# THERE'S A GHOST IN EVERY MIRROR:
# The Identity of the Ghost In *Hamlet*

Bachelor's thesis

Antti Keisala

University of Jyväskylä
Department of Languages
English
April 21st, 2009

HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
KIELTEN LAITOS

Antti Keisala
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The Identity of the Ghost In *Hamlet*

Kandidaatintutkielma

Englannin kieli
Huhtikuu 2009 34 sivua

Tutkielmassani käsittelen William Shakespearean näytelmän *Hamlet* keskeisen hahmon, Haamun, identiteettiä katolisessa ja protestanttisessa teologiassa eriävän kiirastuliopin kautta avautuvana ristiriitana. Tulkitsen Haamun hahmoa perinteistä skeptisemmästä näkökulmasta, jonka pohjalta pyrin löytämään tekstistä viitteitä siihen, että Haamun identiteetti ei missään vaiheessa ole suoraan johdettavissa siihen perinteiseen tulkintaan, jonka mukaan se olisi Hamletin isä. Pyrin valottamaan jo 1500-luvun lopulla Englannissa vaikuttaneen protestanttisen maailmankuvan valossa teoksen kuvauksia Haamun alkuperästä sekä analysoimaan, millä tavalla sen kanssa tekemisissä olevat henkilöhahmot siihen reagoivat näytelmän eri vaiheissa. Erityisesti kiinnitän huomioita niihin kohtauksiin, joissa Haamu on läsnä, sekä ottamaan kantaa vallalla oleviin käsityksiin kohtauksista, jotka Haamuun liittyen ovat olleet joko vaikeaselkoisia tai, kuten tutkielmassani väitän, väärintulkittuja.

Tutkin Shakespearen näytelmää eritoten kriittisen diskurssianalyysin ja kulttuurintutkimuksen menetelmin, käyttäen hyväksi Aristoteleen käsitteitä *katharsis* sekä *hamartia* sekä lähiluvun käsitettä koettaessani ymmärtää Haamun funktiota näytelmän dynaamisena osana sekä sen vuorovaikutusta Hamletin funktioon näytelmässä.

Tutkimuksissani selvisi, että kaksi perinteistä tulkintaa näytelmästä voidaan osoittaa virheellisiksi: ensinnäkin tulkinta siitä, että Haamu on Hamletin isä, on tekstipohjaisissa perusteluissaan vajavainen; uskon kuitenkin, että Shakespeare tahallisesti ohjaa lukijaa tässäkin tapauksessa kahtaalle, mutta tutkimukseni osoittaa, että on turha luottaa Haamun identiteettiin aksiomaattisesti. Toiseksi väitän tulosteni perusteella, että Hamlet toteuttaa Haamun antaman imperatiivin ei niinkään viimeisessä näytöksessä Claudiuksen vaan Poloniuksen kuoleman kautta, ja että väitökset Hamletin viivyttelystä ovat ylimitoitettuja; mikäli Hamletille jokin hamartia tahdotaan suoda, on se hänen epäjohdonmukainen uskonsa Haamun identiteettiin.

Kandidaatintutkielman formaatin asettamien rajoitusten seurauksena esimerkiksi Horation hahmon tarkastelua suhteessa Haamun identiteettiin sekä Hamletin syntaksin tutkimusta on ollut mahdotonta toteuttaa. Myöskään kaikkia näytelmässä esiintyviä nyansseja on ollut mahdotonta sisällyttää tähän tutkielmaan, ja esimerkiksi Hamletin iambisen pentametrin variointia sekä hänen hendiadyksen käyttöänsä ei ole tässä tutkimuksessa tutkittu.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, Hamlet, cultural studies, critical discourse analysis

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In academic studies religion has always been a controversial topic. Concerning Shakespeare, most of the intellectuals that offer their readings are either deeply naturalist in their thinking or have been raised into the mindset believing, as Levine (1962:539) does, that to apply a Christian framework for *Hamlet* is ”superimposition” and ”unjustifiable” (ibid.). At its worst, naturalist literary criticism not only denies the *possibility* of a Christian framework in a work of art, in this study-case *Hamlet*, it actually diminishes the play when such a framework is implicit already. Yet the rise of New Historicism and cultural studies has opened the door for *culture* to enter the analysis of the work. On the other hand, at its worst New Historicism reduces Shakespeare into a vessel of social energy although Greenblatt's criticism of consigning Elizabethan literature from its culture is admirable (see Greenblatt 1989, 2001, 2004).

Christianity itself is a framework for the Western culture. Thus, to ”superimpose” Christianity as a framework to *Hamlet* is impossible because Christianity as a cultural force is implicit in it already. This does not equate Shakespeare or Hamlet with pious believers but implies that Christian theology provides a *possible* reading for the play considering that the references to said theology are myriad in the play already. In other words, not to allow a *possible* reading within the Christian framework is not only unscientific—a form of prejudiced academism not fit for the twenty-first century—but harmful as literary criticism should not delimit the richness of the work of art, regardless of whether one shares said believes or not.

In this thesis this Christian dimension has been allowed. Hamlet is not viewed as particularly pious but rather as someone whose logic and cosmology have been influenced by Protestant theology. This has allowed the Ghost's function to be viewed from a fresh perspective, as the friction between the Catholic and Protestant theology concerning the existence of Purgatory is crucial in the analysis of its origins. This thesis will thus argue that the traditional interpretation of the Ghost as Hamlet's father should be questioned and is based not on textual evidence but on the naturalist prejudice towards Christian influences in Shakespeare's work that prevails in the academic society.

This study consists of five sections. After this introduction the critical propulsion concerning the Ghost's identity and Hamlet's doubt is clarified. The third section introduces the data and the methods used in its retrieval, after which begins the analysis of the play. The final section draws this study into a conclusion, discusses its flaws and presents possibilities for further study.

## 2 EARLIER STUDIES ON *HAMLET*

This section, in which I shall introduce the framework for this study amidst earlier *Hamlet* studies, consists of six chapters. 2.1 offers a brief synopsis of the play. In 2.2 I shall introduce the religious-historical climate of Elizabethan England in the beginning of the seventeenth century and in 2.3 present the critical opinion concerning the Ghost, which is divided in two: 2.3.1 examines its identity and 2.3.2 its ephemeral presence in the play. In 2.4 the change in Hamlet's function in the middle of the play in its proper critical context is explained and finally in 2.5 the research questions will be posited.

### 2.1 A Synopsis of the Play

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 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" (1.1.25), a Ghost, which then appears in the form of the dead King (1.1.41). Hamlet is informed, to whom the Ghost propounds that it is his father, murdered by Claudius, and gives an imperative to revenge his "foul murther" (1.5.25), hurrying away as it is "[d]oom'd for a certain term to walk the night,/And for the day confin'd to fast in fires,/Till the foul crimes done in [his] days of nature/Are burnt and purg'd away." (1.5.9-13)

Hamlet prompts by his behaviour 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 murder of his father. Claudius is shocked at the implications and confesses in private prayer, overheard by Hamlet who, for fear of sending Claudius to Heaven, does not kill him. 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 and returns, sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths instead.

Ophelia goes mad over her father's death and later drowns. Laertes is enraged at Hamlet and together with the King he 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, yet when the Queen drinks of the poisoned cup and dies Hamlet discovers the plot and in a whim of rage kills Claudius. Laertes, then dying of the poison.

### 2.2 The Religious Climate Of the Late 16th Century in England And *Hamlet*

In this chapter I will give a condensed introduction to the theological background for *Hamlet*, written in the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The purpose of this chapter is to provide elementary knowledge about the relation of Catholicism and Protestantism that most likely influenced Shakespeare during his work as a dramatist in late 1500s and early 1600s.

In 1509 Henry VIII ascended to the throne of England at the age of 17 and during his lifetime England moved away 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 initiate a doctrinal revolution (ibid.). Although considered by some merely a sum of odd coincidences (Haig 1994:14), 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 Haig 1994 for more information).

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 al-

lowed 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. This art includes the play *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, likely written 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 common 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.

As a consequence of the Reformation, 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 *Hamlet* 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.

Now that even the bare minimum of the theology of *Hamlet* has been explained, in the next chapter I will explore the critical consensus on the Ghost and how previous studies have examined it.

### 2.3 The Ghost

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

### 2.3.1 "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 subchapter I will explain the critical ambivalence on the subject.

In short, the two polar opposites are represented by Bradley (1958), and Prosser (1977): 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. For example, Bloom (2003:33) believes that the Ghost is indubitably Hamlet's father without any evidence; for Bradley (1958:86) Christian elements of motivation are absurd. Axiomatically critics do as Garber (2004:469, 477) does and equate the Ghost with Hamlet's father without any inquiries. Some are as hostile as Levine (1962:543) who proclaims that to superimpose a Christian framework for the play is "unjustifiable" (ibid.).

The divergent argument of Prosser (1977:119) 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 augmented the academic atmosphere where even the cultural reality of Christianity has been downplayed. Nevertheless, Prosser's controversial argument remains as a minority opinion: for example, whereas she finds in Horatio's inquiries to the Ghost in 1.1 (cf. chapter 4.1 below) perfectly suitable rhetoric to be used with an unknown spirit (Prosser 1977:120-21), critics more often 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) summarises the voice of opposition toward Prosser and the modern Historicists (of the two only Prosser predates Jenkins). He argues 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 vivacious Christian culture of the time and the notion that Shakespeare wrote and was read and seen by his contemporari-

es—and for one's contemporaries the drama is signalled through a shared framework of ideas and events of a shared reality, which presently includes the revolutionary concepts of the Reformation.

Perhaps the most politically correct current view is that of Greenblatt (2008:1683) and Nuttall (2007:203-205) who emphasize that the identity of the Ghost is ambiguous. As reported by Nuttall (2007:205), the Ghost is never called—neither in the scene directions (SD) 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 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.

Whereas the other side of this study relies on theological questions, the other is purely literary. Mainly it concerns itself with the question of the dynamics of the play, specifically how the Ghost's function in the play diminishes from the initiator of action to defunct inexistence. This question will be the topic of the next chapter.

### 2.3.2 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 dynamical 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 anymore.

### 2.4 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 subchapter 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 182:142).

As observed by Erne (2003:236), the closet-scene is at the epicentre 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 1982:143-44. See 143-47 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.).

Although this study does not concern itself with the question of Hamlet's delay 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 the scene 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)—for Bloom both Hamlet's revenge motifs and the function of the Ghost are"defunct" (ibid.)

### 2.5 The Research Questions

As it stands this study tries to show that the Christian elements are an implicit part of Shakespeare and *Hamlet*, and that they reinforce the play rather than reduce its power.

This study will explore whether or not the Ghost is Hamlet's father, and whether one may find a convincing argument from the text itself. An underlying question is whether for Hamlet, who is a grand poet himself (Bloom 2003:11), the Purgatory is but a poet's fable and as a consequence the spirit claiming to be his father's spirit a demon. Also of interest for this study is to show that Hamlet did in fact avenge his father's death and that this scene, 3.4, is the culmination of the Ghost's appearance in the play.

# 3 DATA AND METHODS

In this section I will discuss how my data has been extracted and the methods I have used in its extraction. First, in 3.1, I will dwell on the details concerning the source text used and then in 3.2 introduce some of the concepts that I have applied to its analysis.

## 3.1 William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

I have used as my data the play *Hamlet* (1603-23) by William Shakespeare and particularly concentrated on the scenes that involve the character of the Ghost either directly or indirectly (it appears only thrice, in scenes 1.1, 1.3 and 3.4 and speaks only in two). *Hamlet* is an ideal play for analysis not only for the clear theological tenor of the play but also for the breadth of its expressive power and its complex dynamical nuances both in its language and structural dynamism. Furthermore, literary criticism has offered an abundance of opinions about it, yet not exhaustively on the topics that will be examined in this thesis.

From amidst the complicated textual history of the play (for summaries see Erne 2003 and Thompson and Taylor 2006a), the perfect edition is almost impossible to find making it most useful to compare between different editions. The difficulty is to be comparative enough yet not to the point of excess when reference to many editions only confuses. I have solved this dilemma by using as my primary text *The Riverside Shakespeare: Second Edition* (Evans, gen. ed.) and as secondary sources the Arden Shakespeare editions by Jenkins (1982) and Thompson and Taylor (2006a and 2006b) as well as those offered by Bevington (2004), Edwards (2003) and Greenblatt et al. (2008). This comparative literary study amounts to its most efficient yet simultaneously a consistent source edition brings clarity. Thus I have used the *Riverside* in all the references not only to *Hamlet* but to *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* as well. Consequently, all line references are to the Riverside edition

The reason the Riverside is used over Norton, Bevington, Oxford or Arden is its faithulness not only to comparative literary study but to Elizabethan spelling. It uses brackets to make a distinction between source editions of *Hamlet* and its archaic spellings reveal much of the multilayered word-play Shakespeare employs. *The Oxford Shakespeare* has been ig-

nored because it fallaciously attempts to construct an early playtext and thus omits several passages.

The play divides in five acts and an irregular number of scenes. Whilst not likely correspondent to Shakespeare's intentions it has been retained because of the source edition and because only using scene-numbering is not necessary for the sake of this study.

### 3.2 Methods And Concepts

On a general level, this study is situated in the domains of critical discourse analysis, cultural studies and literary theory. In this chapter the aforementioned methods will be enlarged on first, after which the key concepts, *katharsis* and *hamartia*, and foreshadowing and close-reading, will be augmented.

In some ways my thesis overlaps with the critical discourse analysis of Fairclough (1995) according to which language can be defined as a form of social practice, focusing on the ways social and political dominance is reproduced in the given text. Despite its limitations the advantage is that it allows *Hamlet* to be seen as an entity in which we can see traces of the religious power struggle of Elizabethan England.

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 by particularly relying upon New Historicist ideas concerning the influence of society on the artist, yet I have modified this theory by the means of the critical discourse analysis of Fairclough (1995) and literary studies, especially by exploring the syntax, structure and rhetoric of the data, which allows Shakespeare to be Shakespeare and not a mere product of Elizabethan culture. In other words, New Historicism is used attenuatedly to expose the influence of the Elizabethan culture, influenced in itself by the power-struggle of the Catholic and Anglican churches, in Shakespeare's work.

Lastly this study takes from literary theory. As a concept it is colossal and encompasses the wide variety of academic thought, yet below the most important terms and their meanings will be elaborated from the perspective of Shakespearean criticism.

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, 2005 and Nuttall 2007, Bloom 1998, 2003, 2004), and as the result of this the intellectual atmosphere of the academia should now ably 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 to a godlike status of cognition. 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, and that Shakespeare as an individual had great cognitive power which Bloom (2004:31) calls "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.

In short, included in the study are the scenes in which the Ghost appears or those which are directly related to it. The data is analysed by relying on or in constant dialogue with religious criticism, New Historicism, cultural studies and discourse analysis. The data is viewed as the artist's statement in which the beliefs of the time are referred to, yet do not wholly constitute, the data, yet in which understanding of the culture enhances the understanding of the work of art.

Before proceeding to the analysis I will shortly introduce the most prevalent literary devices used in this thesis to explore the play.

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)", the concept of

*katharsis* will be used in this study to examine the critical scene 3.4 in which Hamlet by accident kills Polonius.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *hamartia* as "the fault or error which entails the destruction of the tragic hero (with particular reference to Aristotle's *Poetics*)". The original Greek word *hamartia* has its root in *hamartein* that negates the word *nemertes,* which means "someone hitting the mark, that is to say, who does not err, who speaks the truth; its corresponding adverb indicates clarity, that no mistake has been made" (Senn 1996:105). It is often used to refer to Hamlet's inability to avenge his father's death sooner.

Foreshadowing, the literary device used by the author to give clues concerning things that occur later in the story, has a prominent role in this study because with this concept I will examine the clues that anticipate the Ghost's appearance and refer to its identity. It has been used in close relation with the method of close-reading.

Close-reading has been a useful tool in analyzing *Hamlet* as it has provided the study with the necessary tools to examine the text that carries Shakespeare's intended meaning and through poetic reference and use of rhetoric conveys a vast structure of ideas and clues. 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.

# 4 ANALYSIS

In this section Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is studied from the concoction of the Catholic and Protestant cosmologies, of which the latter had effaced Purgatory. In other words, the Ghost will be examined as a manifestation *within* the Protestant cosmology, and it will be shown that such an interpretation is attainable. The play is examined chronologically with special emphasis on the scenes where the Ghost appears or where it is mentioned.

## 4.1 The First Appearance of the Ghost in 1.1

The first scene of the play is built around the suspense of the encounter with the Ghost, yet of the 175 lines in the scene the Ghost speaks none and is on stage during 29 lines. The opening dialogue between Barnardo and Marcellus, two sentinels, sets a dark and suspicious mood, through which the Ghost's arrival is superbly foreshadowed: at arrival Barnardo seems very nervous (1-3); the air is unnaturally cold (8); Marcellus' line "you arrive most carefully upon your hour" (6) can be interpret as "you come very cautiously"; the first greeting, "Long live the king!" (3), is grotesquely ironic as the king has just died and his brother has risen to the throne. Barnardo and Horatio, his "rivals" (13) to the watch arrive and Horatio, who has been brought there specifically to talk to the apparition, is skeptical concerning the manifestation, concerning which Marcellus gives an elaborate speech. This is disrupted by the sudden appearance of the Ghost.

### 4.1.1. Why the Ghost is Mute and Flees

The Ghost disappears as quickly as it appeared. Horatio questions it, as seen in Example 1*:*

Example 1.

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.

(*Hamlet,* 1.1.45-48)

After line 48 the Ghost mutely stalks away. Thompson and Taylor (2006a:153) are right to explain this passage by saying that presently Horatio concedes that the Ghost looks like the king yet not that it is him, yet they wrongly assume that the Ghost is "offended" (49) only because of the verb "usurp'st" and because of "an apparent threat of violence" (ibid.). They fail to see that the Ghost is offended not after the word "usurp'st" but "By heaven I charge thee speak." Considering that the men themselves realize they cannot harm it in any way ("We do it wrong being so majestical/To offer it the show of violence,/For it is as the air, invulnerable,/And our vain blows malicious mockery." (141-145) 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). Therefore the Ghost flees because otherwise it would have had to reveal its identity, which, if it flees because of a charge in the name of God, is of a demon. The reason it wishes this information not to become known is that its intention to reach Prince Hamlet and have him kill the King.

### 4.1.2 Reappearance of the Ghost and the Significance of the Cock

Some lines later the Ghost reappears, says nothing even if urged to by Horatio, and disappears at the crowing of the cock. Marcellus gives an explanation for this (See Example 2):

> Example 2.
>
> It faded on the crowing of the cock.
> Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
> Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
> This bird of dawning singeth all night long,
> And they say no spirit dare stir aboard,
> The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
> No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
> So hallowed, and so gracious, is that time.
>
> (*Hamlet*, 1.1.157-164)

Horatio has observed that at the crowing the Ghost "started like a guilty thing/Upon a fearful summons" (148-49) and now Marcellus tells of the common belief that the con-

stantly crowing cock kept evil spirits away during the Christmas night. Marcellus' conclusion, based on Horatio's account, is that the spirit they have just seen is likely an evil spirit (Horatio responds with skeptic stoicism that he "in part believes it" [165]).

After this they decide that the ghost will surely speak to Hamlet, the Prince, because the apparition assumed the form of the dead king perhaps with the intention to find Hamlet.

### 4.2 The Report to Hamlet

Following Hamlet's first great soliloquy in 1.2.129-159, Horatio and the sentinels arrive to Hamlet. Horatio reveals that they believe to have seen the dead king the night before. Behind Hamlet's bewilderment ("'Tis very strange" [220]) is deep discontent when Horatio reveals the ghost vanished as the cock crowed. "But this troubles me" (224) is Hamlet's response to Horatio who says they came to him out of duty. Hamlet sees in Horatio's argument the intrinsic illation made by Horatio in 1.1.171-73 that the spirit will speak to Hamlet because it looks like Hamlet's father. Horatio and the sentinels have grown more confident that it is Hamlet's father, yet to this Hamlet answers that such news trouble him. Hamlet's suspicion is also marked in delineated in his otherwise fierce remark that "If it assume my noble father's person,/I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape/And bid me hold my peace" (243-45). The important part of this phrase is his use of the word *if* in the beginning, the verb *assume* (in the sense of "taking on an appearance") in the middle and the noun *person* in the end of the first line. Although Hamlet is resolute to speak to it, he seems not to care whether it is a demon or not. Yet when Horatio and the sentinels are gone, Hamlet says to himself:

> Example 3.
>
> 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.
>
> (*Hamlet*, 1.2.253-56)

Branagh has Hamlet examine a book on demonology after this encounter in his film *Hamlet* (1996), which well captures the theological awareness he must have gained in Witten-

berg, and the deep anxiety he feels about the identity of the Ghost. Thompson and Taylor (2006a:188) note that when Hamlet speaks of ”all is not well” and ”foul play” in this context he is unaware of the connection the others have made between the Ghost and the state of Denmark. Not that he would not be able to make such a connection himself, but the otherwise personal language speaks more of personal than political anguish: in this passage Hamlet senses that something devilish is in the works.

### 4.3 The Second Appearance of the Ghost in 1.4-5

The following night Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus go to the platform to meet the Ghost. This time Hamlet’s exposition of the current frivolity of Claudius’ court is cut short by the appearance of the Ghost.

#### 4.3.1 Hamlet’s Reaction to the Ghost in 1.5

As the Ghost enters Hamlet’s first reaction is a cry to the heavens: ”Angels and ministers of grace defend us!” (1.4.39) Wright (1991:186) shows that this is 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”.

Example 4.

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
*Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,*
*Bring with thee airs from 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 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 interred
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?

(*Hamlet*, 1.4.39-57, italics added)

The first important are italicized in Example 4. Hamlet's rhetoric consists of a Protestant dichotomy and it dismisses the existence of Purgatory altogether. Thus in his mind the cosmology demands that the Ghost is either from Heaven or hell. This is in stark contrast with Horatio's plea in 1.1.130-31 where he asks whether he could do something to ease its pain, which is very purgatorial language.

To the modern reader Hamlet's line "Thou com'st in such a questionable shape/That I will speak to thee" is difficult, yet it means simply "propitious to conversation, affable" (Schmidt 1962:931). 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". Hamlet disregards whether the Ghost is heavenly or not. In fact, whereas in 1.1 Horatio follows the Scriptural advice to test the spirits ("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, King James Version]) Hamlet does the opposite: what he says is that "although I should ask where you come from I will not, because you look so friendly, and instead will speak to you". As has been seen, Hamlet made his mind to converse with the Ghost already in Example 3. He goes further and willingly names the Ghost "Hamlet", father, based solely on its appearance. Hamlet has thus arrived to a paradox, as none of his words betray a belief in Purgatory, yet it seems that Hamlet's reason for the disregard of such theology is the purgatorial appearance of the Ghost: he knows it cannot come neither from Heaven nor Purgatory but cannot accept that it might come from hell.

The Ghost beckons Hamlet to follow him and Horatio and Marcellus try to stop him. Horatio warns him:

Example 5.

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 assume some other horrible form

Which might deprive your sovereignity of reason
And draw you into madness?

(*Hamlet*, 1.4.69-74)

Horatio is cautious, and his gloomy list proves he fears that the Ghost is a demon: now friendly, later revealing its "horrible form".

Yet Hamlet knows his Scriptures and answers: "I do not set my life at a pin's fee,/And for my soul, what can it do to that,/Being a thing immortal as itself?" This is a reference to Matthew 10:28: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (KJV) In this passage Jesus refers to God as the only one able to destroy both soul and body.

Hamlet follows the Ghost and the first dialogue between the Ghost and Hamlet ensues.

### 4.3.2 Ambiguous Testimony

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 exposition concerning its identity:

Example 6.

My hour is almost come
When I to sulph'rous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.

(*Hamlet*, 1.5.3-4)

This passage is marvellously ambiguous as one may interpret this to refer to the Purgatory, yet just as well to the horrible torments of hell. The Scriptures supports the latter interpretation as the Revelation tells that the fiery furnace is reserved for the wicked demons of Satan (Revelation 20:10, 14-15). The Ghost continues:

Example 7.

I am thy father's spirit,
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confin'd to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purg'd away. But that I am forbid

> To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
> I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
> . . .
> But this eternal blazon must not be
> To ears of flesh and blood.
>
> (*Hamlet*, 1.5.9-16, 21-22)

The Ghost obviously wants Hamlet to think that it comes from the Purgatory: ”fast in fires” (11), ”the foul crimes” (12) and ”burnt and purg’d away” (13) are very pious language. It does not reveal where it comes from yet it calls it the ”prison-house” (14). Although the idea of purgatorial punishment indeed seems prison-like, theologically speaking the Purgatory is not a ”prison-house”: the soul, once purged, is let to Heaven. Hell, instead, is a prison as the soul has no hope at all of vindication.

### 4.3.3 Swearing to the Ghost in 1.5

The first shortcoming of editorial judgment that ignores the possible demonic origin of the Ghost is the usual editorial interference in 1.5, where the Ghost compels Hamlet to swear on his sword, and also make his fellows swear; even the *Riverside Shakespeare*, used in this study as the primary source text, makes them swear at 1.5.81. Nonetheless, the original texts (Q1, Q2 and F) remain silent about the occurence.

Modern editors consider the scene incomprehensible without the 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. In other words, The scene is not at all incomprehensible, and the decision by 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 familiary 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 wrong to assume that both the readers and Hamlet have accepted the Ghost's account. He goes even further astray by claiming 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 this study suggests, there is deep anxiety in Hamlet's mind concerning the origins of the Ghost apparent based on not only the self-conscious Protestant language of Hamlet (there is a clear reference to the Diet of Worms in 1521 in 4.3.19-21 ["a/certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at/him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet"]) but also based on the Protestant theology that renders the existence of Purgatory nonexistent, linked by the fact that Hamlet is a student in Wittenberg (1.2.113), famous for Martin Luther.

Jordan (2008) recognizes that Hamlet does not swear. This is because Hamlet thinks it (the blade and the hilt form a cross) dangerous as he cannot be sure whether the spirit is demonic or not. If one is to insist Hamlet have his *hamartia* it would be his illogical wish to access his dead father even if his *logic* (influenced by Protestant theology) would prove it a fallacy. This is in no way in conflict with his assertion that the Ghost is honest for even if the apparition told the truth it could still be the Devil:

> [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, The Geneva Bible)

One could argue that Shakespeare did not know about such doctrine, yet in *Macbeth*, written within five years from *Hamlet* (Bevington 2004:1255), there is the following speech by the character of Banquo:

> Example 8.
>
> 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.—
>
> (*Macbeth,* 1.4.120-126)

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* (Jordan 2008).

Based on this anxiety Hamlet does not swear on the cross (the sword) and instead tries to move away from the Ghost (1.5.156-7, 162-63) 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).

In conclusion, this scene is hardly irrational and does not need editorial interference because the whole point is that Hamlet *does not* swear, that the Ghost follows him trying to convince him to do so and then vanishes because the morning drives it away.

### 4.4 The Doubt of Hamlet 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. Much of the play from now on concentrates on this aspect: his 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 as is evident from Example 4 (ch. 4.3.1) despite the Ghost's

claims to have returned whence. He refers to death as an "undiscovered country" (3.1.78) whence no traveller returns.

Hamlet devices a play with a playacting company that has a arrived at Elsinore. In Example 9 Hamlet gives his reasons to device *The Mousetrap:*

Example 9.

Hum—I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been strook so to the soul, that presently
They have proclaim'd their malefactions:
For murther, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murther of my father
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,
I'll tent him to the quick. If 'a do blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be a [devl'], and the [dev'l] 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.

(*Hamlet*, 3.1.588-605)

Hamlet refers to 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (cf. section 4.3.3 above) in l. 598-603 and consequently devices a play with a fratricidal scene. From the King's reaction he thus plots to see whether the Ghost has spoken the truth or not.

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" (3.2.244). 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?" (3.2.287).

There are two errors in his reasoning: firstly, he has made the king's nephew to kill the king, and Hamlet himself is the nephew to Claudius. Thus he 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 and thus is consolidated there, 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 (Bloom 2003:4) he is not distrustful enough. The Ghost's effect does, however, erode in the central scene 3.4, although it is already too late then, as the King has already grown suspicious.

### 4.5 The Third And Final Appearance of the Ghost

The Ghost appears for the last time in 3.4, also known as the "closet scene" as it takes place in the private room of Gertrude (not a bedroom; cf. Thompson and Taylor 2006a:333). The King has seen *The Mousetrap* (3.2) and on his way to his mother's chamber Hamlet passes by Claudius, whom he overhears praying and confessing the murder (3.3.35-72). For fear that Claudius' might be saved Hamlet spares him (3.3.73-4). In the Queen's chamber Polonius has counselled with the Queen and has hid himself behind an arras. Hamlet arrives and what follows is a dialogue of wit and agitation between Hamlet and Gertrude (3.4.7-19) which leads Hamlet to assault his mother and Gertrude to cry for help. What follows is discussed below and is worthy to be quoted at length.

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. . ." (3.1.123-24) 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 we consider the final duel between Hamlet and Laertes—the murdering of the King is so impulsive that would warrant Everett's argument (ibid.), but when we only look at the final act we loose the focus and actually ignore the one scene where Hamlet himself thinks he has just killed the King:

Example 10.

POLONIUS *(Behind)* What ho, help!
HAMLET (*Drawing)* How now? A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead! *(Kills Polonius through the arras.)*
POLONIUS *(Behind)* O, I am slain.
QUEEN O me, what hast thou done?
HAMLET Nay, I know not, is it the King?

QUEEN 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.
QUEEN As kill a king!
HAMLET Ay, lady, it was my word. *(Parts the arras and discovers Polonius)*

(*Hamlet*, 3.4.23-30)

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 Hamlet 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”: his *katharsis* has thus been completed. Then the Ghost appears for the last time.

In the performance tradition of *Hamlet* the most famous Q1 SD that is left untouched 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 night-gown, stripped of power. The Ghost has diminished into an insignificant entity not even seen by its supposedly own wife (ibid.).

Rather than viewing the Ghost as a failed king-husband the interpretation offered in this study invites to view the Ghost as the deceiver. Hamlet has avenged his father’s murder and a new revenge cycle has begun and in this cycle the Ghost has no function anymore, and, for fear of becoming defunct, it tries via the final plea of sympathy to trick Hamlet.

The timing of the Ghost’s arrival is thus crucial in determining its motifs. Hamlet has just begun a passionate description of the difference between his father and Claudius, and at that precise moment the Ghost appears: ”A king of shreds and patches—/Save me, and hover o’er me with your wings,/You heavenly guards! What would your gracious figure?” (3.4.102-5). Hamlet refers to the Ghost as the king of ”shreds and patches” (102), and at which point the Ghost enters wearing the ”night-gowne”.

An important detail is Hamlet's invocation: again he invokes the aid of Heaven, and the final plea on the Ghost's part is to "whet thy almost blunted purpose" (3.4.111). The Ghost knows that Hamlet has not delayed and that he has not been "tardy", a word used by Hamlet a moment earlier (3.4.106). It has come because it knows its time is running out.

### 4.6 Coda: The Rest Is Silence

After this a whole new play begins: Hamlet goes to England willingly and finds out that the king has given orders that he be killed there; he alters the message so that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die instead of him (5.2.1-62); he is then captured by pirates (4.6.15-22) and returns. Hamlet kills Claudius only in the whimsical end when he knows he is dying himself and has seen his mother poisoned by Claudius.

The Ghost is never mentioned again. One of his most famous lines in the play concerning providence betrays a new consciousness of fate, achieved after he has lost the ghost who has haunted him. Shakespeare had created a character full of tremour and courage in the face of death some years earlier in *Julius Caesar,* where Caesar has just been told about a terrifying dream by his wife Calphurnia:

> Example 11.
>
> Cowards die many times before their deaths,
> The valiant never taste of death but once.
> Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
> It seems to me most strange that men should fear,
> Seeing that death, a necessary end,
> Will come when it will come.
>
> *Enter a* SERVANT.
>
> What say the augurers?
>
> (*Julius Caesar,* 2.2.32-37)

Yet Shakespeare has Caesar still depend on the augurers. In *Hamlet* Hamlet moves beyond omens: death remains mysterious and providence conquers the devilish spirits. The Ghost has dispersed into oblivion; Hamlet is left with the consciousness of his own impending death, before which he is no longer obliged to avenge:

Example 12.

Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special
Providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be [now],
'tis not to come; if it be not come, it will be now; if
it be not now, yet it [will] come—the readiness is all.
Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows what is't to
leave betimes, let be.

(*Hamlet,* 5.2.219-224)

## 5 CONCLUSION AND FOR FURTHER STUDY

In this study I have criticized traditional Hamlet studies from what one may call *literary naturalism:* literary criticism that not only excludes the notion of God or theology on the level of interpretation but also on the level of characterization. In *Hamlet* such naturalism is apparent in how the character of the Ghost has been interpreted. By inserting the Catholic and Protestant theologies side by side within the framework of the play I have tried to analyze the Ghost as a likely demon that brings havoc to the play through Hamlet. I have argued that Hamlet's doubts about the Ghost's identity mature and reach their climax in the closet-scene where he kills Polonius believing him to be the King, thus avenging his father's death. I have argued that he indeed reaches his *katharsis* when killing Polonius, an act which releases him from all obligations to the Ghost, because of which the Ghost disappears from the play entirely and becomes defunct. I have also argued that Hamlet's final calm and resolution concerning fate, life and death are in part a result of Hamlet's final freedom from the imperative of a spirit he does not know but wants to trust.

Naturally due to its small size this study lacks the depth of a proper exploration of the rich dynamics of the play: I have not been able to study the character of Horatio, for example, and have only briefly touched upon his doubts concerning the Ghost's identity. I have not been able to trace Horatio through the play at all. Also whilst I have taken issue with some traditional interpretations I have viewed as misconceptions I have been unable to give an exhaustive list of such occurrences and have only dealt with the most famous ones, the question whether Hamlet and the company swear in 1.3 or not, whether *The Mousetrap* proves the Ghost is from Purgatory or not, and finally how in 3.4 Hamlet actually revenges his father. For further study one could examine in more detail the chronology of the play, Hamlet's doubt on word-level, the variation of his iambic pentameter in the course of the play and to examine more exhaustively the references to the contemporary Elizabethan culture.

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