

A DEVIL'S LABYRINTH:
A Rereading of *Hamlet*

Master's thesis
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tämä tutkimus käsittelee William Shakespearen näytelmää <i>Hamlet</i>, kiinnittäen huomiota haamun alkuperään sekä Shakespearen näkemykseen koston oikeutuksesta perustuen Prosserin (1971) tutkimukseen esittäen, ettei Haamu ole todellisuudessa Hamletin isä vaan demoninen henki. Näytelmän keskiössä ei tämän tulkinnan mukaan ole perinteisesti ymmärretty teema pojasta, jonka täytyy kostaa isänsä kuolema, vaan se, että hän uskoo demonista henkeä ja näin saattaa toiminnallaan tuhoon koko Tanskan kuningaskunnan. Tragedia ei siis perustu koston oikeutukseen ja Hamletin päättämättömyyteen ja kykenemättömyyteen kostaa, vaan siihen, että hän kostaa siitäkin huolimatta, ettei se ole sallittua.</p> <p>Sen sijaan, että lopussa Hamlet aivan kuin löytäisi tiensä takaisin, ehdotetaan Hamletin muutoksen viimeisessä näytöksessä perustuvan hänen tarpeeseensa oikeuttaa tekonsa, jolloin hänen onnistuu uskottella itselleen olevansa Jumalan koston lähettäjä.</p> <p>Tutkimus on jaettu kuuteen osaan. Kun tutkimuksen peruslähtökohdat on selvitetty ensimmäisessä johdantoluvussa, esitellään ensin <i>Hamlet</i> kirjallisuudentutkimuksen traditiossa sekä Prosserin (1971) tutkimus pääpiirteissään. Kolmannessa luvussa esitellään lyhyesti kiirastulioppi tutkimuksen kannalta olennaisena elementtinä katolisen ja reformoidun kirkon välisenä opillisena skismaana sekä historiallisena kysymyksenä. Neljännessä luvussa esitellään tutkimusaineisto tarkemmin sekä käytetty tutkimusmetodologia. Analyysi sijoittuu viidenteen lukuun, jota seuraa tutkimuksen yhteenveto sekä jatkotutkimuskysymysten esittely.</p>	
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Into such a devil's labyrinth is he led!

— Granville-Barker (1971: 249)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS.....	6
1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
2 EARLIER STUDIES ON "HAMLET"	8
2.1 GENERAL VIEWS ON SHAKESPEARE.....	8
2.2 THE GHOST	13
2.2.1 "A Spirit of Health, Or Goblin Damned"	13
2.2.2 The Ghost As A Diminishing Presence.....	15
2.3 THE SHIFT IN HAMLET'S FUNCTION.....	16
2.4 PROSSER (1971)	17
2.5 THE PRESENT STUDY IN RELATION TO PROSSER (1971)	21
3 THE PURGATORY AS A THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINE	22
3.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE REFORMATION.....	22
3.2 THE DEFINITIONS OF PURGATORY	26
4 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	28
4.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	29
4.2 DATA.....	30
4.2.1 Hamlet by William Shakespeare	30
4.2.2 The Synopsis of the Play.....	32
4.3 METHODOLOGY	35
4.3.1 New Historicism.....	35
4.3.2 Literary studies.....	37
4.3.2.1 Foreshadowing and Close-reading.....	37
4.3.2.2 Catharsis and hamartia	38

4.4 THE PATH OF THE ANALYSIS	39
5 ANALYSIS	40
5.1 HAMLET AND DOUBT	42
5.1.1 The Ghost Enters.....	42
5.1.2 "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt"	50
5.1.3 The Report To Hamlet.....	53
5.1.4 The Ghost Enters Again.....	56
5.1.5 The Ghost of Sulphurous Flames	59
5.1.6 The Ghost As Iago	62
5.1.7 Hamlet's Response And "The Swearing Ritual"	65
5.1.8 Doubts of Identity and "The Mousetrap"	69
5.2 HAMLET'S REVENGE.....	71
5.2.1 Hamlet as Pyrrhus and Vice.....	71
5.2.2 The Prayer Scene	74
5.2.3 The Closet Scene	76
5.2.4 Hamlet, Heaven's Scourge and Minister	79
5.3 CODA: DESTROYING THE TRAGIC IN THE TRAGEDY.....	86
6 CONCLUSION AND FOR FURTHER STUDY.....	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	89

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>1 Macc</i>	The First Book of Maccabees
<i>1 Cor</i>	Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians
<i>1H4</i>	The First Part of Henry IV
<i>2H4</i>	The Second Part of Henry IV
<i>1 John</i>	The First Epistle of John
<i>Ard²</i>	<i>Hamlet</i> , ed. Harold Jenkins, Arden Shakespeare (1982)
<i>Ard^{3a}</i>	<i>Hamlet</i> , eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, Arden Shakespeare (2006)
<i>Ard^{3b}</i>	<i>Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623</i> , eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, Arden Shakespeare (2006)
<i>AW</i>	All's Well that Ends Well
<i>CE</i>	The Comedy of Errors
<i>Cor</i>	Coriolanus
<i>F, F1</i>	<i>Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, The First Folio</i> (1623)
<i>GB</i>	The Geneva Bible (1557)
<i>Gen</i>	The Book of Genesis, <i>or</i> the First Book of Moses
<i>KJV</i>	The Authorized King James Version (1611)
<i>KL</i>	King Lear
<i>Ham</i>	Hamlet
<i>LLL</i>	Love's Labour's Lost
<i>Mac</i>	Macbeth
<i>Matt</i>	The Gospel of Matthew
<i>Mark</i>	The Gospel of Mark
<i>NOAD</i>	New Oxford American Dictionary
<i>NCS</i>	<i>Hamlet</i> , ed. Philip Edwards, New Cambridge Shakespeare (2003), 2 nd ed.

OED	Oxford English American Dictionary
Q1	<i>The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke. By William Shakes-peare, The First Quarto (1603)</i>
Q2	<i>The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. By William Shakespeare. Newly imprinted and enlarged. . . according to the true and perfect Coppie, The Second Quarto (1604-5)</i>
Rev	The Book of Revelation to John
Riv	<i>The Riverside Shakespeare</i> , ed. G. Blakemore Evand and others, 2nd edition (Boston, Mass., 1997)
RSC	<i>William Shakespeare: The Complete Works</i> , eds. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (The Royal Shakespeare Company, 2007)
RS	Romeo and Juliet
SD	Stage directions, scene directions
TS	The Taming of the Shrew

1 INTRODUCTION

The prevalent theme in the studies of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been the understanding as sons avenging their fathers. Based on this, *Hamlet* studies have been generally oblique in addressing the ambiguous testimonies concerning the Ghost's identity, and to consider revenge as a moral question would undermine the basic function of the play. Encouraged by Prosser (1971), this study has questioned such axioms, instead arguing that the Ghost's identity is a problem that merits further investigation, and also that *Hamlet* does not exist nor was written in a moral vacuum, challenging the notion that revenge is an imperative that Hamlet is obligated to fulfill without any moral hesitations.

Prosser (1971) found many reasons to support the hypothesis that the Ghost might be demonic, in the Christian sense, and that Elizabethan drama did not adhere to what modern critics label "revenge code", according to which it would be completely understandable to revenge without moral dilemmas. This study expands Prosser's investigation in the sense that it argues that the Ghost's demonic origin (closely linked to the question of Purgatory) is fundamental in the play's structure, which in many ways reverses the classic Hamlet interpretations — the tragedy lies in Hamlet believing the Ghost and aligning with the demonic, ultimately resulting in the death of several, including Hamlet, and the fall of the Danish kingdom. One important aspect is the question of Purgatory, which at the time of Shakespeare had been demolished by Protestant doctrine: as explained by Greenblatt (2001: 240), in reference to his own study:

In terms of the particular issues with which this book has been concerned, a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament, is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost.

There are, hence, likely some fundamentally different arguments presented in this study in comparison to those which one might be accustomed to expect (for the previous studies of *Hamlet*, see chapter 2). One such argument is that *Hamlet* is not a redemptive story (of which I will use the term *redemptionist*), and that the tragedy lies not in Hamlet procrastinating to fulfill the Ghost's imperative but in Hamlet actually fulfilling the Ghost's imperative. Not only this, I will agree with Prosser (1971) that the Ghost is a demon yet go even further and argue that the audience (this term including both readers and playgoers) is supposed to be aware of the clues hinting to such a conclusion by the end of the first act. This will be reflected in the analysis where much energy is first given to the question of the Ghost's origin. After this the analysis shifts into the complex function of Hamlet more determinedly.

Abandoning the redemptionist reading of *Hamlet* means basically that in the end Hamlet does not fight his way out of hell (Prosser 1971: 235), instead towards the end transforming himself by his need of self-justification into a heaven's scourge and minister, basically thus justifying his condition in the revenge tragedy. Thus Hamlet's stoic calmness is the result of his contorted view of his function in the events. The lack of relying on a redemptionist method is somewhat unheard of in *Hamlet* studies yet it should for its transparency offer greatly to the general understanding of Shakespeare.

This study consists of six chapters, including this Introduction. The following two include the historical background not only to Hamlet studies but to certain topics of Elizabethan culture as well. They are followed by the exposition of the design of this research (ch. 4), where I will, for example, discuss and in part criticize the dominant academic movement of the day, New Historicism, and explain how it will be used in this study. Finally, the Analysis (ch. 5) will be the core of this study and in the Conclusion I will draw all the propositions together and compare them to my initial research

questions (given in 4.2 below) as well as propose further topics for investigation.

2 EARLIER STUDIES ON "HAMLET"

Whereas the following chapter is historically oriented and will explore the English Reformation from a historical context, this chapter provides some framework for the academic studies on *Hamlet*.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first gives a very general introduction into the scholarly debate over *Hamlet* in the most conventional modus operandi possible, followed by the specific questions concerning the Ghost in 2.2 and Hamlet's function in the play in 2.3, the latter two being categories that are most relevant for this study. The section 2.4 is reserved for a summary of the study by Prosser (1971), which is an essential one for the understanding of this study, and the final section, 2.5, finally addresses the relationship between these two studies.

2.1 General Views on Shakespeare

Here Bevington's (2004: xcvi-xcix) useful chapter on Shakespeare criticism has been used as the primary source. *Hamlet*, being the most written about play in the Shakespearean canon (Thompson and Taylor 2006a: 1-2), allows for consideration of the following axiom: the critical attitude of an age concerning Shakespeare manifests itself most strongly in the analyses of *Hamlet*. Nevertheless, this axiom is reciprocal in the sense that one may infer a general understanding of *Hamlet* based on what emerges in Shakespeare criticism in like manner, an assumption followed in this section.

To begin with, "in his own time, Shakespeare achieved a reputation for immortal greatness that is astonishing when we consider the low regard in

which playwrights were then generally held" (Bevington 2004: xcvi). This is evident in the eulogies and other writings of contemporaries such as Weever, Meres and Jonson, the latter which famously remarked that Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time!" (Jonson 1623). This attitude was only heightened by the time of Dryden and Pope during the Restoration period of the late seventeenth century, however, during this time "Jonson was the more correct poet, the better model for imitation. Shakespeare often had to be rewritten according to the sophisticated tastes of the Restoration" (Bevington 2004: xcvi). Dryden and Pope saw Shakespeare as an "untutored genius" who would have "written 'more correctly'" (ibid.) had he lived under the refined times of the Restoration. Pope's 1725 edition of Shakespeare thus freely sought to ameliorate Shakespeare's language, "rewriting lines and excising those parts he considered vulgar, in order to rescue Shakespeare from the barbaric circumstances of his Elizabethan milieu" (ibid.).

By the time of Johnson in the late eighteenth century criticism had already been directed towards Shakespeare's violation of the classical unities as the "classical criticism tended to distrust imagination and fancy" (ibid.). Johnson, however, praised Shakespeare for transcending the classical theatrical decorum but found Shakespeare's loose plot-constructions, mismanaged endings, licentious humour and punning wordplay objectionable, and deplored Shakespeare's failure "to satisfy the demands of poetic justice, especially in *King Lear*" (ibid., c).

Coleridge brought Shakespeare to the Romantic period, during which Shakespeare criticism turned away from the classical approach of the immediate past. "Shakespeare became a seer, a bard with mystic powers of insight into the human condition", and it was Goethe who first, in 1796, "conceived of Hamlet as the archetypal 'Romantic' poet: melancholic, delicate, and unable to act" (ibid.). Much of the day's analysis was centered on characters, and Coleridge's conception of Hamlet, in part based on that of

Goethe (and Hegel), survives even to this day: Hamlet, as a character, procrastinates, loses the power to act and falters from sensibility. Regardless, Coleridge was one of the first to see Shakespeare as a deliberate artist, a new attitude shared by Schlegel as well.

The Romantics had become increasingly weary of Shakespeare as a man of the theatre, and he, above all else, existed mainly as a literary dramatist. In short, "the Romantics were enthusiasts of Shakespeare, and sometimes even idolaters" (ibid., ci), exalting Shakespeare as a poet-philosopher and creator of immortal characters. Bradley (whose *Shakespearean Tragedy* was first published in 1904) was the last influential critic heavily influenced by Romanticism, yet his character analyses already demonstrated an acute scholarly awareness to textual problems.

The answer of the twentieth-century to the character criticism of the previous century were the so-called historical critics. They argued that to understand Shakespeare's historical milieu (theatre, audience, politics, social environment) better meant to understand him better, and from the beginning they saw him as the man of the theatre. It was during this time that Shakespeare criticism became an academic profession by its very nature, and Shakespeare's plays were seen more increasingly as artifices arising out of their historical milieux, which were to be analyzed as such and not deflected by either biographical or even moral issues. However, this era was the first to see *Hamlet* as a revenge story and not a story about delay (a Romantic notion). This led to a form of social Darwinism, arguing sometimes more explicitly than not that Shakespeare was merely a product of his environment, yet the major achievement of this period was the knowledge and research they contributed to the understanding of the staging of Shakespeare's plays.

However, a critical answer to historical criticism was already developing and is well summarized by Bevington (2004: ciii):

The suggestions urged by Stoll and others that Shakespeare was the product of his cultural and theatrical environment tended to obscure his achievement as a poet. Amassing of information about Shakespeare's reading or his theatrical company often seemed to inhibit the scholar from responding to the power of words and images.

The answer to the problems of historical criticism is nowadays called New Criticism, demanding that Shakespeare should be read without the encumbrance of the historical. Shakespeare's poetry was now moving to the epicenter, and as a movement New Criticism has generated detailed studies on Shakespeare's language and imagery, retaining a pedagogical position against the overtly aridly academic and frigid scholarship associated with the historical critics.

Partly the psychological criticism based on Freud and Jones is a continuation of the Romantic character criticism of the nineteenth century, where Hamlet has been analyzed as a "real person", whose childhood traumata can be traced through the text, a branch of criticism that quickly suffused the imagination of the masses due to Olivier's 1948 film on *Hamlet*, which is consumed with the idea of representing Hamlet as the archetypal model of Freud's Oedipus complex. Nowadays it survives in part in the various emanations of feminist criticism.

World War II and the ensuing Cold War gave rise to what is nowadays called the Theater of the Absurd, whose driving force of interpretation was to channel the disillusionment with the world, especially traditional values, exposing Shakespeare to bleaker interpretations. For example the so-called "redemptionist" (by which I mean an interpretation according to which the play has to have a happy and unambiguous ending) views of *King Lear* were rejected and what Johnson had earlier criticized as Shakespeare's inability to bend his will to poetic justice was now seen as Shakespeare's vision of a disjunct world with which artists living in a society under constant nuclear

gloom could well identify with (Foakes 2006: 1), and there was a revived interest in his history plays as well due to the possible links to be made between Shakespeare and world politics, including capitalism and communism.

New Historicism, as practiced by Greenblatt and his followers, is perhaps the most recent way of investigating Shakespeare from a demystifying perspective. It is largely the inheritor of the historical critics, focusing on the themes of power and subversion and the role-plays associated with it. As summarized by Bevington (2004: cvii):

Among the ways in which new historicists seek to separate themselves from earlier historical critics is by denying that the work of art is a unified and self-contained product of an independent creator in masterful control of the meaning of the work. Instead, the new historicists represent the work as shot through with the multiple and contradictory discourses of its time. New historicists also deny that art merely "reflects" its historical milieu; instead, they argue that art is caught up in, and contributes to, the social practices of its time.

In the end I wish to offer some cogitations on the direction of Shakespeare criticism, nowadays still obsessed with the biographical. Textual criticism, thanks to Erne (2003) and Bate and Rasmussen (2007) is perhaps slowly changing the paradigm away from the overt New Historicism — which has in many ways become a blanket term for all sorts of disciplines, including the feminist — and introducing Shakespeare to the twenty-first century as a poet, thinker and dramatist all the same. I will argue for my position in this continuum in section 4.4 where I will discuss the methodologies used in this study.

2.2 The Ghost

In this section I will now turn away from the general critical understanding of Shakespeare and instead concentrate on the specific, not only on *Hamlet* per se but what constitutes *Hamlet* for this study.

The Ghost is the figure who, in the words of (Nuttall 2007: 205) destroys the lives of Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius and Gertrude. This section examines the critical impetus concerning the equivocality of its identity and its diminishing presence in the play.

2.2.1 "A Spirit of Health, Or Goblin Damned"

Whilst it may be effortlessly claimed that the Ghost is Hamlet's father as Bloom (2003: 33, see also 1998: 383-431) amongst others does, several textual mysteries have kept the current of criticism from addressing the issue exhaustively. In this subsection I will explain the critical ambivalence on the subject.

In short, the two polar opposites are represented by Bradley (1958), and Prosser (1971): the interpretation of the Ghost of the former is based on the presumptive axiom that Shakespeare uses no Christian elements in his plays or that they carry no thematic value. Indeed, for Bradley (1958: 86) Christian elements of motivation are absurd, and following this tradition, Bloom (2003: 33) believes that the Ghost is indubitably that of Hamlet's father without any evidence. Axiomatically critics do as Garber (2004: 469, 477) and Bloom (2003) do and equate the Ghost with Hamlet's father without any inquiries. Some are as belligerent as Levine (1962: 543) who proclaims that to superimpose a Christian framework for the play is "unjustifiable" (ibid.).

The divergent argument of Prosser (1971: 119) is that the Christian theology of demonology and afterlife are central to the play and bring into

focus the deep existential and theological discontent this question gives rise to. The rise of New Historicism has in part reactivated such investigations, yet Prosser's (who is not a New Historicist) controversial argument remains as a minority opinion: for example, whereas she finds in Horatio's inquiries to the Ghost in 1.1 (cf. section 4.1 below) perfectly suitable rhetoric to be used with a possibly demonic spirit (Prosser 1977: 120-21), critics tend to swerve toward similar explanations as offered by Ewbank (1977: 91), for whom Horatio's communicative attempts are a failure, not least because of his use of the word "usurp'st" in 1.1.45.

Jenkins (1982: 123) epitomizes the antithetical voice against Prosser, arguing that Hamlet has suffered from what Waldock calls the "documentary fallacy" (see Waldock 1975: 78 *and passim*), a "habit of treating a work of fiction as though it were a record of historical fact, from which inferences about other supposed facts could be drawn" (Jenkins, *ibid.*). The problem of such a view is that it precludes any influence from the general Christian culture of the time and the notion that Shakespeare wrote and was read and seen by his contemporaries — and for one's contemporaries the drama is signaled through a shared framework of ideas and events of a shared reality, which presently includes the theological concepts of the Reformation.

Perhaps the most politically correct current view is that of Greenblatt (2008: 1683) and Nuttall (2007: 203-5) who emphasize that the identity of the Ghost is ambiguous. As reported by Nuttall (2007: 205), the Ghost is never called — neither in the SDs nor speech headings — "King Hamlet" or "Hamlet's Father" but always "the Ghost". In fact, as reminded by Thompson and Taylor (2006a: 141), the Ghost was named the "Ghost of Hamlet's Father" only in the list of characters for the sixth quarto (Q6).

Nuttall (2007: 205) also wonders why Hamlet is so seldom adjudged as wielding Christian theology. Such naturalism is traceable at least to Bradley (1958), yet in part because of the New Historicist thrust in emphasizing the

cultural dimensions of art discussion of a Christian cosmology for Hamlet can be reinvigorated. Being closely linked to this, Hamlet's quest for certainty has become a theme in modern criticism: Levin (1959: 58) argues that whether the Ghost is an evil genius or Hamlet's father continually harasses Hamlet; Hibbard (1977: 3) emphasizes that Hamlet's intelligence is used to find the truth.

2.2.2 The Ghost As A Diminishing Presence

An intrinsic mystery in the play is the ephemeral presence of the Ghost. In this subchapter the subject of this dynamic feature will be elaborated on. Then the shift in Hamlet's function is expatiated.

The Ghost appears in the play only thrice, in 1.1, 1.3 and 3.4, speaks only in two and appears — if we follow the Q1 stage direction — in the last of his scene in a “night-gowne” (Thompson and Taylor 2006b: 13, 2006b: 132. See also Hibbard 1987 and for a counter-argument Jenkins 1982). This is, as observed by (Everett 1977: 118), a great decline from the majestic figure that first appears on the battlements to the sentinels to an old man ready for bed whom his wife cannot see anymore (Some editors, such as Edwards [2003: 191], abandon this Q1 reading). Yet its function there is not completely useless, as its last appearance does, as explained by Jenkins (1982: 142), begin a new revenge cycle in the play. Yet when it does appear for the last time in 3.4, it has been away so long that when it appears again it stays exactly so long that we realize having almost forgotten about it (Everett 1977: 118). Bloom (2003: 20) goes so far as to call the Ghost “defunct” as nothing is heard of it after the closet-scene and no one mentions it again.

2.3 The Shift In Hamlet's Function

I have already discussed that the Ghost's function changes during the play from an authoritative spirit in full armour to one that only appears in a desperate attempt to remind his son Hamlet of killing the wrong man, as if Hamlet would somehow forget. But the Ghost is not the only character whose function changes during the course of the play, and this section is devoted to exploration of the critical consensus concerning the shift in Hamlet's function.

Hamlet does not become defunct, but his role changes dramatically after killing Polonius. Up until that moment he has been the agent of vengeance, yet through Polonius' blood he has now become its object. When the Ghost returns and the corpse of Polonius lies before it and Hamlet, "the second revenge action is ready to begin" (Jenkins 1982: 142).

As observed by Erne (2003: 236), the closet-scene is at the epicenter of the play's structure. In this scene not only does the Ghost appear for the last time and be utterly forgotten but by killing Polonius Hamlet inadvertently lets his function in the play change from the revenger to the one being the object of revenge (Jenkins 1982: 143-4. See 143-7 for full expatiation; Erne 2003: 236). Jenkins calls this the "dual role" of Hamlet and also wonders how little interest it has aroused with critics considering how fundamental it is in the play's structure (ibid.).

Considering that this study also concerns itself with the question of Hamlet's "delay" to some extent, be it merely in passing, it is necessary to bring it forth in consideration of what the closet-scene actually implicates. That is, when explaining away the possibility of delay, it has been possible to argue that Hamlet does not delay — some might prefer the word *procrastinate* — in revenging his father because he did not revenge his father at all (Everett 1977: 118); according to Jenkins (1982: 139), the use of the word *dull* in scene

3.4 shows that Hamlet was aware the he had become what the Ghost warned him of becoming: dull in his revenge. Nuttall (2007: 203) does not find in the final act the killing of Claudius nothing more but a whim that “emerges by accident from a tangle of confused circumstance”, and Bloom does not believe that Hamlet returned from his sea-voyage to perform his revenge (2003: 20), rather that both Hamlet’s revenge motifs and the Ghost itself were “defunct” (ibid.).

2.4 Prosser (1971)

In this section I will discuss the study of *Hamlet* by Prosser (1971), which to my knowledge is the only study to consider the identity of the Ghost based on a Christian framework. For that reason, and also due to the depth of her historical research, I will briefly summarize her study in this section.

One of her main findings was that the main argument of the play is not, as Jenkins persists, “that sons must avenge their fathers” (1982: 153). Instead, Prosser found that there existed no such thing as a widely accepted revenge code in Elizabethan times as argued by Bowers (1940: 37, quoted in Prosser 1971: 17): the law was absolute and murder was never justified (ibid., 18), and the only “exception” to this was instant retaliation for an injury, which was interpreted as manslaughter, not murder; however, only on the grounds that it were wholly unpremeditated it could receive a royal pardon (ibid.). Thus, by the Elizabethan standard, Hamlet would have been guilty of murder if he did plan to kill Claudius when entering his mother’s closet (ibid., 19).

Prosser’s finding was that when analyzed, the Elizabethan works showed a similar complexity as nowadays in society’s reaction to revenge: “Subjected to this kind of close analysis, the evidence from Elizabethan England suggests not an approved counter-code of revenge that seems foreign to the

modern mind, but an ethical dilemma that obtains even today" (ibid., 33).

Not only this, but she found that

The mass of evidence would seem to deny categorically that the Elizabethan audience viewed blood revenge in the theater as a "sacred duty". Of the twenty-one plays analyzed in the present chapter, only four are even slightly ambiguous in their condemnation of revenge. The evidence is even more striking when we consider the judgment on specific characters." (ibid., 70)

Veritably, when reading through Elizabethan plays where revenge played a part from the year 1562 to 1607, she found that the characters "for whom revenge is merely a device imposed by the playwright are significant because they indicate how useful the motive could be in arousing repulsion. They seek vengeance solely because they are villains" (ibid., 39). Thus,

[i]f a character willfully defines patience/heaven and invokes fiends/Hell or is aligned with demonic forces. . . , if he aligns himself with night/darkness/corruption . . . , if he imitates the medieval Vice in his ecstatic delight in intrigue and brutality. . . , if he avidly hungers to spill/drink/such blood. . . — if he does any one of these things he necessarily aroused the suspicions of the audience." (ibid., 71)

This led Prosser to argue that "we have not recognized the familiar ethical and religious foundation upon which the plays were constructed because it is buried so deep" (ibid., 72), meaning that the ethical question of revenge is rarely central in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama not because it is unimportant but because it was not a "question" to most of the playwrights and their audience.

Another argument that Prosser refuted was that, as asserted by Joseph (1953: 44, quoted in Prosser 1971: 74) amongst others, in Shakespeare's work one in general does not find condemnation of revenge. Indeed, if Joseph's argument would be true, Prosser hypothesizes, "such a break with the dominant ethical, religious and even dramatic code of his day would be of great significance." (ibid.) Via an analysis of Shakespeare's plays Prosser

concluded that there existed no real correlation between reality and Joseph's claim, as Prosser found that as with many of Shakespeare's plays, revenge actually always seemed to lead to physical and spiritual destruction (ibid., 83). Furthermore,

In all this evidence—over thirty characters, drawn from most of the Shakespearean canon—we find no suggestion that Shakespeare expected his audience to accept without question the validity of private blood revenge. The evidence suggests, rather, that his plays rely on the orthodox ethical and religious injunctions against it." (ibid., 93)

An interesting finding withal is the frequency with which revengers in Shakespeare associate their motives and actions with the demonic (ibid., 93). This led Prosser to a major discovery that is still incalculably misapprehended: "In only one instance in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays (and nowhere, so far as I have read, in popular literature) is there even a hint that a ghost may have returned from Purgatory. That play, of course, is *Hamlet*" (Prosser 1971: 105). She shows that Purgatory ghosts were never ascribed with such malicious motifs as that of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, as they appeared only to ask for alms, fasts, pilgrimages and holy works to be performed for their sake, and to give detailed descriptions of their suffering to incite remediation (ibid., 115). Because of this the identity of the Ghost is central to the tragedy, and Prosser's study can be summed in her own words as follows:

Hamlet too is led by melancholy first to consider and reject suicide and then to be prompted to revenge by a demonic spirit that cannot endure the light of day. He too is led into a riot of rage. He too is transformed when he meditates on "dusty Death". He too finds a new orientation in the serene assurance that nothing matters but that which passes through nature to eternity. (ibid., 235)

A survey of ghosts on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage makes it apparent that Shakespeare was not merely revitalizing a familiar convention in *Hamlet*. The spirit that visits Elsinore is like no other

in the drama of the English Renaissance. Its nature is in question, and both Hamlet and the audience are called upon to test it according to Christian doctrine. (ibid., 259)

Consequently, to Prosser, Hamlet is deceived by an evil spirit due to his melancholy, then he sides with demonic powers but in the end is transformed when meditating on death. The identity of the Ghost is central: Shakespeare's Ghost is original in the sense that it is the only one who claims to come from Purgatory and as such has malicious intents, clearly contradicting with Church dogma, both Catholic and Protestant as well as with the moral paradigm of the day. The basic problem that Prosser sees in studying Shakespeare and *Hamlet* in particular is that the Christian elements and ethics are completely overlooked, and historical facts, while not in themselves essential to the interpretation itself, are crucial in any detailed analysis to correct misconceptions about the play (ibid., xiii) because the scholars have confused the issue (ibid., 100). Her analysis was written as an answer to that question so that, as she identifies,

I believe that we can understand *Hamlet's* unrivaled power to move emotions and stimulate thought only when we grant the basic Christian perspective in which the action is placed. To do so requires no knowledge of religious doctrine, no scholarly investigation into Elizabethan theories about ghosts or the meditations of Luis de Granada or archaic meanings of "conscience". Shakespeare gives us everything we need to know. In short, we must take the play on its own terms. (ibid., 253)

This is not to say that Prosser's study would be without its faults, which becomes apparent when the research questions of this study will be explained. However, Prosser's elaborately extensive analysis of Elizabethan drama is invaluable in the dialogue between the diametrically opposite interpretations that either accept Christianity as a valid tool in analysis and those who do not.

One might ask why write a new analysis of *Hamlet* if a previous one is perfectly capable of presenting much of the same conclusions. The next section is devoted to answering this question.

2.5 The Present Study In Relation To Prosser (1971)

It is a good question to be asked, that is, what is the purpose of a study which is not dissimilar to one conducted already, i.e. that of Prosser (1971) concerning the identity of the Ghost. There are, however, many reasons.

Prosser's study, although it is groundbreaking in the understanding the identity of the Ghost, is mainly concerned how *Hamlet* should be understood best in performance, there posing more questions than answers, and that those answers can only be obtained by hindsight. However, during the first ten years of the twenty-first century the understanding of Shakespeare not only as a dramatist but as a literary artist but as well has brought new perspectives especially in our understanding of the Folio text. Indeed, a reader of F should not be considered to be in a worse position than a playgoer seeing a hybrid text of Q2/F being performed. This study, thus, approaches *Hamlet* from a perspective that Prosser (1971) could not: *also* as a literary artifact where much of the changes between Q2 and F are actually oriented towards creating a dynamically whole literary artifact instead of a play for the Globe, as evidenced by Erne (2003).

This leads to another fundamental reason to analyze *Hamlet* from a so-called Prosserian perspective: the main argument of this study is not to duplicate that of the earlier study but to actually arrive at a reading of what makes *Hamlet* the tragedy that it is. Above all I find Prosser's inability to see *Hamlet* not as a redemptionist story unsatisfying, and will argue very dissimilar things in this study, arguments that I have given in section 4.1.

3 THE PURGATORY AS A THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINE

Considering that *Hamlet* directly addresses the question of the schism between the Anglican and Catholic interpretations of Scripture concerning the existence of Purgatory — an issue that is fundamental in analyzing the origins of the Ghost — this chapter is written for purely historical and theological exposition. Its aim is to give an elementary understanding of the historical and theological aspect behind the concept of the Purgatory, and it is structured in the following manner: first, I will briefly introduce the historical dimensions of the Reformation as a whole and then particularly in England, after which I will then explain the difference between the Catholic and Anglican/Protestant views on the Purgatory.

3.1 An Overview of the Reformation

The primary catalyst for the Reformation is widely seen to be the church policy of indulgences during the 16th century. The indulgences mean the full or partial remission of temporal, purgatorial punishment for sins that have already been forgiven. (*Code of Canon Law*, IV, 2003) and an indulgence is granted by the church after the confession of the sinner and receiving absolution, and "any member of the faithful can gain partial or plenary indulgences for oneself them to the dead by way of suffrage" (ibid.). One motif for the use of indulgences was as pragmatic as it was financial, as the Pope Leo X had to finance, amongst other things, the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and offered indulgences for anyone who gave alms to rebuild the Basilica, provoking a response by Luther and followed by others (Filoramo and Menozzi 1997: 13-14).

Although a primary catalyst, the use of indulgences underlined a greater problem Luther saw in the Church, that being centered around the doctrine

of justification by faith alone (Filoramo and Menozzi 1997: 11), explained by Luther (2005: 289) as follows:

The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (Romans 3:24–25). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23–25). This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us ... Nothing of this article can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth and everything else falls (Mark 13:31).

As expressed by Tyacke (1997: 11), the doctrine of justification by faith alone completely undermined the “whole panoply of medieval Catholic teaching and practice built on the notion of spiritual good works.” Also, it largely made “irrelevant the great round of masses, prayers, penances, pilgrimages and related observances” (ibid.).

In this context, Purgatory was considered “a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God’s grace are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.” (“Purgatory”, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2009) To Luther this was inconceivable, as he saw there no need for such purification since the justification before God was attainable only by faith and “cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law or merit” (Luther, ibid.). This is well summarized by Prosser (1971: 102):

The sixteenth-century controversy between Catholics and Protestants over the nature of ghosts arose out of Protestant attacks on the Catholic beliefs in the efficacy of good works and thus of prayers for the dead. Because man is justified by faith alone, the Protestants argued, either he is in a state of grace at the moment of his death and goes immediately to Heaven or he is damned and goes immediately to Hell.

Luther's reformation became fragmented when theologians around Europe joined the movement with differing motifs. Next I will briefly explain the development of the Reformation in England.

In 1509 Henry VIII ascended to the throne of England at the age of 17 and during his lifetime England broke from under the influence of Rome. As argued by Scruton (1996: 470), the English Reformation was more an attempt to "unite the secular and religious sources of authority within a single sovereign power" rather than the motif being doctrinal, as had been the case with Luther (*ibid.*). Although considered by some merely a sum of odd coincidences (Haigh 1994: 14), the general consensus is that it was Henry VIII's marriages to Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn and a political power struggle for a sovereign ruler in England that ultimately divided England from Rome (see Phillips 1991, Lacey 1972, Morris 1998 and Haigh 1994 for more information), not a specifically doctrinal division.

Some (e.g. Haigh, 1987, 1993; Duffy 1992 and Scarisbrick 1984) see the Reformation in England as an imposition upon an unwilling people by the elite, making it impossible for the Reformation to gain a dominant position amidst the people very quickly and seeing the subsequent successes as a by-product of Tudor politics (a position which Tyacke [1997] identifies with the propagation of a Catholic version of events). However, if seen only in the scope of the years of the Elizabethan and early Jacobean era (during which Shakespeare lived), the Reformation must be judged as a runaway success (Duffy 1997: 36). Despite the tumultuous and often asymmetrical development of the Reformation in England, by the late sixteenth century there was no doubt that England was considered a Protestant country, if "Protestant" is defined as anti-Catholic (Gregory 1997: 309). To quote Duffy (1997: 36), "[one is] struck by the extent to which, within two generations, England's Catholic past was obliterated, and how deeply impregnated

seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English culture was by Protestant values." Truly, to somehow argue that because the evangelical clerics in the eighteenth-century England were complaining about the heathenism and ignorance of the people would prove that the Reformation had been unsuccessful would be irrational, as much the same complaints had universally been heard throughout the times, e.g. also during the tenth and eleventh centuries by clerical activists (Duffy 1997: 36). Indeed, "[t]he achievement of a Christian society is, or was, an ongoing project which those charged with its attainment have never believed to be complete" (ibid.).

England's adoption of the Reformation stopped and reversed in 1553 when Mary I succeeded her father to the throne due to the Queen's Catholic inclinations; in 1558 Mary died childless and Elizabeth I became the Queen of England and during her reign the Reformation was completed and in 1559 the Anglican Church was created.

Despite the political upheaval caused by the Reformation, according to Marsh (1998: 214ff), the people adopted the new religion as a continuation of the old, which allowed for the survival of Catholic thought well into the seventeenth century. Greenblatt (2001) postulates that such beliefs remained extant particularly in the folklore and art on the afterlife, also known to Shakespeare, who wrote *Hamlet* likely between 1599 and 1602 (Jenkins 1982: 11-13, Thompson and Taylor 2006a: 43-53). Watson (1994: 74-102) and Neill (1997: 216-61) see in *Hamlet* signs of the shift from a culture in which the living aided the dead to the new one in which the dead were out of reach. According to Greenblatt (2001: 240), the effect of the Reformation results in having in *Hamlet* "a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament" who is "haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost" (ibid.). Thus Watson (1994), Neill (1997) and Greenblatt (2001) all share the notion that the ordinary people of Shakespeare's time were accustomed to the problem of the origin of spirits that arises when one moves from the Catholic cosmology

to the Protestant one. However, Prosser (1971) shows that the problem of the origin of spirits was a shared issue for both Catholics and Protestants.

3.2 The Definitions of Purgatory

In this subchapter I will finally introduce the concept of Purgatory, a subject so far only referred to in passing, and how it is viewed in the Catholic and Anglican traditions.

For the Catholics, Purgatory is defined as a "place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions" ("Purgatory", *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2009). This doctrine is also formulated in such fashion in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* ("The Final Purification, or Purgatory", 2003), referred to here in length because one could not find a more authentic explanation of the concept:

(1030) All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

(1031) The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire:

["]As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.["] [quoting from St. Gregory the Great, *Dial.* 4, 39]

(1032) This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore Judas

Maccabeus] [*sic*] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." [2 Macc 12: 46] From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead:

["]Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.["] [quoting St. John Chrysostomos, *Hom.* in 1 Cor. 41, 5]

Based on these three articles, the Catholic dogma states that Purgatory is a separate entity from Heaven and Hell, reserved not for the wicked but those who "die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation". However, they are not considered holy enough to enter Heaven without being cleansed, i.e. purified, to which, often, the image of fire is affixed. Thus, a person who, according to Roman Catholic dogma, is an elect Christian but "imperfectly purified" undergoes a certain amount of time in Purgatory to be purged; for the sake of this study one could say that the direction of traffic is upwards (from Purgatory to Heaven but not from Hell to Purgatory), never downwards (from Heaven to Purgatory or from Purgatory to Hell).

Thomas Cranmer's *Ten Articles* in 1536 was the first attempt to create a doctrinal guideline for the newly-formed Church of England, now independent of Rome and the Catholic doctrines, and also included the first declaration concerning Purgatory, making it a non-essential doctrine. This view reaches its ultimate maturity in the *Thirty-Nine Articles* (1563), where Purgatory is rejected:

The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no

warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.
(The Thirty-Nine Articles, 2010)

As a consequence of the rapid movement of the Reformation and the creation of the Church of England, by Shakespeare's time the concept of Purgatory had been demolished from the cosmological system and lowered to the level of a fantastical poem, which Tyndale proceeded to call a "poet's fable" (1850: 143). By the time of Shakespeare the possibility of a spirit coming back from beyond the grave was reduced to naught: Heaven was the place whence no soul wished to depart and Hell the other whence it was impossible to escape (Nuttall 2007: 205). As pointed out by Bloom (2003: 4), Hamlet is very distrustful of motifs, his own or someone else's. Hamlet, as discovered by Greenblatt (2001: 4), does not worry about his soul going to Purgatory but does worry whether it might go to Hell. The point of this, however, is not that Shakespeare would have not been able to refer to past and pagan religions and cultures (as he does explicitly for example in *King Lear* and *The Tempest*) but much rather that he clearly chose to refer to the one specific element in the Christianity cosmology that had changed dramatically: Shakespeare elaborately sets the play in a Protestant context by introducing Hamlet as studying in Wittenberg and referring to the Diet of Worms, whereas the language of the Ghost strongly sets it to the Catholic world. This has led Greenblatt (2001: 240) to write that in *Hamlet* "a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament, is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost."

4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter is dedicated to giving further instruments for the understanding of the analysis of the play. First I will introduce the research questions of this

study, after which I will introduce the data, methodology and the path of the analysis.

4.1 Research Questions

As might be considered obvious, this study will make several unconventional hypotheses. I have listed them in the following.

(1) I will, based on Prosser's 1971 study, argue that one may from the beginning realize that the Ghost is a demon and not Hamlet's father. This is in direct opposition with what Prosser says herself, arguing that if one could clearly argue that the Ghost is a demon and its command damnable, "the tragedy would be destroyed." (1971: 145) I will thus argue that the tragedy in no way loses any of its qualities with such a reading.

(2) I will re-evaluate Prosser's argument that Hamlet, in the end, is vindicated. Prosser counts the killing of Polonius something that would not be considered pre-meditated by English courts, which might be true, but I will argue that Hamlet still does not abscond with murder as he still takes vengeance in his own hands in the end. Similarly, I will argue that what is so tragic in *Hamlet* is that he believed the Ghost and let himself be aligned with satanic forces, being unable to get rid of them.

(3) As for his apparent change as he appears in 5.1, I will argue that this is primarily because he is subsumed in the imaginary scourge of heavens, thus justifying his actions to himself.

4.2 Data

This section is organized in two subsections. First I will introduce the chosen data of this study, which, whilst a seemingly simple question, actually poses various problems for the analyst. The second section includes a brief synopsis of the play, whose aim is to give an elementary understanding of the play's proceedings. Any synopses, however, can never replace a proper reading of the play, and despite the academic transparency of this study, knowledge of the play first-hand should be commended.

4.2.1 *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

This study revolves around the play *Hamlet* (1603-23) by William Shakespeare, likely between 1599 and 1602 (Jenkins 1982: 11-13, Thompson and Taylor 2006a: 43-53). *Hamlet*, as a play, can be considered fecund material not only because its expressive power and its complex dynamic nuances both in its language and structure allow it to be posited in the epicentre of the Shakespearean canon, but also because literary criticism has offered theories concerning it in abundance, nevertheless allowing for yet another perspective to be taken. As I have already argued in the Introduction, largely every reader and literary critic is still permeated by the Hamlet myth, allowing this study to try to return to an interpretation instead of trying to create something particularly new.

From amidst the complicated textual history of the play (for summaries see Erne 2003 and Thompson and Taylor 2006a), the perfect edition seems to be almost impossible to find. For that reason the most common method is to either select one conflated edition that would incorporate elements from both Q2 (1604-05) and F (1623), thus creating an imaginary construct, a play that Shakespeare never wrote. In this study I have then taken a decisive departure

from such methodology and settled with the edition of Shakespeare's plays edited by Bate and Rasmussen (2007) for the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), which, instead of introducing a conflated text of both Q and F elements, is solely based on F. To quote Bate and Rasmussen:

To stress again: our claim to originality is that we have edited a real book (the First Folio), not an imaginary construct ('the plays as they came from Shakespeare's hand', as in the dominant editorial tradition, or 'the plays as first performed' as in the revisionist school of editing). We grant that this results in the alteration of some things that Shakespeare originally wrote, as in the case of oaths, which were modified ('heaven' for 'God', removal of the blasphemous 'zounds' and 'sblood') following a parliamentary act of 1606. We accept that there are almost certainly passages in the Folio that are the result of playhouse additions after Shakespeare's death or scribal regularizations and emendation in the process of preparing a copy. But such features are worth retaining for the sake of editorial consistency, of fidelity to the ambition of recovering the plays at one particular key moment in their evolutionary history, and of recognition that Shakespeare's achievement was at the profoundest level collaborative. (Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 56)

Although Erne (2003) has already cast into doubt the common assumption that, especially with F, "Shakespeare initially wrote his plays as scripts for performance, not finished literary works for publication" (Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 50) and never had the intention to publish them as literary artifacts, their method of seeing the Folio text as a "key moment" in the evolutionary history of the plays is commendable. Indeed, seen from the perspective Erne (2003) has given to Shakespeare as a conscious dramatist *both* for the stage and print, and actually seeing the Folio as a literary artifact, the decision of the editors to edit not a conflation of several readings but only the Folio is indispensable.

The editors do later acknowledge that "the Second Quarto and Folio represent different stages in the play's life" (Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 1923), reinforcing the idea that there is validity to find Shakespeare's ideas in the changes made to the Folio text (for example, Hamlet's last major soliloquy, "How all occasions do inform against me", can be found in Q2 but is missing

from F). Although one does not have to follow Alexander (1964) and Bloom (1998) in arguing that Shakespeare would have written the *Ur-Hamlet* (see Bloom 1998: 383-431) circa 1590, to see F as an evolutionary step from Q2 does go hand in hand with Prosser's (1971: xi) assertion: "All evidence indicates that Shakespeare was alone responsible for putting the old barbaric story into a Christian framework[.]". Thus, whether Shakespeare wrote the *Ur-Hamlet*, the "old barbaric story" Prosser refers to, or not, does not matter as the outcome would still be the same: Shakespeare refined the *Ur-Hamlet* into a theologically rich *Hamlet* in the years to come, and most likely made improvements to the end. For this reason the Folio text is invaluable.

All line numbers refer to and all quotations are from that edition. If one has access to the *RSC*, they do print Q2-specific passages in the textual notes (cf. Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 2000-2003), but will not be included in this reading.

Although *RSC* will be my edition of choice, I have used other editions as well in the function of commentary. The difficulty of using many editions as sources is to be comparative enough yet not to the point of excess when reference to many editions only confuses. The same applies to using them only as sources for commentary. I do, however, occasionally refer to different editions (see Abbreviations on pp. 5-6). This way this study may use the most helpful and up-to-date commentaries available efficiently yet simultaneously being consistent by having only a single source edition.

4.2.2 The Synopsis of the Play

Hamlet, in F, is divided in five acts, the play consisting of 19 scenes in total. In this study I will refer to a specific scene in numeric form, where the first number refers to the act in question and the latter to the scene (e.g. 5.1). If I

will refer to specific lines (following *RSC*), the line numbers are introduced after the act-scene information, e.g. 5.1.1-10.

Three quarters of the play are written in verse, one quarter in prose; Hamlet speaks 37 % of the lines, having 341 speeches and appearing in 12 scenes on stage. For comparison, Claudius, who has the second largest role in terms of lines, speaks 14 % of all the lines, has 100 speeches and appears in 11 scenes. The Ghost, on the other hand, only speaks 2 % of the lines, has 15 speeches and appears only in 3 scenes, of which only 2 scenes contain speech (from Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 1922).

The primary setting of the play is the castle of Elsinore in Denmark. Prince Hamlet is the son of the late King Hamlet of Denmark, also named Hamlet, whose brother Claudius has become King by marrying the widowed Queen, Gertrude. The first scene starts in ominous darkness at a platform where two sentinels have invited Hamlet's school-fellow Horatio to investigate a "treaded sight" (1. 1. 29), an apparition, twice seen by them, which then appears in the form of the dead King as identified by the sentinel Barnardo (1. 1. 47). The Ghost appears to them twice, without saying a word, and they decide that they should inform Prince Hamlet as the Ghost would be likely to speak to him, considering its appearance (1. 1. 163).

Scene 1.2 shifts to the court of the new king and his new wife, towards the end of which Hamlet delivers his first soliloquy ("O, that this too too solid flesh would melt", 1. 2. 129-159). He is then interrupted by Horatio and the sentinels, who give an account of what has happened. Hamlet joins them in scenes 1. 4-5 at the platform, where the Ghost appears to them again, urging Hamlet to follow it: now the Ghost propounds that it is Hamlet's father, murdered by Claudius, and gives the imperative to revenge "his foul and most unnatural murder" (1. 5. 29), hurrying away as it is "[d]oomed for a certain term to walk the night,/ And for the day confined to fast in fires,/ Till

the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away" (1. 5. 14-17).

Hamlet then prompts by his behavior the King and Queen and their advisor Polonius to send two of Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to spy on him. Polonius believes that Hamlet is in love with his daughter, Ophelia, which is objectionable to her brother Laertes. A play-acting company arrives at Elsinore and Hamlet has them act a play called *The Murder of Gonzago*, retitled as *The Mousetrap* by Hamlet, a re-enactment of the imagined murder of his father. Claudius is shocked at the implications and confesses in private prayer, overheard by Hamlet who does not kill him at the moment of recantation for fear of not sending his uncle's soul to hell. In his mother's chamber he by accident kills the hiding Polonius for Hamlet mistakes him for the King. The King sends Hamlet to England and plots to have him killed there, of which Hamlet finds out, sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths instead. Hamlet is then captured by pirates and returns, of which he gives a brief account to Horatio in a letter.

In the meantime, Ophelia goes mad over her father's death and later drowns. Hamlet returns to them at the graveyard, and tensions between him and Laertes escalate. Laertes, enraged at Hamlet, together with the King plots that he fence Hamlet and use a poisoned blade to kill him, whilst the King poison Hamlet's drink. Laertes wounds Hamlet and vice versa when the blades shift hands, and when the Queen drinks of the poisoned cup and dies Hamlet discovers the plot and in a whim of rage kills Claudius. Laertes, then, dies of poison as well. Horatio is left amidst the corpses to tell Hamlet's story, when the Norwegian Prince Fortinbras, the son of a king killed in combat by Hamlet's father, sieges the castle and conquers it. The play ends with the soldiers picking up Hamlet's body and carrying it away in the sound of trumpets.

4.3 Methodology

On a general level, this study is situated in the domains of literary analysis and cultural studies. In this section the aforementioned disciplines will be enlarged on first, after which some key concepts will be augmented.

4.3.1 New Historicism

To begin with, New Historicism can be understood as relating the birth of literary creativity to the financial and social power relations of the time in which the literary work was created (Korhonen 2008: 17) and which sees literature as an expression of a moment in history (Korsisaari 2008: 308). The divide in theological thought of the pre- and post-Reformational church is examined in this study by in part relying on New Historicist ideas concerning the influence of society on the artist.

However, I find the use of New Historicism in itself insufficient, as it posits Shakespeare merely as a product of Elizabethan culture, and I have thus tried to balance the overtly socio-historical theory with literary theory. In other words, New Historicism works in the background as an axiom according to which each person is affected by one's culture. The goal of this study, however, is not to analyze Shakespeare to understand the culture but merely — to paraphrase Prosser (1971) — to understand the culture to the extent that the most obvious misconceptions about Shakespeare could be erased and. Consequently, I will use New Historicism in such a way as to draw attention to the text as a literary artifact, something that is unfashionable in politically-driven academics.

To quote Goddard (1951a: vii), we are nearer the beginning than the end of understanding Shakespeare's genius, because "[p]oetry forever makes itself over for each generation" (ibid.). In the current landscape of Shakespeare

criticism we should have repelled the radical forms of New Historicism as practiced by Greenblatt et al. (see for example Greenblatt 1989 and 2004), yet it has now morphed into the conceptual labyrinth of cultural studies. The problem of New Historicism and cultural studies is that they see Shakespeare merely as a product of his circumstance. There are, however, critics who appreciate Shakespeare both as a thinker and literary dramatist (see Kermode 2000 and Nuttall 2007, Bloom 1998, 2003, 2004), and as the result of this the academia should now be able to view Shakespeare as someone who not only wrote for the stage but for the page as well (see Blayney 1997 and Erne 2003).

Thereby we are arriving at the counterpoint in Shakespeare studies where one neither has to uncritically follow the New Historicist movement in categorizing Shakespeare as a mere summary of social energy nor to exalt Shakespeare and the tradition to a godlike status beyond criticism. Instead, this study takes from both sides the useful features they present: the axiom that the culture of Elizabethan times, whilst not arguing that it created Shakespeare, is an important factor in analyzing Shakespeare to correct possible misconception that the scholars themselves have created, and that Shakespeare as an individual had great cognitive power which, to borrow from Bloom (2004: 31) is like “cognitive music”. This way one may read *Hamlet* as a literary work of art enriched by the cultural knowledge of the time in which it was written, never however forgetting the work itself either by dwelling too much on matters of culture as determining everything, nor as giving the tradition too much weight by never questioning what they have written.

In this study I will at some length dwell in historical information concerning the Elizabethan culture, which has in the past century become a banality in Shakespeare studies. Yet at the same time I advocate a certain post-historicist

reading, making these two perspectives seem contradictory. To answer this I quote Prosser (1971: xiii), who addressed a similar issue almost forty years ago: "If historical facts are not essential to interpretation, why have they been analyzed in such detail? Only to correct a series of misconceptions." Perhaps it is too much to ask that there be movement to a more aesthetic approach to Shakespeare and literature in general, closer to Nuttall and Bloom, but at least in this study I see no point in putting the horse behind the carriage: history, in this particular study the knowledge of Elizabethan culture and theology, remains important only to the extent in which they actually clarify the possible intention of the author.

4.3.2 Literary studies

Secondly, this study takes from literary theory and identifies itself as a literary analysis. As a concept and discipline literary theory is colossal, yet below the most important concepts used in this study are elaborated on.

4.3.2.1 Foreshadowing and Close-reading

An important concept will be *foreshadowing*, the literary device used by the author to give clues concerning things that occur later in the story. It occurs prominently in this study because with this concept I will examine the clues that anticipate the Ghost's appearance and refer to its identity, as well as to Hamlet's behavior and motifs. It has been used in close relation with the method of *close-reading*.

Close-reading is a reading method whose primary feature is the close examination and interpretation of passages, in which particular attention can be paid to everything from individual words to broader ideas occurring in the text. It has been a useful tool in analyzing *Hamlet*, as it has provided the study with the necessary tools to examine the text, which through poetic

reference and use of rhetoric conveys a vast structure of ideas and clues. It has also been used to examine the representation of the characters of the Ghost and Hamlet, in passing applied to some minor characters as well. This study does not, however, dwell on the subject of Shakespeare's use of prose and poetry, which could be a fruitful analysis in and of itself in relation to the theme of the play.

The text has been treated as a unity that makes sense in itself, which does not mean that textual and comparative criticism would have been abandoned when necessary, but has enabled this study to trust the data more than is nowadays conventional.

The process of close-reading is also expanded to convey the whole body of work of Shakespeare. That is, when one discusses whichever topic, be that insanity, revenge or demonic interference, the best way to arrive to any relevant conclusion is to see what Shakespeare has written of the topic elsewhere. This way Shakespeare is allowed to explain himself.

In practice, I will refer to the text fulsomely, parallel to a juridical process where evidence is clearly presented and analyzed. My primary objective has been to let the text speak for itself, allowing for an agreeable level of transparency.

4.3.2.2 Catharsis and hamartia

Two Greek concepts, both introduced by Aristotle, are famously connected to *Hamlet* and are explained here, although they are, for the sake of this study, only secondary: *catharsis*, which, defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the purification of the emotions by vicarious experience, esp. through the drama (in reference to Aristotle's *Poetics* 6)", is a famous concept concerning dramaturgy in general and *Hamlet*, as well, and will be referred to when examining whether or not Hamlet actually receives his catharsis or not. To quote Mikics (2007: 52):

Aristotle in the *Poetics* (ca. states that tragedy “effects through pity and fear the proper catharsis of these emotions” (Ch. The question for readers of the *Poetics* concerns the meaning of the word catharsis (in Greek, spelled katharsis). Catharsis might mean purging (as it does in a related passage of Aristotle’s *Politics*, in which music is said to get rid of, katharein, disruptive emotions). But catharsis also means a purification; and, in addition, a demonstration or display. Does tragedy relieve us of emotions, or does it exhibit them? Does it educate the emotions by training them to endure extreme tragic situations? Since the Renaissance, when the *Poetics* was rediscovered, these are some of the questions that critics have raised in their efforts to explain Aristotle’s use of catharsis.

The other is *hamartia*, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as “the fault or error which entails the destruction of the tragic hero (with particular reference to Aristotle’s *Poetics*)”. As explained by Mikics (2007: 298):

According to Aristotle the tragic hero makes a mistake (in Greek, *hamartia*, a missing of the mark). A hero like Oedipus may be marked by the violent arrogance, or *hubris*, that often attends *hamartia*, but his tragic punishment is always vastly greater than he deserves.

It is often used to refer to Hamlet’s inability to avenge his father’s death soon enough, his inability to act being his fatal *hamartia*. In this study, however, I will offer a fresh perspective on the question, not from the perspective of procrastination as most scholars do, but instead from the perspective of failing to see the warning signals concerning the Ghost.

4.4 The Path of the Analysis

Hamlet, both the play and character, both the enigmas that they are, invite each generation to explore and evaluate. Not only is Hamlet characteristically abstruse but concurrently lucidly transparent intellectually to the point of being a real person. In *Hamlet* many themes, narrative or

stylistic, Shakespeare worked with find an intersection in this particular point in his career.

Influenced by Bloom (1998, 2003) and later Nuttall (2007), one may view Hamlet as not only a hero but a great thinker. However, the essentially Christian elements of the play begin to take precedence, especially when seen against the clearly demonic nature of *Macbeth* and to some extent *Othello*. To quote Nuttall (2007: 280), "good old Iago is the real outsider of the play; his evil is not human, it is Satanic". Read against the nuances of the demonic in the aforementioned play one may wonder what is sequentially the difference between *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. The tradition that occasionally borders on idolatrous sees Hamlet not only seeing Hamlet as the greatest philosopher, see him also ethically superior and inerrant, so such an interpretation would find no support easily.

As for this present study, the analysis itself required the most effort, as there Shakespeare had to be presented most lucidly: the ideas were prerequisite to be clearly stated, but it was also necessary to synoptically give enough exposition of the events that advanced in-between the material that was worked with. Also, some minor adjustments were necessary concerning one of the method used, New Historicism, so that the analysis would concentrate more on the literature rather than the person or the environment.

5 ANALYSIS

The examination of *Hamlet* is in this section arranged as follows: I have divided the analysis into three parts, of which the first will occupy itself with Hamlet's doubt, and his reasons to doubt, including the identity-question of the Ghost. Thematically, the Ghost and its appearance, origin and function operate largely as the catalyst of the play, and it will be analyzed first. This moves, chronologically speaking, to the introduction of Hamlet's character

and the analysis of Hamlet's first soliloquy, a representation of his melancholy, a theme that is of great importance in this study.

After this I will advance to bring Hamlet and the Ghost together via the report of the early events of 1.1 to Hamlet, and subsequently Hamlet meets the Ghost. The end of the first part will be Hamlet's climactic play-investigation, *The Mousetrap*, based on which he becomes certain of his mission.

The second part of the analysis concerns itself with Hamlet's revenge. For this reason I have analyzed the small scene in which Hamlet meets the players and they enact the murder of Priam by Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, drawing several connections between Hamlet's role as the revenger to that of Pyrrhus. After this the prevalent theme of Hamlet's role as the revenger brings this study to consider the Prayer Scene, culminating in the Closet Scene in which Hamlet kills Polonius. Unlike in many conventional studies, here the Closet Scene is not the end for Hamlet's revenger function: I will also analyze the Hamlet of the final scenes, 5.1 and 5.2, as an emanation of Hamlet-the-revenger, departing from the critical tradition also in this respect. Thus the subsection 5.2.4 ("Hamlet, Heaven's Scourge and Minister") also touches upon the Hamlet of the final acts. There I will take a stand against the prevailing critical consensus that *Hamlet* would be a redemptive story. There I will challenge the axiomatic notions that Hamlet would change for the better towards the end, and argue that instead Hamlet subsumes himself with the role of a divine avenger, thus relativizing his moral dilemma and justifying his murders.

The final part of the analysis is reserved for hypothetical counterarguments that one might feel obliged to sound against the arguments made in the course of this examination. I will treat the most significant there, offering reasons why the readings made in this study as possible as I argue them to be.

5.1 Hamlet And Doubt

5.1.1 The Ghost Enters

There is no void of commentary on the suspicion in the first act and the dramatic force prevalent in it. Barnardo, arriving to release Francisco from duty, asking "Who's there?" (1) to the darkness and Francisco's "Nay, answer me: stand and unfold yourself!" (2) betray an immediate sense of trepidation. Only by Barnardo's voice (3) does Francisco recognize him. He admits that he is "sick at heart" (9), to which Barnardo responds by asking whether he has had "a quiet guard" (10), Francisco then admitting that there has not been even "a mouse stirring" (11). However, the sense of trepidation is not diminished, since both of them clearly are expecting something to happen. Barnardo, now fearing to be left alone, bids Francisco goodbye and asks him to bid Horatio and Marcellus, his companions for the night, to make haste (14).

Then, suddenly, they are interrupted by a sound in the darkness, alerting Francisco to again shout "Stand! Who's there?" (15) It is revealed that the newcomers are Horatio and Marcellus. Of interest is the short adjacent pair of dialogue between Barnardo and Marcellus:

(1)

BARNARDO: Welcome, Horatio: welcome, good Marcellus.
MARCELLUS: What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

[1. 1. 24-25]

Barnardo is obviously shaken and afraid, since Marcellus interprets his greetings as a message that "this thing" has "again" appeared already, perhaps delivered in such haste and anxiety. Now the audience for the first

time hears the reason for such anguish: something has appeared to them before, and they fear it will appear again. Indeed, Marcellus then reveals why Horatio has been brought with them:

(2)

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
 And will not let belief take hold of him
 Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us:
 Therefore I have entreated him along
 With us to watch the minutes of this night,
 That if again this apparition come,
 He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

[1. 1. 27-33]

Now, Horatio's function is explained. He, not believing that an apparition would actually appear, is brought there not only to witness that the men have spoken the truth but also to speak to it. I will return to Horatio's function as the speaker a few paragraphs later, when it becomes a central aspect in the plot.

The men sit down, Barnardo trying to explain what they for "two nights have seen" (38), the following being part of his explication:

(3)

Last night of all,
 When yond same star that's westward from the pole
 Had made his course t'illuminate that part of heaven
 Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
 The bell then beating one —

[1. 1. 41-45]

Jordan (2008) gives a reasonable explanation to the "yond same star that's westward from the pole" that Barnardo refers to:

The pole means the North Pole, marked by the star Polaris. The star to the west, that Barnardo points out, might be Capella.

Capella is in the constellation Auriga, the Charioteer. In mythology, the Charioteer is associated with the ideas of serpents and madness, which are significant ideas in the play. It should not be taken that Barnardo is giving the position of a certain star exactly. The star is mentioned for its symbolism in relation to the play.

This could be a very subtle hint by Shakespeare to refer to both serpents and madness; although later on one learns that Claudius was stung by a serpent, at this point, this reference arriving so early on, this would be unknown. This could, then, be a Biblical reference to the serpent in *Gen 3*, identified as "the great dragon . . . that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (KJV) in *Rev 12: 9*.

Then this "dreaded sight" appears again. Barnardo is amazed as it appears "in the same figure like the king that's dead" (47), with which Horatio agrees, saying that the apparition "harrows me with fear and wonder" (50). What then follows is something that has proved to be difficult for a large quantity of scholars. Barnardo says of the apparition that "it would be spoke to" (51), Marcellus encouraging Horatio twice to fulfill his function on the platform: "Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio" (48) and "Question it, Horatio" (52).

Before analyzing Horatio's speech, it is useful to consider why Horatio has been brought to the platform. As has become apparent, he has been brought there to speak to the Ghost because he is a "scholar". *RSC* comments on the passage by explaining "scholar" as "one knowledgeable enough to know how to address a ghost; a ghost was thought to be unable to speak until spoken to" (Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 1925). However, the problem is that it might not be a mere ghost. Prosser (1971: 119) comments on this:

Since Francis Douce, editors have repeated his assertion that ghosts had to be addressed in Latin. On the contrary, the evidence most frequently cited indicates something quite different. . . . In Fletcher's *The Night-Walker*, Coachman Toby says: "Let's call the butler up, for he speaks Latine, And that will daunt the devil." (II.i) Exactly. Latin was the language used in the rite of exorcism.

Not only has there been a hint that the Ghost might be demonic in due to the reference to the Charioteer, it is exactly for this reason that Horatio has been brought to the platform. The language used to refer to it before it is identified as being similar in appearance to the dead king is curious: "this thing" (25), "this dreaded sight" (29) and "this apparition" (32). It "harrows" Horatio with "fear and wonder" (50). The men are not frightened for nothing: they are prepared to expect the worst of it, which is the reason Horatio is there. As Prosser above explained, Latin was used in the rite of exorcism. Although Jenkins in *Ard*² writes that "[t]hough Latin, as editors remark, was necessary for the exorcism of spirits, that is not the point here. The purpose of questioning a ghost is to discover 'who it is, and what is its business'" (1982: 168), there is another possibility: although the purpose of questioning the ghost is indeed to discover who it is and whence it comes, Horatio has been brought to the platform because he is capable of exorcism and testing the spirit. Thus, the sentinels have considered it to be an evil spirit and did not want to address it without someone capable of defending them against a demon. That Horatio does not speak Latin in the scene is not of importance here. Latin in itself is not more fit as a language to be spoken against spirits than any other, but Latin in this context merely refers, synecdochically, to the theological education of which Latin is a part of. Horatio's invocation speaks for itself:

(4)

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
 Together with that fair and warlike form
 In which the majesty of buried Denmark
 Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee speak!

[1. 1. 53-56]

It would be fallacious to argue that here Horatio identifies the Ghost as the dead king. What he is saying is this: "what are you that usurp this time of night in that form in which the *dead* king did march?" There is no implicit acceptance of the Ghost as king Hamlet here, this becoming obvious at least in Horatio's strong invocation: "By heaven I charge thee speak!" (56).

The immediate effect of this invocation is noticed by Marcellus' "It is offended" (57) and Barnardo's "See, it stalks away" (58). Horatio tries to get an answer from it ("Stay! Speak, speak! I chargee thee, speak!", 59), but the Ghost disappears and "will not answer" (60). *Ard*^{3a} argues that "perhaps the Ghost is offended by Horatio's *usurp'st*, by his over-importunate use of *charge* (should a subject command a king?), or as at 139-145, by an apparent threat of violence" (Thompson and Taylor 2006a: 153). *Ard*² directly refutes the interpretation I share with Prosser (1971: 98-99) by arguing that the reason the Ghost goes away is "because this interlocutor is not the one it seeks" (Jenkins 1982: 169). However, both explanations avoid the primary objection: if the Ghost is offended because Horatio's use of the word "usurp'st", it would be incomprehensible why it would wait until his charge to leave, especially considering that if the Ghost goes away because Horatio is not the one it was searching for, there would be no reason to stay there as long as it did. Another incongruity in the *Ard*^{3a} explanation concerning "apparent violence" is that the men themselves later realize they cannot harm it in any way: "We do it wrong being so majestic/To offer it the show of violence,/For it is as the air invulnerable,/And our vain blows malicious mockery" (136-39). Thus there is no reason to believe that the Ghost would somehow be offended by the "vain blows" but rather of the name upon which the charge is made: when made in the name of Heaven, it is made in the name of God (cf. *Mark* 6: 7).

Consequently, the text is quite clear that it is offended and flees at the very moment when Horatio charges it to speak in the name of Heaven, a way of

insuring whether it is a good spirit or an evil one. Horatio, it seems, is at least convinced: Barnardo remarks of him that he is trembling and looks pale (61), then asking what he thinks of it (63). Horatio's answer is telling: "Before my God, I might not this believe/ Without the sensible and true avouch/ Of mine own eyes" (64-66). And as for Marcellus' question whether or not it looked like the king, Horatio's answer is worthy of closer examination:

(5)

As thou art to thyself,
Such was the very armour he had on
When he th'ambitious Norway combated:
So frowned he once when, in an angry parle,
He smote the steelèd pole-axe on the ice.
'Tis strange.

[1. 1. 68-73]

Several remarks are important in this description: firstly, Horatio observes that it did not appear in a peaceful outfit but that its armor was as the one he had on when he combated the Norwegians. Secondly, this ghost was frowning and angry. Again, this does not mean that Horatio identify the Ghost as the dead king, merely that he observes some resemblances between them. Instead, when read as signs of a spirit's origin, it hardly seems like a purgatorial spirit, since, as reasoned by Prosser (1971: 120), it is possible that an armed spirit might have been interpreted as demonic by the audience.

This inference is picked up by Horatio later as he utters the prophetic words: "This bodes some strange eruption to our state" (78). With hindsight one may infer that this eruption is fulfilled in the final act, where the king, the queen and the prince are all found dead and the land in the hands of a Norwegian conqueror. Apparently this is Shakespeare's intention, as Marcellus then demands, perhaps exasperatedly, the reason to such warlike preparations that "does not divide the Sunday from the week" (85) and makes "the night joint-labourer with the day" (88). This leads to Horatio's

background exposition: Hamlet, the king, slew Fortinbras, the Norwegian king, and now "young Fortinbras,/ of unimprovèd mettle hot and full" (105-6) had "sharked up a list of landless resolute" (108) to "recover of us, by strong hand/ and terms compulsative, those foresaid lands/ so by his father lost" (112-4). This, says Horatio, "Is the main motive of our preparations,/ The source of this our watch and the chief head/ Of this post-haste and rummage in the land" (115-8).

This is by no means a useless piece of exposition whose only function is to let the Ghost exit and enter again. Neither is it undramatic in the sense that after the supernatural they turn to domestic issues, since such an interpretation confuses the men's earlier anxiety and Marcellus' question about what is going on in the land is not taken as authentic. The link between the two, of course, is that the Ghost has raised their suspicions. They are quite at loss in explaining what it means, but they are quite sure that it cannot signify anything good and most likely means further havoc in the kingdom. Horatio's exposition is well-tied to the fear that the Ghost is indeed a hellish demon whose appearance cannot be a good thing. As they are sentinels and as it is their job to guard the kingdom, such pragmatism in thought is in no way in conflict with what they have seen. They are worried about the domestic issues precisely because the Ghost's appearance have made them so.

Horatio's exposition is however interrupted with the second appearance of the Ghost. Horatio remains the man of action, and intends to "cross it, though it blast me" (119-20). This has sometimes been interpreted as making the sign of the cross, but most editions nowadays understand the other meaning, "cross its path" as do *RSC*, *Norton*, *Ard*^{3a} as well as *NCS*. Assuredly, that Horatio most probably crosses the Ghost's path is reinforced by the context, where he yells to it "Stay, illusion!" (119), revealing that Horatio is

trying to make it stay. Confirmation of this is his permission to Marcellus' request to strike with his partisan "if it will not stand" (132), only after which Marcellus realizes that it is impossible to "offer it the show of violence,/ For it is as the air invulnerable,/ And our vain blows malicious mockery" (137-39).

But just before all of this, this time the Ghost does stay — and this time Horatio does not invoke Heaven. Instead, Horatio asks whether there be anything he might do for it to ease its pain (a very subtle hint to Purgatory). But the Ghost does not say anything, and does flee. But the reason is very different this time. At this time an SD says that a cock crows, causing the Ghost to flee immediately. The reason for this is readily available to the men:

(6)

BARNARDO: It was about to speak when the cock crew.

HORATIO: And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard
The cock, that is the trumpet to the day,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day, and at his warning,
Whether sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th'extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine: and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.

MARCELLUS: It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long,
And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad:
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
No fairy talks, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

[1. 1. 140-57]

The Ghost, as shown, is trying to speak to them. However, the first time it was interrupted by an invocation after which it had to flee, and this time it was given the opportunity without similar invocations. However, just as it was about to speak, it vanishes. The men's explanation is very simple: they

know that the cock is considered to be "the bird of dawning" and that its voice drives all demons away; this they immediately connect to the "guilty thing" the Ghost seemed like, "upon a fearful summons". Horatio agrees with this "in part" (158), and then they break their watch, as the morning has come. However, by Horatio's advice, they agree to tell of the spirit to Hamlet, as "this spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him" (164). Horatio seems to recoil momentarily, asking for their approval: "Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it, / As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?" (165-66). Perhaps he realized the danger of the situation, yet apparently he still has in its mind that most likely the spirit is "privy to [their] country's fate" (125).

5.1.2 "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt"

This subsection is devoted to a short analysis of Hamlet's first major soliloquy. I will give it below in its entirety, and will then refer to it in more detail.

(7)

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
 Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
 His canon gainst self-slaughter! O God, O God!
 How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on't! O, fie, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
 That grows to seed: things rank and gross in nature
 Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
 But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two.
 So excellent a king, that was to this
 Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
 Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on, and yet within a month —
 Let me not think on't: frailty, thy name is woman! —
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old
 With which she followed my poor father's body,

Like Niobe, all tears: why she, even she —
 O, heaven! A beast that wants discourse of reason 150
 Would have mourned longer — married with mine uncle,
 My father's brother but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules. Within a month?
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing of her galled eyes,
 She married, O, most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
 It is not nor it cannot come to good:
 But break my heart, I must hold my tongue.

[1. 2. 129—159]

One of the aims of this study is to show that the Ghost, demonic as it is, turns Hamlet into something similar. I will later explain the relationship between the two as an anticipation of Iago and Othello. But the most important things this soliloquy does are four-fold: firstly, it reveals the depth of Hamlet's melancholy, "the nurse of frenzy" (*TS*, Induction, 2.124), as was familiar to Elizabethans. In fact, as explained by Prosser (1971: 110), "the widespread belief was that melancholy was like a weapon in Satan's hand". Secondly, Hamlet's admiration for his father leads to calling his father a Hyperion, one of the twelve Titan gods in Greek mythology and the god of the Sun, and his uncle a satyr, a mythological creature that is part-man and part-goat, often associated with the vice of lechery. Thirdly, extreme disappointment in his mother, Gertrude. This motif, summarized in Hamlet's exclamation "frailty, thy name is woman!" (146), will appear later in the Nunnery Scene when Hamlet is disappointed in Ophelia. Fourthly, Hamlet's thoughts that border on obscenity when it comes to imagining the "incestuous sheets" (159). I will refer back to this soliloquy in the analysis below of the Ghost's long oration to Hamlet.

Those four motifs listed above are intentionally there, I believe, to prepare the audience to anticipate what will happen when Hamlet finally meets the Ghost. After all, as Prosser's quote above reveals, it was melancholy that was considered fruitful ground for demonic spirits.

Hamlet has now been exposed as highly melancholic. It is quite clear that there is a melancholic element in the soliloquy, yet, unlike with "To be, or not to be" (which is more likely about Hamlet's dilemma concerning the identity he is about to take as a revenger), here there is also a suicidal tendency. However, the point of the soliloquy is more in emphasizing Hamlet's agony over not being able to escape from his misery ("that the Everlasting *had not fixed*/ His canon against self-slaughter!"): Hamlet is not contemplating whether or not to kill himself, he is reacting to the perceived inability to do so. That, I believe, is the main motif in lines 129—132, whereas 133—137 explain why. Because the world is "weary, stale and unprofitable" (133), it would be better that his "too too solid flesh would melt" and "resolve itself into a dew" (129—30). After this, in 135—37, Hamlet marks how the world seems to him:

(7.1)

Fie on't! O, fie, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed: things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely.

[1. 2. 135—7]

After this Hamlet posits his dead father as a Hyperion in comparison to his uncle, a satyr, culminating in his exclamation concerning his mother that "frailty, thy name is woman!" (146).

This theme is in many ways cultivated in the Nunnery Scene later. Not only does Hamlet see his father as a Hyperion, he sees her mother as irrational in her behavior, first seeing that "she would hang on him/ As if increase of appetite had grown/ By what it fed on, yet within a month" (143—5). First, his mother had wept like Niobe, "all tears" (149), then just as suddenly as his father's death, married Claudius. Niobe, of course, refers to the daughter of Tantalus, who was slain by Apollo and Artemis, because she

boasted herself to be superior to their mother. The two gods then slew her children and turned her into a stone (*NOAD*). The name has since taken the meaning of "an inconsolably bereaved woman, a weeping woman" (*OED*). Shockingly, Gertrude had such a change of heart and married in "most wicked speed" (156). In Hamlet's view, Gertrude has thus betrayed not only the memory of her husband but her reason and better judgment as well, as becomes obvious in Hamlet's utterance: "A beast that wants discourse of reason/ Would have mourned longer" (150—1). Although not directly related to the topic of revenge, Hamlet's idiomatic "Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven/ Ere I had ever seen that day" (182—3), when speaking of the hasty marriage that "followed hard upon" (179), is greatly ironic, since Claudius himself rises to the role of Hamlet's "dearest foe" ("dearest" in the sense of "closest, greatest" as in *RSC*).

This theme of bestiality is introduced in Hamlet's words. Gertrude has now married and surrendered herself to "incestuous sheets" (157). Very soon, as I will analyze later, the Ghost will use exactly these images to send him on a frenzy, very concretely displayed in the Closet Scene.

5.1.3 The Report To Hamlet

By the time of arrival of Horatio and others the audience knows that Hamlet is taken by melancholy. What now follows is the dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio where the former is informed by the strange nightly visitations. It is worth longer quotation:

(8)

HAMLET: My father, methinks I see my father.
 HORATIO: O, where, my lord?
 HAMLET: In my mind's eye, Horatio.
 HORATIO: I saw him once; he was a goodly king.
 HAMLET: He was a man, take him for all in all:
 I shall not look upon his like again.

HORATIO: My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.
 HAMLET: Saw who?
 HORATIO: My lord, the king your father.
 HAMLET: The king my father?
 HORATIO: Season your admiration for a while
 With an attent ear till I may deliver,
 Upon the witness of these gentlemen,
 This marvel to you.
 HAMLET: For heaven's love, let me hear.
 HORATIO: Two nights together had these gentlemen,
 Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch,
 In the dead waste and middle of the night,
 Been thus encountered. A figure like your father,
 Armed at all points exactly, cap-à-pie,
 Appears before them, and with solmen march
 Goes slowly and stately: by them thrice he walked,
 By their oppressed and fear-surprisèd eyes
 Within his truncheon's length, whilst they, distilled
 Almost to jelly with the act of fear
 Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me
 In dreadful secrecy impart they did.
 And I with them that third night kept the watch,
 Where, as they had delivered, both in time,
 Form of the thing, each word made true and good,
 The apparition comes. I knew your father:
 These hands are not more like.

[1. 2. 184-215]

Horatio's address that "I knew your father:/ These hands are not more like" (214—15) at this moment do not yet give away anything else than the familiar suspicion, yet Horatio is clearly in awe of what has happened. Hamlet wants information about the place where it happened and whether they spoke to it or not. Horatio tells Hamlet that he tried, but "the morning cock crew loud,/ And at the sound it shrunk in haste away/ And vanished from our sight." (224—25), to which Hamlet's "'Tis very strange" (226) is an apt answer, as the whole ordeal "troubles" him (230), and Hamlet then continues his interrogation of the events: "But where was this?" (216), "Did you not speak to it?" (218), "Hold you the watch tonight?" (231), "Armed, say you?" (233), "From top to toe?" (235), "Then saw you not his face?" (237), "What, looked he frowningly?" (239), "Pale or red?" (241), "And fixed his eyes upon you?" (243) and "His beard was grizzly, no?" (251).

Of interest is not only Hamlet's suspicion concerning the events but some of the answers, as well. Interestingly, Horatio in Example 5 above describes the Ghost as resembling the king, "frowning" and in an "angry parle". Here, answering Hamlet's question whether "looked he frowningly?" (239), Horatio actually answers not that it did but that its "Countenance [was] more in sorrow than in anger" (240). This is crucially different. The reason for this is unclear, but it could be argued that he is already swept by the circumstances against his better judgment, yet this is not altogether convincing.

It may be argued that Hamlet is not actually too worried about the Ghost's origins, yet not only does the rest of the play prove otherwise, also quite possibly the small question "Pale or red?" (241) concerning its countenance. None of the editions I have examined explain what could be behind this little question. However, Prosser (1971: 9) finds a connection between vehement anger provoking a frenzy or a falling sickness, possibly related to Caesar's fear of "pale Cassius" in *AC*: "What was't/ That moved pale Cassius to conspire?" (2. 6. 16-17). It is likely that Shakespeare uses the word again to refer to disturbance of the mind. Indeed, by asking such a question, Hamlet would have gained knowledge that this ghost in question was a "pale" Ghost.

The scene ends with Hamlet's agreement that he will join the others in their watch that night, and the speech itself warrants full quotation:

(9)

*If it assume my noble father's person,
I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape
And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,
If you have hitherto concealed this sight,
Let it be tenable in your silence still,
And whatsoever else shall hap tonight,
Give it an understanding but no tongue.
I will requite your loves. So, far ye well:
Upon the platform 'twixt eleven and twelve*

I'll visit you.

(10)

My father's spirit in arms? All is not well.
I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come.
Till then, sit still my soul: foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

[1. 3. 256—265, 267—271, italics added]

Of interest is Hamlet's exhortation that "though hell itself should gape" he would speak to it. I suppose one major misunderstanding in making Hamlet a melancholic is to make him overtly phlegmatic, as done by Olivier (1948). Instead, although Hamlet is melancholic to begin with, he is all but passive. Far from being a dispassionate Stoic intellect, he much rather emerges as energetically passionate and acts according to his feelings. Such is his weakness, as seen in the above example: whether or not the Ghost is a demon or not, he will speak to it, meaning that he is open to what it has to say, whereas if he followed Horatio's example, he would test it.

Branagh has Hamlet examine a book on demonology after this encounter in his film *Hamlet* (1996), which captures the deep anxiety he feels about the identity of the Ghost. Hamlet senses that something devilish is in the works, possibly both domestically and personally.

5.1.4 The Ghost Enters Again

Finally, Hamlet and Horatio and Marcellus arrive at the platform. Quickly, the Ghost enters. Hamlet's response is quoted below:

(11)

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
Bring with thee airs of heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,

Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
 That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
 King, father, royal Dane. O, O, answer me!
 Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell
 Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
 have burst their cerements, why the sepulchre
 Wherein we saw thee quietly inurned,
 Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
 To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
 That thou, *dead corpse*, again in complete steel
 Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous, and we fools of nature
 So horridly to shake our disposition
 With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
 Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

[1. 4. 20—38, italics added]

The exhortation "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" is, as shown by Wright (1991: 186) merely a hendiadys (the expression of a single idea by two words connected with a conjunction when one could be used to modify the other) meaning simply "angels who minister grace". As a response it fits the occasion well, and perhaps one is even alerted to the occasion that Hamlet is advancing after all in Horatio's vein and questioning it. However, Hamlet casts aside, as he promised in Example 9.2, all reasoning. What makes this even curiouser is that Hamlet speaks in dichotomized pairs ("heaven and hell", "wicked or charitable") that are persistently Protestant, dismissing the existence of Purgatory altogether. In his cosmology the Ghost is thus from either from Hell or not, in itself in stark contrast with the purgatorial nuance in Horatio's plea earlier, when he asked whether "there be any good thing to be done/ That may to thee do ease and grace to me" (1. 1. 122—3). Quite irrationally, then, Hamlet does not care whether the Ghost is demonic or not: his choice to follow it disregards the scriptural advice that Horatio followed: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 *John* 1: 1—2, *KJV*).

To the modern reader Hamlet's line "Thou com'st in such a questionable shape/That I will speak to thee" might be difficult, yet it means simply "propitious to conversation, affable" (Schmidt 1962: 931), not "questionable" in the sense it is used in modern English. The Ghost is affable for the very reason that it comes in the shape of Hamlet's father. Paraphrasing, the line says "Whether you are a spirit from Heaven or a demon, . . . you arrive in such a friendly shape that I will speak with you". He goes further and willingly names the Ghost "Hamlet", father, based solely on its appearance.

Hamlet has thus arrived to a fundamental paradox: none of his words betray belief in Purgatory and he knows it cannot come neither from Heaven nor Purgatory, possible here actually accepting that it might come from hell. Again, his anxiety and passion overrule his better judgment.

Forebodingly Hamlet's description of the Ghost as a "dead corpse" (33) is in direct conflict with Christian doctrine, both Protestant and Catholic: the spirits had no physical body. Indeed, there seems to be an internal struggle within Hamlet's mind of reason (theology and philosophy) and his emotions, of which the latter win. The audience should be, at the latest, warned by Hamlet admitting that the Ghost visits in "the glimpses of the moon" (34) and makes "night hideous" (35), two signs associated with ghouls and demonic spirits.

By now it should be obvious that the Ghost has no good intentions, but against the advice of both Marcellus and Horatio, Hamlet wants to follow it. Horatio obviously knows some specific demonic lore since he counters Hamlet:

(12)

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assumes some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason

And draw you into madness?

[1. 4. 53—8]

Horatio's warning is not dissimilar to Gloucester's belief that it was a demon that tempted him toward the cliff in *KL*:

(13)

EDGAR: As I stood here below, methought his eyes
Were two full moons: he had a thousand noses,
Horns whelked and waved like the enragèd sea.
It was some fiend: therefore, thou happy father,
think that the clearest gods, who make them honours
Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

GLOUCESTER: I do remember now: henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
'Enough, enough' and die. That thing you speak of,
I took it for a man: often 'twould say
'The fiend, the fiend': he led me to that place.

[*KL*, 4. 5. 82—92]

Based on this evidence, Horatio is obviously not considering the Ghost as a friendly, purgatorial spirit but as a demon. Ironically, Hamlet, who overlooked *1 John*, refers to Matt 10: 28 when he answers that "And for my soul, what can it do to that,/ Being a thing immortal as itself?" (50—51). Also dramatically ironic becomes Horatio's appeal for Hamlet's "sovereignty of reason" (see Example 11), when obviously Horatio and Marcellus try to bar Hamlet's exit by holding him down. Hamlet becomes furious, urging them to "unhand [him]" (66), and swearing that "By heav'n, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!/ I say, away!" (67—68). Hamlet's motif is well described by Horatio: "He waxes desperate with imagination" (69)

5.1.5 The Ghost of Sulphurous Flames

When the Ghost has led Hamlet at some length, Hamlet regains his composure and refuses to go any further. Then follows the Ghost's own

there. However, it could also mean, conceptually speaking, the ultimate prison-house of which there is no release, Hell.

Prosser (1971: 115) is quick to notice that "primarily the Purgatory ghost appeared only to ask for masses, alms, fasts, pilgrimages, and, above all, prayers. Not one instance has ever been noted of a Purgatorial spirit's commanding revenge, either his own or God's". Not only this, she also noted, when examining Elizabethan ethics and the theatrical tradition, that those who seek vengeance do so "because they are villains. According to ethics, revengers are evil; according to theatrical tradition, evil men are ipso facto revengers" (1971: 39). Furthermore, Prosser found that the audience was trained to respond with suspicion to certain conventions concerning revenge: a character defying "patience/heaven and [invoking] fiends/Hell or is aligned with demonic forces" (1971: 71) would raise the suspicions of the audience. This study shows later that this is exactly what Hamlet does, and the tragedy is veiled in his inability not to obey the Ghost. Obviously, as the Prosser's above-quoted example about the purgatorial spirits shows, this ghost cannot be a Purgatory ghost, since, as was explained earlier in this study, the Purgatory was the place of purification for righteous souls who were not, so to speak, righteous enough to go directly to Heaven. Also, as Prosser (1971: 134) notes, a purgatorial spirit has no obligation to be silent about the place whence it comes from; instead, one of the reason of their return would have been to make men, in this case, Hamlet, to understand all the specifics of their torment. In short, the Ghost acts demonically, not as a purgatorial ghost.

The Ghost then gives a demonic imperative. Hamlet's response is swift, as vows that "Haste, haste me to know it, that I with wings as swift/ As meditation or the thoughts of love/ May sweep to my revenge" (33—35). No wonder the Ghost may say: "I find thee apt,/ And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed/ That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,/ Wouldst thou

not stir in this" (36—39). That the Ghost finds Hamlet apt to murder is tragically ironic, often misunderstood in analysis. The reason why the Ghost finds Hamlet apt is not because Hamlet shows moral standing or strength of reason as the Hamlet myth often would make one believe — instead, Hamlet is apt for the very reason that he does not think before it is too late.

5.1.6 The Ghost As Iago

To quote Nuttall (2007: 280), in *Othello*, Iago is the satanic force that destroys Othello, the latter which is again driven by his passions and thus unable to resist Iago's towering and demonic genius, genius which is much closer to Hamlet than to Othello or Macbeth, for that matter. What I will propose here is not familiar to Shakespeare analyses: that the Ghost in *Hamlet* is in some ways what Iago is to *Othello*; that both are the evil masterminds behind much personal and domestic destruction — both Hamlet and Othello are brought down because their demon has triggered in them obscurities and led them astray. Obviously Hamlet is the genius of the two, which in many ways is only dynamically and dramaturgically more convenient: the reason why the Ghost's role is so restricted in this play is that, unlike Iago, it does not have to say too much, since Hamlet, already a great poet in himself, does not need an overt catalyst. But whereas Hamlet is — as a poet and philosopher — above the earthly Othello, they share the same flaw of dislodged reason due to passion.

What follows is the Ghost's long description of the king's murder and of Claudius. Often overlooked quite possibly because the Ghost, without any further function than to trustfully set Hamlet on his course for revenge, becomes "a pompous bore", to borrow Prosser's (1971: 247) words. However, from the perspective of this analysis this speech is one of the most important in the entire play.

(15)

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
 With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts —
 O, wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
 So to seduce! — won to his *shameful lust*
 The will of my most *seeming-virtuous* queen.
 O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!
 From me, whose love was of that dignity
 That it went hand in hand even with the vow
 I made to her in marriage, and to decline
 Upon a a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
 To those of mine!
 But virtue, as it never will be moved,
 Though *lewdness* court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed,
And prey on garbage.
 But, soft, methinks I scent the morning's air;
 Brief let me be. Sleeping within mine orchard,
 My custom always in the afternoon,
 Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
 With juice of cursèd hebenon in a vial,
 And in the porches of mine ears did pour
 The leperous distilment, whose effect
 Holds such an enmity with blood of man
 That swift as quicksilver it courses through
 The natural gates and alleys of the body,
 And with a sudden vigour it doth posset
 And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
 The thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine,
 And a most instant tetter barked about,
 Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,
 All my smooth body.
 Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
 Of life, of crown and queen, once dispatched:
 Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
 Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled,
 No reckoning made, but sent to my account
 With all my imperfections on my head.
 O horrible, O horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damnèd incest.
But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven
And those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once;
 The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
 And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire.
 Adieu, adieu, Hamlet: remember me.

[1. 5. 47—96, italics added]

Perhaps no speech in all of Shakespeare, with the exception of Hamlet's "To be, or not to be", could be more misunderstood. Apparently no one reads this speech so closely after one has, with Hamlet, started calling the Ghost "Hamlet, father". However, as I have argued, the voice speaking is not that of a friendly purgatorial spirit but of Iago-foreshadowed, where the obscene is obscured by the grandiose (the poetical justification through revenge) and the immorality of the act concealed in the immorality of the offender.

The Iagoan elements are aplenty. Firstly, they are those through which The Ghost poisons Hamlet's mind with obscene images: "that incestuous, that adulterate beast" (47), "shameful lust" (50), "most seeming-virtuous queen" (51), "lust . . ./ will sate itself in a celestial bed/ And prey on garbage" (60—62). Especially the image of the incestuous bed will remain with Hamlet until the very end and it is exactly this obsession that merited Hamlet as an ideal example for Freud's reading of Hamlet as an archetype for Oedipus complex. The Ghost seems to answer directly to Hamlet's earlier cry how the world is "an unweeded garden/ That grows to seed: things rank and gross in nature/ Possess it merely" (1. 2. 135—137) and his abhorrent remembrances of how his mother within a month fell to Claudius and the "incestuous sheets" (1. 2. 157).

Secondly, the Ghost's remark that Hamlet should not "taint" (90) his mind is tragically ironic, since that is precisely what the Ghost has been doing for the whole time: it has assumed the role of Iago and has tainted Hamlet's mind with such filth that he will struggle for the rest of the play to rid himself from it. Also, its advice that Hamlet should let Gertrude to be left "to heaven/ And those thorns that in her bosom lodge,/ To prick and sting her" (91—93), although at first glance very noble, are not, ultimately, that virtuous, since "heaven" in this sentence can be understood as having to

opposite functions: it may refer to the liberation brought by the Last judgment, this liberation brought to the righteous, but it may also refer to the judgment brought to the damnation to the wicked: it is Heaven that brings both (cf. the Closet Scene, 3.4 in the play).

Thirdly, and finally, is the command to revenge itself. As has been pointed out already, no purgatorial spirit would ever incite anyone to murder. Such is, however, the Ghost's meaning, in no way implicit. Its "howsoever thou pursuest this act" (89) most likely does not refer to whether Hamlet should murder Claudius or not — if the Ghost did not expect Hamlet to kill Claudius, to separately warn that Hamlet should not kill Gertrude would be irrational. I believe that most critics have no trouble admitting this, but only due to incoherency, since by admitting this they should also admit the immorality of the imperative itself, instead overriding it with the vague concept of "Elizabethan code of revenge" that has already been proved false by Prosser (1971, cf. section 2.4 in this study).

5.1.7 Hamlet's Response And "The Swearing Ritual"

This subsection I will dedicate in analyzing Hamlet's response. After the Ghost has challenged Hamlet to remember it, Hamlet breaks into speech:

(16)

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
Shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old.

[1. 5. 97—99]

(17)

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live

Within the book and volume of my brain.

[1. 5. 103—8]

In Example 16, Hamlet does something that the Elizabethan audience would likely have considered not only suspicious but utterly alarming: Hamlet, when swearing by Heaven and earth, "couples" hell. There might be a sexual nuance in this word, as well, foreshadowing the obscene relationship Hamlet has let himself into when aligning with a demonic force, but most certainly he now accepts being directed by hell. In said example he shows his commitment, which — despite the modern "problem" of procrastination — one should take seriously, ending with a damnation of her mother and uncle: "O pernicious woman!/ O villain, villain, smiling damnèd villain!" (110—111).

After this Horatio and Marcellus enter again, and the Ghost cries to them from underground: "Swear!" (166, 173, 198). In this brief and chaotic sequence one glaring shortcoming in editorial judgment presents itself, ignoring the possible demonic origin of the Ghost. Thrice the Ghost compels Hamlet to swear on his sword, and also make his fellows swear; even *RSC*, which I have used as my primary source, makes them swear not only once but thrice: in 1. 5. 173, 179 and 198. Nonetheless all three of the original texts (Q1, Q2 and F) remain silent about the occurrence.

Modern editors consider the scene incomprehensible without the additional SDs: the Ghost compels Hamlet, who turns it into a joke whilst moving ground, away from the Ghost. Then the Ghost dissipates and Hamlet and his company are left alone. Almost every editor inserts a bracketed SD somewhere in this scene to make them swear on the sword on the grounds that it would be irrational that Hamlet swore not. Yet the original ambiguity of the text is thus distorted and what is in fact a cohesive structure is broken. The scene is not at all incomprehensible, and the decision by *RSC* and *Ard*²

(Jenkins 1982: 225-27) to make them swear thrice is twice as absurd because Jenkins rightly asserts that Hamlet's apparent jocularity in 1.5.148-90 has "an aura of diabolism" (1982: 458). He even advances to write that:

We shall have accepted, along with Hamlet (l. 144), the Ghost's account of its purgatory, and its presence down below will seem to accord with this. But 'under the stage' is the traditional theatrical location for hell. . . The shifting locality of the voice adds to the impression of a subterranean demon. The familiarity with which Hamlet addresses it may recall the manner in which the stage Vice traditionally addressed the Devil. . . The Latin tag *Hic et ubique* (l. 164), while literally apt, sounds like a conjuration formula, and, . . ., it is only God and the devil that could be 'here and everywhere' at once. (ibid.)

This is a part of a wonderful summary of the references to the Devil in 1.5 (cf. Jenkins 1982: 458-59) yet Jenkins is arguably wrong to assume that both the readers and Hamlet have accepted the Ghost's account. He goes further to claim that to Hamlet to doubt the Ghost's story would be in conflict with his assertion of the Ghost's honesty and its collaboration in the "swearing ritual" (Jenkins 1982: 459).

As I have argued, Hamlet has accepted the Ghost as it is. In this point, however, I believe that Hamlet, having been awakened by his friends from the quasi-psychedelic experience just earlier, realizes the danger he has put them in. Jordan (2008) recognizes the simple solution to the non-existent "editorial problem" by admitting that Hamlet does not swear. This is because Hamlet thinks (the blade and the hilt form a cross) it would be dangerous as he cannot be sure whether the spirit is demonic or not (one has to remember that unlike so many other things, Hamlet's uncertainty is not shared by the audience and was never meant to). He cannot be sure for the reason that he never tested it as did Horatio. If one is to insist Hamlet have his *hamartia*, it would be his wish to access his dead father through the Ghost even if his logic would prove it a fallacy. This does not conflict with his assertion that

the Ghost is honest for even if the apparition told the truth it could still be the Devil (cf. 2 *Cor* 11: 13—15):

For such false apostles are deceitfull workers, and transforme themselues into the Apostles of Christ. 14And no marueile: for Satan himselfe is transformed into an Angel of light. 15Therefore it is no great thing, though his ministers transforme themselues, as though they were the ministers of righteousnes, whose end shall be according to their workes. (GB)

Shakespeare utilized this doctrine abundantly in *Macbeth*, written within five years from *Hamlet* (Bevington 2004: 1255), there is the following speech by the character of Banquo:

(18)

That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence. —

(*Mac*, 1. 3. 129—135)

Such references are also found elsewhere: "Devils soonest tempt, resembling spirits of light" (*LLL*, 4. 3. 257), "O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face! / Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave? / Beautiful tyrant, fiend angelical" (*RJ*, 3. 2. 75—77) and "It is written, they / appear to men like angels of light, light is an effect of fire, and fire will burn. *Ergo*, / light wenches will burn. Come not near her" (*CE*, 4. 3. 43—45). Hamlet himself refers to this doctrine later when he says that "the devil hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape" (2. 2. 530-31).

As explained by Jordan (2008), Hamlet does not want them to swear to the Ghost because he fears the Ghost might be an evil spirit, even the Devil himself. If that be the case, he would put his unsuspecting friends in danger

because the Ghost's imperative "swear" refers that they should swear to it. Based on this anxiety Hamlet does not swear on the cross (the sword) and instead tries to move away from the Ghost who then follows and there is a great sense of ironical sully present in his addresses to the Ghost ("truepenny", "old mole", and so on). Perhaps many mix the two categories of swearing to be done in the sequence. Firstly, Hamlet makes his friends swear that they "never make known what [they] have seen tonight" (158), to which they answer later, "We have sworn, my lord, already" (164). Secondly, the Ghost wants them to swear as well, but Hamlet, recognizing this, tries to shift ground, and the scene ends without them swearing at all.

In breve, in this scene Hamlet surrenders to his melancholy emotions and, as Horatio feared, was deprived of his "sovereignty of reason" (1. 4. 57). Hamlet is committed to the task of murder, the Ghost finds him apt and the scene ends when Hamlet, in some sort of psychotic ecstasy, is confronted by his friends and they move away from the Ghost, who shouts to them from underground.

5.1.8 Doubts of Identity and "The Mousetrap"

The Ghost has now set in motion the so-called revenge-tragedy. Hamlet, however, has now entered a pact with something of whose nature he cannot be sure, yet whom the audience now should know to be demonic of origin. Much of the play from now on concentrates on this aspect: his doubt and the consequences of this doubt. Greenblatt (2001: 4) is right to argue that Hamlet does not worry that his soul might go to Purgatory but instead to hell. For Hamlet, Purgatory seems not to exist despite the Ghost's claims to have returned whence. He refers to death as an "undiscovered country" (3. 1. 85—86) whence no traveller returns. This subchapter concentrates on Hamlet's doubts about the Ghost's identity, culminating in the device he plots to test

its honesty, the reworking of a play called *The Murder of Gonzago* renamed as *The Mousetrap*.

Hamlet devises a play with a playacting company that has arrived at Elsinore. Below Hamlet in soliloquy states his reasons for the play:

(19)

Fie upon't, foh! About, my brain! I have heard
 That guilty creatures sitting at a play
 Have by the very cunning of the scene
 Been struck so that the soul that presently
 They have proclaimed their malefactions:
 For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
 With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
 Play something like the murder of my father
 Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks,
 I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,
 I know my course. *The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil, and the devil hath power
 T'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps,
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
 As he is very potent with such spirits,
 Abuses me to damn me.* I'll have grounds
 More relative than this: the play's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king

[2. 2. 520—537, italics added]

Hamlet refers to 2 Cor 11: 13—15 as his motif in lines 531—532 and consequently devices a play with a fratricidal scene to test the validity of the Ghost based on that motif. From the King's reaction he thus plots to see whether the Ghost has spoken the truth or not. There is, however, a seminal paradox in Hamlet's reasoning.

He rightly refers to the Biblical doctrine of the Devil's ability to *seem* like an angel of light but lead astray, after which he, by designing the play, hopes to find proof of the Ghost's words. This is paradoxical, however, since it is at war directly with what Hamlet has just said: a demon might speak of things that are true, which still do not make it anything less than a demon. Hamlet

seems not to see this, since he reasons that the truth value of Claudius as a murderer would equate with an honest ghost. I consider this to be a fatal flaw in Hamlet's reasoning, which is traceable to 1.5 and his first encounter with it, where he trusts the Ghost without testing it. After that in Hamlet there mulls a struggle of self-justification, which leads to such a fallacious syllogism as presented here: to him, to prove that the Ghost spoke true is to allay the fears that he has, as he wants to justify the path he has chosen, not change: simply put, he does not want to be wrong.

The play-within-the-play is not without its ambiguities: Gonzago, the King of Vienna, is killed not by his brother but by Lucianus, "nephew to the king" (3. 2. 210), as explained by Hamlet himself. Lucianus pours the poison to Gonzago's ear, and Claudius rises and leaves. Hamlet then tells Horatio: "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst/ perceive?" (3. 2. 248—249). Again, the ambiguity is clear: he has made the king's nephew to kill the king, and Hamlet himself is the nephew to Claudius. Thus one cannot be sure whether Claudius shrieks at Hamlet for knowing the truth about the fratricide or whether he is afraid that Hamlet will kill him instead. Later in the next scene Hamlet overhears Claudius' confession, yet the second problem persists: even if the Ghost had told the truth does not mean that it were not a demon. Although Hamlet is seen as distrustful of motives by some (Bloom 2003: 4) I cannot see him being distrustful enough.

5.2 Hamlet's Revenge

5.2.1 Hamlet as Pyrrhus and Vice

I will shortly return to 2.2.393—459, where the players have just entered and Hamlet remembers a past performance he enjoyed, starting to cite the story.

It is the story of Priam, the king of Troy, who is killed by Pyrrhus during the attack on his city. Pyrrhus was Achilles' son, and after his father's death in the war he was noted for his ferocious and vengeful savagery. Hamlet begins the story in Example 20:

(20)

'The rugged Pyrrhus, like th'Hyrceanian beast' —
 It is not so: it begins with Pyrrhus:
 'The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,
 When he lay couchèd in the ominous horse,
 hath now this dread and black complexion smeared
 With heraldry more dismal: head to foot
 Now is he total gules, horridly tricked
 With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,
 Baked and impasted with the parching streets
 That lend a tyrannous and damnèd light
 To their vile murders: roasted in wrath and fire,
 And thus o'er-sizèd with coagulate gore,
 With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus
 Old grandsire Priam seeks.'

[2. 2. 393—407]

The player takes it over in 410—439, telling how Pyrrhus, aroused by vengeance, kills Priam cruelly, then finding Hecuba, wife to king Priam, slaying her as well.

Hamlet, and the audience with him, are taken aback by Hecuba's grief, yet, as noted by Prosser (1971: 153-4), not only is the description of Pyrrhus' demonic savagery thrice as long as Hecuba's grief, Pyrrhus is described as "hellish (2. 2. 406) in his vengeance, an addition for which Shakespeare is solely responsible (this, according to Prosser, not occurring in neither of the sources, *Aeneid* or *Dido*).

However, the parallels between the two sons who avenge their fathers (Pyrrhus' father Achilles was killed in battle) are striking, yet the sympathies lie completely with Priam, not with Pyrrhus, who is painted as demonic. This is further emphasized as Hamlet fails to see this connection himself, only

focusing, as the rest of the audience most likely does with him, in Hecuba's grief. Further evidence of this intended parallel is Hamlet's first slip in the beginning, "th'Hyrceanian beast". RSC glosses it as "the tiger of Hyrcania (land bordering the Caspian sea), known for its ferocity" (Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 1953). This directly influences how the vengeance-episode is to be viewed: Pyrrhus is seen as hellish for the reason that he has chosen the hellish, the "Hyrceanian" way to avenge his father's death. In Pyrrhus, thus, is presented the prototype of Hamlet-to-be if he followed his chosen path.

Now one can turn back to the end of 3.3 — *The Mousetrap* is over, Hamlet is convinced of his uncle's guilt and delivers the following lines:

(21)

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
 When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
 Contagion to this world; now could I drink hot blood
 And do such bitter business as the day
 Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother,
 O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
 The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
 Let me be cruel, not unnatural.
 I will speak daggers to her, but use none.
 My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites:
 How in my words some ever she be shent,
 To give them seals never my soul consent!

[3. 3. 331—342]

Many critics ignore Hamlet's harsh language here possibly because after this follows the Prayer Scene, where Hamlet does not kill Claudius because he would send a repenting man to Heaven — perhaps, if Hamlet's obligation and first premise is seen, as elaborated by Jenkins (1963: 137), as to avenge his father, these words then mean nothing. I will argue, following Prosser (1971), that this is the moment where Hamlet turns in to the Medieval Vice (an interesting reference to Luther actually adds to this interpretation rather than diminishes it: when Hamlet is captured and questioned by the king

concerning the whereabouts of Polonius' body, Hamlet responds: "Not where he eats, but where is eaten: a certain convocation of worms/ are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet", 4. 2. 21-22. Considering the context, Hamlet's reference is obscene, not merely referential to the Diet of Worms in 1521).

Hamlet has now received his evidence that Claudius is a murderer and that the Ghost was speaking the truth. No longer is the Ghost's demonic identity seen as a problem, but most likely not because Hamlet would think that it would be angelic but rather because he does not care: he sees himself chosen to revenge. These arguments go against the critical tradition, yet are actually confirmed by the text quoted above: Hamlet does not identify himself with Heaven, much rather with the demonic: "the very witching time of night" (331), i.e. the time when the satanic overwhelms, is upon them, and he could "drink hot blood" (333) referring to some satanic rituals of human sacrifice. The Ghost's imperative is clearly in his mind, as he is so enraged and subsumed by his new demonic identity that he has to calm himself down to obey the Ghost and not harm his mother, only speaking "daggers" (339) to her, clearly referring to the Ghost's "Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive/ Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven/ And those thorns that in her bosom lodge,/ To prick and sting her" (1. 5. 90—93). Hamlet has become the "hellish" Pyrrhus, and his decision *not* to kill Claudius in the next is confirmation of this, not negation.

5.2.2 The Prayer Scene

The imperative given to Hamlet by the Ghost is to revenge. Yet there is no question that Hamlet would not realize the sinfulness of the act of revenge: as pointed out by Nuttall (2007: 203), Hamlet, whilst listing his faults, lists "revengeful" as one of his flaws in: "I am very proud, revengeful,

ambitious. . ." (3. 1. 127) It is not thus worth arguing anymore that Hamlet would be on a heroic quest to avenge his father's murderer: initiated by the demonic, Hamlet has subsumed his identity into such, and on his way to his mother's closet immediately has his chance: he happens by Claudius, who is praying, unaware of Hamlet's presence.

Whatever comes later (Claudius trying to get Hamlet killed in England and his ultimately successful bid to poison Hamlet) should not interfere with the rectitude of his repentance: "But, O, what form of prayer / Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder?'" (54—55). Hamlet is convinced:

(22)

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying:
 And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven,
 And so am I revenged. That would be scanned:
 A villain kills my father, and for that,
 I, his foul son, do this same villain send
 To heaven,
 O, this is hire and salary, not revenge,
 He took my father grossly, full of bread,
 With all his crimes broad blown, as fresh as May,
 And how is audit stands who knows save heaven?
 But in our circumstance and course of thought
 'This heavy with him: and am I then revenged,
 To take him in the purging of his soul,
 When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
 No.
 Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent:
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
 Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,
 At gaming, swearing, or about some act
 That has no relish of salvation in't,
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
 And that his soul may be as damned and black
 As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays,
 This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

[3. 3. 76—99]

Unless one is so misguided by the Romantic Hamlet, whose main problem is to overcome his unwillingness to act (implicitly, of course, admitting that to revenge is the noblest command in the whole play), these words should

horrify. This is not procrastination in the sense that Hamlet finds no willingness in himself — he has just evoked hell before entering, and already has his hand on the hilt. Indeed, Hamlet finds no other hindrance but the lack of “perfect” revenge: he is delaying due to the dilemma of whether or not to kill the king, but rather he is withdrawing because he realizes that he cannot send Claudius to eternal damnation if he were to act now.

The popular argument goes that Hamlet is forced not to act due to his weakness. Instead, the text is clear that his decision to “spare” Claudius now only forebodes the urge for a wholesome revenge. While in this scene many revenge-thirsty might see Hamlet at his weakest, I see him as his most demonic. As he himself says, “This physic but prolongs thy sickly days” (99), meaning by “physic” medicine, as glossed by *RSC* (Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 1969) and this medicine can be both Claudius’ prayer and Hamlet’s decision to postpone his revenge.

5.2.3 The Closet Scene

Scene 3.4 is often referred to as the Closet Scene, as it takes place in the private room of Gertrude (not a bedroom; cf. Thompson and Taylor 2006a: 333, to discourage any Freudian re-readings). In the Queen’s chamber Polonius has counseled with the Queen and has hid himself behind an arras.

As has been argued by Everett (1977: 118), the point is not that Hamlet delays in revenging his father but rather that he does not revenge him at all. This position can be elaborated when one consider the final duel between Hamlet and Laertes — the murder of the king is so impulsive that it would warrant Everett’s argument (*ibid.*), but when one merely looks at the final act one loses the focus and actually ignores the one scene in which Hamlet himself thinks he has just killed the king, and blood-thirsty and hell-evoking

invocations made by Hamlet just before the Prayer Scene. This is what happens in Gertrude's closet:

(23)

POLONIUS: *[Behind the arras]* What, ho? Help, help, help!

HAMLET: *[Draws]* How now? A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!

POLONIUS: O, I am slain! *[Hamlet kills Polonius]*

GERTRUDE: O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET: Nay, I know not: is it the king?

GERTRUDE: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET: A bloody deed: almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king and marry with his brother.

GERTRUDE: As kill a king?

HAMLET: Ay, lady, 'twas my word.— *[Discovers Polonius]*
Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell.

[3. 4. 26—36]

Polonius, hiding, is alarmed by Gertrude's cries for help, revealing his presence in the room. Hamlet finds out the identity of the man behind the arras only after having killed him and having lectured his mother about fratricide.

When Jenkins (1982: 142) elaborates that Hamlet stands "convicted of neglect" (ibid.) when the Ghost returns, and that the "second revenge action is ready to begin" (ibid.), he and Everett have it only half right. Hamlet is indeed convicted of neglect by the Ghost, but he has not neglected his duty: he has killed Polonius accidentally because he thought it was the king behind the arras: thus, when he made the strike of death he thought he was stabbing Claudius. What has happened, then, is that Hamlet has thought he has revenged his father and in deed he has fulfilled the imperative to both "remember" and "revenge": this is a part of his catharsis. Then the Ghost appears for the last time.

The most famous Q1 SD is the entrance of the Ghost in a "night-gowne". Some argue that it diminishes the Ghost's effect (Edwards 2003) yet some applaud its dramatic function (Everett 1977): gone is the militaristic and

powerful Ghost of 1.1 and 1.3 and what remains is an old man in his nightgown, stripped of power. The Ghost has diminished into an insignificant entity not even seen by its supposedly own wife (*ibid.*). This could be even a different ghost, but as an argument it would be completely irrelevant. The reader, rather, should seek to answer why the Ghost has appeared by the time current time.

Rather than viewing the Ghost as a failed king-husband the interpretation offered in this study invites to view the Ghost as the deceiver. A possible interpretation could thus be that now that Hamlet has avenged his father's murder and a new revenge cycle has begun, the Ghost has no function in this new cycle anymore, and, for fear of becoming defunct, it tries via the final plea of sympathy to trick Hamlet. However, one would then have to answer what it is trying to trick Hamlet into — he has already invoked satanic forces earlier, now he has already killed an innocent bystander in the belief that he be the king. The Ghost knows that Hamlet has not delayed in trying to kill the king, but it still urges: "Do not forget: this visitation/ Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (3. 4. 112-13). But I do not believe this to be its primary reason.

I believe that Prosser (1971: 198) has it right: "No matter what the Ghost may be, the one direct result of its appearance in the Closet Scene is to forestall Gertrude's repentance by convincing her that Hamlet is mad". Hamlet has made Gertrude convinced of guilt and a horrible mistake she has made ("O, speak to me no more:/ These words like daggers enter in mine ears./ No more, sweet Hamlet!", 3. 4. 95-97). I quite agree with Prosser here that the reason why the Ghost enters now, invisible to Gertrude is simply to make her believe that Hamlet is mad, in which it succeeds (Gertrude utters "Alas, he's mad!", l. 108, immediately when Hamlet starts addressing the air). Some argue that the Ghost's declaration "But look, amazement on thy mother sits./ O, step between her and her fighting soul:/ Conceit in weakest

bodies strongest works: / Speak to her, Hamlet" (3. 4. 115-17). Prosser (1971: 198) is the only one who actually says anything about the Ghost's "step between her and her fighting soul", while all of my references are silent about it. It does not mean necessarily to comfort but "to come between (two persons, a person and thing, etc.) by way of severance, interruption or interception" (OED). In other words, the Ghost implores Hamlet to interrupt Gertrude from becoming fully aware of her dire situation that would lead her to repent. This is the sense in which Shakespeare uses the word in *AW*, 5. 3. 341-42: "If it appear not plain and prove untrue, / Deadly divorce step between me and you!".

The motifs of the Ghost are, thus, two-fold: firstly, it does appear to remind Hamlet of its presence and his present mission (taking for granted that it is the same ghost as earlier), yet most importantly, it intercepts Hamlet and Gertrude before the latter confesses her guilt and comes to repent (cf. the Ghost's command in Example 14. This becomes apparent when the Ghost is gone: Hamlet urges Gertrude to repent (155) but she answers merely that "Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain" (161), quite likely referring to Hamlet first directing her emotions to guilt and then patently appearing insane and possibly untrustworthy.

5.2.4 Hamlet, Heaven's Scourge and Minister

In this subsection I will clearly depart from any previous critic I am aware of, and even Prosser (1971), with whom I am in agreement most of the time, does not follow me further.

The question at hand is a crucial one, whether one has ever read *Hamlet* from my perspective or not. It is the question of Hamlet's retribution. When *Hamlet* is read as a noble revenge tragedy where Hamlet acts according to a moral obligation to kill, this question becomes irrelevant, yet when Prosser

(1971) saw that the tragedy of Hamlet revolves around the demonic spirit that masquerades as Hamlet's dead father, it becomes central to find whether Hamlet, in the end, finds his peace or not. Prosser's (1971: 235) stance is clear:

Hamlet too is led by melancholy first to consider and reject suicide and then to be prompted to revenge by a demonic spirit that cannot endure the light of day. He too is led into a riot of rage. He too is transformed when he meditates on "dusty Death". He too finds a new orientation in the serene assurance that nothing matters but that which passes through nature to eternity.

The ending is ultimately a happy one: Hamlet has fought his way out of hell and has surrendered himself to the will of providence. Much of this revolves around Hamlet's apparent calm in 5.1 and 5.2, and his famous words on providence as well as his guilt concerning Laertes. In this subsection, however, I will argue that Hamlet has not changed for the better as is usually interpreted. Instead, his fallacy is differently observable but remaining fallacy: before killing Polonius he aligned himself openly with the satanic, after which he identifies himself as the "scourge and minister" (3. 4. 173) of Heaven, aligning himself with the divine. This, I will argue, is his ultimate and fatal delusion.

As already mentioned above, the crucial shift in Hamlet's function and reasoning occurs after the murder of Polonius in 3. 4. 170—177:

(24)

For this same lord,
I do repent, but heaven hath pleased it so
To punish me with this, and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.
I will bestow him, and will answer well
The death I gave him.

[3. 4. 170—75]

In this short piece he admits that he repents killing Polonius, i.e. that it was never his intention, but considers it the will of heaven that it happened, since he has been appointed heaven's "scourge and minister", which RSC correctly glosses as "agent of retribution" (Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 1973). "Scourge", of course, means "a whip used as an instrument of punishment", a meaning obviously in Hamlet's mind, and "minister" might most closely pick up the archaic meaning given by NOAD (meaning 3), "a person or thing used to achieve or convey something", giving as an example the phrase "the Angels are ministers of the Divine Will".

What Hamlet is thus saying is that heaven's punishment for him is that he must be their minister of retribution. Many feel certain awkwardness when, after such an "apology", Hamlet then bluntly says of Polonius' body: "I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room" (202). A certain amount of astonishment is also felt by some when, as late as 5. 2. 61, where we should have the "mature Hamlet", he shrugs off sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths:

(25)

Why, man, they did make love to this employment:
 They are not near my conscience; their defeat
 Doth by their own insinuation grow.
 'This dangerous when the baser nature comes
 Between the pass and fell incensèd points
 Of mighty opposites.

[5. 2. 61—66]

This is the Hamlet that embraces his destiny with calmness and who just 90 lines later speaks one of the most tranquil lines written in the English language:

(26)

Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come: if it be not to come, it will be now: if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?

[5. 2. 150—53]

Hamlet presents himself as such a personification of tranquility that it is almost impossible to remember the apparent phlegmatic disinterestedness towards the deaths of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Later on, when he realizes that he and his mother have been poisoned, he, frantically, kills the king shouting: "Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damnèd Dane,/ Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?/ Follow my mother" (5. 2. 270—72).

I agree that Hamlet is a changed man in the final act. However, all of Shakespearean criticism, including the otherwise acute Prosser (1971) fail to see *Hamlet* as anything else but redemptionist, i.e. Hamlet is brought to final salvation, be it Christian, pagan, literary or metaphysical. Prosser's (ibid.) final judgment that Hamlet battled his way out of hell is such an unsatisfactory conclusion simply because it is her study that has made it possible to escape the redemptionist argument.

In terms of arguing for the contrary, one might argue that the biggest and most prevalent problem in the need of resolve would be to give a proper explanation for Hamlet's sudden change in the final act. I will attempt to answer that question below.

I believe that the crucial passage quoted in Example 24 should be considered key to unlocking this dilemma-seeming situation. Hamlet does not repent of killing Polonius. Shakespeare has given an example of a murderer repenting his murder, and that example is of Claudius in the Prayer Scene — Hamlet, compared to this, seems strangely detached. Instead, he says something along the lines of "I do repent, *but*. . .", and what

follows actually outweighs his supposed guilty conscience. That which follows is his new self-identification as heaven's scourge and minister, and is consistent with Hamlet's early exhortation: "The time is out of joint: O, cursèd spite/ That ever I was born to set it right!" (2. 1. 205—07). Hamlet has, from the very beginning, considered him as the *elected*, the one who has been chosen by God to act as His scourge and minister. After all, he admits: "I must be cruel, only to be kind:/ Thus bad begins and worse remains behind" (3. 4. 176—77).

Thus, Hamlet considers his mission to be God's chosen one on earth to put in practice the Almighty's revenge. Obviously, as has been showed in the early on in this study, this is not a Christian idea and unthinkable for Elizabethan dramatic conventions as well, no matter how compelling the idea might at first glance seem. Instead, Hamlet, who has been consumed by the role of the Vice, is not transformed into an angel of light in himself, but does appear as one: whereas the demonic appeared to him in a friendly form, Hamlet himself fulfills the biblical passage from 2 *Cor* referred to earlier, worthy of further quotation:

(27)

13 For such false apostles are deceitfull workers, and transforme themselues into the Apostles of Christ. 14 And no marueile: for Satan himselfe is transformed into an Angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing, though his ministers transforme themselues, as though they were the ministers of righteousnes, whose end shall be according to their workes. (2 Cor 11: 13-15, GB)

Of interest is verse 15, where it is said that the false apostle's "end shall be according to their workes". By this it is meant that works shall show what they are, and it does not escape Shakespeare, who uses this theme to imply that works shall show what Hamlet is: he is just as revengeful as always, but now he has self-fashioned himself not to appear as revengeful but on a sacred duty, where it does not matter whether he has killed or not. As I

already pointed out in subsection 5.4.3, which might function as a general axiom in understanding *Hamlet*: the obscene is obscured by the grandiose (the poetical justification through revenge) and the immorality of the act concealed in the immorality of the offender.

This interpretation answers the question of Hamlet's apparent lack of violence and his calm in the final act: he is at ease with himself because now he is convinced that his works are guided by God's providence. He identifies himself with the divine, and Shakespeare turns the insignificant-seeming scriptural passage quoted above from the Ghost-Hamlet axis to the Hamlet-audience axis: appearances deceive, and when they do, everything is relativized. Only those who retain their "sovereignty of reason" (1. 4. 57), i.e. will be able to see clearly, will not let themselves be deceived. Hamlet does not stand outside ethics or morality, yet he works hard to make us believe he does. However, in the end he violently and full of rage kills Claudius. Although it might be considered a whimsical act of sudden outbursting revenge that might be pardoned in the Elizabethan law, critics who consider it only as an insignificant and isolated incident misunderstand the continuity of the play that demands a Hamlet that, paradoxically, does not change: he is still the passionate man in 5.2, but the difference that is perceived in him is the result of a difference that he sees in himself and what his function is. He aligns himself with the demonic but finds relief when he considers himself an agent of the divine after all. His will is not his own but of the one who has sent him.

I have already quoted Hamlet's line to Claudius when he finally is able to kill him: "Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damnèd Dane,/ Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?/ Follow my mother" (5. 2. 270—72). Although Hamlet quite likely means by "Follow my mother" that Claudius is now following his mother to death by the same poison that killed her, there is a terrible nuance in these words as well. "Follow my mother" to death, but

more specifically the correct question should still prevail: *where?* The place where Claudius is going is not Purgatory, since Purgatory is, according to the Catholic dogma, the place of the righteous to be purged to be able to enter heaven. Hamlet, as has been discussed earlier, is eager to send Claudius to hell. When Hamlet calls Claudius "incestuous", such an adjective would also befit his mother, since not only was it illegal in Elizabethan law, it was, in Hamlet's mind, against nature.

Many critics are so mesmerized by revenge and blood that they, in their eagerness to throw away morality skipping this passage altogether, fail to see this passage from its proper perspective. I believe that Shakespeare intentionally made Hamlet speak with the voice and words of the Ghost in this brief extract, easily lost in the violence of the scene and the whimsical frenzy of the action. However, at this stage the most shocking revelation should be the realization that the words of the Ghost and Hamlet intertwine and are one and the same.

Although many overlook this, one has to stop and consider: this is the doings of a man who has, in the words of Horatio, lost his "sovereignty of reason" (1. 4. 57). Hamlet's change, which many see as positive, is actually not so positive at all: his change, I argue, is merely another manifestation of him having lost his "sovereignty of reason" — in the beginning he fell because he let the Ghost lure him; in the end he falls because he has let his own imagination lure him to believe that somehow what he has done is justified. This is not a change for better, merely another emanation of a fundamental problem.

In breve, I have argued and showed from the text that Hamlet, although apparently a changed man in 5.1 and 5.2, is transformed only in the sense that he has now justified his quandary by absorbing the role of a divine minister of retribution, which allows him to justify his means towards his ends.

5.3 Coda: Destroying the Tragic in the Tragedy

I will conclude this analysis with a short consideration of a possible counterargument that might be proposed against this study.

To begin with, one could argue that the reading presented in this study completely destroys the tragic in the tragedy, a valid argument especially when considering *Hamlet* as a tragedy for the reasons of his procrastination to kill, his failure to adhere to his father's command and his mistrust of motifs as well as his death by the machinations of his adversary, Claudius. However, this study has tried to advance an interpretation where such reasons would appear more centrifugal than centripetal. If one considers *Hamlet* as involving a demonic spirit luring a melancholic son to avenge his father's murder, ending up destroying the whole Danish kingdom as well as the lives of many along the way, the tragic in the tragedy still prevails and only the perspective has shifted: the tragedy would now not lie in Hamlet failing to obey the Ghost's command but in the fact that he obeys. His passion and succumb into revenge leads not only in the destruction of himself but also of Ophelia, Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Laertes, Gertrude and Claudius. In other words, one does not have to endorse revenge as morally ethical to consider *Hamlet* as a great tragedy. Although I agree that at the moment Hamlet acts in a violent frenzy it does not justify anything: he chooses to kill Claudius, in itself a very tragic moment.

6 CONCLUSION AND FOR FURTHER STUDY

In this study I have presented a reading according to which the Ghost is demonic and that there is ample textual evidence to lucidly prove such an argument to be correct. This owes much to the classic study by Prosser

(1971), whose work is, however, nowadays largely forgotten. In what I differ with Prosser's study is that she considers the Ghost's demonic origin more of an enigma, whose richness depends on the ambiguity and uncertainty. In this study, however, I have shown that the tragedy of *Hamlet* does not collapse when one sees the Ghost as demonic, instead opening new possibilities of interpretation. One major new interpretation that I have not found in the earlier literature is my argument that *Hamlet* is not a redemptionist play in the sense that would see Hamlet as finding peace towards the end — instead, I have argued that the tragedy of *Hamlet* not only arises from Hamlet aligning himself with the satanic but also from his strong need of self-justification, through which he is able to see himself not as a murderer but as heaven's scourge and minister. This, I have argued, is his flaw that leads to his total collapse — possibly without him ever realizing it.

With *Hamlet* and any Shakespeare text that exists in multiple versions there exists the textual problem. This problem I have solved by using the Folio text, based on the paradigm-shifting work by Blayney (1997) and Erne (2003) who have shown abundant evidence for the literary development of Shakespeare's works up to the Folio text, which should in fact be considered a literary document.

The problem of *Hamlet* is, however, somewhat academic in the sense that in the academia the meaning of the play has changed radically with the literary-political movements. Nowadays it is fashionable to read either postmodernism, discourse analysis or New Historicism into everything, and this study, although it does use New Historicism as one of its methods, is trying to subsume it into the literary, where the historical would only serve its function in clarifying possible misconceptions so that the text would become clearer to understand. This is a great challenge, and this study has tried to open a pathway to literary studies that would not misuse the historical, political or societal. Instead, this study has tried — some could

argue paradoxically — retain *Hamlet* in the domain of the literary, not socio-political. Because of this, the method of close-reading has been utilized, so that the focus would be on the text, and the historical would methodically only fall under instrumentalist functions. I have thus tried to solve the restrictions of New Historicism by balancing it with literary analysis, primarily close-reading. This can be seen as having served the main objective that was to allow the historical only to subserviently clarify the literary. Without close-reading this study would have been reduced to the mere socio-political.

Without question one must acknowledge the natural restrictions in a study such as the present one. For example, the scope of this study is much larger than the format allowed for it, resulting in possible difficulties for in-depth arguments in all areas. Also, this study would have merited from closer textual examination, which expertise in Shakespeare's blank verse and its nuances would have given; an expertise that I confess of not possessing.

Despite these shortcomings, the possibility of viewing the Ghost as demonic should offer ample ideas of investigation into Shakespeare on areas that might exist but have not exhausted their possibilities: demonology and the supernatural in general in Shakespeare, either seen through the folkloristic or the Christian perspective; the concept of an untrusted narrator in Shakespeare based on the Ghost in this analysis; the detective genre in Shakespeare, where either a character or the audience is considered as a part of solving a mystery. As I have no interest in the biographical, this study should not be used to argue anything concerning Shakespeare's person in itself, and the focus of investigation should be on his writings instead. If focusing on *Hamlet*, the systematic analysis of religious symbolism is still considered a subservient genre in itself.

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