

Chloé Zhao, director. *Hamnet*. Focus Features. 2025.

The historical drama *Hamnet*, directed by Academy Award Winner Chloé Zhao, is based on the 2020 novel of the same name by Maggie O'Farrell. The novel follows William Shakespeare and his wife Agnes Hathaway through their grief after the death of their son, Hamnet. William is a sensitive and creative man, and Agnes is a herbalist who follows pagan traditions passed down by the women in her family. She is the protagonist of the film, with her husband as a supporting character. The film takes place in sixteenth-century England, the Tudor Period (1485-1603 AD), where art flourished. It is an emotional illustration of family bonds, life aspirations, and grief.

The marriage between William and Agnes is key to the former's theatrical success. Most importantly, through this marriage, he obtained the opportunity to push himself into the public eye and make his name known. William is well educated, and he has a talent for storytelling, yet he does not have the support of his father to pursue it. The film portrays how unstable their relationship is, leading to William's mental breakdown. Agnes urges her brother to help her husband by sending him to London, where he has the opportunity to prove himself and be away from his father. Moving to London is his next step in becoming the greatest writer in the English language.

While William is temporarily based in London for work, Agnes gives birth to their twins, Hamnet and Judith. The twins are tightly bonded, happy, and adventurous, even though the girl was born weak. Judith falls gravely ill and hovers on the edge of death. In a desperate act, Hamnet tricks Death into taking him instead, sacrificing himself to save his sister. His sudden and heartbreaking death devastates the family. Agnes struggles to understand William's way of grieving; to her, it seems that he is trying to move on too quickly, creating tension and strain within their marriage. Overwhelmed by the guilt of not being present when his son died, William becomes consumed by grief and attempts to jump off a bridge into the sea. Instead, in that moment full of tragic emotions, an idea to honor his son spawns: writing a play with his son as the main protagonist to show all of England what an amazing child he was, and for the whole country to mourn him as well. Agnes hears of the play taking place,

named after her son, and rushes to London to see what her husband has been plotting. The film presents these last few scenes as an awakening to Agnes as she sees that her husband did not move on from the death of their child and is still grieving. He turned his grief into art, with himself playing a father as a ghost, showing he wishes he could trade his life for his sons.

*Hamnet* is historical fiction, and it is expected to be inaccurate because modern films are made for entertainment purposes. The film is based on the theory that Shakespeare wrote the play “Hamlet” as a response to his son’s death. The play follows a young man named Hamlet as he seeks revenge for the deaths of his family members. The story of the play has no similarities to the death or characteristics of his son, and many scholars debunked the idea that the play was written as an expression of grief after losing his son. The Great Plague of London is part of the background of the lives of the Shakespeare family, which is accurate since the final days of the plague are taking place when William first arrived in London. Hamnet most likely died of the plague; however, the film portrays his death as supernatural. The film also refers to Anne Hathaway as Agnes because of a spelling pattern of the seventeenth century. In the film, Agnes has a deep spiritual connection with nature, even being nicknamed a witch’s daughter by the townspeople, yet this is a fictional aspect of her personality added by Maggie O’Farrell and Chloé Zhao. Fans of Shakespeare and historical fiction will enjoy this film.

*Brisa Sirena*

Maciej Pieprzycza, director. *Ołowiane Dzieci* [*Lead Children*]. Orient Film, Netflix, 2026.

Based on true events, the 2026 Netflix limited series *Ołowiane Dzieci* [*Lead Children*] tells the story of Polish pediatrician Jolanta Wadowska-Król (nicknamed Jola). Set in 1970s Szopienice, Poland, Dr. Wadowska-Król uncovers the horrifying cases of lead poisoning in neighborhood children, and the subsequent cover-up by local authorities. Throughout the limited series, Dr. Wadowska-Król battles with the local capitalist and political administrations to bring her findings