proclaim” their “malefactions.” (2.2.524-527). Hamlet believes Claudius will “blench” and reveal a guilty face if he did commit the crime (2.2.532). This is not the only instance of combined mind/body reaction to art. When the ghost of Hamlet’s father first begins

to speak to Hamlet, we can see that he also believes in the power of storytelling and the possible effects of just listening to a story. He says that words of tales from his “prison house,” would “harrow up [Hamlet’s] soul, freeze [his] young blood,” make his hair stand on end, and in short, elicit a great deal of fear (1.5.15-20). The ghost’s story of his *own* murder, however, has its own strong effects as it makes Hamlet vow to wipe away all other things within his mind and never forget the tale. Of course, we as audience can never seem to forget the tale either, perhaps because *Hamlet* as a drama has had similar effects on us.

A look into Elizabethan audience response for *Hamlet* is challenging because most of the research relies on speculation. As Thomas Cartelli notes, Elizabethan audience responses to plays are “either irrecoverable or too enmeshed in polemical considerations to be trusted” (43). Thus, conversations behind Elizabethan audience response often rely on broader concepts of English society in general. I want to follow Cartelli’s idea that it is less important to study the composition of the audience and more important to think about “what motivated people of all classes to attend plays, what effects plays might have had on them, and what such people brought to their successive acts of playgoing” (47-48).

Looking at the Elizabethan audience response, thus, might seem challenging or problematic, and the application of a much later theory like Brecht’s “alienation effect” might seem even more challenging, but the self-reflexiveness of “The Mousetrap” lends itself to this type of interpretation. Thus, I by no means seek to argue that *Hamlet* completely operates as a Brechtian play or that applying Brecht to *Hamlet* is “correct,” I merely want to suggest that turning to Brecht and his conceptions of the *verfremdungseffekt*, or “alienation/distancing” effect can help us think through our ideas behind this critical scene of the play.

In using “self-reflexiveness,” I have focused on revealing how formalistic elements – dialogue, setting, plot, etc. – intentionally bring the audience’s attention to the fact that we are watching a play, or that have reflected meanings or ideas that bring the audience back to earlier moments in the text. To say it another way, these moments of self-reflexivity “break” the fourth wall¹¹ and enter the audience into a meta-dialogue between themselves and the play – one example being the character from the dumb show pouring poison into the “sleeper’s” ear. These moments can be conceptualized as examples of Brecht’s “distancing” effect; Brecht explains in “A Short Organum for Theatre,” that “a representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (192). A scene in theatre that employs the distancing effect will give the audience enough familiarity to recognize the character, but enough unfamiliarity to avoid any loss of context of the story or the production that includes politics.

I have shown that in *Hamlet* the play, Hamlet seems to use similar theatrical strategies as Brecht to force King Claudius to recognize and reflect on his crimes. By employing the “dumb show” and *The Murder of Gonzago*, Hamlet blends the familiar with the unfamiliar, creating a “mousetrap” that places Claudius’ mind within the context of the murder he is watching *before* he makes the connection that it is “him” on stage committing the murder. We as the audience of *Hamlet* are alienated on a different level, since we are forced to meta-reflect on the play-within-a-play and the effects of theatre more broadly. We recognize the previous ghost story in adaptation and reflect on earlier moments of the play as the scene unfolds; furthermore, we are watching people “watch” a play and are thus distanced from the story.

¹¹ Of course, the fourth wall was a 19th century convention attributed to Diderot, but I want to emphasize this anti-illusionistic intent to include the audience within the performance instead of acting like they are not “there”.

Brecht actually has a unique relationship with Shakespeare. Margot Heinemann notes that, “the stress in *A Short Organum for the Theatre* is different from that in *Messingkauf*, the first more concerned with *dissociating* Brecht from Shakespearean tradition, the second with emphasizing the *power* of Shakespearean dramaturgy and how much can still be learned and made from it” (202). Rather than this revealing a confused interpretation of Shakespeare, Brecht’s changing views instead show that Shakespearean plays and Elizabethan theatrical practices with their anti-illusionistic, self-reflexive qualities were something to be studied, re-conceptualized, and to great extents, admired.

Brecht even discusses *Hamlet* in explaining how to employ the distancing effect in drama, and he suggests that productions of plays from earlier time periods are one way to reflect on the present. He explains that what “needs to be alienated, and how this is to be done, depends on the exposition demanded by the entire episode; and this is where the theatre has to speak up decisively for the interests of its own time” (201). Alienation can happen in different forms, but using an older drama to reflect on current politics should be demanded by current theatre. As Heinemann notes in her reading of Brecht, “it’s possible for the director by changing the stress to highlight a different aspect of the contradiction, even with little or nothing added or changed in the text, to engage a modern audience” (207). He explains that given “the dark and bloody period in which I am writing – the criminal ruling classes, the widespread doubt in the power of reason, continually being misused – I think that [*Hamlet* as seen as a story in an age of warriors] might in my view interest our audience” (201-202). In a post WWII Germany, Brecht believes that examining the war and geopolitics of the drama is one way of reading the play and one way to reflect further on “Reason.”

Brecht explains how to do this in practice:

If we ensure that our characters on the stage are moved by social impulses and that these differ according to the period, then we make it harder for our spectator to identify himself with them...if we play works dealing with our own time as though they were historical, then perhaps the circumstances under which he himself acts will strike him as equally odd; and this is where the critical attitude begins. (190)

Thus, historicism and time are one way to employ the distancing effect since people like the 1940s German citizen will find it difficult to completely empathize and identify with a character like Hamlet, since he is a member of the royalty of Denmark in the 1600s. This difference in space and time is important, and his goals are to inspire a critical response. Brecht does not want passive viewers of theatre – he wants to employ techniques to affect the mind and perhaps even the body (in terms of activism and protest).

Thus, Brecht's reasons for employing the distancing effect, then, are political. He believes that these techniques will help to create a critical response that moves beyond something like Aristotle's catharsis¹². Brecht explains that we, "need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself" (190). Here, Brecht is connecting theatre with something bigger – with a field of human relations – and he wants viewers of drama to take these thoughts and feelings and use them to transform the field, or in other words, to spur social or political action. If *Hamlet* is staged in a modern context, then the audience can recognize

¹²Aristotle's "catharsis" is often applied to analysis of theatre since his work, *The Poetics*, is one of the first that discusses the different forms and purposes of drama. Aristotle defines catharsis as a tempering of emotions through the reproduction of pity and fear in the audience. For example, we as viewers/readers of *Hamlet* should experience catharsis when we finally see Hamlet kill Claudius at the end. "Catharsis" to Aristotle, however, is merely the purgation of emotions; it does not necessarily invite further audience thought or action.

important themes like the surveillance state within the drama and not get lost empathizing with Hamlet as a character.

Hamlet's intentions then, are somewhere in between Aristotle's catharsis and Brecht's morally or politically transformative field. "The Mousetrap" is intended to insight guilt in Claudius, but not necessarily purge this guilt. We as viewers of *Hamlet* may experience catharsis, but I believe that the multiple moments of self-reflexiveness and distancing make this response more difficult. Indeed, we might instead focus on the follies of Hamlet's decisions or the threat of war in Europe (at the end of the play, we are left with Fortinbras to take over).

I will later loosely apply Brecht's ideas of alienation to Shakespeare on film – Bhardwaj's *Haider*, in particular, but provisionally, we can say that Bhardwaj is using the story within *Hamlet* as a cultural artifact and "knowledge point" to then build his own drama that reflects the cultural politics of Kashmir in the 1990s. At many moments, Bhardwaj employs filmic techniques that function like distancing effects. Brecht's techniques were conceptualized for the theatre, but applying them to film, particularly *Haider* can help us better understand and analyze the film's political stakes and intents. More broadly, however, I want to first show how adaptation and Shakespeare on film as a field provides perhaps the most impactful and relevant space to engage with Brecht and *Hamlet*.

The rise of *Shakespeare* on film largely coincides with the rise of film more broadly, with directors and actors always interested in presenting their own performance and interpretation of the plays. The earliest Shakespeare film coincided with the earliest availability of the camera: in 1899, a scene from Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's production of *King John* was filmed¹³. Earlier Shakespeare films were largely documentations of actual theatrical performances, but as film as a medium grew, so did Shakespeare on film, with the British cinema creating actual "films" (that is films that were conceived originally as films and not as theatre) as early as the 1930s¹⁴. *Hamlet* in particular has been fairly popular, with the first "classic" film version being that of Laurence Olivier in 1948. By the mid-twentieth century and the dawn of sound, Shakespearean films began to travel, and *Hamlet*'s reach extended beyond the United Kingdom to India, Japan, and Russia; for example, some *Hamlet* films include Kurosawa's *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960, Japan), Kozinstev's *Hamlet* (1964, Russia), and Xiaogang's *The Banquet* (2006, China). *The Bad Sleep Well* is an adaptation,¹⁵ and indeed, more recent Shakespeare films move back and forth between a filmed interpretation of the play and a large adaptation that only keeps the Shakespearean "plot."

In terms of criticism, Shakespeare on Film is a relatively new field. The first full-length study of Shakespearean film was Robert Hamilton Ball's *Shakespeare on Silent Film* in 1968

¹³ James Ellison notes explains that Herbert Beerbohm Tree's "enormously successful stage revival" of the play prompted William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson and Walter Pfeffer Dando to record four scenes; only the scene of King John's death survives today (294).

¹⁴ For example, Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935) and George Cukor's *Romeo and Juliet* (1936).

¹⁵ By "adaptation," I here mean a film that divorces the play from either its time, setting, and/or original language. Of course, some adaptations like Kozinstev's are "weaker" in that his largest intervention is changing the dialogue into Russian, whereas other adaptations are "stronger" like Kurosawa's that transforms *Hamlet* into a film about Japanese business culture and corruption.

(Shaughnessy 5). Earlier criticism focused on fidelity to the text, and many scholars had to battle the discussion over whether Shakespeare on film was a worthy field to study. In the introduction to her book, *Shakespeare on Film*, from 2005, Judith Buchanan notes, however, that now:

Shakespeare on film has...been sanctioned as part of the legitimate performance history of a Shakespeare play. As a subject, it has carved out a place for itself both within Shakespeare performance studies as part of the history of the ongoing life of a play, and within film studies as part of the debate about adaptation and the encounter between differing cultural registers. (2)

Like any emerging field, it can be difficult to find an appropriate place within previous scholarship, and Shakespeare on film is unique because it has ties to performance studies, English, cultural studies, and other fields. Shakespeare on film is interdisciplinary because, as Shaughnessy explains, there is an issue of language and form: a new relationship is forming “between a poetic discourse which was initiated within the context of the non-illusionist, non-realist, extravagantly rhetorical early modern theatre and a predominantly realist visual medium” (3). Of course, theatrical performance is going to be different than film, but Shakespeare in particular wrote plays that were anti-illusionistic and, as I have argued, purposefully self-reflexive and meta-theatrical, so transforming that into film can be challenging.

Thus, I intend to address this challenge by analyzing “The Mousetrap” scene within Bhardwaj’s *Haider* which uniquely adapts the scene into a musical performance that blends the real with fantasy, and deploys self-reflexive, anti-illusionistic elements. This study of “The Mousetrap” on film is unique because it further complicates these ideas by looking at a play-within-a-play-within-a-film. Most cinematic versions of *Hamlet* omit the dumb show and/or present the “The Mousetrap” in a fairly “direct” adaptation (like Kozinstev’s *Hamlet* that simply shows a filmed scene of Claudius and court watching the players perform within the castle). Many of the cinematic versions of the play also originate from the United States or Europe. Thus

Haider's "Bollywood" adaptation into different cultural contexts presents a challenge. Mark Burnett notes in his recent book, *Shakespeare and World Cinema*, that there has been little commentary and detail into "how, where and with what results the plays are translated into the idiom of world cinema" (2). Indeed, some people view non-English adaptations of Shakespeare as "not Shakespeare." Yet, films that credit themselves as "inspired by Shakespeare" or indeed "adaptations of Shakespeare" clearly use the cultural capital of "Shakespeare" and keep traces of plot, character, style, and/or form. *Haider* being a larger part of Bhardwaj's "Shakespeare trilogy" (the other two being *Maqbool* [*Macbeth*] and *Omkara* [*Othello*]) certainly utilizes this cultural capital, but uses it to explore specific cultural politics.

Bhardwaj's *Haider* moves *Hamlet* into an embattled India-administered Kashmir in 1995. While the film still follows the basic story of *Hamlet* (and maintains many of the emotional arcs of the characters), it speaks to the greater issue of the "disappeared" in Kashmir. Following the partition of India, Pakistan and India fought over Kashmir and, as Athar Parvaiz (a journalist based in Srinagar) notes, "Enforced disappearances is one of the many repressive measures (like killings, illegal detentions etc.) aimed at breaking the resolve of people" (Essa). In many ways, the film does not present India in the greatest light, but Bhardwaj comments that "I'm also an Indian, I'm also a patriot, I also love my nation. So I won't do anything which is anti-national. But what is anti-human, I will definitely comment on it" (Pandey). Thus, in presenting both an adaptation of *Hamlet* and a film that speaks to the cultural politics of Kashmir, Bhardwaj transforms the character of Hamlet into Haider (played by Shahid Kapoor): a young student and poet who returns home to Kashmir to investigate the disappearance of his father. Gertrude becomes Ghazala (played by Tabu) and Claudius becomes Khurram (played by Kay Kay Menon). Much like Hamlet, Haider becomes concerned about the burgeoning relationship

between Ghazala and Khurram, and after he learns of the circumstances behind his father's disappearance, he seeks vengeance and the death of Khurram. Also similar to *Hamlet*, Haider realizes that Kashmir (the adapted Denmark) is a prison.

Haider's form as Bollywood film more broadly, and its presentation of "The Mousetrap" scene more specifically reveals how Bhardwaj deploys distancing techniques that alienate the audience and ultimately leave us with the possibility to critically engage with the politics of the drama. While Brecht's concepts of alienation and distancing were limited to the stage, using them for film can be edifying because they aid in explaining the complex negotiations of reality and fantasy, closeness, and distance that *Haider* deploys. As Brecht suggests, Bhardwaj presents this early modern play as an adaptation that can create important connections and relevancy for a modern audience. An important note, however, is that while *Haider* often deploys stylistic elements that distance the audience, the film also maintains realism in many scenes, and thus the film shifts back and forth between alienation and familiarity. For example, in between the musical numbers, the film follows a more traditional approach of including things like establishing shots of locations, close-ups of characters speaking colloquially (as opposed to singing and dancing), and longer sequences that do not deploy montage or "music video" / musical number editing. Thus, I use Brecht's ideas as a critical base that is then complicated and twisted by *Haider*.

The layers of "distancing" and self-reflexiveness are employed at many levels in *Haider*. Song and dance are employed as distancing effects, but so too is the frame of *Hamlet* as narrative. *Hamlet* as a narrative is familiar to the postcolonial audience, and thus while familiar (we know the story), it is also unfamiliar because the "original" *Hamlet* exists within the early modern period. Then again, the story is adapted to directly relate to the civilian disappearances,

and names, dialogue, and setting of the original play are all changed to better reflect Kashmir in the 1990s. In this way, the film is following Brecht's ideas about temporal displacement. And yet, amongst these "familiarities," the form is itself a Bollywood film with dance numbers and songs that are self-reflexive ("Bismil" mentions ideas and words from the previous song "Jhelum" and other songs are familiar poems) and that take the audience "out" of the drama and into a meta-reflection on form. In this way, *Haider*, creates a tug-of-war between familiarity and unfamiliarity, distancing us at one moment, but bringing us back in at the next. In the end, however, *Haider*, adeptly presents its message and critique of the political climate, and it ultimately calls on us to critically engage with the issues of these "disappeared" in Kashmir.

"The Mousetrap" scene in *Haider* is adapted as a performance of a Bollywood dance number and the drama is transformed into a song titled "Bismil" that includes Hamlet as lead singer, a group of accompanying singers and dancers, puppets, drums, and a striking backdrop of the snow-covered ruins of the Martand Sun Temple in Kashmir (see fig. 1). One key intervention that Bhardwaj deploys in this scene is the expansion of the audience. Unlike *Hamlet* with the limited audience of Claudius and small court, in *Haider*, the audience is bigger; the audience now includes a large group of Kashmiri citizens watching the performance within the film. Beyond that, however, is the fact that the audience is extended even further to the people of Kashmir and India and to all viewers who have now witnessed the injustices of the civilian disappearances. In many ways, this suggests that they may be complicit in the crimes, but it only definitively presents them as witnesses. *Hamlet* the play includes meta-reflection, but there is not a condemning of the viewing audience as complicit murderers. In *Haider*, we are asked to take a stance and to engage with these issues more critically; we must reflect on whether we are complicit and whether some sort of action should be taken.



Figure 1: Haider played by Shahid Kapoor performs with dancers before Khurram, Ghazala, and audience.

Similar to that of *Hamlet*, *Haider*'s presentation of "The Mousetrap" is purposefully differentiated from the rest of the film by the use of many formal elements including puppets, dancing, a metaphoric song, and the placement of the camera in Khurram's point of view. Within films, musical numbers will always stand out because their form is different from that of spoken dialogue, but within *Haider*, "The Mousetrap" scene is presented *as a performance* (not just a musical number that exists within the context of the film) and it employs the most deliberately dramatic and theatrical effects. A multitude of wide shots are included in the performance, displaying the vast size of the audience, the extraordinary ruins, and the added musicians and dancers. Many of these effects are anti-illusionistic and deliberately depart from any associations with reality, and due to this, this moment in the film arguable stands out as the highlight with its "big production number" effects.

Bhardwaj employs Dadi Pudumjee's puppetry to collapse the dumb show within the performance of "Bismil," creating a more layered text that complicates our conceptions of imitation. Three puppets are included in the scene (see fig. 2): two smaller puppets representing Ghazala and Haider's father, and one large puppet that represents Khurram (and possibly the

larger threat of the military, corruption, death, and other threats to the people of Kashmir). Instead of the embodied dumb show, we have the dumb show through puppets and it is presented as a prologue or precursor to the other part of “The Mousetrap.” It is all one performance. Puppets in themselves are very anti-illusionistic, and these puppets specifically alienate because they border the line between being recognizable and unfamiliar. The two smaller puppets are just a bit smaller than real people, and their faces are gold masks but they wear normal clothing and clearly resemble a human form. They never look completely human, but as the dancers move the puppets, the puppets become ghostly imitations. In contrast, the large puppet is completely exaggerated, and only somewhat human-like to emphasize the danger of Khurram’s influence. One side of the head of the puppet looks like a bird’s beak (alluding to the nightingales mentioned in the song which refer to Ghazala and Haider’s father), but as the puppet turns, we see a very different face: dark, red, and devilish. Quite deliberately we are shown that Khurram is two-faced, and one of these two faces is quite evil.



Figure 2: Dadi Pudumjee’s puppetry in *Haider*.

During the song, the large puppet ensnares the puppet representing Haider's father, but the meaning of this representation moves beyond just this one "disappeared" man. Haider sings:

He had the injured man imprisoned
And tied him up like a slave
Took him to the Jhelum bridge
And threw him to a watery grave¹⁶

These lyrics reference the bodies of the disappeared that are thrown in the Jhelum river; they also reference an earlier song in the film, "Jhelum," that mentions how the blood of the disappeared has stained the waters of the river. Thus we have a self-reflexive moment here where the audience is invited to remember the earlier song. As these associations and meanings begin to intertwine, the representation of Haider's father also intertwines with those who are "disappeared." In singing "Bismil," Haider figuratively lays out Khurram's crimes before him and through the use of puppets, Khurram sees an eerie representation of all of those who have been thrown into the river. Quite literally, at one moment the smaller puppet representative of Haider's father is thrown off the stage to his "grave."

Haider's performance is particularly effective in "catching the conscience" of both Khurram and the audience because Bhardwaj includes many shots where the camera takes on the point of view of Khurram and Ghazala and I believe this is one of the most effective techniques that Bhardwaj deploys, as well as one that uniquely works for film. Thus, both Khurram and the audience are directly addressed as Shahid Kapoor's piercing eyes convey the threat when Bhardwaj cuts multiple times to these close-ups of Haider's piercing expression (see fig. 3).

¹⁶ These are translated lyrics that are included as subtitles since the original "Bismil" is in Hindi. *Haider* predominately uses Hindi and Urdu. While these translations are reliable, I will nonetheless focus my analysis less on form and more on images and concepts that the lyrics contain.

During the end of the song, this anti-illusionistic direct address occurs concurrently with lyrics that warn Ghazala and that suggest that Haider's father (as well as the others who have disappeared) will be alive. Haider sings:

He is alive, he will be living
The criminal now cannot hide [repeated]
Come to your senses, lover's nightingale
The flower's scent is filled with poison

This first line is as much of a hope as it is a demand. Haider earlier mentioned watery graves, but he also hopes that his father is alive. And if his earthly body is no longer present, Haider suggests that his father will still be alive in memory. The phrase “he *will* be living” echoes this idea of memory but also demands of Khurram and the others involved in this conflict to ensure that the disappeared will not be killed.



Figure 3: Haider looks directly at Khurram and film audience.

Haider insists that the criminal cannot hide any longer, and after this performance with the stand-in puppets, suggestive lyrics, and direct address, it would be hard to deny that the criminal is Khurram. And yet, “criminal” is used—not “Khurram,” “father,” “leader” or

something more direct. This aligns with the metaphorical nature of the song and opens up opportunities for others (re: members of the viewing audience) to join in the conception of “criminal.” Haider pleads “come to your senses” which is directed to Ghazala (since he is reasonably unhappy with his mother’s nuptials with Khurram); but again, this is enfolded into a metaphor of the “nightingale,” which encompass others who might be indirectly involved with the conflict in Kashmir. The use of the word “nightingale” also moves beyond just bird metaphor but an allusion to “Operation Nightingale” or “Operation Bulbul.” Praveen Swami discusses “India’s forgotten army” and notes that “‘Bulbul’, the Urdu word for the Asian song bird, was a mid-ranking military intelligence official working with troops of the 5 Rashtriya Rifles in Sumbal, near Bandipora” and that “‘Song’ was a coded reference to details about anti-terrorist operations in the hard-hit Bandipora belt, in northern Kashmir.” Thus, the image and meaning of the nightingale transcends from a simple songbird to an allusion to anti-terrorist operations in Kashmir.

Finally, Haider explains that the “flower’s scent is filled with poison” and thus we keep the original idea of poisoning from Hamlet, but this poison is not in a singular ear, but in a tempting unassuming flower. It is not difficult to become caught up in this conflict, but *Haider*’s message serves as a warning, and the inclusion of multiple point-of-view shots where Haider looks directly at the camera (presumably at Khurram in the audience, but also literally at the viewer of *Haider*), this message is hard to ignore.

Thus, Bhardwaj uses anti-illusionistic, alienating techniques in adapting “The Mousetrap” scene from *Hamlet* to highlight the cultural politics of Kashmir and to critically engage the audience with these issues. This all, however, leaves us with a question: do these techniques work? The answer is not simple. Within *Haider*, Khurram and Ghazala are clearly

affected during the performance as Bhardwaj intercuts scenes of them looking confused, concerned, sad, and remorseful. At the end of the performance, Haider kneels in front of Khurram and we see tears in both of their eyes. And yet, at the next moment, Khurram begins clapping and smiling, asking, “Who wrote this play?”¹⁷ The key difference in this moment between *Haider* and *Hamlet* is that in *Hamlet*, Claudius calls for “lights” and leaves rather quickly. In the performance history of *Hamlet* on screen, Claudius usually looks upset and indeed “guilty.” Thus, Claudius is still powerful in terms of being the king but he is genuinely affected by the performance, and in the context of the play, he could be identified as murderer. Later, he orders the death of Hamlet, but not as directly as Khurram. If we view “The Mousetrap” as successful, then this scene is key because it proves his guilt and revitalizes Hamlet’s search for revenge. Here, however, Khurram laughs – his tone implies that he understands Haider’s intents, but ultimately, Haider has no power to overthrow his position. Khurram still has power and he orders his men to follow Haider and put him in a mental institution. Thus, Haider *did* catch the conscience of Khurram but this whole endeavor may have been pointless¹⁸. But what about the audience of *Haider* as a film? Are they affected by this performance?

It is difficult to say whether the audience of the film was forced to critically engage with this scene, but much evidence suggests that they were indeed affected by it. The film won numerous awards and currently has very positive ratings and reviews,¹⁹ but as Vats notes, the film drew a “fierce reaction on social media from Hindu nationalists, who called for a boycott”

¹⁷ Of course, this question is yet another moment of “distancing” because we as audience might want to answer “Shakespeare.”

¹⁸ If this performance makes no impact on Khurram, we might instead read it like Steve Roth, and say that this scene instead reveals Haider’s knowledge of Khurram’s wrongdoings.

¹⁹ As of March 2016, IMDB has over 35,000 votes rating it 8.3/10 and it is “certified fresh” on Rotten Tomatoes.

and the film has been banned in Pakistan (surprisingly since the film casts more of a negative light on India). Gossip sites include heated discussions on the ethics of the film, and many articles on *Haider* include quotes from Bhardwaj defending his idea and his presentation of India. In terms of this evidence, we can say that the film invited debate.

Thus, in many ways, *Haider* successfully uses Brecht's ideas of alienation to make the audience critically engage with the political. The "name" of Shakespeare as well as Bhardwaj (this being the third of Bhardwaj's "trilogy" of Shakespeare adaptations including *Maqbool* [*Macbeth*] and *Omkara* [*Othello*]) elevates the film in terms of viewing interest. The experience of viewing the film as a known adaptation that is not a direct adaptation but that nonetheless has traces of the old, makes its moments of deviation from the original even stronger and more alienating.

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I want to end by returning to David Bevington's idea about the performance and critical history of *Hamlet*: it is a "kind of mirror, a touchstone, a key, to understanding the collective and individual self" (viii). If this is true, then in what critical and performative moment do we currently exist? What moment does *Haider* present for us? One possible answer is that we are in age of "adaptation." With the dawn of the digital age and the internet, we exist in a space where adaptation and the reuse of "old" ideas persist as normative and profitable. While *Haider* is a brilliant film in its own right, one cannot deny that marketing it as "Shakespeare" ultimately broadens the audience to worldwide viewers. Adaptation is unique because it has elements of both the past and present; *Haider* keeps only the plot and the main characters from Shakespeare's drama, but it also has a wealth of elements that bring it to the present, and that complicate our traditional readings of "The Mousetrap." Our age of adaptation and "remix" allows us to critically engage with the politics and the problems of the present, but it also does not let us forget our past.

In this thesis, I hope to have shown that in critically viewing *Hamlet* through the lens of Brecht's distancing effect and through the idea of audience response, we find new ways of reading Hamlet's "Mousetrap," particularly in terms of thematic concerns of action/acting, performance and reality, and the surveillance state. This focus on theatre and audience engagement also reveals how *Haider* importantly uses Shakespeare and Hamlet's "trap" to critically reflect on the cultural politics of Kashmir. While I only look at one adaptation of "The Mousetrap" scene in *Hamlet*, I believe that other adaptations do similar work in utilizing this moment in the play to speak more broadly about the cultural politics of the time and setting. For example, the aforementioned Akira Kurosawa's *The Bad Sleep Well* as well as Michael

Almereyda's *Hamlet* critique corporate corruption. Almereyda's film additionally speaks to surveillance and the arts in New York²⁰. Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (both the play and the film), use *Hamlet* and "The Mousetrap" scene to explore existentialism (and to dive even deeper into layers of meta-theatricality). Overall, there are many exciting and important possibilities for the continued study of Shakespeare on film. As Shaughnessy notes, Shakespeare on film exists "as something to be both taught and studied, [and it] provided the kind of bridge between high and popular culture that, as well as appealing to the new and expanded student constituency, might also offer the means for the academic discipline to revitalize itself" (6-7).

Finally, I must note that Shakespeare on film, and *Haider* in particular offers a lot of pedagogical possibilities in the classroom. Previous literary criticism marks a string of tired debates on whether or not Claudius sees the dumb show, and indeed, almost everyone know the story of Hamlet. *Haider*'s adaptation, however, revitalizes the play, making it relevant but also showing how Shakespeare can provide us an avenue for discussing "hard" topics like war, surveillance, and terrorism. Hamlet may have set up his "Mousetrap" to catch the conscience of the king, but this unique moment of meta-theatricality and self-reflexivness, with its many possibilities for critical engagement and reflection should remain in the consciences of viewing audiences and scholars alike.

²⁰ Almereyda's film also transforms "The Mousetrap" into a film created by Hamlet himself. Thus it is a film-within-a-film and makes a meta comment on film as a medium.

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