

# **Hamlet Essay**

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A hallucination can be defined as "an experience involving the apparent perception of something not present." Hamlet, a character from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, experiences just this. Hamlet is introduced as a man who has recently lost his father. In the play, some of his actions can be described as a process of grieving, although Hamlet is going through an extremely extensive amount of grief. In order to break down this grief, one would have to look through a different perspective than usual. The psychoanalytical process allows one to analyze Hamlet's thoughts and feelings while he experiences the traumatic events and high stress levels. Stress levels that are so exceedingly high, the effects of this stress cause anywhere from depression, due to Hamlet's situation, to hallucinations. Using the psychoanalytical perspective to analyze "Hamlet", it is evident and easy to see that King Hamlet's ghost is not a true ghost, but rather a manifestation of Hamlet's conscience.

When the ghost is first introduced in Act 1, Scene 5, he claims that he is Hamlet's father. The ghost states, "I am thy father's spirit, doomed for a certain term to walk the night, and for the day confined to fast in fires, 'till the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burnt and purged away." (13-17) This initiates that King Hamlet is in Purgatory. Through this statement, a number of problems arise. Purgatorial spirits were not supposed to convince people to commit murder, as that would ultimately defeat the purpose of purging your sins. Yet, that is exactly what the ghost desires. Secondly, Protestants do not officially believe in the doctrine of Purgatory. Hamlet went to Wittenberg, which was a Protestant school and where the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation took place. Because of Hamlet's religious status, he is initially hesitant. He is not entirely sure about who or what the ghost is, therefore he is melancholy and confused. The ghost's appearance sets the revenge plot into motion, but it also delays the play's action, almost as if Hamlet is dragging the audience into his world of confusion.

King Hamlet's "ghost" is commonly familiarized and compared to Hamlet himself. They speak similarly (mainly about Gertrude's "incestuous" relationship with Claudius) and they were also similar in looks. When Hamlet

arrived in Ophelia's bedroom in Act 2, Scene 1, she described him as "Ghostly pale, as if he had been loosed out of hell." (89, 91) Could the "ghost" be Hamlet himself manifesting his need for a father figure's guidance? In Act 2, Scene 2, he states, "The spirit that I have seen may be a devil, and the devil hath power t'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps, out of my weakness and melancholy, as he is very potent with such spirits, abuses to damn me." (587-592) Hamlet admits to being in an unstable state of mind and susceptible to hallucinations, which further justifies the fact that the ghost is simply a manifestation.

It is obvious that Hamlet was experiencing a great amount of stress and anxiety. Within psychiatry, the belief is that severe stress can cause psychotic symptoms, such as auditory and visual hallucinations, and paranoid delusions. This is evident when only Hamlet is capable of seeing the ghost in Act 3, Scene 4. Hamlet can clearly see his father's ghost in this scene, but Gertrude is incapable of identifying or hearing the ghost, "Alas, how is't with you, that you do bend your eye on vacancy, and with th'incorporal air do hold discourse?" (198, 129-131) Hamlet replies by questioning, once again if his mother can see the ghost, to which she replies with, "Nothing at all; yet all

that is I see." (198, 146) Although the ghost could be seen by many people in the early acts of the play, it is signified that the appearances diminish. It is possible that the ghost could have been real initially, but by this point in the play, Hamlet's instability has resulted in him manifesting the ghost within himself.

Hamlet's devastation and depression occurring from his father's murder led to mental and physical instability. Hamlet was incapable of distinguishing his world of confusion from reality. This consequently caused hallucinations and exacerbated anxiety. These hallucinations became more severe with the progression of the play and caused Hamlet to be, in a way, two people. By analyzing Hamlet's interactions with the characters mentioned in Shakespeare's play, it is revealed that King Hamlet's ghost was truly a manifestation of Hamlet's conscience.