

# Hamlet's Two Souls

Lauro Filipe Reis

**Abstract**—Much of Hamlet's agony and frustration appears in the homonymous play as a result of the abruptly broken relationship with his father, in which the young prince idealized himself as an inevitable continuation of the late king, not only in familial terms but, above all, in political terms. The fact that Hamlet wasn't allowed to receive the crown and was left with only the idealized memory he had forged of his father (given that Claudius tried to eradicate any reminiscences of the former king as quickly as possible) means that the young Prince was deprived of the precursor he was destined, in the future, to become. This rupture means that Hamlet, the prince, is bereft of becoming Hamlet, the king. Because of this, the inner burden doubles on himself: that of bearing an unendurable memory with which he identifies, but which can only be maintained through imminent and deadly revenge. The memory of Hamlet, the father, thus becomes incompatible with the future of Prince Hamlet. Contrary to Kantorowicz's dualistic division in *The King's Two Bodies*, between the «natural body» and the «body politic» of the king, categories that can be contrasted with the descriptions of the ghost of King Hamlet, Prince Hamlet suffers from the tragic fact of having only one body, but two Hamlets in himself.

**Index Terms**—Dissonance, father, ghost, hamlet

## I. INTRODUCTION

The young Prince Hamlet's relationship with his father is, throughout the play, an indirect but vital one. Filtered by the idealization that Prince Hamlet projects, by the memory of the father he conjures in his dialogues and by the ghostly apparitions throughout the play, the late King Hamlet determines his son's agency and introspection. In [1], it's author takes the idea of the power of memory to determine present actions and inverts it, applying it to Hamlet: it is his present interests and desires that appropriate the past and reshape it [1]. The young prince thus suffers from the attempt to reify a paternal memory, prompted by contemporary events, such as the ghostly appearance of his father, the usurpation of the throne by his uncle (and the King's murderer) and his mother's hasty marriage.

Hamlet's idealization of his father, which manifests itself aggressively in the closet scene with his mother, Gertrude, proves that the kind of relationship Hamlet tries to project towards his father is not exclusively Oedipal. Hamlet's comparison between Claudius and King Hamlet reveals, instead, an apprentice complex, which resolves the Oedipal complex in the process, but introduces other problems:

*"HAMLET. Look here upon this picture, and on this"  
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers:*

*See what a grace was seated on this brow,  
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,  
An eye like Mars to threaten and command,  
A station like the herald Mercury  
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,  
A combination and a form indeed  
Where every god did seem to set his seal  
To give the world assurance of a man;»  
(Shakespeare [2] 3.4, 30-38)*

The fact that Hamlet begins the comparison between kings through an artificial representation of two paintings already confirms the idealized, partial and indirect aspect of such exercise. Furthermore, the celestial characterization applied by Hamlet to describe his father, such as "what a grace", "Hyperion's curls", "the front of Jove", "an eye like Mars", resorts to clearly hyperbolic attributes, projected with the intention of precluding any attempt to equate Claudius with the late king.

It could be argued that this idealization serves as an attempt to try to convince, not only Gertrude, but also Hamlet himself. The apprentice complex determines a way of enjoying dependence on the father under the pretext of a future independence from him [3]. As Otto Fenichel describes it, since it is an «ambivalent complex, given that the ultimate goal is to replace the father, [the complex] can mask a powerful degree of hostility, being open to various forms of pathological distortion," ([3] p.306). The intention would always be the long-term replacement, in which the father voluntarily ceded his position to the son (or in the case of monarchical political systems, the natural death of a king and inheritance of his title and privileges by a prince) or the son would take it by force<sup>1</sup>.

Now, Hamlet seeks to establish, from the first episode with the ghost, a line of continuity with the idealization he creates of his father. However, the difficulty in establishing an organic continuity (and dependence) arises from three problems: a) the fact that King Hamlet is not alive and, as such, there is no final position, or authority, that Prince Hamlet could aspire to obtain directly from him; b) the fact that the ghostly apparition of the king asks Hamlet to commit murder is something that only benefits the deceased king on another existential plane, and not Prince Hamlet. The spiritual benefits of executing vengeance (ascension of the father's soul from purgatory to paradise) harm Hamlet on the earthly plane; c) the fact that King Hamlet does not exist as an external entity on the same existential plane that Prince Hamlet means that Prince Hamlet will have to unfold in two

Manuscript received June 28, 2022; revised July 23, 2022; accepted October 23, 2022.

Lauro Filipe Reis is with the University of Lisbon, Portugal.

\*Correspondence: lauro.reis@campus.ul.pt (L.F.P.)

<sup>1</sup>“After having given up the belief in his own omnipotence and having projected it onto the father, there are several ways in which a boy may try to regain participation in the father's omnipotence. The two opposite extremes are the idea of killing the father in order to take his place [Oedipus] and the idea of ingratiating, of being obedient and submissive to such a degree that the father will willingly grant participation [Hamlet],” ([3], p.306, my square brackets).

and carry within himself, both the paternal authority with which he identifies (and seeks vengeance in his name) and his own identity. It can also be argued that the Ghosts apparition could solely be a creation of Prince Hamlet's own subconscious mind trying to reify his wishes to murder the usurper Claudius and reclaim his rightful throne. If that would be the case, it would raise problems of a different nature, such as the fact that, at the beginning of the play, the two sentinels plus Horatio were able to see and identify the appearance of the Ghost as of the late King Hamlet, thus materializing in the play that otherworldly figure. The fact that the play starts precisely with such a sighting, could be interpreted as Shakespeare's way of eliminating, from the start, any identification of the Ghost as solely a product of the Prince's imagination.

Kantorowicz, in [4], describes the fictitious division of the king projected by Tudor jurists into «body natural» (the mortal body of a monarch) and «body politic» (the eternal and immutable body), as mere «political mysticism» ([4] p.3), subject to spatial and temporal contexts too specific to be taken seriously outside of them. However, this division appears to be useful to metaphorically strengthen the constitution of the King's ghost in *Hamlet* and Prince Hamlet himself, albeit in procedures somewhat different from those used in *Richard II*.

*Hamlet* begins with the appearance of a ghost, who claims to be the spirit of King Hamlet ("I am thy father's spirit" [2] 1.5, 91) and who also declares to walk between worlds, moving at night through the earth ("walk the night. [2] 1.5, 92) and suffering fires in purgatory ("fast in fires" 1.5, 93; "sulphurous and tormenting flames" [2] 1.5, 84). According to catholic belief, King Hamlet's mortal body resides underground, although his spirit resides in purgatory. There is a dissociation between the King's body and his soul. However, this ghost that appears does not correspond to the legal version of the "body politic," in fact, the first association that Prince Hamlet makes of the spirit, although he is militarily dressed ("in complete steel" [2] 1.4, 32) is precisely with the "body natural" of the king, the corpse that resides under the earth, from which it apparently emerged:

*"HAMLET. Why thy canonized bones  
hearsed in death"  
Have burst their cerements, why the sepulchre  
Wherein we saw thee quietly interred  
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws  
To cast thee up again.»  
(Shakespeare [2] 1.4, 28-32)*

Prince Hamlet establishes a connection between the king's corpse that resides underground, in the tomb, with the spirit that appears before him, dressed in military armor. The curiosity of this description is that it was made before the ghost spoke. Once his death, murderer and request for vengeance are described, the Prince changes his perspective on the spirit: the father's spirit will no longer be "supported" by the corpse that resides in the tomb, but by the constant act of remembrance (or idealization) by Prince Hamlet ("Remember thee? / Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe." [2] 1.5, 71-73). This displacement, from a lifeless corpse (King Hamlet) to the inner life of a living body (Hamlet's mind), alters the nature

of the spirit itself, as Hamlet will treat this commandment of revenge as the conscious attempt to incarnate in himself the (idealized) memory of his father, as well as getting rid of the rottenness spread by Claudius in the state of Denmark. Although it could be highlighted its universal aspect, the dead being somewhat alive in the minds of those who remember them, the play's political circumstances allied to Prince Hamlet's temperament allow to take this interpretation one step further and claim that at least a part of Hamlet aspires the embodiment of his father's strong will and soul. This embodiment comes closer to the process of metempsychosis, the transmigration of the soul into another body, and less to the mere and simple act of remembrance.

Once dead, King Hamlet no longer possesses the double body that Tudor legal doctrine advocated. Furthermore, the King's ghost is emptied of both "natural body" and «political body». And while the ghost is interested in his own spiritual salvation, Prince Hamlet is interested in King Hamlet's earthly redemption. The "commandment" ([2] 1.5, 78) that Hamlet claims to accept carries some ambiguity, for it is not clear whether the Prince will carry out the commandment of "remembering" his father, to avenge his father's death, if the very act of remembrance manifests itself precisely in the act of revenge, or whether it is the act of revenge that personifies the act of remembrance. Nevertheless, believing that such a redemption will benefit himself and the entire court, such as removing the rottenness that had spread since Claudius usurped the throne ("Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" [2] 1.4, 76), Hamlet finds himself carrying within himself a discredited but, above all, forgotten «body politic». None of the court characters, with the exception of Horatio, will recognize any illegitimacy of Claudius as king and (according to Prince Hamlet) virtually all will forget the virtues of the former late King. Neither Polonius, Gertrude nor, above all, Claudius react in agreement with any description that Hamlet makes of his father throughout the play. So Hamlet believes it is his responsibility, as his direct successor, to support the eternal and heavenly blessed «body politic», which is absent from the throne. This way, Claudius, once a king, is a king who, for Hamlet, is devoid of «body politic», and the language that Hamlet uses to describe Claudius may give a hint of Claudius' impoverished and mortal existence as a monarch ("Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed" [2] 3.4, 56; "Your fat / king and your lean beggar" [2] 4.3, 10-11), a king who was not blessed (in Hamlet's eyes) with an eternal body, only with a mortal and sinful body deadly which, as a consequence, infects all of Denmark.

Indeed, it is not surprising the impulse in Hamlet to identify himself with the image of the father-king that he idealizes, given that the other option, Claudius, is promptly rejected by the prince at the beginning of the play. According to Fenichel's theory, identification and dependence (obedience, and even submission) are stipulated because the child recognizes that this will bring long-term benefits to him (if some stability in the authority is maintained). In the case of a royal lineage, benefiting and strengthening the position of the king, as son and prince, will eventually pass on such benefits to his offspring, thus continuing the lineage of a perfect, immutable and eternal body, given that, under normal conditions, the son will ascend to the father's throne after his

death (“The king is dead. Long live the king”, a phrase traditionally uttered during the coronation of a new monarch, in place of the dead king, signaling the continuity of sovereignty in the body of another king. First uttered in 15th century France, but quickly adopted and practiced by the English court).

The death of a monarch is a symbolic moment of renewal and continuity; however, this did not happen with the legitimate heir in the case of *Hamlet*. Death did not renew continuity: it altered and broke it. As if that were not enough, the request that the ghost makes definitively excludes the possibility of Prince Hamlet successfully incorporating the «body politic», as this request continually jeopardizes the safety of Hamlet's «natural body». Recognizing any type of «body politic» in a monarch implies the existence of a legal, religious and/or popular apparatus that identifies such authority and continuity in the mortal form of a monarch. Given that Claudius was able to successfully contaminate the entire court (except the people, who adore the prince), eliminating the rot that Claudius spread implies also eliminating all the people who could potentially recognize Hamlet as a possible manifestation of «body politic». This is the tragedy *in Hamlet*: that of seeking revenge, but recognizing it, along the way, as self-destructive of his pretensions. The more Hamlet carries out his plan to avenge his father's death, the more he sabotages his chances of becoming king.

## II. THE ABSENT HAMLET

The voluntary and natural ceding of position from father to son was made impossible by the murder of the former. The throne, the kingdom and the court did not pass from Hamlet to Hamlet. This rupture installs an internal dissonance in the young prince's psyche, manifesting itself in his efforts to obtain proof (“The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King” [2] 2.2, 516-517) that legitimizes the revenge that he intends to carry out in his father's name, but who, at the same time, seems to doubt, hesitate and question its fulfillment (“Now might I do it. But now 'a is a-praying. / And now I'll do it / [...] / Why, this is base and silly, not revenge” [2] 3.3, 50-51 and 60). The elements of doubt, skepticism and deep questioning in Hamlet are a consequence of his temper brought on by the death of his father (“But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe.” [2] 1.2, 65-66) and the poisonous atmosphere of the Elsinore court, but we also cannot ignore the influence of his Protestant university education in Wittenberg.

Although this academic background attests to the existence of some intelligence, linguistic and argumentative dexterity, it also brings to light Christian religious incompatibilities, namely between Catholics and Protestants beliefs, especially regarding the origin of the ghost of King Hamlet. Prince Hamlet's Protestant upbringing is incompatible with the Catholic belief in purgatory as an intermediate realm of suffering, which was necessary to tread in order to ascend to paradise. As such, there are more obstacles to an attempt to idealize an organic continuity between Hamlet-son and Hamlet-father than just the murder and usurpation of the throne (and of Gertrude) by Claudius. Skepticism about

purgatory also makes Hamlet hesitate to trust the ghost's identity at all («Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned» [2] 1.4, 21). The academic, rational and Protestant side of Hamlet emerges as an evaluator of the ghost's apparition and proposal. The middle ground that Hamlet concluded is that he needed proof (or a confession) to confirm what the ghost described.

Despite how quickly Claudius tried to make the king's death forgotten (“Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death / The memory be green, [...] / That we with wisest sorrow think on him / Together with remembrance of ourselves.” [2] 1.2, 160-161 and 164-165), Hamlet seems unable to forget it and readjust to the proposal that Claudius puts forward at the beginning of the play, that of embracing him as his new father (“[...] and think of us / As of a father [...]” [2] 1.2, 84-85) and Hamlet as his new son and heir (“Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son” [2] 1.2, 92). Hamlet eventually concedes not to return to Wittenberg and to remain at court, where, to Claudius's benefit and distrust, Hamlet will be kept under close watch. But his speech clearly rejects the possibility of voluntarily becoming dependent on Claudius and recognizing him as king. The price to pay to regain a pseudo-hypothesis of ascendancy to the throne is too high: there is nothing to guarantee that Hamlet will not be exiled or killed, in the event that Claudius produces offspring with Hamlet's mother.

After all the characters have left, Hamlet's first soliloquy emerges. In a mournful, fatalistic speech (“How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!” [2] 1.2, 112-113) and, above all, resigned to the reality as it presents itself, Hamlet concludes with something that appears to be the antithesis of what he will do in the rest of the play: “But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue” ([2] 1.2, 135). Until this scene, Hamlet was a prince who had no intention of acting in a way that would change the course of events; he was outraged at his mother's speed in marrying, at the ease with which the court embraced the new king at the expense of the previous one, his father. But nowhere in the soliloquy, other than the final line in which he declares himself to remain in silence, is there any call to action. Without the intervention of King Hamlet's ghost in the next scene, the young prince would not have been moved to act and to unleash his voice. In retrospect, knowing the rhetorical power of the ghost in convincing Hamlet to avenge his death, Hamlet's description of the ancient king (prior to the ghost's appearance) seems peculiarly lacking:

*“HAMLET. But two months dead – nay not so much, not two,”*

*So excellent a king, that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly. [...]»  
(Shakespeare [2] 1.2, 117-121)*

This is because this mourning soliloquy demonstrates that the prince's descriptions of King Hamlet are about praising him as king (“So excellent a king”) and husband (“so loving to my mother”), but at no time does it occur to mention the virtues of King Hamlet as a father. In light of Kantorowitz's monarchical division, it is curious that Hamlet refers the

deceased king as father in this soliloquy only when he wants to allude to his body (“my poor father's body” [2] 1.2, 125) or to his brother, the now King Claudius (“My father's brother (but no more like my father / Than I to Hercules” [2] 1.2, 129-130), both identities that we can describe as exclusive and impoverished personifications of the «natural body».

The absence of paternal elements is not coincidental: this absence allows its filling in through an active idealization by Hamlet of his father throughout the play, less as a paternal entity and more as a warrior, politician and husband. And yet, only a supernatural apparition could sufficiently spur Hamlet to revisit his father's memory and incorporate it into himself. Contrary to what Stephen Greenblatt claims, that “the appearance of the king is a kind of incarnate memory” ([5] p. 212), what seems more likely is the appearance of the king to be what instigates Hamlet to idealize and incorporate a memory of the father in himself, which enable and justify his actions in the face of injuries from the people around him: Gertrude's hasty marriage and “forgetfulness” of the late king; the usurpation of the throne by Claudius; the change of sides of Polonius, former adviser to King Hamlet, now adviser to the usurper.

These affronts call into question the identity of King Hamlet and, by association, the young prince. Hamlet is, in fact, grieving, not for the death of his father, but for the death of the king and the husband, and all the implications that will follow for him as prince and heir. Hamlet's self-interest is just one of many that are manifested in Elsinore's court: all the characters can be described according to the self-interest that drives them (except Horatio, the only apparently altruistic character who survives the final conflict) and which, simultaneously, they try to obscure, whether through flattery (Polonius and Claudius), obedience (Ophelia), or ignorance (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern).

### III. IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

The conscious effort Hamlet makes to identify with his father's memory, especially in the first three acts, is manifested most intensely in his interactions with the ghost. After revealing the cause of his death, the ghost ends its appearance with “Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me.” [2]. Afterwards, the young Hamlet carries out a rationalization exercise in which he decides to remove unnecessary recollections from his memory:

*“HAMLET. [...] Remember thee?”  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past  
That youth and observation copied there  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain  
Unmixed with baser matter.[...]  
(Shakespeare [2] 1.5, 73-80)*

The peculiarity of this decision, of wiping «away all trivial fond records» that «youth and observation» placed in his memory, indicates a conscious attempt to convince and force himself to carry out the request for revenge in the name of the

father's ghost. It implies, ironically, also the erosion of any affectionate records that may have existed between father and son in the past. The ease with which Hamlet declares such intuitions that, perhaps, the degree of proximity was not high, which, once again, confirms Rhodri Lewis' premise mentioned at the beginning of this article that it is the present that modulates the past. What will live on in Hamlet aren't fond memories, but the ghost's supernatural commandment.

The active effort of rationalization in Hamlet, of convincing himself to become a recipient and an incarnation of revenge in the name of his father, contains two dissonant and, to some extent, incompatible dimensions. On the one hand, since he is an absent father, his absence facilitates the idealization, reconfiguration and acceptance of the late King Hamlet's commandment of revenge; on the other hand, such absence makes its execution difficult, precisely because it is only the idealization that sustains Hamlet's entire agency. If the ease with which Hamlet declares to clean all “trivial fond records” is just a figure of lyrical expression, a hyperbolic expression, in order to mention that he will dedicate all his attention to his father's commandment, or even an expression that is just easy to declare, due to the fact that there aren't that many affectionate records to «wipe», is difficult to prove. However, Hamlet is intelligent enough to recognize the unstable state in which he finds himself, of internal division, and through the soliloquies we can have a better perception of this dissonance, because we cannot declare that Hamlet takes in an absolutely focused and unquestionable way the revenge of the death of his father (After all, the ghost needs to reappear to remind him of his purpose: “This visitation / Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.” [2] 3.4, 92-93). If that were the case, Hamlet would not be Hamlet, but a version of Laertes. The dissonance in Hamlet is, therefore, demonstrated in the conflict between acting in accordance with the father's commandment, or not acting, in accordance with his intelligence and self-awareness, given that what the father asks of him, as a ghost, is incompatible for Hamlet, as a mortal being. However, abandoning revenge isn't possible, since in the first soliloquy it is possible to glimpse the unhappiness that Hamlet believes awaits him, if he ends up accepting his uncle as king and father. Thus, for the hyperbolic Hamlet, the only two options are «to be, or not to be»: to accept and suffer placidly what the world determines for him (becoming the son of King Claudius), or to take up arms, face fate and risk death (become King Hamlet's prince). This dialectic runs through Hamlet from the moment the ghost asks him for revenge, to the moment he returns to Denmark after being captured by pirates. After the return, the dissonance in Hamlet is attenuated, since the circumstances, as they present themselves, leave no room for any other possibility than the direct and mortal confrontation, the very thing Hamlet had postponed (or failed) during the three previous acts (“Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting / that would not let me sleep / [...] / Our indiscretion sometime serves us well / when our deep plots do fall [...]” [2] 5.2, 277 278 and 282- 283).

### IV. MY KING, MY MOTHER AND MY HOPES

The young prince's idealization of King Hamlet, especially in the closet scene, never won Gertrude's agreement. Faced with the physical description of the dead King and his murder,

the only thing Gertrude can reply is to beg Hamlet to stop his accusations (“O speak to me no more! / These words like daggers enter in my ears” [2] 3.4, 70-71), to which Hamlet responds with yet another hyperbolic description of his father, comparing him to the usurper who now sits on the throne (“A murderer and a villain, / A slave that is not twentieth part the kith / Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,” [2] 3.4, 72-74). Again, Hamlet reinforces the late king's excellence in contrast to Claudius' baseness; yet the only answer he can urge comes from the ghost and not from Gertrude. This intervention serves, above all, to «whet [Hamlet's] almost blunted purpose»:

*“GHOST. Do not forget! This visitation”  
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.  
But look, amazement on thy mother sits!  
O step between her and her fighting soul.  
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.  
Speak to her, Hamlet.»  
(Shakespeare [2] 3.4, 91-96)*

The ghost mentions again that the problem is not the mother. The ultimate problem is between Hamlet and Claudius. The remaining members of the court are only poisoned by Claudius' manipulations. The ghost, wishing to focus his revenge exclusively on Claudius, reveals his intentions, which transcend the terrestrial domain: the father's ghost is here, solely and exclusively, to obtain peace in the divine plan. However, Hamlet's speech and attitude demonstrate a certain asynchrony with the ghost's wishes. Hamlet wants to judge and punish all those around him who show agreement and acceptance with Claudius' will. This is a key moment that demonstrates Hamlet's inner dissonance. He did not accept to bear the burden of revenge solely to save his father's spirit: Hamlet accepted this burden to punish those who in life benefited from the loss in which he feels most harmed (“He that hath killed *my* King and whored *my* mother, / Popped in between th'election and *my* hopes.” [2] 5.2, 44-45, *my* italics and bold).

Another argument could be raised from this interaction between Hamlet and the ghost: that who least believes in the idealization established by Hamlet through the interactions (and monologues) that he has throughout the play is Hamlet himself. The doubt and hesitation that constantly arise in him may be the consequence of the fact that a part of him seeks to identify with an idealized version of an absent father, about whom he only has indirect and filtered information, both through paintings and through ghostly descriptions; hence, the fact that the majority of the king's descriptions are always as the personification of military, political, or physical excellence. The need for verbal confrontation, not only in this episode with Gertrude, but also with Claudius, Polonius, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, and even Ophelia, could be described as an ambivalent hostility, given that Hamlet *finds* in his attitudes and behavior glimpses of a betrayal of the former king and, by correlation, the prince's own goals. In the same way that Hamlet sees himself as a continuum of his dead king, he sees all court characters as continuities of Claudius and, by association, of all his insidious interests.

As we saw earlier, for Hamlet, Claudius does not hold the king's «body politic», even if the other members of the court

believe so (“The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing.” [2] 4.2, 4-5); the one who should possess the king's “body politic” is young Prince Hamlet. However, Denmark's rottenness spreads because Claudius has successfully managed to contaminate the thinking of the members of the court, making up for the lack of “body politic” with his manipulative rhetoric. Removing the rot from the realm thus involves removing Claudius from the throne. As such, Hamlet continually seeks, especially until the episode of the play within the play (*Murder of Gonzago*), confirmation that will make his awareness shift towards revenge (identification with his father), and less towards the skeptical and intellectual side. However, even if such absolute confirmation were given (as in the episode of the play within the play), and it wasn't an occasion shrouded in ambiguity, Shakespeare's genius resists conjuring a moment of clear and unambiguous rupture in order to make Hamlet lean exclusively to one side of his dissonance. This is all in order to avoid resolving, in an anticlimactic way, all the internal tension and division that has been gradually accentuating in the young prince's psyche.

In the last two acts, the rot had already spread throughout the court beyond a point of no return, including in Hamlet. Polonius had been killed, Ophelia had committed suicide, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had been murdered, Hamlet had already suffered an assassination attempt by Claudius when he was exiled to England, and Laertes was on his way to Elsinore to avenge his father's death. And, despite these deaths, only a gradual accumulation of tragic events could lead a protagonist in internal conflict to such a final external conflict. If just one of these aforementioned events were enough to focus Hamlet and resolve its internal dissonance, the play would lose its masterful use of ambiguity, not only on a narrative level, but also on a linguistic level. The purposeful and accumulative use of hendiadys, more than in any other Shakespearean play, attests to the reinforcement of ambiguity, indeterminacy and opacity as distinctive attributes in *Hamlet*. In the verses cited in this essay, we find two examples: “youth and observation” and “ponderous and marble”. Let us now focus on the first example, “youth and observation”.

## V. A TRAGIC IRONY

George T. Wright says, in [6], apropos of a sermon by Laertes to Ophelia on the dangers of Hamlet, something peculiar about the young prince's inner dilemma:

*“Body is one thing, the inner life another; the inner life is itself double (“mind and soul”); [...] Whatever that case, Hamlet's “will,” even if virtuous, “is not his own.” As minds (and souls) are subject to the size of bodies (“temples”), Hamlet is “subject to his birth”; as “head,” he is subject to the “body” of Denmark, and his “choice . . . circumscribed / Unto the voice and yielding of that body” - unto its vote of approval. Hamlet is to the body politic what the mind or soul is to the body - inside it, restricted in movement choices, unable to act without its acquiescence. Denmark's a prison.” ([6], p. 177)*

The divisions that Wright advances here in Hamlet, between body (external dimension) and inner life (internal

dimension, which contains the mind and soul), attest to a complex existence, aggravated in Hamlet by the fact that his free will is not, in fact, entirely his. Hamlet is subject to exceptional conditions, which take away his agency and freewill: he is subject to the demands of his position at court. As such, his body does not entirely belong to him: it belongs, in part, to Denmark. As if that were not enough, Hamlet is also torn between committing, or not committing, murder in the name of his father. The dissonance is accentuated precisely because Hamlet recognizes that the nation is rotten by Claudius and is also a prison that determines his movements, where he is constantly inspected and judged as a manifestation of the “body politic” of Denmark. While Denmark imprisons Hamlet as “body politic”, the mission of revenge threatens Hamlet’s “body natural” and, by association, his free will.

When he uses the hendiad «youth and observation» to describe the moment when Hamlet decides to remove all the trivial records from his memory, Shakespeare knows that this is voluntarily impossible to do: one does not decide to forget, since memory is a process of the body that we do not fully control. We can (try to) remember facts, people, events, but we cannot voluntarily forget them. This asymmetry is amplified by the hendiad, which seeks to provide the origin of such memories in the act of observation when Hamlet was young. However, what’s tragic about Hamlet is that the effort of trying to forget only accentuates his internal dissonance: the hendiad simulates the dissociation that Hamlet wants to provoke between himself and his memory, between remaining an observer (able to observe current events), but consciously remove the naively jovial element, which he believed harmed him in the perception of the present and conflicting situation in which he found himself. Nevertheless, this division has the opposite effect, for it reveals that the conjunction which Hamlet assumes to be perfectly established between him and his memory, between him and the act of observation, which he believes to be capable of separating, is not to be trusted. This hypothetical internal union, as in all the unions that resonate throughout the play, is manifested above all by the asymmetries, ambiguities, oppositions and inherent imbalances. Hamlet’s conscious

effort to remove this memory is another attempt to try to regain some agency for himself, to regain some glimmer of free will in the face of the rotting prison he found awaiting for him in Denmark, the oppressive nature of the monarch’s office and the unbearable demand of the father’s ghost in committing murder. The prince’s tragic irony appears, therefore, as this: his philosophical ramblings are attempts, either to justify his actions in accordance with what he believes to be the demands of circumstances and his father’s request, or to obtain some agency and thus justify his inaction in carrying out such a violent act. Hamlet dies, tragically, without resolving the anguish and dissonance he created and carried with him throughout the play.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

#### FUNDING

This work was supported in part by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), under grant 2021.04562.BD.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to thank the academic colleague and friend Eunice Pereira for her help during the writing of this paper.

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