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Hamlet: The play’s the thing

Hamlet, a genre-bending revenge tragedy? – Act 1 scene 2

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Hamlet, a genre-bending revenge tragedy? – Act 1 scene 2

Andrew Hiscock

1 William Shakespeare's contemporary, the scholar Gabriel Harvey submitted that 'The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeare's *Venus & Adonis*: but his *Lucrece*, & his tragedie of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*, haue it in them, to please the wiser sort'[1] and thus offers one amongst a number of references during Shakespeare's own lifetime to indicate the popularity of the text under examination in this issue.

2 In addition to exploring the dramatic development of act 1 scene 2 of Shakespeare's tragedy, the present discussion is shaped as an opportunity to reflect upon theatrical expectations and the ways in which they might be challenged, modified, resisted and/or satisfied. There has been a tendency in early modern scholarship to construct Shakespeare's audiences as clones, all reacting in predictable ways to given texts or as having all the information at the disposal of the given critic. On reflection, taking into account the number of lost texts from the early modern playhouse and our enduring critical need to speculate given the *lacunae* in the surviving documentation, there should be no reason to standardise audience consumption of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre in any way. More generally, audiences down the centuries seem to have had the irresistible urge to summon up the spectral figure of Shakespeare when the word 'Hamlet' is mentioned, but it might be helpful to remind ourselves that some audience members at the time might have had other performative associations in mind: what the critique nowadays calls the *Ur-Hamlet*.[2] Thomas Nashe, for example, refers in his prefatory text to Robert Greene's prose romance *Menaphon* (1589) to 'whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfulls, of tragical speaches' and another of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Thomas Lodge, draws attention in *Wits Misery* (1596) to 'ye ghost which cried so miserably at ye Theator like an oisterwife, *Hamlet*, *reuenge*'.[3] Thus, as with Shakespeare's *Henry V*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar*, for example, it is perfectly possible that the audience member was lured through the early modern playhouse doors by the prospect of revisiting a familiar narrative for the stage, but this time treated by a different dramatist.

3 Each audience, or rather each member of that audience, brings with it different horizons of expectation and it is important to bear this imponderable in mind when formulating critical readings of a collectively constructed artform: drama. Regarding the scene under discussion, one possible key frame of reference for educated Elizabethans and Jacobeans in understanding act 1 scene 2 of Shakespeare's dramatic narrative would be that of Seneca's tragedies. These texts, which may have benefited from ensemble reading at the imperial court in Rome in the first century CE rather than fully-fledged theatrical performance, may easily have been encountered in English universities, Inns of Court, elite libraries as well as the classroom environment of older, more able pupils in the grammar schools; and the dissemination of these texts was inevitably even wider with the publication of English translations in the second half of the sixteenth century, culminating in *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies* (1581).[4] Seneca's concept of tragedy is one powered wholly by the dynamic motivation of revenge and this led to a whole sequence of recurring tropes in his dramatic narratives: enactments of murder and mutilation; scenes of horror; evocations of supernatural presences; referencing of omens; the deployment of *sententiae* (apophthegms or proverbial sayings); the interventions of a chorus and so on. More generally, amongst the three primary philosophical legacies to the European Renaissance, Platonism, Scepticism and Stoicism, the latter with its emphasis on the vigorous government of the emotions was particularly associated with Seneca. Indeed, this branch of enquiry was enjoying a particular renewal of interest across early modern Europe at the close of the sixteenth century supported by the scholarship of eminent figures such as Justus Lipsius and Henri Estienne.[5] However, all of these branches of philosophical enquiry inherited from antiquity with their concerns to posit a higher reality of existential meaning (Platonism), the querying of received wisdom (scepticism) and the restraint of the passions (stoicism) came to be a familiar source of scrutiny and questioning in all kinds of cultural and educational environments across the continent. As Peter Mack has demonstrated, from the earliest age in the sixteenth-century classroom:

> School pupils were trained to extract moral sentence from their reading and use them in their writing, to analyse and compose moral narratives, to collect historical examples illustrating ethical principles, to compose letters and themes, to amplify and to recognize and use various figures of rhetoric. University students were trained to discover arguments, to form syllogisms, to organise sequences of argument, to define words and distinguish shades of meaning, to read dialectically, to declaim and to take part in disputations.[6]

4 In all probability, we have the prospect of some audience members, educated to varying degrees, having undergone this challenging regime of early modern pedagogy year on year and who would be finely attuned to analysing narrative and knowledge acquisition in this manner. Thus, to recapitulate briefly, we have the possibility of multiple *Hamlet*s, found variously in dramatic and prose narratives circulating in the period, and educated audience members in the early modern playhouse who had potentially been exposed to Senecan models of tragedy and to rigorous modes of rhetorical training and debate.

5 In addition, building on paradigms of Senecan dramaturgy, there was a whole sequence of revenge tragedies regularly served up for Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences. These might include Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* or *Titus Andronicus*, for example, but extend to a whole host of productions offered also by his fellow dramatists in the period, such as: Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587?); Henry Chettle's *The*

Tragedy of Hoffman (1602); John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) and *Antonio's Revenge* (1602); Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606-7); John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1614); John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's A Whore* (1629); James Shirley's *The Cardinal* (1641). Such dramatic narratives transport us all too frequently to heady, emotionally charged, horrifyingly corrupt locations around the Mediterranean. This may have been especially persuasive for London audience members when even Elizabeth I's chief minister, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, had advised, 'Marry thy daughters in time, lest they marry themselves. And suffer not thy sons to pass the Alps. For there they shall learn nothing but pride, blasphemy and atheism' – and a goodly number of publications available on the bookshelves might endorse such contentions.[7] For example, in a translation from a text by Benedetto Varchi, Richard Tofte's *The Blazon of Jealousie* (1615) made reference to commonplace opinions that

> such as dwell in hot Regions are very jealous; either because they are much given and inclined unto Love naturally: or else for that they hold it a great disparagement and scandal, to have their Wives, or their Mistresses tainted with the foul blot of unchastity: which thing those that are of contrary Regions, and such as live under the North-Pole, take not so deep at the heart.[8]

6 In his influential essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T. S. Eliot argued that 'what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it'.[9] These prefatory remarks to a consideration of act 1 scene 2 of Shakespeare's tragedy are focused on how we might encounter and re-encounter this now celebrated text. *Hamlet* enriches enormously our understanding of the tragic experience as it has been formulated since the fifth century BCE at least, but it can also encourage us to query how we might wish to constitute Shakespeare's audiences and texts, then and now.

Act 1 scene 2: a matter of succession

7 Act 1 scene 2 focuses our attention, like so much of Shakespeare's dramatic narrative, on the question of royal and political succession. This was, of course, a question which was exercising late Elizabethan England to a remarkable degree as the nation negotiated the final years of the reign of an ageing, childless queen. Since the fifth century BCE at least, the tragic genre has been associated with elevated diction and the collective, public implications of actions taken by elite characters – and this is precisely the manner in which this scene opens:

> Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
> The memory be green, and that it us befitted
> To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom
> To be contracted in one brow of woe
> (1.2.1–4).[10]

8 Linguistically, Claudius adopts the royal formulation, 'we', with consummate ease, deploying expertly his skills as a rhetorician: he does this by fulfilling the expectations of rhetorical practice established since antiquity – expressing himself in decorous language (*logos*), affirming his moral sensibility (*ethos*) as well as strategically forging relations of shared emotional experience with his audience (*pathos*). His sentiments are impressively counterpointed and held in balance, indicating, as early modern theorists had argued, that the successful exploitation of language is itself the key to the successful exercise of political leadership. However, whereas so often in early modern

revenge tragedy the emphasis falls upon inveterate discord, pervasive corruption and the terrifying operations of a malignant universe, in Shakespeare's tragedy the emphasis falls again and again upon novelty and immediacy: 'green'; 'sometime sister, now our queen'; 'to pester us'; 'we have here writ' (1.2.2, 8, 22, 27). Repeatedly, the audience is encouraged to focus hard upon pressing questions of political negotiation and transition both within and without Denmark – to attend to events in the recent past and those taking place immediately in the present of barely finished funerals and newly minted courts. Nonetheless, whatever the concerns raised later in the play regarding Claudius' moral nature, we are invited to attend to an impressive public performance which initiates a new phase of political business in the realm.

9 At this castle of Elsinore, the seat of political power and dramatic interest, we are left in no doubt that we are far from the Mediterranean world conventionally associated with such revenge intrigues. There is a vigorous focus on Danish-Norwegian relations and we, as audience, become an extension of the court listening attentively to the proclamations of a new regime on the Baltic. Moreover, we are not allowed to forget the ways in which the power structure of this northern world is governed by ailing uncles and headstrong nephews. Political thinking extending back to antiquity and renewed regularly during the medieval centuries had stressed that tyranny might frequently be identified in part by the refusal of the political leader to take counsel. Here, however, Claudius emphasises the communal labours of mourning and the court's assent to his new marriage: 'Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone / With this affair along' (1.2.15–6). The dissonant words and presence of Shakespeare's protagonist inevitably deeply colour our experience of this very particular dramatic world, but we are wrong if we nominate him too quickly as a public hero, championing widely perceived wrongs. None of the other characters is agonizing like the protagonist with the advent of a new political leader. On the political (if not the theatrical) stage of Denmark, the prince must give place to the new incumbent on the throne. And what is the manifesto of this Claudius? – the reassuring, traditional values of *natio*, *patria*, *pater* and *gens*.[11] Claudius articulates this newly assumed role of *pater patriae* (father of the nation) with assurance, attending meticulously to details of state and concern for those most immediately under his care in the court.

10 Whatever the nature of the motivation governing the king's responses, audiences on- and off-stage witness his attentiveness, the sustained manner in which he insists upon his role as a warm-hearted, second father for Laertes: 'You cannot … lose your voice' (1.2.44–5). The point is forcefully made in this scene as Claudius' speech acts to Laertes are framed within the interrogative mood: 'Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?' (1.2.57). Indeed, the attentive questioning conducted by Claudius is placed in stark relief with the bombastic, laboured utterances of the young man's natural father: 'wrung from me my slow leave / By laboursome petition' (1.2.58–9). More generally, the vigorous exercises of both these patriarchs, Claudius and Polonius, in attention-seeking form an unexpected continuity with the subsequent behaviours of the protagonist himself in this scene.

11 Laertes' personal desire to leave the kingdom once again returns attention not only to the ways in which this court world is governed by rituals (funerals, weddings, coronations) to affirm its legitimacy, but also to the markedly international world in which Denmark operates. Indeed, Shakespeare's dramatic narrative is at pains to emphasise this, inviting us to ponder Norway, France and subsequently the German

states (notably, Wittenberg) in the company of the prince himself to consolidate subsequent extra-Denmark actions and agents in the intrigue at times when the audience may have become too preoccupied with the claustrophobia of life at Elsinore.

12 Expertly adopting the role of the monarch, orchestrating all the operations of the court, Claudius now turns his attentions as adoptive father from Laertes to Hamlet himself. Visually and linguistically, Hamlet wishes to distinguish himself from this elite community, creating dissonance with his tactical punning and drawing energy from the discomfort, humiliation and confusion of others: like Shakespeare’s Richard III, might we not see him in such scenes as a persuasive descendant of the medieval Vice figure?[12]

Speaking with Gertrude

13 At this point in the scene, Gertrude is ushered into the exchanges of this court world, insisting upon the needful and healing properties of an *ars oblivionis* (the art of forgetting): ‘Thou know’st ’tis common, all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity’ (1.2.72–3).[13] Such counsel in the arts of forgetfulness is, of course, anathema to the prince who promotes himself as a memory expert in a world enacting political transition and seeking social renewal. Gertrude has been seen as a recurring, sometimes obsessive source of interest for the prince, but also for critics and audiences down the centuries. T. S. Eliot was notable, for example, in his contention that ‘Hamlet is not up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her’.[14] It may be that audiences have a marked appetite for learning more about the queen than Shakespeare’s intrigue is willing to yield and many adaptations in the theatre, the dance studio, in the concert hall and on the screen have sought to cater to this appetite in recent decades. However, while focusing on perceived *lacunae* in the intrigue, critical studies have frequently failed to attend to the multifariousness of the queen’s functions in the texts of *Hamlet* which have survived down to us: ‘In this scene, Gertrude is afforded a number of *sententiae* (or proverbial sayings) in the manner of a character in a Senecan tragedy all that lives must die’ (1.2.72).[15] This may or may not enhance her status in the scene depending on the given reading, but such utterances are nonetheless afforded attention onstage. Her expansive responses, like those of Claudius and Polonius, are made to contrast keenly with the often gnomic, terse utterances of the protagonist in this public forum of the court. Moreover, by investing in such apophthegms, Gertrude may indeed emerge as a familiar theatrical device, as an agent connecting directly with audience members trained in the arts of rhetorical debate: here, rehearsing and querying the relative merits of prolonged mourning.[16]

14 Gertrude’s interventions only serve to highlight the emotional disconnection between herself and her resentful son: her argument concerning the universal or ‘common’ cycle of human experience is ill-judged for a prince who wishes in every way to stress his own, superlative ‘particularity’ (see 1.2.75). Acknowledging the authority that the queen may have over her son, Claudius mistakenly also takes up the rhetorical argument of his wife: ‘obstinate condolement is a course of / Impious stubbornness’ (1.2.93–4). Indeed, he even evokes the world of the heavens, ‘A fault against the dead’ (1.2.102), and thus returns attention to the preceding scene on the castle ramparts and to subsequent stage business in this scene. In the event, the highly wrought nature of

the prince's emotional state is strategically foregrounded in his highly rhetorically-staged interventions. Investing ostentatiously in the trope of anaphora, 'Nor… Nor… No, nor… Nor…' (1.2.78–81), Hamlet expertly captures the attention of multiple audiences with these stage-managed performances deploying *enumeratio* and *amplificatio*, but we should be mindful not to underestimate the force of mutual recognition in these theatrical performances. By the end of the sixteenth century across early modern Europe, Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (1330–74), for example, had enjoyed generation upon generation of admirers and imitators:

> …'miserere' del mio non degno affanno…
> ('on my unworthy sufferings miserere' – rime 62)
> Che fai alma? che pensi? avrem mai pace?
> ('Soul, what is it that you do? what do you think? Will I ever have peace?' – rime 150)
> …Pien d'un vago penser che mis desvia
> da tutti gli altri…
> ('Rapt in the one fond thought that makes me stray/
> from other men' – rime 169)
> Tutto 'l dì piango; e poi la notte, quando…
> ('All day I weep; and then at night' – rime 216)[17]

15 Hamlet's emotionally-charged retort does not only seek to fracture the co-operative and politically achieving ambiance fostered by Claudius at the court. With his evocative discourse of mourning, weeping, sighing, victimisation and superlative interiority, Hamlet construes himself ably as the conventional Petrarchan lover (determined to stress his exceptionalism) and he may certainly have been recognised as such by educated members of the audience. Like most Petrarchan lovers, his sufferings eclipse all thoughts of the loved one, for his desire all too often reveals itself as narcissistic, an end in itself.[18]

Elsinore, Wittenberg and International Politics

16 In addition to its significance as a primary site in the history of the Reformation, the evocation of Wittenberg returns attention once again to the world of international politics from which Elsinore's court cannot disengage. Claudius endeavours to mask the discordant notes of Hamlet's interventions by focusing on the more reassuring customs of the Danish court: ritual. John Stow's *Annals*, for example, recalled the 1606 visit of Christian IV's, King of Denmark, to the English capital:

> …king Iames, Queene Anne, Prince Henry, with certaine other Brytaine princes and peeres … went a boord the king of Denmarkes greatest shippe … the said princes were very royally feasted, and as they sat at Banquet, greeting each other with kindnes and pledges of continuing amity and hearts desire of lasting health, the same was straight wayes knowne, by sound of Drumme, and Trumpet, and the Cannon lowdest voyce…[19]

17 However, such rituals of feasting and drinking may not only synchronise with practices witnessed more broadly in early modern elite society, but in dramatic terms they engage tightly with the stress on forgetfulness and unhappy remembrance being negotiated repeatedly amongst this company.

18 The final phase of Shakespeare's scene is initiated with one of the most famous soliloquies in the play. Modern audiences are perhaps so much in the habit of anticipating the prince's soliloquies that we may be distracted from recognizing the

marked preponderance of the dramatic strategy in this text. Revenge tragedy is frequently powered by successions of actions and reactions, emphasising the precarious, passionate, impulsive nature of human interaction in these dramatic societies. Shakespeare's tragedy not only transports us to a dark world of northern Europe, but is also unexpectedly, disproportionately meditative in character.

19 At the turn of the twentieth century, A. C. Bradley argued, '[i]t was not that *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's greatest tragedy or most perfect work of art; it was that *Hamlet* most brings home to us … the sense of the soul's infinity'.[20] With Hamlet's soliloquy, we transition from the political world of the court to the metaphysics of philosophical enquiry. Overwhelmed, it seems, by a larger, existential world nausea, the prince engages in swift succession with the provisionality of human life, the relationship of Christian faith to the death wish and the corrupt living environment in which he finds himself. Equally importantly, we are asked to address the nature of Hamlet's mental responses. One of the leading jurists of the period, Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634), defined murder as the act of 'a man of sound memory and of the age of discretion, [who] unlawfully killeth … any reasonable creature … with malice aforethought'.[21] The degree to which Hamlet has reached the age of discretion may be a source of ongoing debate, but the question may be legitimately asked whether is he of 'sound memory'? In contemporary English, we might be more likely to turn to the phrase *of sound mind* in this context, but concerns surrounding memory percolate into all the nooks and crannies of this dramatic world. How secure is the prince's grasp of the past? Is it credible that the warrior Old Hamlet was of such a fine sensibility that he wished Gertrude's complexion protected from the fierce elements? Moreover, perplexingly, it becomes increasingly apparent, that the son is not remembering these two figures as parents, but as lovers – indeed, calling to mind the intimacies of their responses to each other and impressing the audience with the subsequent vehemence of the demonisation of his mother. Again and again in Shakespeare's tragedy, this embittered prince is forced to confront the impermanence of his father's place *and his own* in the affections of others.

20 The scene now draws to a close in the company of a society that Hamlet is assured in this instance he can lead: that of his comrades from Wittenberg. The convergence of the erstwhile stoic Horatio and of Marcellus and Barnardo introduces a note of unforced familiarity and exchange to the stage. The new arrivals are reminded by this newly assumed host, 'We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart' (1.2.175), reiterating the customs of the country. As marriage is found to 'follow hard' upon funeral rites, the witty prince is once again forced into the role of auditor with the deeply troubling news that other, hitherto secure distinctions are being blurred not only in the theatre, but on the castle ramparts, where night plays hosts to visiting spirits: 'My lord, upon the platform where we watched' (1.2.213). Laertes' public act of obedience to his father and that of Hamlet to his mother are now succeeded in this phase of the scene by a final act of submission by the prince's own entourage: 'we did think it writ down in our duty / To let you know of it' (1.2.222–3). Hamlet has been adopted by the living at court and now he awaits the prospect of being adopted by the dead: 'I will watch tonight; / Perchance 'twill walk again' (1.2.241–2).

NOTES

1. British Library Add 42518, fol. 422[v]. Quoted by Anthony Grafton, 'Lisa Jardine: A Life in the Margins', in *Testimonies: States of Mind and States of the Body in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Gideon Manning (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020), pp. 7–19 (p. 9).

2. For evidence of ongoing critical debate concerning the presence of the *Ur-Hamlet* in early modern theatrical life, see, for example: Andrew Hadfield, 'The *Ur-Hamlet* and the Fable of the Kid', *Notes and Queries* 53.1 (March 2006), pp. 46–7; Tom Rutter, '"Hamlet", Pirates and Purgatory', *Renaissance and Reformation* 38.1 (Winter 2015), pp. 117–39; Ted Tregear, 'Mourning in Thomas Kyd's Lost Works', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 58.2 (2018), pp. 307–30; Holger Schott Syme, *Theatre History, Attribution Studies, and the Question of Evidence. Elements in Shakespeare and Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), doi:10.1017/9781009227391.

3. See respectively: Robert Greene, *Menaphon* (London: Thomas Orwin for Sampson Clarke, 1589), **3[r]; Thomas Lodge, *Wits Miserie and the Worlds Madness: Discouering the Deuils Incarnat of this Age* (London: Adam Islip, 1596), p. 56.

4. For further discussion here, see Andrew Hiscock, '*Hamlet*, Early Modern Tragedy and the Question of Genre', in Hamlet *in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Victoria Bladen and Yan Brailowsky (Paris: CNED/Belin, 2022), pp. 33–55 (p. 41).

5. On the influence of Stoicism on early modern drama see Donovan Sherman, *The Philosopher's Toothache: Embodied Stoicism in Early Modern English Drama* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021); Daniel Cadman, *Sovereigns and Subjects in Early Modern Neo-Senecan Drama: Republicanism, Stoicism and Authority* (London: Routledge, 2015).

6. Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 2.

7. See John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion and other various occurrences in the Church of England during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), vol. 4, p. 477.

8. Benedetto Varchi, *The blazon of iealousie*, trans. Richard Tofte (London: Thomas Snodham for John Busbie, 1615), pp. 21–2.

9. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1932), pp. 13–22 (p. 15).

10. All references to Shakespeare's tragedy are taken from the following edition: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, 3rd ed., ed. Philip Edwards and Heather Hirschfeld (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

11. These cultural markers (nation, country, (fore-)father, race) were frequently deployed in classical texts (and early modern texts imitating classical precedents) to stress the key points of allegiance for the ideal citizen in the *res publica* (or political community).

12. The 'Vice' figure is a recurring figure in survival English moral plays from the medieval period. This symbolic villain thrives on chaos and rejoices in predatory or

destructive practices. In Shakespeare's tragedy, the referencing of such associations is rendered more explicit later at 3.4.98 ('a vice of kings').

13. While much has been made of the importance of memory and memory performance in early modern society, the strategic exploitation of the *ars oblivionis* (the art of forgetting) might also be deployed in rhetorical tracts and dialogues of the period as a means of asserting power over a disputant.

14. T. S. Eliot, 'Hamlet' (1919), in *Selected Essays*, pp. 141–7 (p. 145). In this context, see also, for example, Jacqueline Rose's '*Hamlet* — the 'Mona Lisa' of Literature' which challenges Eliot's stress on woman-as-flaw in Shakespeare's dramatic narrative: *Critical Quarterly* 28.1–2 (1986), pp. 35–49.

15. See, for example, the dominant emphases in: David Leverenz, 'The Woman in *Hamlet*: An Interpersonal View', *Signs* 4.2 (Winter 1978), pp. 291–308; Baldwin Maxwell, 'Hamlet's Mother', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15.2 (Spring 1964), pp. 235–46. Carolyn Heibrun's 'The Character of Hamlet's Mother' justly chooses to return to close readings of Shakespeare's dramatic narrative to produce more nuanced readings. See *Shakespeare Quarterly* 8.2 (Spring 1957), pp. 201–6.

16. This is also a theme taken up elsewhere in Shakespeare's oeuvre: in *Twelfth Night*, for example, the grief of Olivia is placed sorely in question by the interrogations of Feste (1.5).

17. For Italian quotations, see Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milan: Editore Arnoldo Mondadori, 1996). English translations are my own.

18. Shakespeare's protagonist may be found elsewhere in the tragedy to indulge in this practice: see 3.1 and 3.4, for example, where Hamlet exploits Petrarchan tropes of love poetry in his verbal attacks upon Ophelia and Gertrude.

19. John Stow, *The annales, or a generall chronicle of England* (London: Thomas Dawson for Thomas Adams, 1615), p. 887.

20. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: MacMillan, 1919), p. 128.

21. Chapter 7, 'Of Murder', in Edward Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (London: M. Flesher for W. Lee and D. Pakeman, 1644), p.47.

ABSTRACTS

This article concentrates on an early, but strategic scene in Shakespeare's celebrated tragedy in which the audience is introduced to the court world of Elsinore and to the protagonist himself. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which Shakespeare's innovative text tests early modern expectations of revenge tragedy as well as incorporating those associated with rhetoric and pedagogy in the period. The article ends demonstrating the international political emphasis of this scene as well as the unexpected continuities in self-representation between the leading male figures onstage.

Cet article se concentre sur une scène stratégique au début de la célèbre tragédie de Shakespeare, dans laquelle le public découvre le monde de la cour d'Elseneur et le protagoniste lui-même. Une

attention particulière est accordée à la manière dont le texte novateur de Shakespeare met à l'épreuve les attentes du public renaissant en matière de tragédie de la vengeance et incorpore aussi celles qui sont associées à la rhétorique et à la pédagogie de l'époque. L'article se termine en démontrant l'importance politique internationale de cette scène ainsi que les continuités inattendues dans la façon dont les personnages masculins se représentent sur scène.

INDEX

oeuvrecitee Hamlet
nomsmotscles William Shakespeare
Mots-clés: Hamlet, William Shakespeare, tragédie de la vengeance, rhétorique, cour royale
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