

Ghost in hamlet

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The Role of the Ghost in Hamlet by 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 Hamlet". 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 of health, 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, personality and 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 committssuicidein 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