

# The Mystery of Ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: A Twenty-First Century Interpretation of Infinite Possibilities of Meaning

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## ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's revenge play *Hamlet* contains a number of unclear and contradicting details. By providing the reader with a variety of options and encouraging them to consider the play critically, the author attempts to stimulate the reader's critical thought. The meaning contained in the gaps, discontinuities, contradictions and ambiguities forces the reader to reinterpret the author's style of reading. One way to accomplish the intended action when a statement has uncertainties, ambiguities or obscurity is to ask the speaker to make their intentions clear (Iser, 1980, 58). Shakespeare purposefully manipulates his audience's minds with psychological tricks. As the readers go through *Hamlet*, their creative imaginations go wild, resulting in a wide range of unique reactions that may be at odds with the play's intended meaning. Shakespeare wants his audience to be imaginative, but instead of using the text's abstract natural world, they create their own. The Ghost in *Hamlet*'s remains a mystery, much like the play itself. This paper "The Mystery of Ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: A Twenty-First Century Interpretation of Infinite Possibilities of Meaning" employs a post-structuralist and psychological viewpoint in addition to Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory of meaning to contextualize *Hamlet* and its ubiquity in the modern world. In particular, the study examines Shakespeare's use of the Ghost in the play to explore the significance of infinitely delaying the possibility of meaning through the use of ambiguities and contradictions.

**Key Words :** Ghost, *Hamlet*, Indeterminacy, Revenge Play, Shakespeare, Sentinel, Infinite, Contemprise, Ambiguities, Contradictions, Spectre, Catastrophic, Omniscient

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy, rife with illogical reasoning and vague concepts. The reader is presented with several options during the play, and they are expected to reply in accordance with those possibilities. The meanings underlying the gaps, breaks, contradictions and ambiguities compel the reader to reconsider how they understood the author's writing. Inquiring of the recipient, "who can then latch onto the speaker's intention and so enable the utterance to give rise to the action intended," is usually the best way to resolve these hazy and confusing situations (Iser, 1980, 58). Shakespeare is a master at tricking his audience's minds. People's imaginations run wild when they read *Hamlet*, which can result in varied interpretations of the

play that may not align with each other. Shakespeare attempts to keep the audience's ideas in check, but instead of doing so, he lets them wander and create a realistic reconstruction of the text's fantastical universe. The Ghost in *Hamlet* is every bit as bizarre as the play itself. Determining the type of enigma, the Ghost demands a very serious investigation. As a result, it has eluded the scrutiny of all. Horatio asks a silent ghost to "speak to me... speak to me... O Speak," but the ghost ignores him (1.1.132, 135, and 138).

It is thought-provoking for readers to decipher what the Ghost is trying to say because it refuses to respond to Horatio's questions. Horatio states, "This bodes some strange eruption to our state," in previous words (1.1.72).

The lack of speech from the Ghost heightens the anxiety surrounding the upcoming disclosure. At first, the Ghost reaches out to *Hamlet*. Shakespeare uses these precise gestures as a useful tool in his arsenal to draw in the audience's imagination. They are deliberate. When the Ghost says, "Mark me," it becomes silent in an attempt to lure attention to himself (1.5.2). Presumably, these two phrases serve as the sole introduction of the Ghost in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's introduction of the Ghost explores the ethereal realm of human existence, which makes it both lyrical and interesting.

Shakespeare wants the Ghost to seem completely armoured in order to suggest impending disaster. The armour and combative attitude of the phantom point to an imminent catastrophe. A few lines earlier, Horatio had established some narrative connections between past and present events in order to tell the tale of the armour. Old *Hamlet* donned the armour during his single-fight victory over old Fortinbras, which resulted in the ceding of a section of land to Denmark. One cannot not but ponder in uncertainty as a reader. With the ghost's presence, the reader is now warned of an impending tragic event. It is now *Hamlet's* responsibility to put things right.

The Ghost seeks to connect with *Hamlet* by saying, "I am thy father's spirit" (1.5.9). The spirit is reaching out to him. Since the Ghost's interaction with *Hamlet* had such a significant effect, few readers could view the Ghost as a "goblin condemned." Rather, they see Claudius as a tormented spirit pleading for the destruction of evil. Shakespeare has so, with a single amazing stroke, raised *Hamlet* to a higher poetic level. A reader in the modern era might write off the Ghost as little more than a plot device. But there existed a sincere belief in ghosts and occult powers during the Elizabethan period. According to Devlin (50), the sceptics assert that the Ghost manifests itself as "a saved Christian soul, temporarily suffering the fires of purgatory."

However, the reader comes across very few saved Christian souls because they are "confin'd to fast in fires, Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature. Are burnt and purg'd away (1.5.11-13)". It is still being purified, and his portrayal of hell demonstrates how evil he is. Furthermore, his thirst for vengeance is apostate unless we come to a different conclusion about that matter. The depravity of the conduct is revealed as the Ghost demands that *Hamlet* immediately exact revenge by any improbable means: "But however thou pursuest this act, Taint not thy mind." (1.5.45-85). When the revenge is to be taken

from Claudius, why the Ghost instructs *Hamlet* not to think about getting vengeance with his mother is a mystery to the reader. Due to her adultery while Senior *Hamlet* was alive, Old *Hamlet's* adoration for Gertrude had to have given way to contempt and hatred for her. Thus, the Ghost's longing cannot be explained by his seemingly boundless love for the queen. Readers learn of a king's abdication through the Ghost's narration. Along with the father's and husband's assets of his child and wife, respectively, a man's right to life has been infringed. It is only just that the son gets revenge for his father's death and the pain he endured while alive. A personal code of ethics can profoundly influence one's life, even though vengeance was not morally or rightfully acceptable during Elizabethan times. These characteristics make us more hostile toward Claudius and sympathetic toward the spirit. The reader is immediately struck by the contrast between the fully armored Ghost at the start of the play and the one reduced to a helpless avenger. A tragic play about tremendous vengeance was therefore put in motion by the author. As *Hamlet* is also not certain whether to believe in the Ghost, the 'to be or not to be' puzzle, which causes him to delay in making a decision, may reach a high lyrical point. Since *Hamlet* achieves literary grandeur by postponing the action and placing the play and *Hamlet* in a state of deferral, people have been reading and performing *Hamlet* for four centuries after its initial performance. When we examine *Hamlet* from the standpoint of Christian doctrine, we can clearly see its conflicts. Many people think that the Ghost's lair is a Catholic hell where sinners burn to make up for their transgressions. According to critic Dover Wilson, the play's linchpin is the Ghost, when he asserts that "remove it, and the play falls to pieces" and that he originates in purgatory and is the play's sole non-protestant (Wilson, 52-53). The Ghost is an essential character in the play since he establishes the scene for the narrative. His claim that he is the only non-Protestant character in the play is still somewhat accurate. Horatio is obviously a stoic Roman, and Claudius does not identify as a Protestant as a result of his arguments. In contrast, *Hamlet* is a devoted Protestant. Furthermore, a reader with keen eyes can see the Protestant view of the afterlife reflected in *Hamlet's* stark contrast between paradise and hell, leaving no place for purgatory.

Furthermore, the spectre conveys the notion that the soul originates from purgatory when it says, "I am thy father's spirit" (1.5.9). His unshriven death, he says,

is the reason for his punishment. Shakespeare plays with the reader's imagination again in a later scene, revealing that the Ghost might have been the devil. "Yea, and perhaps, Out of my weakness and my melancholy, As he is very potent with such spirits, Abuses me to damn me," he said, suggesting that the spirit might have conjured *Hamlet's* imagination (2.2.596-599). This allows the reader's imagination to be both channelled and released, allowing him to conjure up a new mental image of the drama's truth and replace it with the one he has already expressed. At first, Shakespeare gives in to the idea that the Ghost exists. After the reader's first conviction that the Ghost is present, their conviction is later shaken into doubt or disbelief. Shakespeare achieves this impact by using paradoxes, which allow the imagination to go further. In this way, the reader's thoughts become a furnace for competing reactions and understandings. There are many glitches that the reader needs help to get the answer of the same while reading *Hamlet*. The reader's observance is further bewildered by his findings because they are so contradicting in themselves. Indeed, *Hamlet* "is, notoriously, the one which most persistently challenges the structural and semantic patterns we elicit from it" (Mc Alindon, 102). The erratic and varied emotions of indifferent readers are justified because the parts together hardly make sense. The target audience may come to his preferred conclusion, regardless of how tenuous the connection is between the question and the play's text. On the basis of Hamlet's statement, it is reasonable to assume that the Ghost is only a creation of his imagination as he believes, "The spirit that I have seen, May be a devil" (2.2.594-595). W. W. Greg's claim that the Ghost originated in *Hamlet's* imagination started the psychoanalysis of the Ghost vogue in the twentieth century. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that the Ghost's account is not credible as an actual revelation because it has indications within that it is a product of *Hamlet's* own imagination. Most of the reported issues with the play are explained by this theory. One possible extension of this line of thinking is that Shakespeare built the play around the hero's hallucination and always meant for the Ghost to be an illusion. *Hamlet* had seen the Ghost of his father twice. The guards believed Horatio was knowledgeable enough to converse with the Ghost after witnessing it run away in fear, so they pushed him to do so: "Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio" (1.1.45).

Based on Horatio's evidence and approval, Shakespeare forces the reader to believe in the Ghost's

existence. Put another way, Horatio serves as both a go-between for the author and the reader and an eyewitness to the events. The Ghost is visible to Horatio and *Hamlet's* sentinels, but the reader or audience frequently misses it. In contrast, none of the other characters in the play notice him at all. Unless we take it for granted that the world as well as the play are both full of paradoxes, we fail to see any ostensible reason to support this contradiction. In any case, it's not just *Hamlet* who notices it. Three more trustworthy witnesses affirmed its veracity even before to *Hamlet's* encounter. For the inexperienced reader, the Ghost might resemble a vindictive king, having lost his realm and been deceived by his wife, who is now making a comeback to Earth to exact revenge. Looking at the bigger picture, we must focus on the extensive exchange between the Ghost and *Hamlet* to determine what others could have missed. The Ghost has religious overtones that any sensible reader would notice right away.

According to this reading, the divine task to restore Great *Hamlet's* honour has been bestowed upon *Hamlet*. Based on this assumption, it is safe to say that the Ghost is not a demon but a messenger who has been directed to deliver a scary message about what happened in the past. We also need to give careful thought to another point. Because of his omniscience, the Ghost predicts two major points before the play begins: Claudius poisons king when he was alive and Gertrude's adultery with Claudius. Contrarily, the adultery had to have been kept hidden from *Hamlet's* father, who was poisoned while asleep. How could "he" learn about them when the king was still alive and was unaware of his wife's adultery the entire time? Since we are in such a convention, one interpretation is that the Ghost is fully aware of everything.

Shakespeare nevertheless bestowed prophetic power on his omniscient Ghost in order to conjure an ethereal atmosphere and inspire readers to interpret what was written according to their own imagination. We may confirm this conclusion from *Hamlet's* speech: "O my prophetic soul!" (1.5.41). So, it is to be oblivious and self-absorbed if one thinks that the Ghost calls upon *Hamlet* to get back with his killer. The reader's reactions to the Ghost are similarly vague because of its nebulous character. Hence, a few opposing responses surface. Shakespeare offers his readers an amazing opportunity to apply his skill to draw connections and use contradictions and inconsistencies to fill in the blanks.

The readers are invited to engage into creative activities by being given precise outline details to fill in and bring to life through the gaps or unwritten areas. While viewing *Hamlet*, the reader and the text work together to produce fresh responses. On the other hand, the number of responses sparked by the text is directly correlated with the quantity of contradictions and inconsistencies it contains; the greater the number of conflicts and inconsistencies, the more reactions there will be for interpreting the text in various manners.

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