

## BEYOND READING

### HAMLET, WHAT A MOVIE DRAMA!

Hamlet is one of William Shakespeare's most famous plays, like *Romeo and Juliet* and *MacBeth*. It's an epic, violent tragedy that lasts several hours and has a large cast of engaging<sup>1</sup> characters who are all involved in its story about family conflict, betrayal, and death (so, so much death. Its popularity also means it has more film adaptations than most of Shakespeare's plays. The following 10 are among the most well-known movies that either adapt Hamlet or have a plot heavily inspired by the drama. They come with their IMDb<sup>2</sup> rating.



#### 1. **The Lion King (1994) by Walt Disney**

**IMDb rating: 8.5/10**

While the idea of adapting Hamlet into a family-friendly Disney movie might sound absurd on paper, it led to one of the most acclaimed animated movies of all time. And yes, though *The Lion King* is far from a direct adaptation, it does feature the protagonist's father being murdered by a treacherous<sup>3</sup> uncle, with the protagonist then setting out to avenge the killing and right the injustice that was committed.

#### 2. **Hamlet (1964) by Grigori Kozintsev and Iosif Shapiro**

**IMDb rating: 8.2/10**

This 1964 version has had high ratings according to IMDb ratings and it is based on a translation by Boris Pasternak. It's not quite as widely seen as many of the better-known adaptations, but it was recognised by the BAFTAs and the Golden Globes.

#### 3. **Haider (2014) by Vishal Bhardwaj**

**IMDb rating: 8.0/10**

Haider is an Indian Hindi-language crime thriller film that tells the story of Hamlet during the 1990s. The plot follows Haider, a young student and a poet, who returns to Kashmir at the peak of the conflict to seek answers

<sup>1</sup> **engaging:** charming and attractive

<sup>2</sup> **IMDb:** Internet Movie Database

<sup>3</sup> **treacherous:** likely to betray trust



about his father's death and ends up being pulled into the politics of the state. At 160 minutes long, it is one of the longest adaptations of *Hamlet* for the cinema, and it shows the violent consequences of its protagonist's quest for revenge after his father dies in mysterious circumstances.

**4. *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) by Akira Kurosawa**

**IMDb rating: 8.0/10**

*The Bad Sleep Well* is a fairly loose<sup>4</sup> adaptation, it does not have much in common with its source material and it transports things to mid-20th century Japan, and follows a young man who seeks revenge on a powerful industrialist who he holds responsible for his father's death. Murder, madness, and human corruption are explored in both *Hamlet* and *The Bad Sleep Well*, and the film captures the spirit of the source material well.

**5. *Hamlet* (1996) by Kenneth Branagh**

**IMDb rating: 7.8/10**

This *Hamlet* is easily the longest, lasting over four hours. This version is famous for adapting the entire play to the big screen. It is thought that it would be very difficult to make a longer adaptation without adding extra material. This results in a movie that might well be too long and exhausting for some viewers, but for Shakespeare purists out there, there is a good chance this would be one of the very best films, because no cuts have been made. Thus, the epic scope achieved through such an ambitious adaptation of the play is undeniable.

**6. *Hamlet* (1948) by Laurence Olivier**

**IMDb rating: 7.6/10**

This *Hamlet* is the only direct Shakespeare adaptation to have won Best Picture. In essence, this take on *Hamlet* is a direct, simple, and perfectly efficient one. It shortens the play down to a still fairly epic 2.5 hours, and has Laurence Olivier at the height of his powers as both an actor and director. It might not stand out now, 75 years later, but it was an undoubtedly impressive film for its time.

**7. *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (1990) by Tom Stoppard**

**IMDb rating: 7.3/10**

*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* re-frames *Hamlet* and focuses on two of its minor characters who tend to be cut out of most film adaptations. Those two characters are none other than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and they spend much of the movie having philosophical conversations about their existence and lack of purpose in life. It is an odd movie, and its sense

**4 loose:** not firmly fixed in place, in this case without a close correspondence between original and adaptation



of humour is not for everyone. Also, for as clever as the premise<sup>5</sup> is, the whole thing is fairly repetitive, considering it's almost two hours long. At least it is unique and undoubtedly entertaining in parts, and benefits hugely from having Tim Roth and Gary Oldman as the protagonists.

#### 8. *The Northman* (2022) by Robert Eggers

IMDb rating: 7.1/10

If there's one thing that *The Northman* does exceptionally well, it's highlighting the cyclical nature of revenge and the way violence can continue to inspire more violence until there is no one left to be violent. Speaking of violence: the movie has a ton of it. Interestingly, *The Northman* might not quite be an adaptation of *Hamlet*, given it is based on the Scandinavian legend of Amleth, which itself inspired *Hamlet*. However, given *Hamlet* has ultimately overshadowed its predecessor, *The Northman* does end up feeling like another take on that familiar story, but thankfully contains a few surprises for those who think they know the original text well (plus a good deal more action than most Hamlet movies).

#### 9. *Hamlet* (1921) By Svend Gade, Heinz Schall

IMDb rating: 7.0/10

1921's *Hamlet* is one of the oldest known film versions of the play, and more significantly, is still watchable. There are plenty of films from the 1920s and earlier that have been lost to time, meaning those interested in old cinema can only imagine what they would have looked like. This old movie also stands out from the crowd because it changes Hamlet from prince to princess, with the title character needing to pass as a man for much of the film's duration. Naturally, this leads to various plot elements being changed, too, adding another level to the film and making it surprisingly unpredictable in the process, even though all the characters, and the core<sup>6</sup> premise, are found in the original play.

#### 10 *Hamlet* (1990) by Franco Zeffirelli

IMDb rating: 6.7/10

*Hamlet* is notable for starring Mel Gibson as the Prince of Denmark, but can also be singled out as the one where the title character has a terrible haircut. Otherwise, it does not stand out among Hamlet adaptations, as it plays things straight when it comes to adapting the original text, and does not add anything to it.

[adapted from: collider.com]

<sup>5</sup> **premise:** a previous statement from which another follows as a conclusion

<sup>6</sup> **core:** main



**1 READING COMPREHENSION** Choose the correct answer.

- 1 Which of the following is NOT a theme explored in *Hamlet*?
  - A Family conflict.
  - B Betrayal.
  - C Revenge.
  - D Climate change.
- 2 Which adaptation of *Hamlet* is known for being the longest?
  - A *The Lion King*.
  - B *Haider*.
  - C *The Northman*.
  - D The 1996 version.
- 3 What sets *The Northman* apart from other adaptations of *Hamlet*?
  - A It is based on the Scandinavian legend of Amleth.
  - B It features Tim Roth and Gary Oldman in the lead roles.
  - C It has a ton of violent scenes.
  - D It is set in modern times.
- 4 How does *The Bad Sleep Well* differ from the original play?
  - A It takes place in mid-20th century Japan.
  - B It focuses on two minor characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
  - C It explores themes of murder, madness, and human corruption.
  - D It has a runtime of over four hours.
- 5 What is unique about the 1921 version of *Hamlet*?
  - A It is one of the oldest known film versions of the play.
  - B It changes the title character from prince to princess.
  - C It features Mel Gibson in the lead role.
  - D It received high ratings from IMDb.
- 6 Which adaptation of *Hamlet* won the Best Picture award?
  - A *The Lion King*.
  - B *The Northman*.
  - C Laurence Olivier's version.
  - D The 1921 version.
- 7 What is the main focus of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern*?
  - A The cyclical nature of revenge.
  - B The philosophical conversations between the two characters.
  - C The violence depicted in the movie.
  - D The comical elements of the story.



## 2 VOCABULARY Match the adjectives with their definitions.

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|--|--|
| 1 <input type="checkbox"/> acclaimed     | <b>A</b> having a strong desire to achieve success or make an impact.                            |
| 2 <input type="checkbox"/> undeniable    | <b>B</b> being actively participating or taking part in something.                               |
| 3 <input type="checkbox"/> unique        | <b>C</b> highly praised or recognized for excellence.  |
| 4 <input type="checkbox"/> unpredictable | <b>D</b> causing extreme tiredness or fatigue.   |
| 5 <input type="checkbox"/> exhausting    | <b>E</b> not able to be predicted or foreseen; uncertain.  |
| 6 <input type="checkbox"/> powerful      | <b>F</b> impossible to deny or reject as true or valid.  |
| 7 <input type="checkbox"/> epic          | <b>G</b> being the only one of its kind; distinct or different from all others.                  |
| 8 <input type="checkbox"/> involved      | <b>H</b> having great strength, influence, or control.   |
| 9 <input type="checkbox"/> efficient     | <b>I</b> performing or functioning effectively with minimum waste of time, effort, or resources. |
| 10 <input type="checkbox"/> ambitious    | <b>J</b> grand and heroic; surpassing the ordinary or usual                                      |