

*'Hamlet Within'* - A film by Ken McMullen

By Martha Parsey.

The established fact of the absolute supremacy of Shakespeare and indeed *Hamlet* as one of his greatest and lasting dramas, the meaning and ramifications of which still ripple into our unknown futures, is not news. Shakespeare may forever make us wonder how a dramatist in the early 1600s could have written drama that resonates beyond our 21<sup>st</sup> century selves.

But if we ever needed a film more than we do today to pose the question: 'Was ist Kunst?', then *Hamlet Within* is the artwork to pose this question. We sense already from the opening of Act I – a film, like *Hamlet*, in five acts- with the repeated mantra '*to die, to sleep*' that this film is going to probe into the innermost depths of our unconscious and eternal resistance to the mortal coil.

Threading together Godardesque cinematic semantics, psychoanalysis and philosophy, Marxist theory and a Baconesque penchant for the brutal and the tragic, a tapestry is woven between Ian McKellen's well known masterful handling of the words of Shakespeare, a collagist cinematic depiction of the Unconscious and documentary interviews with Shakespeare scholars that flow like a dream into Jacques Derrida's questions on plagiarism and the future of artistic originality.

The creation of the Shakespearean legend is further explored through Shakespeare's creation of the inner-voice, the space created in Shakespearean drama for inward thinking, the monologue, the pause, the hesitation. It is a pregnant pause that begets, in the words of Richard Wilson, inwardness and interiority, the performance of thinking that becomes the foundation of modern literature, indeed the beginning of the modern Self. The film itself is a pause, an opportunity for inward reflection '*between the acting of a dreadful thing and the first motion all the interim is as a phantasm, a dream, a hallucination*'.

With Hamlet's obsession with the ghost of the father, the film cleverly brings together a father and son cast, as well as pulling together the imaginations of international actors, artists, scholars, philosophers alike, that carefully and intentionally deconstructs its own construct. '*Words words words...*' that thread in and out of voice-over and text in Mandarin, German, French, Russian, Italian and English, steps over language, like a hindrance to meaning, defying its boundaries, even within a single dialogue, always returning to questions of the human condition that is neither altered nor changed through time nor consciousness; like the shore left unchanged after the lashing of timeless waves.

Varsha Panjwani's astute feminist reading of the character of Ophelia and the constant psychic invasions on Woman is a refreshing and bold addition to interpretations of the Shakespearean legend, as are McMullen's own contributions of text and poetry.

Details from McMullen's other films find their rightful place in this tapestry, excerpts from '*Lumen de Lumine*' - a meditation on solitude - as well as figures from Pompeii from '*Pioneers in Art and Science*', appear like the sea reveals old wrecks, and the Unconscious spits up past memory.

The use of the famous '*To be or not to be*' speech in German is a masterful nod to the great German philosophers- Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and McMullen's artistic collaborations with Joseph Beuys, as well as working as a reminder to the continued resistance to autocracy and Fascism. This is a film that poses more artistic, moral, philosophical and political questions than it ever seeks to answer, placing it as an artwork of the highest order, with the motivating thrust of the film being: Was ist Kunst? And indeed: What is cinema?

Martha Parsey  
ARTIST AND ART PRODUCER  
**MPHQ** Project Space London | Cologne