

# [Ghost in hamlet](https://assignbuster.com/ghost-in-hamlet/)

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The Role of the Ghost inHamletby William Shakespeare The role of the ghost in Hamlet is twofold: firstly it is to create  interest; secondly it is to further the narrative of the play. Shakespeare recognized that he needed to create interest in the  audience from the very first scene of the play. The play opens with a conversation between Officers of the Watch who  patrol the Battlements of Elsinore castle. Their talk is of a ghost  who has appeared before twice previously: " What, has this thing appeared again tonight? " Immediately this arouses the audience's curiosity.

What is the nature  of 'this thing' that has appeared? Horatio, who has not seen the ghost, voices the scepticism that some  of the audience may have been feeling: " Tush, Tush, 'twill not appear". Suspense is therefore created in the minds of the audience i. e. will  the ghost actually appear; does the ghost exist? The character of Horatio is contrasted with that of Barnardo,  Francisco and Marcellus. Barnardo, Francisco and Marcellus are believers in the ghost, whereas  Horatio, who is highly educated, unlike Barnardo, Francisco and  Marcellus, questions the ghost existence.

When the ghost finally appears in line 40, cutting short Barnardo's  line, it is a moment of high drama resulting from the tension that has  been created. The appearance of the ghost has a huge impact on both the characters  and the audience (who together with Horatio see the ghost for the  first time). Horatio, sceptic, expresses his fear and amazement in the  first line he speaks since seeing the ghost: " a€¦. It harrows me with fear and wonder". The audience would have been filled with similar emotions on seeing  the ghost, and would have realised that the appearance of the ghost  signifies that something is wrong.

Elizabethans believed that only  people who died without the chance of confessing their sins walked the  earth as troubled spirits. Horatio questions the ghost, which  disappears mysteriously without speaking. When the ghost fails to  speak, it adds to the tension of the scene and the apprehension of the  characters. The ghost makes a second appearance in Act 1 Scene 1 after Horatio has  talked about preparations for war with Norway. This sets up the idea  in the minds of the audience that the ghost may have something to do  with the on going war, but, again the ghost does not speak, and so the  audience is left with unanswered questions.

This sense of mystery  sustains interest and builds suspense in the preparation for scene 2. At this point the nature of the ghost is ambiguous. Is it a good  ghost, it appears in the form of Old Hamlet, or is it an " erring  spirit"? It disappeared when the cock crowed i. e. at first light. The audience  would have known that light represent goodness, and dark represents  evil. Horatio comments: " And then it started like a guilty thing". The audience would have been left wondering why the word 'guilty' had  been applied to the ghost. Is the ghost to be trusted, or not?

The  only thing person who can decide is Hamlet: " Let us impart what we have seen tonight unto young Hamleta€¦. " In the next scene Horatio tells Hamlet after some prevarication, that  he has seen his fathers ghost. Hamlet is thoroughly depressed because  his mother Gertrude, has re-married very quickly. To make matters  worse, she has married Claudius, Old Hamlets brother, whom young  Hamlet mis-trusts. This is a man " With one auspicious and one dropping eye" Which an Elizabethan audience, would have recognized as the sign of a  hypocrite.

Horatio describes the ghost to Hamlet, emphasising that the ghost  appears to look like Old Hamlet: " a€¦. A figure like your father armed exactly, cap-a-pe" And is dressed in armour. Hamlet wants to know everything about the  ghost, where it appeared, whether it spoke etc, and through his short,  excited questions which he utters in quick succession, reinforces the  mystery and ambiguity of the ghost, thus building the audiences  anticipation of the second appearance of the spirit. The scene closes with Hamlet arranging to take the watch on the  battlements that night, in order to meet with the ghost.

He asks the  others to keep quiet about the appearance of the ghost. The ghost appears to Hamlet in Act1, Scene 4. Immediately, the  ambiguous nature of the ghost is addressed. Hamlet himself says, " Be thou a spirit ofhealth, or goblin damned" , Meaning is the ghost to be trusted, or is it some evil creature come  to destroy? The ghost refuses to speak in front of the others, but beckons Hamlet  away to speak with him alone. Marcellus and Horatio are suspicious of  the ghost intentions: Marcellus. " But do not go with it" Horatio. " No, by no means".

Eventually, almost fighting off his companions with a sword, Hamlet  follows the ghost and they are alone. In scene 5, the role of the ghost moves from creating interest and  suspense, to the function of moving on the narrative and plot line. Hamlet is not naturally a man of action, and, although suspicious of  his Uncle Claudius, would not have tried to find out more about the  circumstances surrounding his father's death. It is the appearance of  the ghost that forces Hamlet to take action, and therefore moves on  the action of the play. The ghost begins by telling that he is in purgatory. Doomed for a certain term to walk the night" Hamlet must have felt puzzled and, at the same time, full of wonder  and despair at the terrible situation his father is in. When his  father finally reveals that he was murdered, Hamlet is overwhelmed. To  make matters worse, the ghost then asks Hamlet to revenge his murder. Ghost. " If ever thou didst ever thy dear father lovea€¦. " Hamlet. " O God! " Ghost. " Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder". Like Hamlet, at this point, the audience would want to know more. The questions that have been posed in Scene 1 are finally about to be  answered.

When the ghost reveals that he was murdered by Claudius,  Hamlet reacts with: " O my prophetic soul! My uncle? " Hamlet had suspected from the beginning that his uncle was the  complete opposite of Old Hamlet in appearance, personalityand action. Now his worse fears have been confirmed. His mother has married a  murderer! Before the ghost leaves, Hamlet swears to revenge his  murder. To make matters worse, the ghost describes the horrific nature of his  death, by poison and the fact that he died without having confessed  his sins: " With all my imperfections on my head".

This is in sharp contrast with the glib statement made by Claudius to  Hamlet concerning the death of his father: " a€¦. All that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity" Finally, at the end of the scene Hamlet rejoins the others and  confirms that the ghost is not evil but, " It is an honest ghosta€¦. " He makes his friends swear to keep the existence of the ghost a  secret. The cries of the unseen ghost " SWEAR, SWEAR" whom Hamlet calls  " old mole", reinforce Hamlet's insistence in secrecy. Interestingly,  only Hamlet can hear the ghost.

Is Hamlet 'really' going mad? The final appearance of the ghost follows the pivotal scene. Up to  this point there has been little action-taking place. Instead the play  consists of building up characters, making motives and giving the  audience information. After this the action increases dramatically in  pace. Hamlet has the opportunity to kill Claudius, but fails because  he believes that Claudius is praying. If he had known that Claudius  cannot pray: " My words fly up my thoughts remain below, Words without thought never to heaven go"

Presumably, Hamlet would have killed Claudius and the play would be  over. It is possible that Hamlet used the situation as an excuse for  the deed he was afraid to do. Therefore, when Hamlet confronts Gertrude he is full of frustration  and anguish at his inability to act. In this scene, Hamlet almost  loses his self-control and perhaps is truly " mad". Having killed  Polonius, it is only the entrance of the ghost that prevents Hamlet  from harming his mother. This time, the ghost appears, not in armour, but " a€¦. In his habit as he liv'd" In other words, dressed in every-day clothes.

The ghost has changed;  no longer the warrior king seeking revenge for his murder, the ghost  is more insubstantial a quieter, gentler ghost perhaps because it is  nearer to oblivion. This ties in with the ghost's speech back in Act 1  Scene 5 when he says: " I am thy fathers spirit, Doomed for a certain term to walk the night" This time only, Hamlet can see the ghost, which begs the question, is  the ghost really there, or is Hamlet quite mad? The role of the ghost in this scene is primarily to remind Hamlet of  his promise. " Do not forgeta€¦. "

However, the ghost also serves as a reproof to Hamlet, exhorting him  to be gentle with Gertrude. " Oh step between her and her fighting soul: Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works" Having delivered its message, the ghost simply slips away. In this  scene, in contrast to earlier scenes in which the ghost appears, there  is no knocking from underneath the stage, the ghost merely " steals  away". From this moment, the play gathers pace as Claudius attempt to have  Hamlet killed, Ophelia's commitssuicidein her madness, and the final  scene of the play ends in a blood bath.

From the very first dramatic appearance of the ghost the whole plot is  set in motion towards inexorable scene of murder and mayhem at the end  of the play. Hamet appears to regain his sanity; we as an audience wonder was he  ever mad and if so was his madness incurred by the ghost. In conclusion it could be stated the ambiguity of the ghost is never  resolved. This is questioned again because as a result of the ghost,  the majority of the characters die. Therefore despite Hamlets thoughts  of the ghost, in the end the audience wonder is the ghost and its  intentions really, true and good or actually bad and evil