

# All that is I see:

Why can some characters see the ghost in *Hamlet* and  
*Macbeth*, while others cannot?

Andrea Agatha Bringaker Grøneng



A Thesis Presented to the  
Department of Literature, Area Studies and European  
Languages  
Faculty of Humanities

30 credits

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# Abstract

This thesis discusses why some characters can see the stage ghosts in Shakespearean tragedies while others cannot. The thesis focuses on *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* and *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, devoting one chapter to each play. Each chapter compares its play with other relevant Renaissance plays. In *Hamlet*, Queen Gertrude is the only character who cannot see the Ghost of King Hamlet. Prince Hamlet has gained evidence that the Ghost has been telling the truth about Claudius being the murderer of his father, yet when Gertrude suddenly cannot see the Ghost one questions all that has been established about it. In *Macbeth*, the Ghost of Banquo is only seen by Macbeth. There are no one but the audience, and sometimes not even them, who can confirm the protagonist's sight and the Ghost does not utter a single word. The Ghost appears in an environment categorized by nightmares, strange visions and witches, and one cannot help but question the validity of Macbeth's senses. The thesis shows why it is so important and effectful to the two tragic plots to include some characters in the sighting of a ghost and exclude others, as well as how the ghosts differ according to what their respective play needs.





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# Introduction

Lady: Why do you make such faces? When all's done

You look but on a stool (*Macbeth*.3.4.63-4).

Ghosts are uncanny and mysterious creatures, not alive nor dead, present yet absent. William Shakespeare included ghosts in several of his plays. The ghost, particularly in Shakespeare's tragedies, affects the plot to a great extent and their appearance and behaviour vary according to their mission. Whether the ghost harrows its spectators with wonder, pure dread or both, there are sometimes characters who are excluded from the vision of a ghost. Perplexed, they look back and forth between empty chairs or hallways and persons seemingly gone completely mad. Why is it that some characters can see a ghost while others cannot? The analysis will mainly pay attention to ghosts from two of William Shakespeare's tragedies: *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* and *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.<sup>1</sup> The ghosts in these two plays illustrate two rather different takes on a stage ghost within one authorship. The tragedies show a variety of possible answers to the same question, as the two ghosts serve distinct purposes in their respective plays. The main focus will be on the Ghost of Hamlet and the Ghost of Banquo, but the analysis will exemplify with other Shakespearean and contemporary stage ghosts. The thesis has two chapters. The first chapter will focus on the ghost of King Hamlet from *The Tragedy of Hamlet*. The second chapter will focus on the ghost of Banquo from *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. Both chapters aim to explain possible reasons why some characters can see a ghost while other characters cannot.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* will be cited in the text. See William Shakespeare. *Hamlet (The Arden Shakespeare Third Series)*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015). William Shakespeare. *Macbeth (The Arden Shakespeare Third Series)*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015).

# Chapter 1. - The Ghost of Hamlet

Queen: To whom do you speak this?

Hamlet: Do you see nothing there?

Queen: Nothing at all, yet all that is I see. (*Hamlet*.3.4.127-9)

‘To whom do you speak this?’ (*Hamlet*, 3.4.127) a confused Gertrude asks her son. Hamlet, who is in conversation with the Ghost of his father, looks confused back. Until this moment in Gertrude’s closet, it seems the Ghost should be seen by anyone who happens to be at the same place as it, but there Gertrude stands, staring right at the spirit of her deceased husband without seeing or hearing him. At once all the information about the Ghost that has been so carefully established through the previous acts and scenes collapses. One expects Gertrude to see the Ghost for several reasons. Firstly, she was married to King Hamlet. Greenblatt explains that when a ghost is sighted it ‘generally appears shortly after death, while the memory of the deceased, usually a close relative or friend of the living person to whom the vision manifests itself, is still fresh’.<sup>2</sup> One cannot get a much closer relationship than marriage and the former King’s death, the audience has learnt, is very recent. The Ghost has previously met with and talked to Hamlet, Gertrude and King Hamlet’s son. Gertrude is strongly connected to both King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet. But even without these reasons, the argument that everyone who has previously come across the Ghost have seen it should be sufficient enough. The Ghost has appeared several nights in a row to seemingly random sentinels, Hamlet’s friend and the young Prince Hamlet. It has been waving its arms for attention and talked to Hamlet with sorrow and urgency. The Ghost is as present to Hamlet in Gertrude’s closet as it has always been. The audience sees it too. The Closet Scene continues to perplex and challenge Hamlet and the audience. Why cannot Gertrude see the Ghost when all the other characters presented to it can?

Several literary critics have attempted to answer the same question through the centuries and decades that have gone since *Hamlet* was first played. Andrew Cecil Bradley simply argues that the Shakespearean ghost could for any reason decide to manifest itself to only one person.<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Prosser insists that the Ghost of Hamlet is a demon trying to bring Gertrude’s soul to Hell and therefore it must prevent a reconciliation between mother and son.<sup>4</sup> Harley Granville

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 41.

<sup>3</sup> See Andrew Cecil Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: MacMillan, 1905), 140.

<sup>4</sup> See Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 197.

Barker explains Gertrude's inability to see the Ghost as spiritual blindness,<sup>5</sup> while John Dover Wilson claims that it is a result of Gertrude's adultery.<sup>6</sup> Much of the research on the Ghost of Hamlet though treats the extraordinary moment in Gertrude's closet, and all the questions it raises, rather briefly or unconvincingly. It is therefore a topic that opens up for further exploration. The Ghost of Hamlet is included in *Hamlet* and acts the way it does because William Shakespeare intended it so. The Ghost affects the plot in a way that makes it evolve in Shakespeare's desired direction. With that in mind, the thesis will begin to investigate why the Ghost is visible to all characters onstage in act 1 but not to Gertrude in act 3.

Including a ghost in a play opens up a range of possibilities that living and mortal characters cannot provide. There are few limits to what one will accept from a supernatural character, be it creating infatuation, summoning prophetic apparitions, provoking storms or returning from beyond the grave. Shakespeare, by including a ghost, forces his audience to reflect upon one of the largest existential questions of life, death. A ghost is one of the most literal representations of death there is and will be understood as such by the majority, if not all, playgoers. Mortality is a central theme in *Hamlet*. Catherine Belsey says about Hamlet that he 'shared with the period an acute awareness of death'.<sup>7</sup> Death provokes now, as it did in Shakespeare's time, one's curiosity precisely because there is so much one cannot know about it. Death is uncanny, abstract and final. Having the dead talk, or at least give hints, of life after death naturally gains an audience's attention. Not to mention, it forces Hamlet to come to terms with his own mortality and to seek a purpose in his life. Seeing the Ghost as a representation of death is therefore crucial for the plot of *Hamlet*. Because the Ghost is a supernatural it cannot be, and does not need to be, explained by logic or science. This could be reason enough to argue why Hamlet, Horatio and the sentinels see the Ghost and not Gertrude. Still, as a representation of death or of the former King Hamlet it is certainly strange that Queen Gertrude cannot see the Ghost. One must also keep in mind that the contemporary audience of *Hamlet* had a different understanding and approach to ghosts than one has today.

Peter Marshall remarks that 'Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is highly unusual among Elizabethan and Jacobean plays in explicitly addressing the question of whether the apparition is really the spirit

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<sup>5</sup> See Harley Granville Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1937), 3: 116.

<sup>6</sup> See John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 254-55.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter: *Hamlet* and the Tradition of Fireside Ghost Stories", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol.61, no.1 (2010): 26.

of Hamlet's father, or a demonic illusion, and making it central to the action of the play'.<sup>8</sup> The uncertainty of whether the 'questionable shape' (*Hamlet*, 1.4.43) can be trusted is a key part of the play's plot. Marshall explains that the Protestants in the Renaissance believed that a ghost could not be the actual body of a dead person, because a body could not walk without a soul, but neither could it be a soul, because souls would be invisible.<sup>9</sup> Could it be the devil then? If the Ghost of Hamlet is a stage devil it is unusually discreet for its time. Demons in other Renaissance plays do not usually shy away from showing themselves in order to gather souls. In *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, Mephistopheles is around Faustus for 25 years before Faustus goes to Hell. He appears in a less frightening form than his natural shape, but Faustus is still very aware that he is a demon and the servant of Lucifer. The devil-dog in *The Witch of Edmonton* by Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley changes shape according to who it surrounds itself with. The dog tells Elizabeth Sawyer that it is the devil before she signs her soul away and when Katherine finds the knife Frank has used to kill Susan, the stage direction says that the devil-dog is 'shrugging as it were for joy, and dances'.<sup>10</sup> Off the stage though, Marshall further explains that it was a common belief in Renaissance England that the devil could take the shape of a deceased loved one to 'deceive the ignorant'.<sup>11</sup> The Ghost of Hamlet has, until it appears in Gertrud's chamber, only appeared at midnight. It has appeared in desolated places and has isolated Hamlet, who is a melancholic young man. These are all aspects that, according to Prosser, indicates that the Ghost is indeed a demon.<sup>12</sup> Stephen Greenblatt too points out that the ghost Hamlet has seen 'could come only from the place in the afterlife where Seneca's ghosts reside: Hell' because it 'could not possibly commit new sins' if it came from Purgatory.<sup>13</sup> To what extent does the Ghost sin though? It encourages Hamlet to get revenge, but is this a sin? Miriam Joseph points to the teachings of the common good by St. Thomas. She explains that if a member of a community was toxic for the rest of the community it was 'praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good'.<sup>14</sup> This applies to Claudius, who is indirectly referred to as that 'Something [which] is rotten in the state of Denmark' (*Hamlet*, 1.4.90). If one is to understand

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Marshall, "The Disorderly Dead", *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 258.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*, 248.

<sup>10</sup> See Arthur F. Kinney, *The Witch of Edmonton* (London: A & C Black Publishers Ltd., 2005), s.d. 4.2. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*, 240.

<sup>12</sup> Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, 110.

<sup>13</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 237.

<sup>14</sup> Miriam Joseph, "Discerning the Ghost in *Hamlet*", *PMLA*, vol. 76, no. 5 (1961): 500.

the Ghost of Hamlet as a good soul from Purgatory it could only have been sent from God, with a godly mission. Prince Hamlet's revenge is in this way not a personal revenge, but a necessary action to save the state of Denmark. He, as the rightful heir of the throne, has this 'authority from God'<sup>15</sup> to kill Claudius. The evidence of what the Ghost is points in many directions and as Greenblatt says 'for many generations now audiences and readers have risen to the challenge and found that each of the questions may be powerfully and convincingly answered on both sides'.<sup>16</sup>

That the Ghost is so versatile is, however, no coincidence. Miriam Joseph points out that all the characters who see the Ghost represent a different hypothesis of the contemporary theological debate surrounding ghosts:

'Marcellus and Barnardo exhibit the traditional Catholic view expounded by Pierre Le Loyer (1586) that a soul might come to earth from purgatory; Horatio displays the sceptical attitude of Reginald Scot (1584), who flatly denies that spirits can assume material form and thereby appear to men; Hamlet expresses the Protestant view of Ludwig Lavater (1570) and King James I (1597) that ghosts, though they might be angels, are generally devils who assume the appearance of the departed'.<sup>17</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that 'Shakespeare's audience had a built-in readiness to accept ghosts'.<sup>18</sup> The subject of ghosts was an ongoing debate in Renaissance England, and there were several and serious claims of ghost sightings. This is easy to forget when reading Shakespeare in modern times. Ghosts are not only a topic in fictional entertainment, but also in religion and everyday life. The Ghost in *Hamlet* is presented as a ghost from Purgatory. Purgatory is a distinctly Catholic idea. At the same time, *Hamlet* is often claimed to have a Protestant frame, with the setting in a fictional Denmark which resembles Renaissance England and Hamlet and Horatio going to school in the birthplace of Protestantism, Wittenberg. Keith Thomas explains that 'the reformer denied the existence of Purgatory, asserting that the moment of death all men proceeded inexorably to Heaven or to Hell, according to their deserts; from neither could they ever return'.<sup>19</sup> For a Protestant, therefore, it is simply not a possibility that King Hamlet's spirit can return to the world of the living. While Catholics believed that souls of the deceased 'might

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph, "Discerning the Ghost in *Hamlet*", 500.

<sup>16</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 240.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph, "Discerning the Ghost in *Hamlet*", 493.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Thomas, "Ghosts and Fairies", *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in 16th and 17th Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1971), 702.

well be sent back for some specific purpose', the Protestants 'agreed that they were not to be mistaken for the souls of the departed but were to be recognized as spirits; very rarely good ones'.<sup>20</sup> Though the Protestants and Catholics appear to be pretty clear on where they stand, Shakespeare, in *Hamlet*, is not. Yet, this was not a problem for English Renaissance playgoers. 'Modern scholars may discriminate between Catholic, Protestant, and sceptical opinions about ghosts, but what is more probable than that ordinary Elizabethans entertained all three at once?',<sup>21</sup> Jump asks. Gertrude, in a way, represents a fourth view by not seeing the Ghost. Considering that *Hamlet* is a play that needed an audience, including a ghost, and creating a debate around it, would certainly gather and engage the audience.

Like most of Shakespeare's plays *Hamlet* draws on several sources and traditions known to the contemporary audience, and these, to some degree, affect how the plot goes. *Hamlet* and its ghost, as one of many Renaissance tragedies, is to a great extent affected by the Senecan tradition of stage ghosts. *Hamlet* is often categorized as a revenge tragedy. The ghost initiates the action of the play, there are references to pagan mythologies, strong rhetoric, a desire for revenge and five dramatic acts.<sup>22</sup> The ghost of Gorlois from *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, the ghost of Albanact in *Lochrine* and the ghost of Andrugio from *Antonio's Revenge* all, like Seneca's ghost of Thyestes in *Agamemnon*, 'long to see the stage run with blood'<sup>23</sup>, as Greenblatt says. The Ghost of Don Andrea from *The Spanish Tragedy*<sup>24</sup> refers to the death of the other characters as 'spectacles to please my soul' (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 4.5.12) and says that he himself will join his friends 'in pleasing sort' (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 4.5.15) and make sure to get 'just and sharp revenge' on his foes (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 4.5.16). Most ghosts cannot directly interfere, and the Ghost of Hamlet can only convey its message in 'hints and metaphors'.<sup>25</sup> The Ghost urges Hamlet to 'Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.25). It reappears night after night and tells Hamlet the true story of its death. But as Jump explains Shakespeare's ghosts usually 'convey encouragement, denunciation, admonishment, or menace to the persons to whom they manifest themselves, but they do not as a rule directly influence the course of events'.<sup>26</sup> One of the major effects the ghosts have to the

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 703.

<sup>21</sup> John Jump, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," *Critical Quarterly*, vol.12, no. 4 (1970): 350.

<sup>22</sup> Jessica Winston, "Seneca in Early Elizabethan England\*", *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol.59, no.1 (2006): 29.

<sup>23</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 153.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy (Arden Early Modern Drama)*, ed. Clara Calvo and Jesús Tronch (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Fergusson, *The Idea of Theater*, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Jump, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," 345-6.



plot of a play is to ‘put right a secular injury’<sup>27</sup> and to ‘bring injustices to light’.<sup>28</sup> One might, therefore, enter the world of *Hamlet* expecting those who see the Ghost to somehow be connected to the revenge. Even though the Ghost of Hamlet is a revenge ghost it is not a particularly cruel ghost. It is important to note that the Ghost of Hamlet never mentions that it wants a *bloody* revenge or that it wants those who have wronged it damned, both of which many Renaissance ghosts do. The Ghost reflects its revenger, and Hamlet can be said to be an unusual Renaissance revenger. Long says about ‘the male revenger’ of a Renaissance revenge tragedy that ‘Whether ruminating upon the magnitude of his loss, beating his brain over the specifics of his revenge, or reflecting upon the bestial obliviousness of his age, the Renaissance revenger is a dense network of mnemonic associations and trajectories: memory traces out the contours of this character type’.<sup>29</sup> Hamlet has not been to war, he is very young and he is a student. Hamlet is a thinker. Because Hamlet is such a retrospective character, and not a Roman stoic or a warrior, the ghost he sees must behave differently than a typical Renaissance stage ghost. Linking this information back to Gertrude, she does not have a central role in the action of the revenge plot. It is Hamlet’s dilemma and his revenge, and this might be a reason why Gertrude cannot see the Ghost.

*Hamlet* and its ghost are not only influenced by the Senecan ghosts and traditions, Belsey points out. She claims that ‘there are indications that early modern audiences saw *Hamlet* as a ghost story’,<sup>30</sup> and that Shakespeare, when developing his ghost, ‘drew on a range of existing conventions’<sup>31</sup> for ghost stories. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* draws on several known sources. The initial story of Hamlet can be traced back to the twelfth century, in the form of a Norse saga, but this story does not include a ghost. *Ur-Hamlet*, a play from a few years before Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, without written copies and a known writer, only briefly does.<sup>32</sup> The importance of the Ghost is emphasized by Shakespeare, and Belsey argues that many interpretations of the ghosts in Shakespeare’s tragedies ‘ignore the long tradition of popular ghost lore’<sup>33</sup>. One can see the pattern of ghost lore in *Hamlet* from the very first scene. Ghost stories usually ‘begin with the disbelief of one participant’,<sup>34</sup> and so does *Hamlet*. The

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<sup>27</sup> Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 17.

<sup>28</sup> Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 18.

<sup>29</sup> Zackariah C. Long, “‘*The Spanish Tragedy*’ and ‘*Hamlet*’: Infernal Memory in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy,” *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2014): 154.

<sup>30</sup> Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 203.

<sup>33</sup> Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

audience, along with the disbelieving participant, starts to question the credibility of what is presented. Belsey points to the change of mode when Horatio agrees to sit down in act 1, scene 1. Bernardo wants to tell Horatio about the strange ‘thing’ (*Hamlet*, 1.1.20) they ‘have two nights seen’ (*Hamlet*. 1.1.32), and so, as Belsey says, ‘the tale begins’.<sup>35</sup> When the character who was initially doubting agrees to acknowledge the ghost, so does the audience. Though the ghost of Hamlet does speak, it speaks, as mentioned, in hints and metaphors. This lack of information is an important aspect of a ghost story, as it leaves the audience’s curiosity ‘still unsatisfied’.<sup>36</sup> Most often it is not the sight of the ghost itself that frightens the characters. Like Brutus’, Hamlet’s and Macbeth’s fear it ‘is brought into being *by* the unknown’.<sup>37</sup> The inclusion and exclusion of characters in the vision of the Ghost creates tension and excitement. The audience wants Gertrude to see the Ghost just as badly as Hamlet does. The exclusion of Gertrude is highly engaging and makes one start questioning the Ghost, which one by this time has started to trust. ‘In its attention to the Ghost’s uncanny physical effects on spectators, *Hamlet* shows how drawing attention to a stage ghost’s liminal embodiment can heighten playgoers’ response to theatrical fiction itself’<sup>38</sup> says Outterson-Murphy. *Hamlet* is, after all, a play made to entertain.

One has already seen that Shakespeare took the contemporary debate about ghosts, together with several traditions, into consideration when creating the Ghost of Hamlet. This affects not only what the Ghost is, but also how it acts. Outterson-Murphy explains that it was a common belief that ‘Early modern spirits could choose to be visible or invisible at will’.<sup>39</sup> This would naturally make it simpler to have some characters see a ghost and others not. The Ghost is not only invisible. It talks. It is heard and not heard at once. Together with the audience, Hamlet is ‘the only character to ever hear its voice’.<sup>40</sup> No one but Hamlet has been given the opportunity to hear the Ghost’s voice up until the Closet scene. Gertrude though, for some reason, cannot hear it either. It creates an effect of secrecy, where the audience and Hamlet share something important. When young Hamlet meets Horatio and Marcellus after the Ghost has left in act 1, scene 5, the Prince makes them promise to ‘Never make known what you have seen tonight’ (*Hamlet*, 1.5.143). The vision is already here a secret for a selected few. The Ghost’s

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<sup>35</sup> Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Outterson-Murphy, “Remember me:” The Ghost and its spectators in *Hamlet*,” *Shakespeare Bulletin*, vol. 34, no.2 (2016): 270.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>40</sup> Jump, “Shakespeare’s Ghost’s,” 340.

information and the mission of revenge makes it highly important to stay secretive if Hamlet wants any chance in avenging his father. Those who have seen the Ghost must be able to keep quiet. There is a sense of mistrust amongst the characters from the very beginning of the play. The fact that Gertrude cannot see the Ghost unquestionably creates excitement, and lets the audience feel like they are let in on a secret. Early modern audiences would also more likely accept that the Ghost shows itself only to Hamlet and not to Gertrude because it would be a usual way for a ghost to behave.

There are, undoubtably, structural reasons why Gertrude does not see the Ghost. Could it, however, also be that Gertrude, the way she is built up as a character, is part of the reason? Is she, to start with a very simple idea, for example not openminded enough? The idea is strongly challenged, if not refuted, by the fact that Horatio has seen the Ghost. Horatio, being the play's most rational and sceptical character, should in that case not have seen the Ghost either. Horatio studies in Wittenberg, which brings up Protestant associations. He initially denies that the Ghost is going to show up in act 1, scene 1. Yet, the Ghost appears. 'Before my God, I might not this believe/ Without the sensible and true avouch/ Of mine own eyes' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.55-7), Horatio exclaims after seeing the Ghost for the first time. Horatio investigates the Ghost in ways that would have been familiar to the contemporary Christian.<sup>41</sup> By the end of the scene, he is still convinced that it is real. Horatio charges the Ghost to speak 'By heaven' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.48), and when the Ghost leaves Barnardo remarks that it looks offended. Still, the Ghost appears before Horatio again in act 1, scene 4. His scepticism and his directness do not exclude him. Horatio does, however, join the watch in the first scene specifically to look for the Ghost. Though he initially doubted the sentinels' story, some part of him must have been curious. Gertrude is presented to the Ghost under very different circumstances. Having said that, one can conclude that it is not Gertrud's disbelief in ghosts that excludes her from the vision, or that it, at least, is not the reason alone.

It is, as mentioned, important to keep in mind that Gertrud is presented to the Ghost under different circumstances from those of the other characters. The idea of the Ghost is very suddenly thrust upon her by Hamlet. Hamlet, at this point, has been acting deranged for several acts and he behaves towards his mother in a cold and sardonic manner. She is on guard, she has had no time to prepare, and it is not an inviting environment for trust like the previous encounters with the Ghost have been. Gertrude's mind is likely racing to find answers to her

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<sup>41</sup> Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, 118.

son's disheartening comments and some form of explanation of his behaviour. There is no time for reflection, no time for curiosity, no time for explanations of what is being said. She is under attack. One must also remember that Polonius' dead and bloody corpse lies onstage when the Ghost appears. Gertrude comes to the conclusion that Hamlet has gone completely mad. 'Alas, he's mad!' (*Hamlet*, 3.4.102), Gertrude exclaims, when Hamlet greets the Ghost. Blaming madness for Hamlet's behaviour, she has an explanation without the Ghost. The audience could very well have been thinking along the same lines as Gertrude, had they not already gained so much evidence of the Ghost's existence, not to mention had they not been able to see and hear the Ghost themselves, also in act 3, scene 4. It is still inexplicable that Hamlet and the audience have such a radically different perception of the incident than Gertrude. Based on one's sight, but also earlier evidence, the Ghost must be real. While the uninviting environment the Ghost appears in in Gertrude's closet might be part of the reason why the Queen cannot see the ghost of her former husband, it is still not a satisfactory explanation on its own.

Though Gertrude is under a form of attack in act 3, scene 4, she is also no doubt part of what creates the hostile environment. The Queen is presented as having a rather different approach to death and remembrance than Hamlet. Gertrude asks her son shortly after King Hamlet's death to stop wearing his black cloths and reminds him that 'all that lives must die' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.72). She has remarried, shortly after King Hamlet's funeral, and thereby decreased the appropriate period of mourning. Thomas Rist points out that 'Shakespeare presents maximized mourning as Hamlet's true ideal'.<sup>42</sup> This creates a contrast between mother and son. Especially in act 3, scene 1, known as the Play scene, one can tell that 'Hamlet and Gertrude differ in their views of how much remembrance for a dead man is 'too much''.<sup>43</sup> Gertrude is removed from the act of remembrance and so is Claudius. Rist remarks that 'Claudius will argue at length that persisting in remembrance is a very 'fault against the dead' (I.ii.102)'.<sup>44</sup> Hamlet's grief over his father's death is treated as unusual and unfitting. *Hamlet* is undoubtedly a retrospective play, always preoccupied by what has been.<sup>45</sup> As Emma Smith points out, when the King dies Prince Hamlet 'bears the name of a dead man. His very identity is caught up in the past'.<sup>46</sup> Hamlet and Hamlet are, alive or dead, strongly intertwined. Remembrance hence becomes essential for

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England (Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama)* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 62

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> Emma Smith, *This is Shakespeare* (Pelican, 2019), 163.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *This is Shakespeare*, 162.

Hamlet's identity. Remembrance in the Early modern era is closely linked to rituals. Outterson-Murphy argues that 'The early modern religious context thus suggests that the Ghost demands not only mental but physical remembrance. In asking Hamlet to "remember me," the Ghost asks him to re-embody the body he sees before him'.<sup>47</sup> Though the Ghost disappears from stage, it is always present through Hamlet, who acts for, even as, his father. To take this constant presence of the Ghost even further one can also link it to Horatio. In act 1, scene 5, The Ghost asks Hamlet to listen 'If thou didst ever thy dear father love' (*Hamlet*. 1.5.23). When young Hamlet dies, he urges Horatio to listen and tell his story in a very similar way. In fact, Hamlet mirrors the Ghost when he says, 'If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart' (*Hamlet*, 5.2.330). The Ghost and its story then live on through Horatio. This makes it important for Hamlet, but also Horatio, to have seen the Ghost. Gertrude, like Hamlet, dies in the end. This means the story could not have lived on through her. Gertrude's forward-looking approach in the play might very well be a reason why Shakespeare does not let her see the Ghost, as Gertrude's lack of remembrance highlights Hamlet's need for it.

Hamlet's strong connection to his dead father is central to the play, but this connection does not seem to be a requirement to see the Ghost. There are several people who encounter the Ghost without having any strong connection to the deceased King. Horatio comes to Denmark to attend the King's funeral. He has sincere sympathy for and understanding of his friend, Hamlet, but he is not in deep grief himself, as there was no close relation between Horatio and the dead King. Even more puzzling, perhaps, than Horatio seeing the Ghost is the fact that the sentinels have encountered the Ghost night after night. They have no close relationship with either the young Prince or the deceased King. A key element might be the time and place. The Ghost appears at the 'dead hour' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.64) of night and the sentinels are awake, alone and alert. They are present every night at the same desolated spot outside the castle. As their job is to keep watch, they are probably the easiest characters to be discovered by. The sentinels are also to protect the castle and the royal family, and one therefore might expect them to be, if not fearless, at least brave men. A dead man walking can, as one knows, scare even the bravest of men. When Horatio joins the sentinels' watch, Marcellus and Barnardo actively seeks out the Ghost. The sentinels' mission in the play seems to be to convey and convince the rational Horatio of the existence of the Ghost, so that he again can inform Hamlet. The Ghost appears to them two times before they ask Horatio to join their watch. Each time there are few but some

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<sup>47</sup> Outterson-Murphy, "Remember me," 263.

people to confirm the visions. The sentinels prove that the characters who see the Ghost do not need a relation to the dead King. They also suggest that these characters serve a purpose to the progression of the plot. Gertrude's relation to King Hamlet might therefore not matter as much as one might first think. It is more likely a matter of what her character can contribute with, to the plot as a whole and to the revenge.

There is no doubt, though, that Gertrude contributes to the play, or else the character would not have been included and allowed the amount of space it gets. Being Claudius' wife, one might assume that Gertrude acts according to his wishes. If she did, it would be a bad move to let Gertrude see the Ghost. Yet, this is not the case. Gertrude is a complex and dynamic character, significantly different when the play ends than when it begins. Abigail L. Montgomery says about Gertrude that 'For Hamlet, Gertrude is a moral self who must be brought to account for her sins and must work through the same confrontation of guilt as every other member –living and dead– of the Danish royal family'.<sup>48</sup> Hamlet forces Gertrude to reflect upon her actions. It proves to be as painful for her as it seems to be for Hamlet, the Ghost and Claudius. 'Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,/ And there I see such black and grainèd spots/ As will not leave their tinct' (*Hamlet*, 3.4.87-9), she says and continues to beg Hamlet to stop his accusations. Alan L. Ackerman Jr. points to the importance of Gertrude's closet as a 'private space' and claims the scene 'presents a structural homology between ghost sighting and soul searching'.<sup>49</sup> Because one has moved deeper into the castle one has also moved deeper into the self, Ackerman argues.<sup>50</sup> Gertrude is confronted with her inner self, so should she not then also see the Ghost? Had Gertrude come fully to terms with her sins and seen the Ghost the plot would likely have gone in a different direction. The 'to be, or not to be' monologue, Claudius' attempt to pray and the Ghost's descriptions of purgatorial pains are moments that draws on the audience's sympathy, like Gertrude's partial acknowledgement of her sins in the Closet scene. Having Gertrude to only to some degree acknowledge her sins and guilt, but still fight against it, and leave the Ghost invisible to her, makes the audience sympathize with her, it leaves Hamlet and his mission alone and it does not ruin the connection between Gertrude and Claudius.

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<sup>48</sup> Abigail L. Montgomery, "Enter QUEEN GERTRUDE Stage Center: Re-Viewing Gertrude as Full Participant and Active Interpreter in *Hamlet*," *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 74, no. 3 (2009): 102.

<sup>49</sup> Alan L. Ackerman, "Visualizing Hamlet's Ghost: The Spirit of Modern Subjectivity," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2001): 130.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

Though Gertrude is flawed, she is not, intentionally at least, Hamlet's enemy. The mother cares about her son, but the play does not allow them to see eye to eye. As Fergusson puts it, 'Hamlet's feeling toward his guilty mother is certainly essential, but not more essential than his dismay at the loss of a father'.<sup>51</sup> Though she is rejected by her son and frightened by his strange visions she does, however, play her part in the revenge plot. When Gertrude later tells Claudius about the murder of Polonius, she says that Hamlet 'weeps for what is done' (*Hamlet*, 4.1.27), though in reality, Hamlet is as sarcastic and grotesque as ever. She also confirms to Claudius that Hamlet has indeed gone mad, though the Prince has told her that he has not. Whether Hamlet has actually gone mad or is just pretending is still a hot topic amongst literary critics. Outterson-Murphy argues that act 3, scene 4, shows 'the danger of theatrical fiction leading to madness'.<sup>52</sup> 'The scene thus hearkens back to Horatio's fear for Hamlet'.<sup>53</sup> For, as one will remember, Horatio warns Hamlet already in act 1, scene 4, that the Ghost might 'draw you into madness' (*Hamlet*, 1.4.74). Hamlet might indeed have played himself mad. Regardless of his actual mental state though, Gertrude knows that Hamlet wants Claudius to believe that he has lost his mind. She keeps her promise to her son and lies to her husband. Gertrude is clearly trying to help Hamlet. 'Gertrude, as much and as individually as any of the play's central men, grapples with her actions and the resulting status of her soul before God',<sup>54</sup> says Montgomery. Be that as it may, her loyalty is not proved to the audience until after the Closet Scene and not knowing whether she is trustworthy certainly forces the audience to be engaged and critical like the protagonist is.

Gertrud's relationship with Hamlet is complicated, and so is one's understanding of her previous relationship with King Hamlet. Gertrud's unfaithfulness, or rapid remarriage, has been suggested as a reason why the two characters are kept apart. Long explains that it was a widespread assumption in the early modern culture that '*places* were natural containers for memories'<sup>55</sup>. With this in mind it certainly becomes peculiar that Gertrude cannot see her former husband in what many assume is her bedroom. However, Gertrude's closet is not her bedroom, only a private space.<sup>56</sup> Gertrude mentions King Hamlet only as a dead man it is time to forget. The Ghost, however, comments on Gertrude's marriage to Claudius when it speaks

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<sup>51</sup> Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of Theater: A Study of Ten Plays: The Art of Drama in Changing Perspective* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 101.

<sup>52</sup> Outterson-Murphy, "Remember me," 267.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>54</sup> Montgomery, "Enter QUEEN GERTRUDE," 103.

<sup>55</sup> Long, "Infernal Memory in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy," 160.

<sup>56</sup> *Hamlet*, headnote, 363.

to Hamlet. ‘Oh Hamlet, what a falling off was there,/ From me whose love was of that dignity/ That it went hand in hand even with the vow’ (*Hamlet*, 1.5.47-9), the it says in vain. A part of the Ghost’s purgatorial punishment is that it is ‘Doomed for a certain term to walk the night’ (*Hamlet*, 1.5.10). This includes watching the living get on with their lives without being able to join them or retreat to the world of the dead. As Long points out ‘the most troubling aspect of this spectacle is not that it exposes the mutability of human attachments –that a wife feels differently now than she did then– but that it implicitly casts doubt on the original quality of those attachments.’<sup>57</sup> Claudius’ and Gertrude’s marriage is a double betrayal, and it creates a negative image of the two characters already in act 1, scene 2. It causes Hamlet to doubt his mother, but also to doubt love in general. ‘Gertrude’s “wicked speed” causes a crisis in the way that father and son are able to remember her’,<sup>58</sup> says Long. They become unable to remember her as who they thought she was, and the past and future perceptions of her change according to the new deceitful image of her. The unresolved conflict, which is very apparent in the Closet scene, also increases the scene’s tension. Not only does the fact that Gertrude cannot see the Ghost raise questions about the Ghost, but it raises questions about the Queen as a character. Had the Ghost been seen by Gertrude it could make for a whole other story. If not a new plot, it would certainly have distracted the audience, and young Hamlet, from the revenge plot.

It is worth noticing that Gertrude, though she does not see any ghost, is the only woman presented to the Ghost in *Hamlet*. In Shakespeare’s plays, and many Renaissance plays too, females are often excluded from the vision of a Ghost. No women see the ghosts in *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale* or *Henry VI, Part 2*. This could be because revenge, or indeed any action at all, usually is portrayed as a masculine affair. As Tronicke puts it one often finds that ‘feelings and femininity correlate with passivity, whereas masculinity correlates with action’.<sup>59</sup> The majority of Renaissance ghosts wants some form of vengeance. This is understandable, as many of them, and most of Shakespeare’s ghosts, ‘were victims of homicide’<sup>60</sup>. The female characters seem to be regarded as unhelpful or unimportant in the mission of revenge. Queen Gertrude gains her status and importance by being Hamlet’s mother and Claudius’ wife. But though Gertrude first seems to only emphasise and comment the struggles and stories of the men, she is, as shown earlier, and independent person with guilt

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<sup>57</sup> Long, “Infernal Memory in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy,” 172.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>59</sup> Marlena Tronicke, “Solid Flesh: *Hamlet*,” *Shakespeare’s Suicides: Dead Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 85.

<sup>60</sup> Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 18.



and ability to take action. She, like her son, grows considerably throughout the play. Nevertheless, since Gertrude is the only female character in the play to come across the Ghost, and there is no one to compare the incident with, one cannot blame her gender for the exclusion from the vision. One cannot know if, for instance, Ophelia would have been able to see or hear the Ghost if she got an opportunity. Of course, there are, as always, exceptions to this rule. In Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* the Ghost of Don Andrea sums up the play with the words: 'Prince Baltazar by Bel-imperia stabbed' (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 4.5.7). Here the villain is here killed by the Ghost's female lover and the Ghost has been passively watching all four acts of the play. Female ghosts are more common, like the Ghost of Susan from *The Witch of Edmonton* by Thomas Dekker, William Rowley and John Ford and the Ghost of Isabella from *The White Devil* by John Webster. The dead women urge for justice but are not directly involved in the revenge or the way of justice themselves. Revenge is a key point in *Hamlet* and the pattern of women not included in the vision of ghosts certainly contribute to answer why Gertrude cannot see the Ghost of Hamlet.

Claudius, though, is a man and the murderer of King Hamlet. Because the Ghost of King Hamlet is known as a revenge ghost it would be natural for it to haunt its offender. The Ghost of Banquo haunts its murderer Macbeth, the Ghost of Caesar haunts Brutus and Richard III's eleven victims haunt him. Why does the Ghost of Hamlet not show itself to Claudius? One answer to this could be that it would not lead to the desired revenge, that is the plot would go in a different direction. If the Ghost had shown itself to Claudius instead of Hamlet, Hamlet would have been ignorant of his uncle's crimes and Claudius would have had to steer his own way to tragedy. If this was the case Hamlet might not even have been included in the main plot. If the Ghost had appeared to both of them, Claudius would have known that he was in danger much sooner. Furthermore, the Ghost would, most likely, not have had the same effect on Claudius, as later one will see it has on Macbeth. It is unlikely that Claudius would have become mad and paranoid due to the vision because his fears would be validated and legitimate. In contrast to the Ghost in *Macbeth*, The Ghost's existence in *Hamlet* can be confirmed by several other people. Another effect of Claudius seeing the Ghost is that it could possibly ruin Claudius' relationship with Gertrude, which is an important part of the sickening portrayal of Denmark. Not to mention Miriam Joseph's previous point that Claudius is toxic for the community, and Hamlet is the only one who has the approval of God to get rid of him. Claudius also has the effect of mirroring his dead brother. He takes the role as King of Denmark and urges the grieving Laertes, who wants to revenge his dead father, to take action for him. This mirroring

is very similar to the one in *The Spanish Tragedy*, where Horatio mirrors the life and death of the Ghost of Don Andrea. Laertes and Hamlet have similar stories as well. When Claudius urges Laertes to revenge his father's death it might remind the audience of the Ghost telling Hamlet to avenge it. Had Claudius seen the Ghost this effect might have been broken. Though Claudius resembles Macbeth to a great extent, his environment and the characters around him differ. It is therefore most effectful for the play to exclude him from the vision of the Ghost.

To conclude one finds that those included in the vision of the Ghost of Hamlet see it for a reason. The sentinels likely see the Ghost because of their availability as watchmen. They play an important part in leading the Ghost and Prince Hamlet together, using Horatio as the middle link. Horatio sees the Ghost because he is one of Hamlet's few trustworthy friends. He is also the play's most critical and rational character. If he, of all the characters, sees the Ghost it must be real. The audience is slowly convinced of the Ghost's existence with him. Horatio is in addition the one to carry the story of the Ghost and Prince Hamlet on after their death. Hamlet sees the Ghost because he is the protagonist. As the protagonist he can, and will, take up much of the play's space. He is portrayed with a deep grief, a reflective mind and a lack of self-identity. Hamlet is a very natural candidate for revenge, being close to a reincarnation of the deceased King, in blood, title and name. Hamlet's identity is intertwined with the past and the Ghost. Because Hamlet is a thinker, and not a blood-thirsty revenger, the vision of the Ghost creates an all-consuming and insolvable obsession for both the Prince and the audience. Gertrude, on the other hand, does not see the Ghost because she does not directly contribute to the mission of revenge. The Queen is troubled with her own guilt, sins and dilemmas, but she is not allowed to take up the same space as Hamlet. Like Claudius, Gertrude is distanced from remembrance of the former King, and thereby from the Ghost. Gertrude and Claudius in this way become a contrast to Hamlet's strong grief. As a woman, she is one of many female characters who does not see the ghost of the play. The exclusion of Gertrude from the vision of the Ghost creates tension and excitement, partly because of *Hamlet's* influence from revenge tragedies and ghost lore. It makes the audience identify with the protagonist of the play even more, as they share his view of the situation and not Gertrude's. Gertrude's exclusion is displeasing and perplexing. Claudius, who even though he might resemble Macbeth in many ways, is not presented to the Ghost at all. As a supernatural character Shakespeare can have the Ghost behave in almost unlimited ways. The Ghost is kept ambiguous and paradoxical by the exclusion of crucial information and the inclusion information that cannot co-exist yet does. All the characters who see the Ghost represent a different point of view in the contemporary

theological debate surrounding ghosts. Ultimately, the traits of the characters are structural choices Shakespeare has made to get the plot to evolve in the desired and to make the play exciting to watch. This might be why many of the attempts to answer precisely why Gertrude cannot see the Ghost of Hamlet have not been fully satisfactory or convincing. The exclusion of Gertrude is a structural choice. As Fergusson so correctly points out, *Hamlet* does not offer ‘the finality of conceptual truth wherein the reason could find its satisfaction and its rest’.<sup>61</sup> At the end of the play there are still many questions that cannot be satisfactorily answered. Dissatisfying as it is, it is also a part of the reason that makes *Hamlet* so continuously appealing.

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<sup>61</sup> Fergusson, *The Idea of Theater*, 102.

## Chapter 2. - The Ghost of Banquo

Macbeth: Which of you have done this?

Lords: What, my good lord?

Macbeth: Thou canst not say I did it: never shake

Thy gory locks at me (*Macbeth*.3.4.46-8).

‘The table’s full’ (*Macbeth*, 3.4.42), Macbeth points out when he is asked to sit down. At first glance there seems to be another dinner guest occupying the seat, but then Macbeth notices that the man is covered in blood. It is his murdered friend Banquo. Macbeth’s dread intensifies as he realizes that no one but him can see the dead man shaking his head. Macbeth has already murdered his way to the throne of Scotland, but no ghost of the former King has appeared. Why has Banquo returned as a ghost? Could the Ghost be real? Unlike Hamlet, Macbeth is not a young scholar, but a man with high social rank and a military background. This certainly affects what kind of ghost the play includes. The Ghost of Banquo creates significantly more fear than that of King Hamlet. The audience gets to know the Banquo before he is murdered and can understand Macbeth’s fear on a deeper level than the fear and wonder King Hamlet’s ghost provokes. Earlier in the play Macbeth has seen a floating dagger, but somehow the vision of the Ghost seems different. The dinner guests are startled by their King’s strange and inexplicable behaviour. Lady Macbeth, though she too has blood on her hands and has summoned evil forces, does not see any ghost either. What causes such a dreadful vision? Is it madness, nerves or maybe the witches? And then there is of course the question of the audience, what point of view does it have? In contrast to the Ghost of Hamlet, the Ghost of Banquo, or its appearance, does not tell Macbeth anything he does not already know. It only strengthens the weird sisters’ prophecy. This ghost has a different role to play and different measures are used to achieve the desired effect of its appearance. This chapter aims to investigate possible reasons why Macbeth is the only one who can see the Ghost and why he needs to see it.

In contrast to the Ghost of King Hamlet, the audience gets to know Banquo as a living character. The knowledge one gains about Banquo becomes important when he later returns as a Ghost, but it also adds tension to the plot while he is alive. Banquo, like Macbeth, receives the gratitude of King Duncan for his bravery in war. Banquo is the only character who can vouch for Macbeth’s vision of the witches and he too is promised great rewards. Yet, Banquo shows from the very beginning that he is reluctant to trust the weird sisters. ‘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*, 1.3.125-8), he warns Macbeth, who has just received the new title, Thane of Cawdor. Of course, he is very right in his precaution. He plays a role somewhat similar to that of Horatio. He rationally questions the supernatural promises given by the witches, and their existence altogether. Already in Act 1, scene 3 the characters start doubting their visions. After seeing the witches for the first time Banquo asks Macbeth: 'Where such things here as we speak about?/ Or have we eaten on the insane root,/ That takes the reason prisoner?' (*Macbeth*, 1.3.84-6). Yet, the witches' prophecy makes an impression on both of them. Banquo is, unlike Horatio, personally involved in the proclaims of the supernatural powers. Not only is he by the involved, but he is promised a price even greater than the protagonist. He, like Macbeth, is presented to the temptation of power. 'I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters' (*Macbeth*, 2.1.20), Banquo later tells Macbeth. 'I think not of them' (*Macbeth*, 2.1.22), Macbeth lies. After the death of King Duncan, Banquo has no trouble seeing through this lie. Up until Banquo's death the audience does not fully identify with Macbeth. Banquo is in a similar situation as Macbeth, but he is patient and does not turn to immoral acts that the audience knows of. His knowledge and conscience make him dangerous and eventually lead to his death. For half of the play, it also gives the audience someone to compare Macbeth to.

To keep the illusion of friendship alive and to avoid being connected to the crime, Macbeth involves murderers to kill Banquo. The murderers Macbeth hires are 'not professional assassins; Macbeth has found individuals whom Banquo has oppressed—peasant tenants, presumably—and he plays on their indignation',<sup>62</sup> says Cox. Cox also points out that Macbeth refers sarcastically to Banquo as 'this good man' (*Macbeth*, 3.1.90). This he does to 'reduce Banquo rhetorically to the injustices he has practiced'. At the same time, the words have a different meaning that is recognized by both Macbeth and the audience. The words are, in addition to Banquo, connected to the murder of Duncan which Macbeth performed himself. Both characters have been shown as important to Macbeth's life and career. Cox says that Macbeth 'somehow knows and even half acknowledges in the equivocation of his language'.<sup>63</sup> 'Perhaps the ultimate searing irony of Macbeth's own rejected but still vividly remembered goodness' Cox continues, 'is his self-deceived confidence that murdering Banquo will create

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<sup>62</sup> John D. Cox, "Religion and Suffering in '*Macbeth*,'" *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2013): 234.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

an apocalyptic end of his suffering'.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, Macbeth shows long before this that he knows that he must take the consequences of his actions. 'Bloody instructions, which being taught, return/ To plague th'inventor' (*Macbeth*. 1.7.9-10) Macbeth says, even before he has murdered King Duncan. The murder of Duncan stands in contrast to the murder of Banquo. King Duncan is murdered offstage and the audience never sees his dead body. His death is a shock to the other characters, and for them marks the start of the constantly present unnaturalness of the play. The murder of Banquo happens onstage. The audience witness his bloody death and hears his distressing screams to his son. Banquo has previously pondered upon Macbeth's sudden rise to the throne, and he suspects that his friend has 'played'st most foully for't' (*Macbeth*, 3.1.3). When Banquo is murdered, he calls the action 'treachery' (*Macbeth*, 3.3.16) and tells his son that 'Thou mayst revenge' (*Macbeth*, 3.3.16). He is aware that it is Macbeth who is the mind behind his death. It is an awareness it is painful for the audience to watch. Macbeth must pay an even higher price for the murder of Banquo than the murder of the King. Though the regicide provoked 'terrible dreams' (*Macbeth*, 3.2.19) and a mind 'full of scorpions' (*Macbeth*, 3.2.37), the reappearance of the dead Banquo forces Macbeth, and the audience, to relive his death and face the utmost of fears. Banquo's death gets the opposite consequences of those Macbeth was hoping for. It does not end his suffering, but instead it increases his fear, anxiety and the acknowledgement of his actions. Macbeth knows he has murdered good men. This acknowledgement is central to his suffering.

In the Banquet scene Macbeth's suffering comes to the surface, yet the audience is the only one who will acknowledge this. The guests at the banquet are all excluded from both the vision and the actions leading up to the Ghost's appearance. No one but Macbeth, the murderers, Fleance and the audience knows that Banquo has been murdered at this point. The murderers and Fleance never return to the play. Does this mean that the Ghost is not real though? According to Stephen Greenblatt 'Stories circulated throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance of ghosts visible to only one single person, and there were stories, too, of murdered spirits returning to haunt and destroy their murderers'.<sup>65</sup> One can therefore not plainly reject Macbeth's vision at the banquet as something real just because he is the only one who sees it. In addition, Macbeth keeps the guests and his wife at a distance as he does not address what he sees as a ghost. Consequently, the other guests cannot know what it is Macbeth sees. Macbeth says he looks on that 'Which might appal the devil' (*Macbeth*, 3.4.57), a 'horrible shadow,/ Unreal

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<sup>64</sup> Cox, "Religion and Suffering in '*Macbeth*,'" 235.

<sup>65</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 191.

mockery' (*Macbeth*, 3.4.104). A natural assumption for the guests is that Macbeth is talking about the late King Duncan, which Lady Macbeth obviously does not want her husband to talk about in front of his subjects. Though the Ghost is only seen by Macbeth it creates fear and attentiveness amongst the other participants at the banquet, Macbeth and the audience. Furthermore, it points to the fact that something is not the way it should be. Macbeth is isolated from the other characters and the contrast between their visions seem completely incompatible. The guests' presence and their point of view is highly important to create the desired reaction in Macbeth. The Ghost, as one sees, accomplishes quite a lot by just showing itself to Macbeth. The situation is chaotic, confusing and exciting to watch. No one can confirm Macbeth's vision, but neither can anyone fully reject it. The Banquet scene is a peak of suspense and a point of no return.

*The Tragedy of Macbeth* is another play influenced by several sources and traditions. Like one find in *Hamlet*, this influence affects the plotline and the rise and fall of tension. *Macbeth* is based on the Holinshed's Chronicles. The Chronicles tell that Fleance's grandson started the Stuart line of kings in Scotland.<sup>66</sup> Though Shakespeare has given the characters from the chronicles a different environment and personality from what was initially described, the work certainly creates presumptions for the play. There are no ghosts in the Holinshed's Chronicles, but one finds that *Macbeth*, like *Hamlet*, is also influenced by the tradition of ghost lore. Lady Macbeth for example refers to the tradition of ghost stories when she tries to gain control over her horror-struck husband in the banquet scene.<sup>67</sup> 'Imposters to true fear, would well become/ A woman's story at a winter's fire,/ Authorized by the grandam' (*Macbeth*, 3.4.61-3), she tells him. Unlike *Hamlet* though, *Macbeth* is not regarded as a revenge play. It may be argued that the Ghost of Banquo does not show up to revenge its death, but to remind Macbeth of what he has done and where he is going. The ghost, like the ghosts in *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III*, is there to restore balance in the universe. As one finds in *Hamlet*, the evident lack of commemoration is a recurring phenomenon. Greenblatt says that there is a 'disruption or poisoning of virtually all rituals for managing grief, allaying personal and collective anxiety, and restoring order'.<sup>68</sup> The revenge that is found in the play is mostly directed towards Macbeth, but the vengeance happens without the interference of a ghost. Therefore, it is not necessary for the vengeful characters to see the Ghost. The Ghost is there for Macbeth's mental battle and

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<sup>66</sup> William Shakespeare, "Introduction," *Macbeth (The Arden Shakespeare Third Series)*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015), 89-90.

<sup>67</sup> Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter," 4.

<sup>68</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 247.

decay, much like in *Hamlet*, but this ghost might be argued to be a symbol of justice more than a symbol of revenge. As one can see, the Ghost of Banquo is also the sum of long traditions, previous works and contemporary customs and debates.

Before inquiring further into the appearance of the Ghost of Banquo, it can be helpful to ask why it is Banquo and not Duncan who reappears as a ghost. The murder of King Duncan is the first, and the most serious murder of the play. It is the action that sets off Macbeth's tragical journey. Still, King Duncan never returns. Though the murder of Banquo no doubt is a dreadful crime, the graveness of the murder of Duncan as Macbeth's 'guest, kinsman, and king'<sup>69</sup> clearly surpasses it. As previously mentioned, stage ghosts were a common feature in Renaissance drama, and it is influenced by ideas from contemporary debates as well as traditions. John Stott argues that since 'only catholic doctrine or classical mythology could legitimate a ghost's presence on the stage' Shakespeare 'would have thought of Banquo, like Old Hamlet, as coming from purgatory, rather than heaven, hell, or the underworld'<sup>70</sup>. King Duncan, on the other hand, is throughout the play 'built up as a figure of light' and he stands in clear contrast to Macbeth. This contrast and its effect 'would be ruined by the discovery that Duncan had sins that needed to be purged'.<sup>71</sup> Banquo, as the audience already knows, is not free of sins. This makes it easier to make his ghost ambiguous. 'The thane, though a whitewashed version of the criminal figure in Holinshed, has been so far corrupted by the prophecy of the witches that he acquiesces in Macbeth's accession to the throne',<sup>72</sup> continues Stott. Banquo, in addition to being a candidate for Purgatory, frightens Macbeth with his knowledge about the prophecy and his wish to keep his 'bosom franchised and allegiance clear' (*Macbeth*. 2.1.27). Banquo might also be easier to identify with than King Duncan, and the audience gets more time to get to know him than the King. Furthermore, King Duncan represents the past, whereas the Ghost of Banquo represents the future that was foreseen by the witches. The play is more concerned with the future and how Macbeth's throne will eventually be occupied by Banquo's descendants. The appearance of Banquo's ghost is an embodiment of this future.

It seems reasonable that it is Banquo's Ghost that returns, but why should the Ghost of Banquo be visible at all, that is, represented in the form of an actor? Banquo's ghost is a silent ghost. Because it has no lines the director of a performance can chose to leave the chair in 3.4 empty,

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<sup>69</sup> John Stott, "The Need for Banquo's Ghost," *Notes and Queries*, vol.39, no.3 (1992): 335.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.



and thereby also exclude the audience from the vision. If the chair remains empty, Thomas Cartelli says, the play may easily transform into ‘a modern morality play’<sup>73</sup> where the audience identifies with the guests at the banquet more than the psychologically tormented and isolated Macbeth. On the other hand, sharing Macbeth’s vision of the Ghost makes the audience identify with the tyrant, making the vision ‘a psychologically problematic experience’<sup>74</sup> for it as well. Some directors have also tried to combine the two approaches, having an actor enter the first time but not the second time Macbeth sees the ghost in 3.4. In regard to who sees the Ghost and not, the Banquet scene in *Macbeth* is somewhat similar to the Closet scene in *Hamlet*. The audience identifies with Hamlet in the Closet scene because it too sees what he sees. There are two radically different points of view represented. Both scenes create confusion, about the ghost and about the protagonist. This thesis will continue to treat the Ghost of Banquo as a character played by an actor, seen by Macbeth and the audience. Many literary critics accept the Ghost of Banquo as an ‘embodied hallucination’.<sup>75</sup> The audience can this way accept it as both a hallucination and as something real, paradoxical as it seems. Though there are several opinions on the matter, Marshall points out about Renaissance ghosts: ‘There was, however, no necessary and intrinsic contradiction, and certainly no hard and fast dividing line, between subjective illusion and objective delusion, between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ explanations for the phenomenon of ghosts’.<sup>76</sup> In the Renaissance the appearance of a stage ghost was close to synonymous with revenge and justice. ‘So clearly was this understood’, says Stott ‘that the ghost did not have to articulate its demand for justice for its appearance to have prophetic significance’.<sup>77</sup> Regardless of whether the Ghost of Banquo is represented by an actor the message would be understood. The identification with the tragic hero might be the strongest reason why many directors chose to include a physical representation of the Ghost.

Apart from the Ghost, the floating dagger might be the most well-known and strange vision in *Macbeth*. One might ask oneself why the Ghost is visible to the audience and not the famous dagger from act 2, scene 1. Should the dagger have been visible to the audience? Or should the Ghost have been invisible? The dagger monologue affects how the audience later understand the Ghost. ‘Shakespeare draws the audience inside Macbeth’s circuit of mixed perceptions’, and this, says Cartelli, makes the audience ‘increasingly susceptible to the suggestiveness of

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<sup>73</sup> Thomas Cartelli, “Banquo’s Ghost: The Shared Vision,” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1983): 390.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>76</sup> Marshall, “The Disorderly Dead,” 250.

<sup>77</sup> Stott, “The Need for Banquo’s Ghost,” 335.

Macbeth's subjective preoccupations'.<sup>78</sup> As the audience increasingly identifies with Macbeth it also becomes increasingly difficult to reject his view of the world around him. Macbeth asks himself whether the dagger is a 'fatal vision, sensible/ To feeling as to sight' (*Macbeth*, 2.1.36-7) or 'A dagger of the mind, a false creation' (*Macbeth*, 2.1.38). He concludes that 'There's no such thing' (*Macbeth*, 2.1.47), which shows the audience that he is in fact able to separate between what is real and what is not. At the same time, 'Macbeth has seen the floating dagger, has, as it were, conjured up out of himself the form and figure of the deed he intends to commit'<sup>79</sup>. Several times Macbeth's fears take shape in the form of imagery and metaphors. The audience sees in their mind's eye the red stained ocean, feels how Macbeth's thoughts sting like scorpions. The dagger, with exception of the Ghost, is by far the strongest and most real of these figures. It also, in contrast to most of the figures, points to the future rather than the past. In the Banquet scene, when Macbeth sees the Ghost, Lady Macbeth says: 'This is the very painting of your fear:/ This is the air-drawn dagger which you said/ Led you to Duncan' (*Macbeth*. 3.4.58-60). By treating the two visions as if they were the same, Cartelli says that Lady Macbeth in fact 'forces the audience to distinguish between them'.<sup>80</sup> Lady Macbeth, at this point, does not have any reason to support the appearance of a ghost, like Macbeth and the audience do. The Dagger scene might strengthen the belief in the Ghost, as one has seen Macbeth is able to separate between illusion and reality, but it might also weaken the belief in the Ghost owing the fact that one knows that Macbeth has hallucinated before and is likely to do so again.

Like in *Hamlet*, madness is a central theme. Does Macbeth see what he believes to be a ghost because he has gone mad? Marshall notes that 'those most likely to believe they had seen a ghost included the guilt-ridden, the sick, the aged, children, women (especially menstruating women), melancholics, madmen, cowards'.<sup>81</sup> Macbeth is certainly guilt-ridden, but whether or not he has truly gone mad can be discussed. Though his actions are horrific they are rational. His fears are legitimate, and his actions are logical steps to prevent them from coming true. He hires murderers to kill Banquo because he fears that Banquo knows too much, which Banquo's monologue in act 3, scene 1 confirms is true. Macbeth gets rid of Banquo and he has an alibi. Macbeth attacks Macduff's family. Macduff has shown that he is opposed to Macbeth. Macbeth therefore demonstrates his power and takes from Macduff what he loves the most. Macbeth

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<sup>78</sup> Cartelli, "Banquo's Ghost: The Shared Vision," 391.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

<sup>81</sup> Marshall, "The Disorderly Dead," 250.

listens to the witches because he has seen that part of their prophecy has come true. Until the very end he uses their predictions to analyse his situation. Before he commits any deed, he discusses the consequences of it with himself or his wife. Though he hallucinates and is haunted by terrifying thoughts and nightmares, he seems to be sane. He does not, like his wife, start acting without having control of his actions. Therefore, it is more likely his guilt and not madness that provokes the vision of Banquo's bloody corpse shaking its head.

Visions, as is evident in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, appear in many shapes. A significant number of these visions are provoked by guilt. This might be the case for the reoccurring connection between dreams and ghosts in Shakespeare's plays. 'One of the characteristic signs of power, and in particular illegitimate power' Greenblatt explains, 'is its ability to provoke nightmares, to generate weird images, to alter the shape of the imagination'.<sup>82</sup> This phenomenon is evident in several of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, amongst them Macbeth. One can find dreamlike ghosts, or ghosts used as symbols, in both Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies. In *The Winter's Tale* the furious spirit of Hermione appears to Antigonus in a ghastly dream. 'I have heard, but not believed, the spirits o'th' dead/ May walk again. If such thing be, thy mother/ Appeared to me last night, for ne'er was dream' (*The Winter's Tale*. 3.3.15-7), Antigonus tells the infant Perdita. However, as Hermione turns out to be alive it is unlikely that it was an actual ghost Antigonus witnessed. Greenblatt says about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that 'there are strong hints that dreams and idle fantasies reveal truths that waking consciousness, naively confident in its own grasp of reality, cannot recognize or acknowledge'.<sup>83</sup> This is also true for ghosts. Hamlet learns the truth of his father's death by a ghost and Macbeth gets confirmation of the veracity of the witches' prophecy. The Ghost of Julius Caesar appears to Brutus when he should have been asleep and so do the eleven ghosts in *Richard III*. Here too the ghosts' knowledge, and the impression they make when conveying their message, exceeds that of a living character that is not supernatural. Jump says about the ghosts in *Richard III* that 'Since these ghosts appear to the two opponents in their dreams, nothing is easier than to think of them simply as projections of the frightened guilt of the one and the hopeful confidence of the other'.<sup>84</sup> Especially in 4.1 Macbeth's visions resemble a dream. Banquo is in this case often regarded as an apparition provoked by the witches and not a ghost. The witches show Macbeth apparitions of the future kings of Scotland, and again the dead Banquo appears. This

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<sup>82</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 168.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>84</sup> Jump, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," 339.

nightmarish vision is Macbeth's worst fear. It shows him that all the guilt and anguish he is enduring is for nothing. Like the weird sisters promised, Banquo's descendants are waiting to push Macbeth off his throne. It is often difficult to decide whether the dream ghosts were physically present or whether they are just fragments of the imagination. The dream ghosts are in addition typically only sighted by a single person, which further complicates the discussion of their actual presence. In act 3, scene 4 the audience is told that the night is 'Almost at odds with morning' (*Macbeth*, 3.4.125). In the Banquet scene Macbeth is likely not sleeping as he is surrounded by guests and his wife, but he might be affected by his lack of sleep and the late hour. When Banquo's Ghost, or apparition, again appears in 4.1. there are only supernatural characters present, and besides Macbeth, the incident is only witnessed by the audience and the witches who provoked the vision. Still, because it is so difficult to deny or enforce the idea of the Ghost as a dream, the Ghost, and the fear with it, becomes even less tangible. As Outterson-Murphy says: 'dream ghosts demonstrate the paradoxical way in which shadows and fictions—perhaps in their shifting, liminal mystery—can be more emotionally effective than stark, definitive reality'.<sup>85</sup>

It is not only dreams that makes it difficult to separate what is real and not in the Scottish play. Imagination is an essential part of *Macbeth*. The strong imagery of the tragedy not only invites, but forces, the audience to enter a world where the lines between fantasy and reality are blurred from the very beginning. The imagery of garments, echoing sounds, predatory animals, light and darkness, sickness and of course blood are all strongly represented throughout the play.<sup>86</sup> This strong and frequent use of imagery emphasizes 'the *unnaturalness* of Macbeth's crime, that it is a convulsion of nature'.<sup>87</sup> The play persistently points to this unnaturalness and the Ghost, whether it is present on stage or not, is a strong representation of it. Macbeth's guilt is often represented in the form of blood. Unlike the Ghost of Hamlet, who appears almost like his living self, Banquo's hair is blood clotted when he appears as a ghost. The Ghost wears visible signs of being dead, yet it acts like a living man. Holloway claims that nature acting unnatural is nature's way of removing Macbeth from a throne where he does not belong.<sup>88</sup> This unnaturalness is visible in the moving forest, horses eating other horses and of course what

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<sup>85</sup> Outterson-Murphy, "Remember me," 255.

<sup>86</sup> Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, "Shakespeare's Imagery in *Macbeth*," ed. Terence Hawken, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Macbeth: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 13-21.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>88</sup> John Holloway, "The Story of the Night," *MACBETH Critical Essays (Shakespeare Criticism)*, ed. Samuel Schoenbaum (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 300.

seems to be Banquo's corpse attending the banquet. Unnaturally the dead man returns to help restore the natural order. Adding unnaturalness to what is already unnatural seems to have a rectifying effect, just as two negatives become a positive. However, one might ask oneself just how much one should allow the mind's eye to take charge. Cartelli claims that Shakespeare has included 'illusion breakers' in the play to create a form of defence against his own 'powerful fantasy-content'.<sup>89</sup> The defence against this fantasy vision includes act 3, scene 5, with Hecate and the witches and act 3, scene 6, with Lennox and a lord. The witch scene suggests that what Macbeth sees are only illusions and the conversation between Lennox and the lord is included to weaken the audience's identification with Macbeth and to warn against 'the moral and intellectual dangers of maintaining Macbeth as its surrogate'.<sup>90</sup> The Ghost of Banquo, therefore, becomes something of a paradox. Shakespeare both discredits and strengthens the idea of what the Ghost is. He creates a competition between 'the unmanageable fantasy-material' and 'meaning as defense'.<sup>91</sup> This stands in contrast to for example Marlowe's *Faustus*, where the audience is allowed to engage in supernatural fantasies that goes against the natural order to the very end.<sup>92</sup> The defence in *Macbeth*, many will argue, is however not strong enough to fully discredit the supernatural phenomenon. The battle between what is real and what is not, which senses that can be trusted, leaves the audience confused and alerted.

In addition to the strong use of imagery, one's understanding of the protagonist and the Ghost of Banquo is complicated by the inclusion of the supernatural witches. The weird sisters separate *Macbeth* from Shakespeare's other play's including ghosts. From the very first scene there seems to be some external evil forces involved in Macbeth's story. The witches are seen by both Banquo and Macbeth, which enforces their psychical existence. The witches might suggest that it is not only Macbeth's state of mind which results in his vision of the Ghost. In 3.5. Hecate proclaims that her magic 'Shall raise such artificial sprites/ As by the strength of their illusion,/ Shall draw him on to his confusion' (*Macbeth*, 3.5.27-9). This puts forward the idea that the Ghost of Banquo was an illusion created by the witches. The idea seems to be supported by the Ghost's attentiveness to Macbeth's speech at the banquet. The ironic and uncanny way the ghost enters, leaves and re-enters the stage could be a result of the interference of an external demonic force. The Ghost enters each time it is addressed by Macbeth, who several times makes a point out of his missing friend. Before the living Banquo leaves to hunt,

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<sup>89</sup> Cartelli, "Banquo's Ghost: The Shared Vision," 399.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 398

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 400

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 401

Macbeth tells him: 'Fail not our feast' (*Macbeth*, 3.1.27). 'My lord, I will not' (*Macbeth*, 3.1.28) answers Banquo. He sticks to his word. The Ghost enters the banquet as Macbeth wishes that 'the graced person of our Banquo' (*Macbeth*, 3.4.39) was present. As the Ghost shakes its head, points, looks at Macbeth, leaves and re-enters it gives the impression of having a form of consciousness. As Cartelli points out, the ghost reminds us of a puppet, which might 'indicate the insidious working of supernatural agents'.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Keith Thomas says that in the Renaissance 'Ghost-beliefs were also closely linked to the idea of witchcraft, for a person who was troubled by a poltergeist or spectre might well blame a malevolent neighbour'.<sup>94</sup> The witches, like the Senecan revenge ghosts, refer to the pagan underworld as their origin. Hecate for example instruct the other witches to meet her in 'the pit of Acheron' (*Macbeth*.3.5.15). After Marlowe's *Faustus*, Walter Clyde Curry explains, devils presented in plays steadily started to gain comic associations. Therefore, demons and devils were often presented in a different shape, like the witches in *Macbeth*, to only vaguely suggest a 'metaphysical world of evil'.<sup>95</sup> Like the Ghost of Hamlet, the witches speak in hints and metaphors. However, while the witches seem to be creating chaos, the Ghost of Banquo begins the process of restoring order. This speaks against the witches as the source of the Ghost. Either way, the witches complicate the understanding of both Macbeth and the Ghost.

The appearance of the Ghost emphasizes just how alone and isolated Macbeth is in his battle and how pointless his murders were. Not only is it inevitably that Macbeth must lose his throne and that he is damned, but he is also unable to enjoy the Crown while he has it. 'And that which should accompany old age,/ As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,/ I must not look to have' (*Macbeth*, 5.3.24-6), he says. Macbeth has several monologues where he expresses his thoughts and state of mind. In addition, the Ghost of Banquo gives the audience deepened knowledge about what the protagonist is going through. It forces Macbeth to confront the emotions he so desperately tries to suppress. The Ghost, 'As an embodiment of remorseful presentiment, it gives visible shape to the emotions of those to whom it appears'<sup>96</sup>, as Jump says. Another example is the Ghost of Caesar, which might 'encourage us to interpret the ghost as an expression of Brutus's own sense of failure'.<sup>97</sup> Unlike Macbeth, Brutus has a calm and

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<sup>93</sup> Cartelli, "Banquo's Ghost: The Shared Vision," 397.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 709.

<sup>95</sup> Walter Clyde Curry, "The Demonic Metaphysics of *Macbeth*," ed. Terence Hawkes, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Macbeth: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1977) 31.

<sup>96</sup> Jump, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," 346.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

stoicism about him. The Ghost challenges this outward appearance and gives the audience a broader understanding of Brutus as a character, which makes it easier to identify with him. Macbeth too, though he can be argued to be slightly more transparent than Brutus, is significantly helped as a character by his vision of a ghost. ‘The face he shows to the world is harsh, cruel, and utterly self-serving’,<sup>98</sup> says Cox. His wife, Lady Macbeth, has little compassion with how her husband feels. Several of the characters never see the anxious and unsure side of the tyrant, and some selected few only see fragments of it as the Ghost appears in the Banquet scene. No one in the play seem to understand Macbeth, but through the Ghost, as a shared vision, the audience learns to. The audience’s knowledge, however, ‘serves simply to deepen the play’s mystery’,<sup>99</sup> Cox notes.

It takes time for the audience to understand Macbeth and his development, but there is no doubt that a Shakespearean stage ghost helps one’s understanding of the protagonist. According to Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespeare had three ways of representing a ghost on stage: ‘the ghost as a projection of fear, the ghost as the spirit of history’ and ‘the ghost as the shadowy embodiment of deep psychic disturbance’.<sup>100</sup> It has, by now, become quite clear that Macbeth’s vision of the Ghost of Banquo is strongly connected to his guilt and fear. The Ghost of Banquo also symbolizes a line of kings, the fall of Macbeth and a new start for Scotland. Macbeth is not mad, but neither is his mental state a healthy one. The element of the prophecy and the weird sisters makes it hard to reject some form of psychic disturbance. This is especially the case in act 4, scene 1. It is difficult to place the Ghost of Banquo within one of Greenblatt’s boxes, or any boxes at all, as it should be when dealing with a ghost. To understand the Ghost, one must understand Macbeth. Macbeth is a very dynamic character. He ‘moves slowly from being a reluctant, conscience-haunted murderer to being a deliberate killer; Lady Macbeth, in the opposite direction’.<sup>101</sup> As Macbeth changes so does one’s understanding of his visions and what provokes them. His transformation is central to the play, and as Stott rightly notes, ‘By act III the time for Macbeth to be hallucinating has passed: hallucination belong to an early stage in his development’.<sup>102</sup> Regardless of what one understands the Ghost as, one understands the effect it has on its murderer. Macbeth’s ‘hallucinations, lack of sleep, constant fear, self-deprived hope in the equivocal oracle, even in his famously expressed despair (5.3.19-28,

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<sup>98</sup> Cox, “Religion and Suffering in ‘*Macbeth*,’” 233.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>100</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 195.

<sup>101</sup> Stott, “The Need for Banquo's Ghost,” 334.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

5.5.17-28), all compel us to see what he is doing to himself and how painful the process is to him'.<sup>103</sup>

The audience sees less of the effect the murders have on Lady Macbeth. Macbeth's vicious partner in crime is often viewed as the driving force of the duo. Why is it that Lady Macbeth does not see the Ghost of Banquo? The most obvious answer to the question is that Lady Macbeth does not yet know of the murder of Banquo at the banquet. Neither was she involved in the murder. Besides this there are several other reasons that might contribute to the answer. Earlier the thesis discussed female exclusion in the vision of ghosts. Though Lady Macbeth is a member of the gentle sex she has several masculine traits. Her lust for power, activeness and lack of empathy gives her a masculine role in the play. Lady Macbeth has earlier summoned evil powers to 'unsex' (*Macbeth*, 1.5.41) her and to 'Stop up th'access and passage to remorse' (*Macbeth*, 1.5.44). In the beginning of the play Lady Macbeth behaves very similar to the witches. It certainly takes longer for Lady Macbeth to be ridden with guilt, but she eventually turns mad. The doctor tells Macbeth that 'More needs she the divine than the physician' (*Macbeth*, 5.3.74). Her madness is understood as 'religious despair or the Devil's work, an association that reflects early modern abstractions of madness, hysteria and related forms of mental illness'.<sup>104</sup> Cox points out that this comment from the doctor also makes it clear that 'a distinction between the physical and the spiritual not only exists but also exists in this play'.<sup>105</sup> The audience is not made aware of this distinction in *Macbeth* to the same degree as in *Hamlet*. Dreams become an important source of information about Macbeth's ruthless wife. Lady Macbeth dreams of Lady Macduff. Macbeth's partner in crime sees blood on her hands, which resembles the floating dagger Macbeth previously saw. Lady Macbeth, however, have tried to wash off the blood on her hands for several nights without any luck. The audience never gets inside Lady Macbeth's head the way they do with Macbeth. During her decay she is seen only once. The Banquet scene is too early in Lady Macbeth's development, or rather her resolution, for her to see a ghost. Also, as was the case with Claudius and Gertrude, Lady Macbeth is not the protagonist and her visions are therefore limited. If Lady Macbeth had seen the Ghost or gone mad earlier the play would likely have ended much sooner. The Ghost of Banquo not only separates the dinner guests' view of the world from Macbeth's, but it also separates man and

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<sup>103</sup> Cox, "Religion and Suffering in 'Macbeth'," 232.

<sup>104</sup> Marlena Tronicke, "Trying the Last: *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare's Suicides: Dead Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 136.

<sup>105</sup> Cox, "Religion and Suffering in 'Macbeth'," 231.



wife. Act 3, scene 4 is the last scene where Lady Macbeth and Macbeth talk together, and this separation highlights Macbeth's loneliness and isolation. The two of them also die apart.

Despite Macbeth's isolation, the play has a constant and uncanny presence of some unidentifiable supernatural force. Before Macduff kills Macbeth, he calls him a 'hell-hound' (*Macbeth*, 5.8.3). Holloway claims that Macbeth is identified as a 'plainer and more active embodiment of the satanic power than the witches themselves'.<sup>106</sup> Some of the identifications one assumed belonged to the supernatural Ghost and the witches can by the end of the play be applied to Macbeth himself, which creates a form of satisfaction and unease simultaneously. Some of the need to identify the Ghost and the witches is gone because their traits manifest themselves more comprehensively in the protagonist, a mortal man with no supernatural powers. Though Macbeth portray many of these traits he does so while suffering. Every action comes with guilt and fear. Many would claim that it is easier to identify these evil forces in Lady Macbeth, as she does not acknowledge what is morally right to the same degree as Macbeth, at least not until the very end. She also seeks out powers she knows to be evil in a more determined way. She is the force that makes Macbeth follow his, and her own, most horrendous desires. Macbeth is 'a man who continues to suffer mysteriously from his own extraordinary awareness of goodness and of what he is doing to destroy it in himself and in the world around him'.<sup>107</sup> He is a tyrant, but he is not evil. However, it is only the audience who have seen the many sides Macbeth consists of. In a somewhat similar way to Hamlet and Horatio, Macbeth paradoxically makes sure that Banquo lives on. Cartelli explains that by the end of the play Macbeth has become 'the only complete embodiment of the prevailing tensions and energies of his drama' and because of this he 'succeeds Banquo's ghost as the primary focus of a vision we in the audience continue to share with each other'.<sup>108</sup>

In *Macbeth* too the ghost is what the protagonist and the play need it to be. There are evident differences between Hamlet, Macbeth, Brutus and Richard III, therefore the ghosts must also act differently. While Hamlet is the offended, Macbeth is the offender. The Ghost of Banquo gives shape to Macbeth's utmost fears. It does not say a word yet brings with it a clear message of unnaturalness and need for justice and divine order. Macbeth is haunted by fear and guilt, the future and the past, what he cannot know and what he cannot change, all represented in the Ghost of Banquo. If the audience shares Macbeth's vision of the Ghost, they identify with him

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<sup>106</sup> Holloway, "The Story of the Night," 307.

<sup>107</sup> Cox, "Religion and Suffering in '*Macbeth*,'" 236.

<sup>108</sup> Cartelli, "Banquo's Ghost: The Shared Vision," 405.

and his psychologically disturbing world. This identification makes the audience want Macbeth to succeed in his mission, even though it, like Macbeth, can see that it is a highly unethical mission. The dagger monologue in act 2 shows the audience that Macbeth is able to separate illusion and reality, yet it also shows what strong illusions Macbeth's mind is able to create. It both strengthens and weakens the idea of the Ghost and it makes the audience susceptible to Macbeth's world. Macbeth is however not mad like Hamlet might be, or like his wife. Throughout the play he reasons with himself or his wife, and his choices are strategic. He is very aware of the corruption and foul play behind his murders and way to the throne, and these acknowledgements pain him. Macbeth is isolated by the vision of Banquo's ghost. From having the gratitude of King Duncan, the support of his friend and the encouragement of his wife, he ends up having nothing and no one. This effect would have been ruined had anyone else seen the Ghost. The focus of the story is on Macbeth's journey. Lady Macbeth's journey, which is in many ways as horrid as her husband's, is downplayed and in the background. She is ignorant of Banquo's death and lacks understanding of husband's suffering. Her exclusion from the vision rises the tension of the scene and it separates the powerful and calculated couple. The witches complicate the idea of the Ghost. They are an evil presence from the very beginning of the play and they plainly state that they will create illusions to trick Macbeth. If this is the case it seems natural that it is only Macbeth who sees his deceased friend. There is an ongoing battle between reality and fantasy throughout the play, but many will claim, like this thesis does, that the defence against the fantasy content is not strong enough to discharge it. One finds that *Macbeth*, like *Hamlet*, is influenced by contemporary works, customs and traditions. This affects how the Ghost is represented. By the end of the play Macbeth has nothing left to live for and the many murders he has committed or commanded have changed him. The audience has seen his suffering, his fear and it sees his death. Macbeth follows his friend Banquo to the grave and becomes the last vision the audience shares of the tyrant. This way the memory of the Ghost of Banquo lives on together with the memory of Macbeth through the audience.

# Conclusion

One cannot know for certain why a Shakespearean stage ghost is sighted by some and not by others, and this is likely the way Shakespeare intended it to be. The very relevant question of what the ghosts are, which affects the sighting of a ghost to a large degree, have been discussed for over 400 years and is still being discussed today. This is especially the case when it comes to the Ghost of Hamlet, which is one of the most extraordinary stage ghosts in the history of literature due to its clever ambiguity. The hypotheses discussed in this thesis about what the Ghost in *Hamlet* might be are all paradoxically made truthful at once. The different hypotheses would all resonate with Shakespeare's audience as they were represented in the contemporary theological discussion about ghosts. There are several reasons that might explain why Gertrude cannot see the Ghost of Hamlet. It might to a degree be explained by her gender, her small role in the revenge plot and her forward-looking approach to life. These ideas, where the reasons why she cannot see the Ghost are connected to Gertrude as a character, have all been discussed amongst literary critics, but none of them are thoroughly convincing. More convincing is the argumentation that the Ghost of Hamlet does what William Shakespeare needed it to do in order for the plot to evolve in the desired direction; that it is a structural choice. The ghosts in Shakespeare's plays are, after all, supernatural characters in a fictional play and can in theory do whatever the author would like them to. Hamlet is the protagonist and will therefore naturally get the most space to evolve and ponder. Gertrude does not need to see the Ghost in order for the universal balance to be restored. Shakespeare draws on Senecan and ghost lore traditions, which affects the function of the Ghost and therefore also who sees it. Including supernatural characters opens up a range of possibilities and the supernatural is exciting to watch. It is frustrating and perplexing that Gertrude cannot see the Ghost. It creates tension and forces the audience to play an active role. The exclusion of Gertrude also challenges one's perception of the world of the play and it makes the audience identify with Hamlet, with whom they share point of view.

Likewise, the Ghost of Banquo is there to be what the protagonist and the plot needs it to be. This ghost is however different, as it shows itself only to its offender and the audience. The idea of the Ghost is also complicated by the witches and the fact that Macbeth has hallucinated before he sees the Ghost. As one finds is the case in several of Shakespeare's tragedies, the Ghost gives the audience information about the tragic hero that one would not otherwise have

had access to. The Ghost of Banquo, without saying a word, emphasizes just how afraid, guilt-ridden and alone Macbeth is. Lady Macbeth, who is far easier to consider evil and who eventually turns mad, does not see the Ghost because her exclusion is a part of creating the feeling of isolation and decay. Both the Ghost of Hamlet and the Ghost of Banquo make a strong impression on their audience and their memory and presence continue to live through the audience when the play comes to an end. There are few fully dedicated academic works on who can and who cannot see the ghosts in Renaissance literature and drama, and why this is. It is a topic that still invites to further research. In the case of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* this thesis concludes that the fact that some characters see, and some do not see, the ghosts cannot be explained by the characters themselves but must be understood as a result of the author's structural choices and desired plotline. Nevertheless, ghosts are not meant to be fully understood, as their ambiguity and paradoxicality is some of what makes them so appealing. Shakespeare's ghosts therefore continue to perplex and excite their audiences as half living and half dead, half present and half absent.

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