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Writing Project #3

Classic and Abstract Tone Determination

Tone has a great affect on the way an audience perceives a Shakespearean work. Film directors that create adaptations take certain liberties to create the tone that they want to achieve in their work. The most elementary way for a director to affect the way in which an audience views a film is in the actors he chooses to portray the roles in the film. Actors such as Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas create a playful tone, while Sir Laurence Olivier retains a tone of tragic sorrow. Secondly, the setting provides the audience with a great determination of what the director wants the audience to take from his work. The setting of Elsinore Brewery in *Strange Brew* once again creates a tone of lightheartedness, while the traditional Elsinore Castle portrays a sense of seriousness. Finally, changes in portrayal of difficult to film scenes reveal to the viewers a great tone determining scene. The Ghost of King Hamlet provides directors with a complicated character to portray and the directors make changes in accordance with the tone they are trying to achieve. The directors of *Strange Brew* and *Hamlet* make adaptive changes to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to create the tone of their film.

The actors portraying the characters in a film create a strong sense of tone in a theatrical work. Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas are known comedic actors, so the audience expects a humorous film. However, the actors in Olivier's *Hamlet* present a more traditional presentation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by classically portraying the bard's work. However, Sir Laurence Olivier as Hamlet provides an interesting insight on the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude because Hamlet looks much older than Gertrude. Throughout the movie, Hamlet and Gertrude

share kisses which reach far beyond the realm of mother and son. King Claudius goes so far as to remark about the length of the kiss after one of their embraces. By using the age difference, Olivier makes an incestuous relationship seem more plausible. However, in *Strange Brew*, Lynne Griffin plays a female Hamlet in Pam, thus eliminating all chances of romance between Hamlet and Gertrude. Olivier also took the liberty of eliminating Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from his version of *Hamlet* because he wanted the audience to focus on the tragedy of Hamlet. Contrastingly, *Strange Brew*'s central roles are based around the adventures of characters similar to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Bob and Doug provide us with an important Shakespearean element, diseased imagery. Translations of lines from Shakespeare's and Olivier's *Hamlet*, such as "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," have been turned into farting and taking a lie detector, belching and lines like, "If I didn't have puke breath, I'd kiss you," and "I gotta take a leak so bad I can taste it!" from Bob (I, iv, 90 and *Strange Brew*). By using a key Shakespearean theme, the directors of *Strange Brew* are once again reminding the audience that the film is a Shakespearean adaptation. Thus, the actors and their actions can greatly affect the way in which and audience perceives a film.

The location of a movie is imperative in determining the tone of *Hamlet* and *Strange Brew*. Sir Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* was set in a traditional Elsinore Castle in Denmark, while *Strange Brew* was located in Elsinore Brewery in Canada. While the plot is loosely related to that of *Hamlet*, *Strange Brew* clearly certifies its adaptive qualities by taking place in Elsinore. The authenticity of the Elsinore Castle in Olivier's *Hamlet* reveals the director's intent to create an authentic *Hamlet* setting for the big screen. While Olivier's film setting produces airs of realism, the setting of an Elsinore Brewery in Canada sets a comedic tone that is followed throughout the film. Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas are immediately playing on their Canadian heritage in the beginning of the film with phrases such as "hosers," "eh," "knob," "hosehead,"

and “shove off” (*Strange Brew*). The national heritage of Hamlet also plays a large role in his motivation for revenge against his uncle for the death of his father. Hamlet’s national pride can be seen in his comment to Horatio, “I am native here,” in regards to him desiring to make his country more respected for the greatness it is (I, iii, 15). However, the nationality of Bob and Doug serves as merely another trait for an American audience to laugh at. The close position of a Royal Canadian Institute for the Mentally Insane to Elsinore Brewery also provides a humorous statement about Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. *Strange Brew*’s directors make a powerful assertion about the mental status of characters in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* because all of the characters in *Strange Brew* are in the mental institution at some point during the movie. Olivier, however, keeps the air of mystery about the sanity of the characters in Elsinore Castle by staying true to the mystery created by Shakespeare’s play. Throughout Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the reader is unsure of the sanity of any of the characters in Elsinore Castle, but *Strange Brew*’s strange brew creates a mental instability in all of the characters that consume it. Setting is obviously a very powerful tone setting device in film.

The portrayal of King Hamlet differs in many adaptations of *Hamlet* and the believability of the King greatly affects the audience’s perception of Hamlet’s actions. Olivier portrays to us a classic humanesque King Hamlet, while *Strange Brew* provides the audience with a King Hamlet for the technologically advanced world. The King Hamlet in Olivier’s *Hamlet* is surprisingly believable as a ghost for a human character playing the role. The human figure appears ethereal and is accompanied by smoke and eerie orchestral music. Similarly, King Hamlet in *Strange Brew* is played by a human, but he is locked inside of the electrical system of Elsinore Brewery, which took his life. The appearance of King Hamlet is also supplemented by surges of power running through power cords, and an eventual embodiment in the form of electrical power. The King finally reveals himself to Hamlet in a video game, which like

Olivier's and Shakespeare's King Hamlet reveals the cause of his death. Olivier's *Hamlet* also used intense cinematography to reinforce the stress caused on the characters by the appearance of the ghost of the king. The camera zooms in and out coinciding with the sound of a beating heart, revealing to us the intensity of the scene. Olivier is revealing to us the inner tension that the Ghost of Hamlet is causing in Hamlet's soul. In *Strange Brew*, we must simply rely on the physical reactions of the characters, which are at best barely shocked, of the characters to determine the effect of the appearance of the ghost on the characters. *Strange Brew's* surveillance video images of Hamlet's father creates too clear of a picture compared to Olivier's *Hamlet*. While Olivier's King Hamlet was a human figure, it seemed ethereal, which created doubt in Hamlet and the audience if the ghost was actually his father. Conversely, Pam never had any doubt that the figure shown in the video was her father. Additionally, King Hamlet in *Strange Brew* took revenge on his murderers by destroying the mental institution, which held the patients affected by the strange brew. Shakespeare and Olivier's King Hamlet received revenge only through Hamlet. The directors of *Strange Brew* are ironically drawing the main focus of the film away from Hamlet, while Olivier remains true to the tragedy of Hamlet. King Hamlet's embodiment certainly diverges according to the tone of the film.

Strange Brew and *Hamlet's* directors certainly diverge to create two opposite tones for their movies. The actors chosen to play the roles in the movie are an important factor in the director's tone, such as the traditional in Olivier's *Hamlet* and the comedic in *Strange Brew*. The location of the film does a great deal for the way in which a director desires his film to be perceived. Similarly, difficult scenes such as the Ghost of King Hamlet are dealt with according to the director's tone. These adaptive stylistic changes greatly affect the tone of a film and the changes made in *Strange Brew* and *Hamlet* reveal the director's tone.

Works Cited

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