

# The ghost of father

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The evocative and vivid language which the ghost employs in speaking to Hamlet about purgatory is highly significant as it encourages Hamlet to spur to action in avenging his father's death. The ghost states that he is 'doomed for a certain term to walk the night' and in the day to "fast in fires". The alliteration in the last phrase places emphasis on the suffering which he is going through. He further describes purgatory with the imagery of a "prison house" and says, in a simile, that should he detail Hamlet on the secrets of purgatory, his hairs would stand on end like quills upon a 'fretful porpentine'.

The ghost also introduces the idea of murder in the play, stating alliteratively, "Murder most foul." Orders are also given to Hamlet by the ghost such as "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" and the haunting "Remember me." All of these factors come together to make Hamlet pity his father and be even more prepared to seek his father's revenge.

Important information for the events of the play yet to unfold is revealed to us by the ghost.

For instance, the ghost tells us of how he was poisoned in the ear by Claudius through references to the situation such as the metonymic phrase "... the whole ear of Denmark..." and the imagery, "The serpent that did sting thy father's life/ Now wears his crown." Hamlet's views are also largely influenced by the language used by his father's ghost. The ghost refers to Claudius in an unhealthy, animalistic manner, calling him, "that incestuous,

that adulterate beast. ” Hamlet thus thinks of Claudius in this manner for the rest of the play.

The ghost also informs Hamlet that he was “ cut off in the blossom of... sin” , meaning that he was killed before even being allowed to ask for forgiveness, and thus he was still in purgatory. This later influences Hamlet’s actions as he does not kill Claudius at the opportunity he gets when Claudius is praying, believing that Claudius would then go “... to heaven. ” Little does he know that Claudius is not actually praying, as Claudius confirms in the rhyming couplet, “ My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

” The fact that there is a ghost present in the play influences several other things. One of these is the fate of the protagonist, Hamlet. Hamlet is obliged to do as the ghost says, and thus situations are beyond his control. The ghost charges him to avenge his father’s death and, should he slack, the ghost reappears to urge him to carry out the revenge. For instance, the ghost appears when Hamlet is being violent towards his mother later on in the play, rather than paying full attention to what he had been charged to do- to revenge.

However, the fact that the ghost is present in the play means that we, and Hamlet, can question the validity of what the ghost says. The whole basis of the revenge lies on the words of the ghost, but what if the ghost is an illusion of Hamlet’s? What if the ghost leads Hamlet to destruction, as is hinted at by Horatio’s rhetorical question “ Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason/ And draw you into madness?”

This is notably the first hint at madness in the play, and Hamlet, perhaps having doubts about what the ghost says, delays his revenge and sets out to find proof for himself. He wants proof to assure himself that the ghost's words are valid, and thus he puts on a 'play within a play' on the theme of his father's death called the Murder of Gonzago to watch the reaction of his uncle. Whilst he delays his revenge, Hamlet does pretend to be mad, fulfilling Horatio's prediction in a manner. The result of all of this is that Ophelia, his lover, actually turns mad and commits suicide.

The play is thus, very importantly, set off by the appearance of the ghost. He is a sort of catalyst to the subsequent events of the play. Described in Act 1 as a "portentous figure", the ghost does not fail to fulfil its potential as the initial trigger which led to the chain of events that make up the plot of this play. The significance of the ghost in this Act is therefore highly important, as the ghost's appearance, words and actions, are the basis on which the rest of the play is built.