



# The Spectre and the Pin: Trompe-l'oeil and Hermeneutic Mourning in *Hamnet*

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**ABSTRACT**

The tragic death of Hamnet, son of William Shakespeare, is commonly linked to *Hamlet*, *Prince of Denmark*, which is possibly the ghostliest work of tragedy ever penned. A few years after the tragic event, the tragedy was written, and thus it sparked a number of psychoanalytical interpretations highlighting its Oedipal undertones in regard to Shakespeare's loss. In her 2020 novel *Hamnet*, Maggie O'Farrell centres on Agnes Hathaway and her children in Stratford-upon-Avon by deliberately distancing the Bard as far as possible from the story. The novel revolves around the untimely death of young Hamnet, leaving his mother and family, yet especially his twin sister Judith, in a state of excruciating sorrow and mourning. By bracketing grief and mourning using Jacques Derrida's observations on the work of mourning, this study will first approach the narrative of O'Farrell in a phenomenological way. While in *Hamnet*, the son is referred to as "the pin" keeping the entire Shakespeare family together, in the tragedy, Hamlet the son represents complete disarray. Therefore, the second goal of this paper is to propose an interpretation of the play as a "hermeneutic mourning" piece through a reading of "trompe-l'oeil" of the memory between *Hamlet* and *Hamnet*.

**Keywords:** *Hamnet*, *Hamlet*, hermeneutic mourning, trompe-l'oeil, memory



## Introduction

*Hamlet, The Prince of Denmark* is among the most famous works in the history of drama to the extent that “many famous phrases that people know from Shakespeare come from *Hamlet*” (Royle, 2014, p. 56). It is the Shakespearean tragedy with the most vivid and richest afterlife. Besides literary critics and scholars interested in drama, there have been a considerable number of philosophers inspired by Shakespeare and more specifically by *Hamlet*. As Emma Smith (2020) pertinently points out: “Big-hitting philosophers like Lacan, Nietzsche and Adorno have all used Hamlet to theorize modern selfhood...” (p. 205). *Hamlet* has been the locus of interest for many thinkers not only with regard to its hero’s modern, individualistic associations, but also due to its representative fecundity that triggers discussions on a range of ideas such as revenge, justice, politics, and ethics. Among the most renowned reflections on the play are Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (1994) and *Deconstruction Is/In America: A New Sense of the Political* (1995), both published following his earlier lectures on the matter. On both occasions, Derrida focuses on the iconic sentence from the play: “The time is out of joint” (1.5.186). For the French philosopher, *Hamlet* represents total disjointedness with its ghostly and hauntological implications through which he discusses certain key concepts such as justice and mourning. In the latter lecture Derrida confesses that: “Until today, I had not noticed what, lying inhumed in “The time is out of joint”, in the subterranean strata of the text, could also resonate secretly with that essential pathology of mourning” (1995, p. 58).

*Hamlet*, apart from anything else, is a play of mourning as is obvious not only to Derrida but to most of its readers and audience. The mourning which is at work in the play is rendered via ambiguity of time perception in relation to the loss of the hinge. Derrida delicately detects that in the play there is a confusion regarding the time, specifically the time and the limit of the mourning and this is “finally the true subject of the play” (1995, p. 58). That the time is out of joint not only implies the rotten state but also the status or the state of mourning. In this respect, *Hamlet* represents disjointedness at an unhinged time and state being trapped in the work of mourning which is also a burden of memory:

Now, Hamlet is mad about dates. His phrase (“The time is out of joint”) does not betray only the symptomatic anxiety of someone whose memory is suffering. His memory is suffering in fact from a death, and a death is

never natural. His memory is suffering from the death of a king, a father, and a homonym, but it is suffering first of all and by that very token, as memory, from amnesia, from an amnesia that is not natural either. It is suffering because it cannot remember, thus because it cannot think the event of this so unnatural death, because it is not a memory that is sure of being able to situate, date, determine, objectify the event. (Derrida, 1995, p. 56-57)

Hamlet is a part of our collective memory; “the experience of Hamlet,” Marjorie Garber observes, “is almost always that of recognition, of recalling, remembering, or identifying some already-known phrase or image.” (2005, p. 840). The play itself needs no introduction, and its holding a specific place in Shakespearean canon in terms of predominantly dealing with the acts of ‘memory’ is hardly news. Some critics believe that the play has the memory of the playwright’s life: by arguably seeing Shakespeare’s life as a back-projection of the plays, finding traces of his life has been the interest of many Shakespeareans by assuming a link between the Hamlet of his imagination to the Hamnet of his flesh. *Hamlet* is known to be pivotal in Shakespeare’s career and life as Peter Ackroyd (2006) explains: “The death of John Shakespeare himself has been considered a defining event in his son’s progress. It has been characteristically associated with the writing of Hamlet, for example, a play that was composed during the obligatory period of mourning” (p. 373).

It is the tragedy associated both with his son’s and his father’s deaths. Therefore, the play is inevitably marked with death and mourning in a doubly uncanny way. In addition, historical evidence suggests that Shakespeare himself played the part of the ghost father (Ackroyd, p. 373). Shakespeare’s investment in this play, thus, exceeds dramatic concerns towards a deeply personal involvement more than any other play. Stephen Greenblatt (2004a) argues that, for Shakespeare, “the coincidence of the names” and “the act of writing his son’s name again and again” can be read as a return to “a wound that had never properly healed” (p. 311). Greenblatt, contradicting Ackroyd’s account, sees the association of the play with John Shakespeare as an imaginary event on the Bard’s mind. He points out that in the tragedy “it is the death not of a son but of a father that provokes the hero’s spiritual crisis” and that there must be an imaginary link between the death of a son and the death of a father since John Shakespeare “was almost certainly still alive when the tragedy was written and first performed” (p.311). On the other hand, Greenblatt also speculates that the Poet might already have heard

about the illness of his father when he sat down to write the tragedy so that “the death of his son and the impending death of his father – a crisis of mourning and memory-constitute a psychic disturbance that may help to explain the explosive power and inwardness of *Hamlet*” (p.318). The lacuna left after historical facts, the room for speculation and imagination accompanies memory and mourning via fiction.

Maggie O’Farrell’s *Hamnet* (2020), which brought her the Women’s Prize for Fiction in the same year, is also a work of mourning, memory, and remembrance. *Hamnet* attempts to give a voice and presence to Hamnet Shakespeare, and specifically to his mother Agnes, while —quite uncommonly— putting, if not ‘forgetting,’ Shakespeare’s presence in the backdrop of the narrative. Mourning and memory in *Hamnet* and the trompe-l’oeil effect create a constant interaction with the tragedy through mirroring, yet blurring, the ‘memory’ of the play(wright) and the reader. In this respect, the bond between Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Maggie O’Farrell’s *Hamnet* is irreducibly intense. According to its definition, which initially emerged as a visual arts term, trompe-l’oeil is defined as “something that misleads or deceives the senses” (“trompe-l’oeil,” 2020)<sup>1</sup>. In her research titled “Love as Trompe- l’oeil: Taxonomies of Desire in *Venus and Adonis*,” Catherine Belsey (2008) introduces this idea to psychoanalytical and literary realms. An ancient Greek tale about two competing painters named Zeuxis and Parrhasius is believed to be the source of the original method (Taws, 2019). In his painting, Zeuxis displays grapes in such a lifelike manner that even birds flock toward it. Parrhasius, his rival, responds by challenging Zeuxis with his painting of a curtain, in return. Even Zeuxis asks him to reveal what is hidden behind the curtain because of how realistically it is portrayed in the picture. Parrhasius prevails in the end. In this regard, the curtain conveys the sense of intrigue that the picture arouses. In Belsey’s words, it “tantalizes,” due to the mystery surrounding what is hidden behind it (2008, p. 34).

The technique of trompe-l’oeil is, according to Belsey’s conceptualization, a representation of a promise that is not kept. The effect of trompe-l’oeil, Belsey asserts, is exhibited by “the promise of a presence that it also withholds” in the case of *Venus and Adonis* (p. 34). Her yearning for Adonis throughout the entire poem is never satiated in the same way that Zeuxis’ “the enticing picture of the grapes yields no pleasure for the stomach” (p. 35). Belsey emphasizes that we must be tricked and then recognize

1 Ayşegül Ernur discusses Catherine Belsey’s appropriation of trompe-l’oeil to literary studies in “No More Yielding But A Dream”: Politics Of Fiction As Trompe-L’oeil In *The Tempest* And *Hag-Seed*. [http://bas.journals.uvt.ro/wp-content/uploads/BAS\\_2022\\_DOI.pdf](http://bas.journals.uvt.ro/wp-content/uploads/BAS_2022_DOI.pdf).

this deceit in order to fully appreciate the text's *trompe-l'oeil* effect (p. 34). This enables the analysis of a text as "a kind of *trompe-l'oeil*, moving undecidably between modes of address, and sustaining the desire of the reader in the process" (p. 35). According to Belsey's argument, *trompe-l'oeil* in literature denotes specific features of unfinished narrative action and sustained promise on the part of the reader. In this respect, making a continuous circling movement between the beginning and the body of the action, this cyclical motion of the story can serve as an example of *trompe-l'oeil* in literature. By doing this, the story makes the reader encounter characters, acts, and modes of address that are mirrored within itself. Through duplicating, repeating, and producing counterparts of characters and events, this type of cyclical motion blurs the distinction between fiction and reality.

At the same time, we see memory as a complex and fragmentary phenomenon in its early Modern understanding. It has meant both deleting and recreating upon something since Plato's conceptualization of memory as a 'wax tablet' and Aristotle's mapping of the mind in a three-partite fashion in *De Anima*: the idea of memory, for this reason, comes to be associated with 'wax' to be imprinted upon (Lees-Jeffries, 2013, p. 13). The influence of quick changes in the society, culture and belief systems of the age led people to be concerned not to forget and to keep memory alive (Greenblatt, 1988, p. 7). When the First Folio was published in 1623, for example, it was with the claim of being the whole body of Shakespeare's works. Shakespeare himself accomplishes his father's wish to be remembered with the coat of arms (Greenblatt, 2004a, p.85). Also, Hamlet itself is full of acts of remembering the father: when the Ghost appears and tells his story, he continuously warns his son to "mark" him, "remember" him; and Hamlet, in turn, promises that his memory will be alive "within the book and volume" of his brain (1.5.103), "whiles memory holds a seat" in there (1.5.96). However, at the same time, the play mirrors, replicates and re-enacts its story line on different levels of the plot. In this respect, we see how Hamlet's words echo the Ghost's and we see parallels of Hamlet's story reflected in contrast to other characters such as Laertes and Fortinbras. Through all these parallelisms, the play underlines the manifold nature of its stories and describes it almost like a repeatable pattern of events without necessarily aiming for a concluding action. "Plays themselves are mnemotechnic," Hester Lees-Jeffries suggests, "representing (necessarily memorable) events as something repeatable, even re-liveable; they re-present completed events, whether based on 'real life' or not, in real time" (p. 6). Memory operates on various levels to bring characters and texts together in the reading experience, thus in reading the story of one, the readers are

haunted by the remnants of the other story. *Hamnet* offers an account of mourning for the young son who is described as the pin, holding the family together. In Maggie O'Farrell's depiction, in compliance with the historical evidence, William Shakespeare, the father, stages Hamlet and becomes the dead father after his son's departure. In a retrospective way, Maggie O'Farrell is offering a bio-fictional prequel for the composition of the tragedy, which makes it a work of "hermeneutic mourning". Once Hamnet, the pin, is gone; both the father and the son end up in the limbo of ghosts where the time is out of joint. Accordingly, this paper will analyse *Hamnet* with a special focus on mourning and memory in relation with *Hamlet*, in an attempt to map the labyrinthic paths of memory between the two texts, paved by trompe-l'oeil.

### **"While memory holds a seat / in this distracted globe"**

The novel opens with the present day of Hamnet. He rushes around in an empty house, looking desperately for someone from the household to tell the situation of his twin. This silent mode sets the tone of the narrative; just like in *Hamlet*. As both the stories of Hamlet and Hamnet begin and end in silence, at this point, we can remember the beginning of *Hamlet*. We are at Elsinore Castle surrounded with nothing but silence, pregnant with expectance. Having been introduced to this atmosphere, we hear him asking: "Who's there?" (1.1.1). Upon this, "Nay, answer me" the other one says, "stand and unfold yourself" (1.1.2). From the very beginning, the novel assumes this pregnant silence of the play. Then, we come back to Henley Street. A boy is uncertain about what to do with his sister. Following him, we see Hamnet who is looking desperately all around the house, full of anxiety and fear, expecting somebody to come.

What does silence signify in this context? Through the silent tone of the beginning, the reader also expects something to be unfolded. It can be the unfolding of Hamnet's story as the title suggests, it can be catching a glimpse of the playwright's imagined perspective, or, by following Hamnet's rushing all around the house, it can be the unfolding of someone by the narrator to put an end to his concern. However, the novel suspends this desire of the reader. By switching to the second plotline, we find ourselves listening to the story of Agnes, and of her almost mythical origin. Since Nicholas Rowe, the Shakespearean biography writing tradition often arguably forges a mythical origin to the playwright's background in the silence of archival documentation. Yet in the novel, shortly after having introduced the reader to Shakespeare the Latin tutor, the novel shifts its focus from him and makes us listen to Agnes's story, of her botanical

endeavours, of her conflict with her stepmother, and her psychic abilities. However, the narrative falls silent in the playwright's story and perspective. Hamnet's father, Shakespeare himself is a ghostly figure in the novel, as is Hamlet's father in the tragedy. Yet, the author intentionally provides an access to the memory of the playwright through deliberate and veiled allusions. His name is never mentioned throughout the novel, not even once, but he is signified only in relation to other people around him. Only the memory of other people gives him a name: Shakespeare is 'his eldest,' 'Hamnet's father,' 'the tutor,' 'Latin boy,' 'the bridegroom,' and 'her husband'. Hence, Shakespeare's presence is a kind of suspension in the novel.

In order to capture Hamnet, the novel dwells upon other people's stories. To find out how the plague reaches Henley Street, the reader follows a glassmaker and a cabin boy; traces a flea of a monkey transferring itself to the cabin boy's red cloth around his neck and travelling from Damascus to Constantinople, Venice to London. We see how it hides itself in a box of beads delivered to Henley Street and how it found first Judith, then Hamnet. At this point, sickness strikes the twins and tricks the perception of their mother. Having read through and followed Judith's sickness and the helplessness of the people around her, the novel suddenly shifts its focus and makes us understand how from the very beginning the dying one was Hamnet. Suddenly after, in the room we saw in our mind's eye the birth of Hamnet and Judith, the end of the following chapter represents to us his death:

There is her daughter, very sick indeed, lying on her back, her face blanched by fever, and there is her son, curled next to her, his arm around her. And yet there is something not right about that arm. Agnes stares at it, mesmerised. It is Hamnet's arm and yet it is not. (p. 246)

Shortly after this scene, Hamnet dies indeed, and the rest is silence (p. 252). Hence it can be observed that memory functions in a Proustian fashion in the novel. Scents, sights, touch, and tastes function to make the characters remember and bring the past to the present day: for example, Agnes revives her late mother by "summon[ing] the sensation of the fall of her mother's hair on her shoulder" (p. 172). Also, we are given a detailed account of how John Shakespeare recollects the memory of his late grandmother by the sight and smell of a breakfast table. However, it is the spectral memory of the other people which haunts the living. All through the first part of the narrative, we look for Hamnet's presence in the story of others. Just after his death, however, we reach towards his vivid yet ghostly existence in the perception of the characters. For instance,

Judith hears him in the swish of a broom against the floor. She sees him in the winged dip of a bird over the wall. She finds him in the shake of a pony's mane, in the smattering of hail against the pane, in the wind reaching its arm down the chimney, in the rustle of the rushes that make up her den's roof." (p. 298)

While Judith hears and feels him in her memory, in her body and in their house in Henley Street, the playwright "finds himself looking out, every evening, over the watching crowd, in search of a particular face, a boy with a slightly crooked smile and a perpetually surprised expression" (p. 303). In this pursuit,

All I have to do is find him. I look for him everywhere, in every street, in every crowd, in every audience. That's what I am doing, when I look out at them all: I try to find him, *or a version of him.*" (emphasis added; p. 315)

Then, the readers follow, indeed, a version of him. Reminiscent of Barnardo and Francisco at the beginning of *Hamlet*, the midwife in the novel informs Judith of her sight of *Hamnet's* ghostly apparition. She sets out to find him at the darkness of night:

The very air feels coalescent, charged, as it does before a thunderstorm. She shuts her eyes. She can feel him. She is so sure of this. The skin on her arms and neck shrinks and she is desperate to reach out, to touch him, to take his hand in hers, but she dares not. She listens to the roar of her pulse, her ragged breathing and she knows, she hears, underneath her own, another's breathing. She does. She really does. (p. 338)

Next, the reader is brought back to the theatre. This time, the illusion of theatre, the interchangeability of *Hamnet* and *Hamlet* trick the memory of the mother. Standing in the yard around the stage, Agnes revives her son's memory in the actor playing Prince *Hamlet*. Agnes, struck in the conundrum of reality and imagination, life and death, memory and fantasy, *Hamlet* and *Hamnet*, says that:

It is him. It is not him. It is him. It is not him. The thought swings like a hammer through her. Her son, her *Hamnet* or *Hamlet*, is dead, buried in the churchyard. He died while he was still a child. He is now only white, stripped bones in a grave. Yet this is him, grown into a near-man, as he

would be now, had he lived, on the stage, walking with her son's gait, talking in her son's voice, speaking words written for him by her son's father. (pp. 364-365)

Death is never the destination neither in *Hamlet*, nor in *Hamnet*. Similarly, in the play as Nicholas Royle argues, "Hamlet sends mixed messages" on death and "purgatory, heaven, and hell are all proffered, along with the apparent capacity, once having shuffled off, to shuffle back again. (*Enter the Ghost.*)" (Royle, 2005, p. 64)

### ***Exeunt Hamnet, Enter Hamlet***

As Maggie O'Farrell (2020) quotes from Stephen Greenblatt at the beginning of her novel: "Hamnet and Hamlet are in fact the same name, entirely interchangeable in Stratford records in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries" (2004b). In *Hamnet*, Maggie O'Farrell opens a window into the home of the bard, leaving William Shakespeare mostly beside the frame and focusing more on Agnes, Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith. Hamnet is taken away by the plague, the plague which was kind of wished for by the children at home since it gave them the opportunity to spend time with their father:

If the plague comes to London, he can be back with them for months. The playhouses are all shut, by order of the Queen, and no one is allowed to gather in public. It is wrong to wish for plague, her mother has said, but Susanna has done this a few times under her breath, at night, after she has said her prayers. She always crosses herself afterwards. But still she wishes it. Her father home, for months, with them. She sometimes wonders if her mother secretly wishes it too. (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 66)

The pestilence reaches Stratford-upon-Avon, infecting the twins, Judith and Hamnet. Judith recovers and yet for little Hamnet it brings "silence, stillness. Nothing more." (O'Farrell, 2020, p.252) After the tragic death of her twin brother Judith asks, "Will he never come back?" and her mother Agnes answers: "No, my love, he will never come again." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 270). Yet the reader will soon meet the spectres of Hamnet, or rather Hamlet through relentless mourning, the mourning of Hamnet, Agnes, Judith, Will and Hamlet. For instance, Agnes will ask Who's there and she will think "It must be some spectre" (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 271). The funeral of the young boy as depicted by O'Farrell can be read as another piece of evidence regarding the hauntological

representation of mourning which construes the bond, the kinship between Hamnet and Hamlet: "It is even more difficult, Agnes finds, to leave the graveyard, than it was to enter it. So many graves to walk past, so many sad and angry ghosts tugging at her skirts, touching her with their cold fingers..." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 276).

Mourning is a work of memory and always a call to resurrection. It always comes to a ghost story. That is why *Hamlet* the tragedy, which is born out of mourning, after a broken, disjointed time for the Shakespeare family, is a work of "hermeneutic mourning" in which William Shakespeare interprets and retells the story of the prince after the loss of his own. In *Death and Remembrance in Hamnet*, Jessica Hines (2022) reflects on the burden of remembering told in the novel exhibiting the grief of the family:

"Remember me"—the final line of *Hamnet* forms a haunting imperative. Pulled directly from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the novel's literary antecedent, these lines are spoken by Shakespeare himself as he acts the part of the ghost of Hamlet's father. In the play it's a command that torments Hamlet, serving as instructions that he remember his father and his own overwhelming grief, and that he seek revenge; it's the moment out of which the spooling lines of the play spiral out as Hamlet struggles with the memory and how best to act on it. In the novel, it's a summation of the great weight Agnes Shakespeare (née Hathaway), her husband William, and her two daughters have been struggling to live with after the sudden death of her son, Hamnet. Coming as it does at the novel's conclusion, the imperative is less commanding. The challenge is not remembering—as Agnes tells her husband she has never forgotten—but living with that remembrance.

It can be claimed that William's way of living with the memory or coping with the ordeal of remembrance lies in his profession, in writing and composing. Remembrance, in this respect, is a burden which also embodies the anxiety of not remembering, of forgetting. The Ghost Father/Shakespeare, therefore, insists on remembering on the stage "as if wishing to pierce the boundary between audience and players, between real life and play" (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 367). In this way, the playwright attempts to resurrect his dead boy in *Hamlet* by killing himself.

Following the idea of hermeneutic mourning, it is possible to suggest that O'Farrell's historical fiction reconnects Hamnet and Hamlet once again, filling the gaps between the homes of Shakespeare, the one in Stratford-upon-Avon, the other one on stage. The Spectre, therefore, appears after the pin is lost: "How were they to know that Hamnet was the pin holding them together? That without him they would all fragment and fall apart, like a cup shattered on the floor?" (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 277).

## Shakespeare's Hermeneutic Mourning

Hermeneutic Mourning is a term which Derrida (1989) uses only once in *Memoires for Paul De Man: The Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine*. The philosopher was invited to contribute to the commemoration with a series of lectures, after the death of Paul de Man in 1983. In the first lecture, Derrida concentrates on Mnemosyne along with Hölderlin's poem and Paul de Man's reflections on Hölderlin and Heidegger. Derrida explains that according to Paul de Man, "the power of memory is not first of all, that of resuscitating, it remains enigmatic enough to be preoccupied, so to speak, by a thinking of 'the future'" (1989, p. 7). Paul de Man considers Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin as appropriation-by-identification, since Heidegger, indeed, reverses Hölderlin's writing in his own text. This, in Derrida's interpretation, stands as Heidegger's "hermeneutic mourning"<sup>2</sup> (1989, p. 7). This type of hermeneutics also allows a multiplicity of memory. Derrida claims that "there is no singular memory" and therefore he calls the lectures *Memoires*, in the plural form (1989, p. 15). In this contexts, it can be pointed out that the play of memories, establishing a 'memorial trompe-l'oeil' between *Hamnet* and *Hamlet* allows such plurality. Writing and interpretation are acts of remembrance and mourning which most of the time follow a death or deaths as in the case of *Hamlet*. Moreover, at each instance of remembering, an appropriation-by-identification takes place since what is remembered is always a subject's *memoires*. Therefore, O'Farrell's version of the story is her own appropriation, especially inspired by the irritating claims in different biographical works that Shakespeare did hate his wife and did not mourn for his son. In one of her interviews, she tells us that "the assumption he did not grieve for Hamnet is outrageous. It's not nothing to call a play and a tragic hero after your son – it speaks volumes. We may not quite know what the volumes are – but it's a huge act. (O'Farrell, 2020).

2 Hatice Karaman discusses hermeneutic mourning in another article titled "Learning To Live, Learning To Die: Writing As Mourning And/Or Fraud In Peter Ackroyd's *The Lambs of London*" in a different context regarding the relation between writing and mourning.

According to Derrida, the name and memory cannot be separated from each other. He explains this with references to Paul de Man's reading of Milton's "On Shakespeare," where he writes:

Dear son of Memory, great heir of fame,  
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name? (Derrida, 1989, p. 27)

For Paul De Man, the prosopopoeia as the trope of an autobiography establishes one's face or figure via his or her name. (Derrida, 1989, p. 29) In any act of remembrance, the name arises with the memory, juxtaposed to the very figure of the ghost. The multiplied Hamlets/Hamnets exemplify Shakespeare's toying with trompe-l'oeil, by which he blurs the limits of fiction and history. A similar manner can also be traced in the novel where the author conjoins history and tragedy in her own narration.

That is why for Hamnet/Hamlet the rest is not all silence, but a polyphony of prosopopoeia. The name -or the title- Hamlet is evoked, recalled, and renamed whenever there is a work of mourning, thereof remembrance, almost synchronically reviving the name Hamnet. Hamnet's presence not only named himself, but also fulfilled the name "twin" for Judith. That's why, after he is gone, she asks: "What is the word, Judith asks her mother, for someone who was a twin but is no longer a twin?" (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 292).

Neither Agnes, nor Judith can find an answer to this stinging question that falls in the middle of the Shakespeare home with the loss of a child, a son, a twin-brother. A twin is no longer called a twin in the absence of one. How about a family? Young William Shakespeare and Anne seem to have named their son Hamnet either from Old French hamelet<sup>3</sup> (a small village) or most likely from the proto-Germanic word haimaz, home with a root that refers to dwelling. Shakespeare family, deliberately or indeliberately, name their son "the home" and he leaves his home at a very early stage of his and his family's life, leaving the Shakespeares in grieving homelessness. Hamnet's name is home: he represents the dwelling space of memories, of remembrance. Recalling the discussion of the uncanny by Freud or by Heidegger; the interplay of the homely and unhomely resonates in both the names Hamlet and Hamnet. The spectre Hamlet has always already been a ghost, a re-appearance from the very first scene of the tragedy to the allusion in O'Farrell's *Hamnet* when Mary sees her grandson looking as pale as a ghost: "Oh, she says. You frightened me! Whatever are you doing, boy? You look like

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3 [https://www.etymonline.com/word/hamlet#etymonline\\_v\\_1414](https://www.etymonline.com/word/hamlet#etymonline_v_1414).

a ghost, standing there like that." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 127). In the following passages, we witness Mary regretting these words:

Mary will tell herself, in the days and weeks to come, that she never said these words. She couldn't have done. She would never have said 'ghost to him, would never have told him that there was anything frightening, anything amiss about his appearance'. (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 127)

And yet in the narrative, O'Farrell brilliantly depicts the spectrality of Hamnet. Even before the pestilence, when Hamnet is still a lively boy, echoes the opening line of Hamlet the tragedy. The gruesome question is addressed to this vivid child by his grandfather: "Who's there?" Hamnet is depicted as the creepy dweller of the home, scaring the household even before he passes away. His transition to a spectre is signalled at several different moments. Nevertheless, his death marks the juncture, the falling apart as mentioned earlier. This loss of the pin is revived in one of the most famous sentences in dramatic history: The time is out of joint.

## Conclusion

Hamnet/Hamlet- the ghost- par excellence is a recollection of the past and the future. As once noted by Walter Benjamin, "...remembrance [*Eingedenken*] can complete what is incomplete (happiness) and make incomplete what is complete (suffering)" (Benjamin, 1999, 471, N 8,1).

Mourning is, therefore, a recollection of memories, a gathering of ghosts, but also an attempt to appeal to the future since it also entails an aporia as Derrida explains:

We can only live this experience in the form of an aporia: the aporia of mourning and of prosopopoeia, where the possible remains impossible. Where success fails. And where faithful interiorization bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead. It makes the other a part of us, between us-and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him in us, like an unborn child, like a future. (Derrida, 1989: 35)

For Derrida, memory is intertwined with reading, re-reading, and writing or the text; he juxtaposes the figures of Mnemosyne with that of hauntology: *All these figures, remember, are also ghostly figures* (Derrida, 1989, p. 35). In this context, he revives another persona from ancient history along with Mnemosyne, which is Mnemon.

But I should also remind you of the character Mnemon: he who remembers but above all makes one remember. He is an auxiliary, a technician, an artist of memory, a remembering or hypomnesic servant. Achilles, whom he served, received him from his mother on the eve of the Trojan War. Mnemon had an unusual mission: an agent of memory, like an external memory, he was to remind Achilles of an oracle. (Derrida, 1989, p. 86)

In this context, Hamlet- the ghost- with his persistence in remembrance, can be considered as the Mnemon, the agent of memory who collaborates with Hamnet, creating the trompe-l'oeil. Such a reading brings O'Farrell's diligent pursuit of the unsettling kinship between Hamnet and Hamlet to a clearer perspective. Hamlet/Hamnet asks to be remembered by asking generations to remember. Agnes, who is furious with her husband for staging such a play, reconciles with the Poet, understands that he did not forget their son. On the contrary, the father wants the son to be remembered, for the suffering or the mourning is not, at all, complete:

Hamlet, here, on this stage, is two people, the young man, alive, and the father, dead. He is both alive and dead. Her husband has brought him back to life, in the only way he can. As the ghost talks, she sees that her husband, in writing this, in taking the role of the ghost, has changed places with his son. He has taken his son's death and made it his own; he has put himself in death's clutches, resurrecting the boy in his place. 'O horrible! O horrible! Most horrible!' murmurs her husband's ghoulish voice, recalling the agony of his death. He has, Agnes sees, done what any father would wish to do... (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 366)

As depicted in the quoted extract, what Agnes witnesses on stage is not only a play produced by her husband, but a trompe-l'oeil of memory that is evoked by her husband's mourning. The Poet reclaims and revives the memories of his son and even of his father via the play. The death of the other, of the loved one would inevitably lead us to "mimetic

interiorization" in Derrida's terms, which is "the origin of fiction" (Derrida, 1989, p. 34).  
Mimetic interiorization:

...takes place in a body. Or rather, it makes a place for a body, a voice, and a soul which, although "ours," did not exist and had no meaning before this possibility that one must always begin by remembering, and whose trace must be followed. (Derrida, 1989, pp. 34-35)

Shakespeare interiorizes and (hermeneutically) mourns the death of his son through his own death via the ghostliest tragedy ever. *Hamnet*, the novel, follows the traces and the footsteps of the Shakespeare family in mourning and finds its origins in his mimetic interiorization especially once the tragedy of Hamlet is put on stage. The death of the other and the mourning that follows lead us to our own thoughts, and our own death. That is why Judith had to question what to call herself, what name would she be given after losing her brother with whom she shared her birthday, who was her reflection in the mirror as her father once said:

In unison, they raised the apple slices to their lips, Hamnet with his right, Judith with her left. They put them down, as if with some silent signal between them, at the same moment, then looked at each other, then picked them up again, Judith with her left hand, Hamnet with his right. It's like a mirror, he had said. Or that they are one person split down the middle. (O'Farrell, 2002, p. 280)

Derrida writes that the name for the soul, -the spirit, Psyche also means the revolving mirror in French; however, in his memorial speech after Paul de Man's death, he calls it the Mnemosyne (1989, p. 39). Memory is both the spirit and the mirror, through which we shall turn to ourselves, to remember. It is an invitation which gathers us in the unhomeliness of our homes: So once again, Hamlet calls, at the end of *Hamnet*: "Remember Me!"

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