THE 'GOTHIC' IN *HAMLET*: THE ROLE OF THE MACABRE IN CREATING CATHARTIC HORROR[1]

HAMLET'TE 'GOTİK': ÜRKÜTÜCÜLÜĞÜN KATARTİK KORKUNUN OLUŞMASINDAKİ İŞLEVİ

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Abstract

Built on Elizabethan dramatic conventions and religious debates about ghosts, Hamlet employs linguistic and dramatic means to chill its audience. Audio-visual means, along with the manner of entrances and exits, are used in order to horrify the audience. These create a fluctuation between belief and disbelief towards the macabre elements in the play, which in turn heightens the fear in the audience. Thus, through these elements, gothic catharsis is achieved, which creates cathartic horror that generates fear in the audience. The overall sensory experience in the Early Modern amphitheatre in which the play was enacted had a great effect on the creation of this form of catharsis. Therefore, this article aims to illustrate how the Elizabethan playhouse experience affected audience reaction towards macabre elements and triggered gothic catharsis in Hamlet.

Öz

Dönemin tiyatro gelenekleri ve dini tartışmaları üzerine inşa ederek, Hamlet dilsel ve dramatik araçlar kullanmakta ve böylece seyircisini korkutmaktadır. Görsel-işitsel araçlar, oyuncuların giriş ve çıkış biçimleriyle birlikte seyirciyi korkutmak için kullanılmaktadır. Bunlar, oyundaki ürkütücü unsurlara yönelik inanç ve güvensizlik arasında bir dalgalanma yaratmakta; bu da izleyici korkusunu daha da arttırmaktadır. Böylece, bu unsurlar aracılığıyla, katartik korku yaratılarak seyirciyi korkutan gotik katarsis elde edilmektedir. Oynandığı Rönesans amfitiyatrolarının duygulara hitap eden ortamı sayesinde katarsisin bu türü gerçekleşmektedir. Bundan dolayı, bu araştırmanın amacı Elizabeth dönemi tiyatro ortamının Hamlet'teki ürkütücü öğelere yönelik seyirci tepkisini nasıl etkilediği ve gotik katarsisi tetiklediğini örneklemektir.

I. Introduction

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599-1601?) depicts macabreness especially through Old Hamlet, the Ghost[2]. The ghost as a dramatic character was not invented by Shakespeare and was based on a long tradition of dead persons who either wronged or were wronged. Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and *Persae*, Euripides' *Hecuba*, and, last, but not least, Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon* were the early examples that gave an introductory or central position to the ghost as a means to trigger resolution in these plays (Lucas 11; Evans 273; Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 281-285; Aeschylus, *Persae* 65-74; Euripides, *Hecuba* 249-253; Seneca, *Thyestes* 93-101; Seneca, *Agamemnon* 5-9).

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[1] An earlier and shorter version of this article was presented at the Sixth International IDEA-Conference (Istanbul, 13-15 April 2011). All translations from Turkish sources are mine.

[2] For a discussion about the rumours that claim "Shakespeare originally played the Ghost" in Hamlet, see Dobson (181) and Shapiro (289).

In line with the classical revival in the Early Modern Period, which first revisited Roman works, the ghost appeared in the form of a Senecan one in Elizabethan drama (Evans 273; Lucas 11).[3] Among these plays, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (performed 1587?, printed 1592) would prove the most successful play to use the Senecan tradition as it employed the ghost of Andrea as a haunting presence between the acts that observed and commented on how its revenge was taken (Kyd 1.1.1-91, 1.5.1-9, 2.6.1-11, 3.15.1-39, 4.5.1-34; Gurr 139; Kernan 257-261).[4] Based on this Early Modernised form of the Senecan ghost, Shakespeare's earlier plays depict ghosts of wronged people, but their presence are of telegraphic nature. In *Richard III* (1592), the wronged souls of the victims of Richard III are used as choral abstract manifestations of psychological disturbances (5.3.119-207). In *Julius Caesar* (1599), Shakespeare turns the title character into a haunting absent presence as a ghost that has just one short on-stage appearance (4.3.273-284, 5.5.17-20).

Although Shakespeare makes use of the ghost tradition before him and his earlier versions of ghosts, *Hamlet* differs from these in several aspects. *Hamlet* depicts the Ghost as a macabre element by contemplating about its reality and its effect on on-stage and off-stage audiences. The play, thus, makes use of and adapts former conventions about ghosts and brings these to the foreground. Defined as "a tragedy of *Angst*" (Frye 67, his italics), the play centres on Hamlet and his philosophical contemplations about remembrance, oblivion, life and death. These centre, on the other hand, on questions about the reality of the Ghost in the play. Building further on Elizabethan religious debates, the play employs linguistic and dramatic means to chill its audience. Thereby, the use of cathartic horror leads to gothic catharsis. Gothic catharsis can be defined as a form of catharsis with the specific aim to create fear and awe in the audience for the sake of creating these to horrify them, which, however, makes the audience members feel relieved because the horrifying incidents did not happen to them.[5] This form of catharsis is achieved

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[3] See, for instance, Thomas Hughes' *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (A2[r-v], F[3][r]-F4[v]), printed in the 1587 collection entitled *Certaine Deuies and ſhewes*, or see W. S.' *Locrine*, performed around 1591 and 1595 (G1[r-v]).

[4] Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* has been compared to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Kyd has been attributed as author of the lost *Ur-Hamlet*, that is, the possible early form of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that could have been used as a source (Kernan 257-258; Wells 74; Shapiro 288-289).

[5] My working definition of gothic catharsis is based on Aristotle's *Poetics* and contemporary film studies. Aristotle's definition of catharsis, as a form of spiritual purgation "through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions" (Aristotle 47-9), and the effect of

especially through the overall sensory experience of the Early Modern amphitheatre in which the play was enacted. Therefore, this article aims to illustrate how Elizabethan playhouse experience affected audience reaction towards macabreness to create gothic catharsis in *Hamlet*.[6]

The macabre elements in *Hamlet* function primarily because of the contemporary debates regarding the ontological reality of ghosts according to the varying readings of scripture. Early Modern England's shift from Catholicism to an anglicised form of Protestantism and the presence of several Catholic, Anglican and Protestant sects created conflicting ideas about religious doctrines (Kastan 29; Collinson 125-143). For instance, Catholicism legitimised the reality of ghosts within the concept of Purgatory where spirits were either damned spirits of hell, blessed spirits of heaven, or that lived in an in-betweenness; these spirits lived in Purgatory usually for some special reason and were allowed to come back to earth (Wilson 61; Thomas 703; Littledale 535). Yet, Protestantism, including Anglicanism, had a "sceptical […] point of view," that rejected Purgatory and considered ghosts as evil spirits (Kaya 30; Thomas 702-703). For instance, the translation of Ludwig Lavater's demonology, entitled *Of ghoſtes and ſpirites walking by nyght* (1572), was reflective of the Protestant questioning of the reality of ghosts:

> [M]any men do falſly perſuade themſelues that they ſee or heare ghoſtes; for that which they imagin they ſee or heare, proceedeth eyther of melancholie, madneſſe, weakneſſe of the ſenſes, feare, ore of ſome other perturbation[.] (9)

In this vein, Catholicism and its doctrines had been considered in Protestant countries like England as frightening elements of the past. Catholicism was associated "with superstition, arbitrary power and passionate extremes" (Botting 41). In particular, the burning of Protestants in Mary Tudor's time, the massacre of the Huguenots and the threat of the Spanish, hence Catholic, Armada were "chief cause[s] of that widespread horror and fear of the English people"

"cathartic horror" on audience members in horror movies (Zwick 83; Yoon 188) can be set as two poles of high and low forms of fear. Gothic catharsis differentiates itself from both of these poles. Gothic catharsis is different from Aristotelian catharsis through its emphasis on the effects of fear on the audience. Gothic catharsis is also different from the cathartic horror as employed in horror movies through the relative immediacy between playgoer and dramatic action, compared to the distance between audience and the work itself in horror movies, and through minimising the possibility of the exploitation of audience emotions.

[6] Henceforward to be referred to as *Ham.* in parenthetical references. All references, if not indicated otherwise, are to William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* Eds. Ann Thompson and Neill Taylor. London: Arden, 2006.

(Bayne 55). Therefore, the parallel between the Ghost in *Hamlet* and Catholicism as elements of the past, which still create fear in the present, complements the general ghastly atmosphere of the play. Therefore, Shakespeare's use of the Ghost to invoke "an older world of Catholic authority and devotional practice," posits the present as being "haunted" by the past, which reinforces the "arbitrary [yet frightening] power" of Catholicism on the predominantly Protestant audience (MacCulloch 6; McCoy 194; Botting 41; Yüksel 55, 68; Shapiro 288) as a macabre element.

II. Audial and Visual Means to Create Gothic Catharsis in *Hamlet*

Based on contemporary religious debates and dramatic tradition, *Hamlet* employs macabre elements through audial and visual means in the theatre. The earliest record of performance in 1602 indicates that it was "played of late," that is before the date 1602, by the "Lord Chamberlain's Men" (Harrison 290). Hence, it can be assumed that *Hamlet* was enacted at the Globe theatre, which the company used at that time (Gurr and Ichikawa 132, 162; Stern 21). Visited by people from all walks of life, the Globe was an amphitheatre playhouse that had three levels, namely, the Hell, which was a cellar underneath the floor reached through a trap-door, the Earth, which was the actual acting space, and the Heaven, which was the ornamented roof through which actors or objects could be descended via a trap-door (Gurr 49-72; Stern 11-32). The thrust-stage and the polygonal shape of the theatre enabled audience involvement through their interaction with players (Brennan 5; Mulryne and Shewring 21; Blatherwick 70; Gurr 1-2; Shurgot and Owens 17; Cooper 26). Through this interaction, audial and visual means could be employed to create feelings in the audience. If Hamlet's metatheatrical comments are taken as clues for Shakespeare's understanding of drama (Umunç 159-172), it can be argued that Shakespeare detested hyperbolic acting and the exploitation of audience feelings in Early Modern amphitheatres. Accordingly, "word[s]" should "[s]uit [...] action[s]" in order "to mirror up to nature" (*Ham.* 3.2.17-18), that is, the imitation of behaviour should look natural. Thereby, audience reaction could be appealed to, rather than exploited, the latter of which Hamlet laments in the following lines:

> [...] O, it offends me to the soul to
> hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to
> tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings,
> who for the most part are capable of nothing but
> inexplicable dumb-shows and noise (*Ham.* 3.2.8-12).

The architecture of Early Modern outdoor playhouses was both a blessing and a curse for a playwright who wanted to appeal aesthetically both to "groundlings," audience members from lower social backgrounds, and audience members from higher social backgrounds. Hence, the architectural shape of the amphitheatre, in which *Hamlet* was most probably performed, had a great effect on the realisation of gothic catharsis.

Whether or not drama at amphitheatres like the Globe "was primarily a "hearing practice devoid of any spectacle aspect" (Gurr 1-2, 81, 99-100; Jones 33-50; Öğütcü 312), the spoken word was indispensable in Early Modern plays. This was not only because of dialogues, but also because linguistic means were used for exposition and description. Reflective of contemporary means of communication, the spoken word was the initial means to transfer information (Raymond 496). The unverifiable nature of the spoken word, on the other hand, created rumour that exaggerated and altered the transferred information (Fox 592-593; Raymond 496). Therefore, when *Hamlet* begins with rumours concerning the appearance of a mysterious object at night-time, it only increases the audiences' suspense and the fear about that object. Accordingly, the very setting of the play enables the characters and conditions the audience to observe a frightening atmosphere. It is "twelve" at night and "bitter cold" (*Ham.* 1.1.7-8), whereby the association of night with mystery leads to both literal and figurative shuddering. In such an atmosphere, Francisco being "sick at heart" (*Ham.* 1.1.7), that is, most probably disturbed in some sense, prepares the scene for the rumours on the appearance of an unidentified object during the previous watches of the Danish guards. Horatio's question, "has *this thing* appeared again to-night?" (*Ham.* 1.1.20, my italics), creates suspense about and mystery around that "thing." Given the fact that unusual reports about mysterious objects were not uncommon around the times *Hamlet* was possibly enacted, that is before 1602 (Wiggins and Richardson 248; Harrison 290), the use of rumour as exposition for macabre elements had real life correspondence. For instance, it was reported in 1601 that there were "[s]trange rumours" involving "three rainbows seen in the Tower," "a sceptre appearing in the place where the Earl of Essex was beheaded" and "of a bloody block, seen by the guards, falling from heaven to earth upon that spot" (Harrison 174). The distance between observable and narrated reality and the lack of any means to verify the

truth create fear in the listener about mysterious stories like the above.[7] The same is valid for the exposition of *Hamlet* in which the linguistic means prepare the audience for gothic catharsis.

Nevertheless, while the linguistic aspect of initiating the play's ghastly atmosphere is important, the actual realisation of gothic catharsis follows after the dramatic entrance of the Ghost.[8] The physical appearance of the Ghost is conveyed through costume and cosmetics which function as dramatic markers. The organic usage of costume and cosmetics both distinguish and emphasise the Ghost's ontological reality that frightens its audience. Accordingly, the Ghost "[l]ooks […] like the [late] King [Old Hamlet]" and is clad in "warlike form," that is, in "armour" (*Ham.* 1.1.40-64), probably of greyish colour. The initial effect of the appearance of the Ghost on the internal audience of the Danish characters in the play is reflective of the possible reaction of the external Elizabethan audience. The Ghost "harrows" Horatio "with fear and wonder" (*Ham.* 1.1.44), which is most probably also created through the use of cosmetics. Although the use of cosmetics by actors was condemned by critics of the theatre like Stubbes as "painted ſepulchres" (L5ᵛ), the use of "white lead and vinegar" to create an artificially white complexion (Karim-Cooper 177), was important to convey the unnaturalness of the Ghost on the stage. In the stichomythic dialogues between Hamlet, Marcellus, Bernardo and Horatio about their memories of their encounter with the Ghost, the face of the Ghost is described as "very pale" (*Ham.* 1.2.234). The use of the adjective "very" conveys the internal audience reaction towards the extremity of the Ghost's appearance. "The paint materialises the Ghost's unfamiliarity" (Karim-Cooper 178), hence, its unnaturalness. Along with further descriptions about the looks and the gestures of the Ghost, of having a "beard" that is "sable silvered" (*Ham.* 1.2.242), and looking with "sorrow" and "fixed […] eyes" (*Ham.* 1.2.232-234), the Ghost's physical appearance invokes decadence and death. The actual appearance of the

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[7] When Nutku refers to the scene where Hamlet argues that he imagined seeing his father in his "mind's eye," Nutku points out the aesthetic power of the actor as an important component for the visualisation of an imagined reality on the stage (Nutku 69; *Ham.* 1.2.185). The imagined reality that is created in the mind of Hamlet is similar to the fear created in the audience members about the narrated reality of mysterious stories.

[8] Outterson-Murphy's recent study on the effects of the Ghost on the "spectators" focuses on the "liminality" that is created through the interaction between the "real" ghost and the "fellow characters" and the interaction between the fictive ghost and the "playgoers" (253-256, 268). While pointing out the proximity of on-stage and off-stage spectators of the Ghost, the article does not elaborate on that proximity in detail. What is more, Outterson-Murphy's analysis is rather too orthographic and disregards the effects of the architecture of the amphitheatre, and the possible choices of costume, props, and scenery on the creation of fear in the on-stage and off-stage audiences.

Ghost as a macabre element heightens the discomfort that is created by the night, by mystery and by the problems as a result of the transition period Denmark faces (Yüksel 50). "Something" really seems to be "rotten in the state of Denmark" (*Ham.* 1.4.90), which is manifested through and visualised by the appearance of decadence as embodied through the costume and make-up of the Ghost. The pale face of the Ghost through cosmetics, its silver beard, and its silvery armour complement the Ghost's white and greyish, hence, ghostly complexion, which creates fear and awe in the audience. Thereby, "word[s]" about fear and "action[s]" that create fear "[s]uit" each other (*Ham.* 3.2.17-18) in the manner Hamlet, and Shakespeare, wanted his players to act.

III. Entrances and Exits to Create Gothic Catharsis in *Hamlet*

Moreover, the manner of the entrances and exits of the Ghost further channel audience reaction towards cathartic horror. In particular, the Ghost enters usually when it is least expected. When Horatio's scepticism about the reality of the Ghost is revealed and he is just persuaded to "sit" and listen to the "story" of the Ghost, the Ghost enters, probably through a stage door, at the exact moment when Barnardo retells how it came before, when "[t]he bell" was "beating one" at the night (*Ham.* 1.1.22-38). While audience attention is on the linguistic "bell," the physical appearance of the Ghost does not only belie Horatio, but also frightens both internal and external audiences. Thus, when the Ghost appears (*Ham.* 1.1.39), in a "dead hour" (*Ham.* 1.1.64), "it harrows" both the characters and the audience "with fear and wonder" (*Ham.*1.1.43), which create gothic catharsis through fear and wonder seen plainly even in the rather sceptical and empirical "Horatio" who does now "tremble and look pale" (*Ham.* 1.1.52) after his encounter with the Ghost.

The subsequent exits and entrances in the first scene of the play (*Ham.* 1.1.50, 1.1.125-140) create a false sense of relief and increase the fear that the Ghost might enter at any moment. After their initial discharge of fear, the Danish characters first try to reassure themselves of the authenticity of the Ghost's likeness to the late Old Hamlet (*Ham.* 1.1.58-68). Then they have a lengthy discussion about the reasons for the war preparations and the significance of the appearance of the Ghost in the likeness of Old Hamlet (*Ham.* 1.1.69-124). Towards the end of Horatio's speech about the appearance of ghosts as "omen[s]" (*Ham.* 1.1.111-124), the Ghost appears once again. The subsequent confusion in the characters is paralleled in the confusion of how the Ghost exits. As Tribble articulates, the Ghost's second exit "convey[s] a sense of mysterious disappearance

rather than a simple exit" by "manipulating the attention" of the audience as follows (248):

> BERNARDO. 'Tis here.
> HORATIO. 'Tis here. [*Exit Ghost.*]
> MARCELLUS. 'Tis gone. (*Ham.* 1.1.140-141).

Whether the Ghost exits through another stage door or vanishes via a trap-door, this manipulation further increases the audiences' fear that the Ghost might enter, as it exits, when it is least expected. This is realised later when Hamlet is informed about the Ghost's appearance (*Ham.* 1.2.188-256) and wants to verify his friends' oral accounts, just like they did in the first scene themselves. When Hamlet meets Horatio and the rest to see the Ghost, a "flourish of trumpets" and the sound of cannonballs are heard (*Ham.* 1.4.6-7). Orchestrated in the tiring-house, the backstage, of the Globe (Jones 34), these sounds create a sense of fear around an unidentified and mysterious event. Yet, the tension after the hearing of these terrifying sounds is cut short by a lengthy anti-climactic explanation about the Danish "custom" of firing cannonballs each time the King finishes drinking his wine (*Ham.* 1.4.8-38). While Hamlet almost flamboyantly continues to elaborate on the custom to criticise the King, the Ghost enters, probably through a stage door, and cuts Hamlet's sentence in the middle (*Ham.* 1.4.38). Hamlet is initially shocked and asks for the aid of "Angels" (*Ham.* 1.4.39). The Elizabethan audience might have felt a similar fear after seeing the Ghost when their attention was directed towards Hamlet's explanations about Danish habits.

IV. Fluctuation between Belief and Disbelief about the Ghost in *Hamlet*

While the use of cosmetics and costume, and the manner of appearance of the Ghost seem to verify the ontological reality of the Ghost within the boundaries of the acting space at the Globe, which create cathartic horror by frightening the audience, *Hamlet* centres on the questioning and rejection of the Ghost's reality, which only increases the fear around the Ghost that cannot be explained through reason. Accordingly, in line with the fact that the majority of the Elizabethan audience consisted of Protestants who rejected the possibility of ghosts, the observable reality of the Ghost is tried to be rationalised within the boundaries of Protestantism. Throughout the play, Hamlet is aware of the possibility that the Ghost may be "a de'il [devil]" (*Ham.* 2.2.534), which, according to the Protestant belief of ghosts as devils, may manipulate his "weakness" and "melancholy" in

order "to damn" him (*Ham.* 2.2.534-538; Lavater 9; Wilson 61-2).⁹ Although Hamlet is not sure whether the Ghost is "wicked, or charitable" (*Ham.* 1.4.42), he is determined to know the truth "not to burst in ignorance," "though hell itself should gape / And bid [him] hold [his] peace" (*Ham.* 1.4.46, 1.2.243-244). This urge for finding out the truth will be functional later in the quasi-detective story procedure of Hamlet's rationalisation of the Ghost's claim that Claudius murdered Old Hamlet, which Hamlet will test through his play-within-a-play (*Ham.* 2.2.523-533).

However, Horatio fears that this search for the truth, with the help of the possibly evil Ghost, may lead Hamlet to commit suicide or make him go mad (*Ham.* 1.4.69-74), which is affirmed by Hamlet's behaviours when he follows the Ghost: "He waxes desperate with imagination" (*Ham.* 1.4.87). This is further aggravated when Hamlet and the Ghost are alone and the Ghost identifies himself with the following words:

> 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. (*Ham.* 1.5.9-13, my italics)

The Ghost's punishment in Purgatory invokes Catholicism (Wilson 70), and sets the background to chill Hamlet and the Elizabethan audience. Hamlet's possible Protestant education at Wittenberg (Curran 4; Greenblatt 240; Kastan 134-135) and the fact that the Elizabethan audience consisted for the most part of Protestants create both suspicion and fear about the incomprehensible nature of the Catholic ghost. The Ghost's use of litotes, that is, its pseudo inefficiency to describe Purgatory as a rhetorical device, further evokes horror and terror and describes the possible effects on any listener, including the Elizabethan audience:

> I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
>
> Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
>
> Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
>
> Thy knotted and combined looks to part
>
> And each particular hair to stand on end
>
> Like quills upon the fearful porpentine— (*Ham.* 1.5.15-20).

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⁹ See also James I's ideas on spirits and ghosts in his *Daemonologie* as "Deuils conuerſing in the earth" (3.1.56).

The Catholic nature of the Ghost creates a sense of intrusion of past and invalid Catholic beliefs into the Protestant world of the Elizabethan audience which both chills them and creates questions within their minds; similar to those questions Hamlet has himself. The Ghost's words appear to be unreliable, and what is more, they cannot be proven (Yüksel 62). Hamlet's desperate need to find answers for his questions is rooted in his contemplation about the reality of the Ghost. This contemplation makes him, from time to time, vacillate between sanity and insanity, which is seen especially in the swearing scene. Although Hamlet is convinced that "[it] is an honest ghost" (*Ham.* 1.5.137), he behaves towards it as if it is "an underground demon" (Wilson 83). This is affected by the Ghost's exit which was probably a descent through a trap-door into the lower part of the stage, called the Hell (Gurr and Ichikawa 131). Most probably because of the Ghost's location in the Hell part of the theatre, Hamlet answers his father's so-called ghost very sarcastically in the swearing scene, which might have created doubts in the Elizabethan audience about whether to believe in his conviction about the reality and sincerity of the Ghost. Each time the Ghost says "Swear" (*Ham.* 1.5.149, 155, 160, 179) being located "*under the ſtage*" according to the 1603 first quarto version (D1ᵛ), Hamlet replies with the following:

> Ha, ha, *boy*, sayst thou so? Art thou there, *truepenny*?
>
> Come on, you hear *this fellow in the cellarage*?
>
> [...]
>
> Well said, *old mole*, canst work i'th' earth so fast?
>
> [...]
>
> Rest, rest, *perturbed spirit.* [...] (*Ham.* 1.5.150-180, my italics)

Hamlet's insults towards his assumed father undermine macabre element of the "disembodied voice" used as a "*gestus*" by the Ghost in the scene (Neill 329, his italics). The fluctuating mood between belief and disbelief creates a vicious circle of ease and tension, which might have been similarly experienced by the Elizabethan audience throughout the play.

The contraction of ease and tension makes both Hamlet and probably the audience disquiet about macabre elements in the play. For instance, Hamlet's fluctuating mood may be seen as an indicator for Hamlet's progress towards real madness while he pretends "[t]o put an antic disposition" (*Ham.* 1.5.170). As he confesses towards the end of the play, some of his actions, such as the murder of Polonius, can be considered as "madness," which the then sane "Hamlet denies"

(*Ham.* 5.2.210-214). Hamlet tries not to stumble on his way on the thin line that separates sanity and madness. Yet, he seems to be inclined towards madness as a result of his deep philosophical reflections on life and death because of the macabre elements in the play.

The gulf between the "man" who is "noble in reason [...] like an angel" and "man" who is just the "quintessence of dust" (*Ham.* 2.2.269-274), confronts Hamlet with complicated questions he cannot answer. Man is superior, but not immortal, which makes him inferior. This inferiority, on the other hand makes human existence futile (Yüksel 56, 60; Curran 12-13). What is more, in his famous soliloquy, his questions regarding how to "oppos[e]" earthly problems (*Ham.* 3.1.55-75), that are from a philosophical point of view also temporary problems, initially seem to be solved through death which is actually the starting point of the problems that trouble Hamlet. His scepticism about the reality of life after "death" (*Ham.* 3.1.75-87), once again, create more questions than answers. When later Hamlet sees the marching of "twenty thousand" Norwegian soldiers who face "imminent death," who according to Hamlet seem to "[g]o to their graves like beds" (*Ham.* 4.4.58-65), he is unable to understand why these brave soldiers eagerly die for nothing. The logic beneath the existence of death, which deprives man of his superior position, is incomprehensible for Hamlet.

His confrontation with death in its spiritual form, through the Ghost that has subsequently created several mental questions, is, however, concretised especially with death's physical form in the gravedigger scene. Particularly, the macabre elements in this scene enable Hamlet to feel death. Through the visual, tactile and olfactory experience of skulls, especially Yorick's "skull" (*Ham.* 5.1.71-205), Hamlet concretises how superior men like Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar or his father Old Hamlet, each of whom were "infinite in faculties," or Yorick who was "[a] fellow of infinite jest," become in the end "dust" on which Hamlet at that moment in the graveyard treads; or in Hamlet's more sarcastic reference, dust that man may use as "loam" to "stop a beer barrel" (*Ham.* 2.2.274, 5.1.175). Awe towards the superiority of mankind and fear because of man's temporariness contract and ease the thoughts and the body of both Hamlet and the audience he addresses. The audience gets afraid, especially, through Hamlet's quibbles prior his realisation that one of the skulls belongs to Yorick, the court jester of his childhood memories. Hamlet perceives several skulls and muses whether they could belong to "a courtier" or "a lawyer" (*Ham.* 5.1.71-110). Taking into consideration that the

Elizabethan amphitheatres held a heterogeneous audience that included courtiers and lawyers (Gurr 49-72; Phillips 33), the sociolinguistic mimicry of these groups in the play creates a disturbing sense of affinity within the audience. Hamlet's progress towards the edge of insanity, on the other hand, might have created fear in the Elizabethan audience which might have similarly undergone an intellectual confrontation with the reality of macabre elements.

Furthermore, when the Ghost re-appears for the last time in the bedchamber scene in Old Hamlet's "*night gowne*" as termed in the first quarto (G2ᵛ),[10] Hamlet feels a nervous prostration, which might have been similarly experienced by the Elizabethan audience. Nightgowns were usually white (Mortimer 187), which complements the ghostly complexion of the Ghost the time it, once more, appears when it is least expected. While Hamlet compares and contrasts Old Hamlet with Claudius, he frightens his mother with his behaviours (*Ham.* 3.4.54-102). When the Ghost appears, probably entering through a stage door, it frightens Hamlet who calls, once again, for the help of "heavenly guards," and his mother gets frightened by her son's "mad" behaviours (*Ham.* 3.4.105-106). This exchange of outcries and the appearance of the Ghost, on the other hand, might have frightened the Elizabethan audience, as well. When the Ghost responds to Hamlet to observe how "amazement on [his] mother sits" (*Ham.* 3.4.108), the Ghost invites Hamlet to observe the effects of gothic catharsis. Dread, trembling, and uneasiness might have been mirrored by both Gertrude and the Elizabethan audience onto each other.

Yet, this uneasiness is interrupted by Gertrude's comments on the reality of the Ghost. When Hamlet can see his father's ghost but his mother cannot (*Ham.* 3.4.112-134), he seems to depart from reason entirely and be totally convinced of the reality of macabre elements. This might have had implications on audience members who could not rationalise the appearance of the Ghost either. Following the Ghost's exit through a "portal" (*Ham.* 3.4.134), that is another stage door, Gertrude takes over the role of rationalising the Ghosts with her disapproval of her son's behaviours: "This is the very coinage of your brain! / This bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning in" (*Ham.* 3.4.135-137). Hamlet's brooding on the Ghost as an element of the past to be remembered and verified, and his constant comparison and contrast between the present and the past, create an

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[10] As Kaya asserts, the Ghost's appearance in a "nightgown" suggests that it might be a "[demon] with sexual appetites" (33), that is, an *incubi*; which, possibly, might have added more to the audience's fear regarding the Ghost's motives.

obsessive nostalgia in him. Thus, while Hamlet idealises the heroic past of Old Hamlet, reflected in the Ghost's appearance in armour (*Ham.* 1.1.59-60), he despises the present embodied in the "satyr[-like]" Claudius (*Ham.* 1.2.140). "Hamlet is being required to reimagine or reconceptualise Denmark's putatively heroic past in order to understand its disjointed present" (Berry 97), which, however, cannot meet. This nostalgia, on the other hand, makes Hamlet muse on oblivion and how soon people are "forgotten" (*Ham.* 3.2.124) after they become the "quintessence of dust" (*Ham.* 2.2.274). Therefore, while Hamlet tries to rationalise the irrational, that is the macabre elements, he is caught within a "claustrophobic paralysis" (Rust 278). Hamlet shuts himself from the outer reality so that he remains what could be termed as within a simulated reality (Baudrillard 81) where truth cannot be distinguished from fiction any longer. Hamlet's condition, therefore, further adds to the audience's fear who is channelled by Gertrude's rationalisation not to get as much as emotionally involved. Thinking too much on the reality about their physical confrontation with the Ghost might similarly lead the playgoers to undergo a nervous breakdown.

Nevertheless, if the macabre elements, exemplified in the Ghost, are regarded merely as Hamlet's own creation, as Salter proposed (182), how should the very beginning of the play be regarded where more than one person and the whole Elizabethan audience see the Ghost? Likewise, how should the detailed description of Old Hamlet's murder, which is affirmed by Claudius's suspicious behaviour and later confession (*Ham.* 3.2.278-282, 3.3.35-56), be considered? Critics maintained that the dumb show and Claudius's subsequent behaviour show that "the Ghost is an objective reality and no mere hallucination" (Greg 402) and that "the appearance of the Ghost [represents] the possibility of worlds beyond the here and now" (Chopoidalo 15).[11] Thus, to make the audience perceive the Ghost as such would make the Ghost functional to represent God's Justice in the nemesis on Claudius and Gertrude in the very end of the play (Fendt 117; Hunter 106; Bowers 87). The parallelism between the biblical phrase, "Vengeance is mine" (Romans 12:19) and the nemesis part of the play would add tension in the contemporary audience, as well. Likewise, it can be observed that Hamlet solves his conflict regarding the realisation of his revenge, when he gives into powers beyond

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[11] Likewise, Yüksel argues that the play-within-a-play functions as a mirror to reflect the rottenness of the reign of Claudius and the fear of Claudius to perceive that rottenness (67), which is similar to the function of macabre elements in the play that confronts its audience with the fears of the past that haunt the present and the future of the Elizabethan audience.

himself, that is, "providence" (*Ham.* 5.2.198): "If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not / now, yet it will come" (*Ham.* 5.2.199-200). Thus, it can be concluded that while Shakespeare through Hamlet presents macabre elements, questions them, tries to rationalise them, and achieves it to some extent, Hamlet is at the end possessed with them so that there remains only "silence" (*Ham.* 5.2.342).

At the end, Horatio is asked to retell the whole story, although the play has done it already (McCoy 196). The whole play with its presentation of macabre elements, its attempts to deviate into reality and its failure, on the other hand, make Shakespeare's audience believe in these elements. This belief creates an Aristotelian "emotional involvement" (McLeish xii) which also heightens terror in them, that is, the aimed effect on the audience.

V. Conclusion

Hamlet illustrates the effectiveness of cathartic horror on the Elizabethan stage. Taking cues from religious controversy and dramatic convention, linguistic and dramatic means are used to create fear and awe in the audience. The subsequent gothic catharsis, on the other hand, is shaped by the architecture of the Globe amphitheatre in which the play was enacted. Here, the fluctuations between involvement and the necessity of detachment about the reality of the Ghost exhaust both the characters and the audience. Hence, it can be claimed that the Elizabethan playhouse experience had a great effect on audience reaction to make them emotionally involved and experience horror in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

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