



## Hamlet, Pirates, and Purgatory

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Résumé de l'article

L'enlèvement d'Hamlet par des pirates durant son voyage vers l'Angleterre est un épisode n'apparaissant pas dans les Histoires tragiques de Belleforest, la principale source narrative de l'oeuvre de Shakespeare. Dans cet article, on revoit les différentes sources possibles de cet épisode, incluant le Ur-Hamlet, la « Vie de Jules César » de Plutarque et un événement de la biographie de Martin Luther. On propose enfin une autre possibilité : un sermon du théologien suisse Heinrich Bullinger, dans lequel le purgatoire est comparé à un enlèvement par des pirates. On y discute de la possibilité que Shakespeare ait pu prendre connaissance de ce sermon, directement ou indirectement, et on y avance que la lecture de Hamlet à la lumière de cette source possible entraîne plusieurs conséquences quant à notre compréhension des liens entre le prince, son père, et Claude.

# Hamlet, Pirates, and Purgatory

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*Hamlet's abduction by pirates during his voyage to England is an episode that does not appear in the main narrative source of Shakespeare's play, Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques*. This essay surveys the various sources that have been proposed, including the *Ur-Hamlet*, Plutarch's "Life of Julius Caesar," and an event in the biography of Martin Luther, before proposing a further possibility in the form of a sermon by the Swiss theologian Heinrich Bullinger where purgatory is compared to pirate capture. It discusses the likelihood of Shakespeare encountering this sermon directly or indirectly, and then argues that reading *Hamlet* in the light of it has important implications for our understanding of the relationship between the prince, his father, and Claudius.*

*L'enlèvement d'Hamlet par des pirates durant son voyage vers l'Angleterre est un épisode n'apparaissant pas dans les *Histoires tragiques* de Belleforest, la principale source narrative de l'œuvre de Shakespeare. Dans cet article, on revoit les différentes sources possibles de cet épisode, incluant le *Ur-Hamlet*, la « *Vie de Jules César* » de Plutarque et un événement de la biographie de Martin Luther. On propose enfin une autre possibilité : un sermon du théologien suisse Heinrich Bullinger, dans lequel le purgatoire est comparé à un enlèvement par des pirates. On y discute de la possibilité que Shakespeare ait pu prendre connaissance de ce sermon, directement ou indirectement, et on y avance que la lecture de *Hamlet* à la lumière de cette source possible entraîne plusieurs conséquences quant à notre compréhension des liens entre le prince, son père, et Claude.*

The subject of this essay is an incident in the plot of *Hamlet* that does not actually take place onstage: Hamlet's abduction by pirates during the voyage to England on which he is sent by Claudius, as described by Hamlet first in a letter read out by Horatio in act 4, scene 6 and then in person to Horatio in act 5, scene 2. This episode is absent from the play's main narrative source, the *Histoires tragiques* of François de Belleforest (first published in 1570), and from the earlier version of the story in the twelfth-century *Historiae Danicae* of Saxo Grammaticus. It may simply be Shakespeare's invention, but various sources have been proposed, including the *Ur-Hamlet*, Plutarch's "Life of Julius Caesar," and an event in the biography of Martin Luther. I do not seek to displace any of these theories, which will be briefly recapitulated in the first part of this essay, but rather to suggest a further text that may have informed Shakespeare's conception, and his audience's understanding, of the episode: a discussion of purgatory by the Swiss theologian Heinrich Bullinger in the fourth of his five

sets of ten sermons (the *Decades*), published in Latin in 1550 and translated into English in 1577. After discussing the likelihood of Shakespeare's knowing this work, which has already been cited in relation to *Hamlet* by Roland Mushat Frye, I will go on to consider how viewing Hamlet's abduction in the light of Bullinger's sermon might affect our understanding of the play. Not only does Shakespeare recycle Protestant polemic for dramatic effect, as Stephen Greenblatt has argued in *Hamlet in Purgatory*; he does so in a way that resonates with the play's underlying structures of relationship between its characters.



The first reference to Hamlet's pirate abduction appears in act 4, scene 6, where Horatio reads a letter from the prince that is presented to him by an unnamed sailor. The relevant section runs:

Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour, and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy; but they knew what they did: I am to do a good turn for them.<sup>1</sup>

In the subsequent scene, Claudius is brought further letters announcing Hamlet's return to Denmark, and in act 5, scene 2 Hamlet recounts to Horatio the events preceding his capture: his theft of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's commission, his discovery that the King of England has been commanded to execute him, and his replacement of the order with a new instruction to the king

That on the view and know of these contents,  
Without debatement further more or less,  
He should the bearers put to sudden death,  
Not shriving-time allowed. (5.2.45–48)

The fight with the pirates occurs the next day.

1. William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.6.14–21 (hereafter cited in the text).

This account is significantly at variance with the narratives of Saxo and Belleforest, in which Amleth actually completes his journey to England, having rewritten the orders to command not just the execution of his companions but his own marriage to the king's daughter. He spends a year in England before returning to Denmark.<sup>2</sup> The usual, and convincing, explanation for Shakespeare's curtailment of this sequence is that it slows down the plot to a degree undesirable in a stage-play, as Harold Jenkins suggests when he refers to the dramatist avoiding "the digression of English adventures."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that there are good dramatic reasons for Hamlet's being taken out of Denmark in act 4: it is a means by which Claudius can deal with the threat Hamlet poses without overtly ordering his execution; it leaves Hamlet ironically unaware of Ophelia's madness and death; it allows Laertes to return and be drawn into Claudius's plot; and it precipitates the change from irresolution to "fatalistic composure" that Hamlet seems to have undergone by the final act.<sup>4</sup> But having got Hamlet out of Denmark, the dramatist is faced with the question of how to get him back; and as W. W. Lawrence succinctly puts it, "This was neatly done by the pirate attack."<sup>5</sup>

Given that the replacement of English sojourn with piratical abduction seems linked to the translation of the Hamlet story from prose narrative to tragic drama, the question arises of whether it originated in the so-called *Ur-Hamlet*, the version predating Shakespeare's that is known from allusions by Thomas Nashe and Thomas Lodge and a record in Philip Henslowe's diary.<sup>6</sup> In their 1938 edition of the Second Quarto, Thomas Marc Parrott and

2. A detailed account of the sequence as it appears in Belleforest is given in William Witherle Lawrence, "Hamlet's Sea Voyage," *PMLA* 59 (1944): 45–70. See also Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1957–75), 7:66–69 (Saxo), 7:101–07 (Belleforest, in a 1608 translation as *The Historie of Hamblet*).

3. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), 104. See also *The Tragedy of Hamlet: A Critical Edition of the Second Quarto, 1604, with Introduction and Textual Notes*, ed. Thomas Marc Parrott and Hardin Craig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938; repr. New York, Gordian Press, 1965), 9; Lawrence, 52.

4. Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 234.

5. Lawrence, 52.

6. In the epistle "To the Gentlemen Students of both Universities" that prefaces Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (London, 1589), Thomas Nashe writes of an unnamed imitator of Seneca, "if you intreat him faire in a frostie morning, he will afford you whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfulls of tragical speeches,"

Hardin Craig argue that a change of this nature was “more or less forced upon the author” of the *Ur-Hamlet*, and suggest that his reshaping of the material may be reflected in a scene of the later German play apparently derived from a version of *Hamlet*, *Der Bestrafte Brudermord oder Prinz Hamlet aus Daennemark*.<sup>7</sup> Here, Hamlet outwits the bandits who have been ordered to kill him by contriving for them to shoot each other instead. Lawrence, however, while agreeing that the sea-voyage episode as a whole “must have been much altered in being put into dramatic form, even before Shakespeare treated it,” sensibly notes that since the *Ur-Hamlet* is lost, “it seems impossible to decide” whether it included the pirates, thus avoiding the trap of circularity identified by Emma Smith whereby “the pre-play becomes a blank page in a textual history which the critic can inscribe as he pleases.”<sup>8</sup> It should also be noted that the First Quarto of *Hamlet* omits the pirates entirely, with Horatio explaining to the Queen that the ship was “crossed by the contention of the winds”: a Hamlet play can evidently be written without recourse to pirates.<sup>9</sup> The possibility of the *Ur-Hamlet* as a source of the pirate episode has generally been ignored by more recent commentators.

Another of Parrott and Craig’s arguments has proved more influential: that “the incident of Hamlet’s boarding of the pirate ship and of his courteous treatment there” was “suggested by Shakespeare’s recent reading of Plutarch’s *Life of Caesar*.”<sup>10</sup> The argument retained currency through its articulation in Harold Jenkins’s Arden 2 edition of the play (1982), and has recently been used by Steve Roth in *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country*.<sup>11</sup> Plutarch writes that in

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sig. \*\*3r. In *VVits Miserie, and the VVorlds Madnesse* (London, 1596), Thomas Lodge describes a devil that “looks as pale as the Visard of [th]e ghost which cried so miserally at [th]e Theator like an oister wife, *Hamlet, reuenge*,” sig. H4v. Philip Henslowe records a performance of *Hamlet* at Newington Butts on June 9, 1594: *Henslowe’s Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.

7. Parrott and Craig, 9, 10–15.

8. Lawrence, 45, 54; Emma Smith, “Ghost Writing: *Hamlet* and the *Ur-Hamlet*,” in *The Renaissance Text: Theory, Editing, Textuality*, ed. Andrew Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 179.

9. William Shakespeare, “*Hamlet*”: *The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), First Quarto, 14.5.

10. Parrott and Craig, 12.

11. Jenkins edition, 104; Steve Roth, *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country* (Seattle: Open House, 2009), 63–64.

his youth, during his absence from Rome at the time of Sulla's dictatorship, Caesar made a voyage from Bithynia, where he had been staying with King Nicomedes:

he tooke sea againe, and was taken by pyrates about the Ile of PHARMACVSA: for those pyrates kept all vppon that sea coast, with a great fleete of shippes and botes. They asking him at the first twentie talentes for his ransome, *Cesar* laughed them to scorne, as though they knew not what a man they had taken, & of him selfe promised them fiftie talentes. Then he sent his men vp and downe to get him this money, so that he was left in maner alone among these theeues of the CILICIANS, (which are the cruelllest butchers in the world) with one of his frends, and two of his slaues only: and yet he made so litle reckoning of them, that when he was desirous to sleepe, he sent vnto them to commaunde them to make no noyse. Thus was he eight and thirtie dayes among them, not kept as prisoner, but rather waited vppon by them as a Prince. All this time he woulde boldly exercise him selfe in any sporte or pastime they would goe to. And other while also he woulde wryte verses, and make orations, and call them together to say them before them: and if any of them seemed as though they had not vnderstoode him, or passed not for them, he called them blockeheades, and brute beastes, and laughing, threatned them that he would hang them vp. But they were as merie with the matter as could be, and tooke all in good parte, thinking that this his bold speach came, through the simplicity of his youth.<sup>12</sup>

After being ransomed out of captivity, Caesar has the pirates captured and crucified.

Although Lawrence's complaint that "the resemblance of this to Shakespeare's play consists solely in that the prisoner was well treated, and ultimately released" is a fair one, it is nevertheless the case that Shakespeare had recently read Plutarch's "Life" while writing his own *Julius Caesar*, and that *Hamlet* contains several references to the Roman including those by Horatio in the opening scene of the Second Quarto (Additional Passage A, 6–13), by

12. *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes Compared Together by that Graue Learned Philosopher and Historiographer, Plutarke of Chaeronea*, trans. Thomas North (London, 1579), 764.

Polonius (to a play about Julius Caesar) prior to the staging of *The Murder of Gonzago* (3.2.99–100), and by Hamlet in the graveyard (5.1.208–11).<sup>13</sup> While the relevance of Caesar's capture to Hamlet may be debated, Shakespeare's knowledge of the episode (which appears near the beginning of Plutarch's "Life") and the persistence of Caesar in Shakespeare's writing at the time of *Hamlet* are not in doubt.

A less literary origin for the pirate episode is proposed by Geoffrey Bullough in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Bullough notes that in the 1580s and 1590s "Pirates of many nationalities swarmed in the North Sea and in the Bay of Biscay," to an extent that impinged upon Anglo-Danish relations: as the ambassador to Denmark, Daniel Rogers, complained in 1588, "the seas are very full of pirates."<sup>14</sup> As a result, "the pirate incident in *Hamlet* would not have seemed as melodramatic, fortuitous, and improbable to the Elizabethans as it appears to some modern critics," in the words of Karl P. Wentersdorf (who supplies further information about Elizabethan pirate activity).<sup>15</sup> Given the prevalence of piracy at the time of *Hamlet's* writing, the possibility has to be acknowledged that Shakespeare's source lies not in a literary narrative, but in the dramatist's own imagination as acted upon by contemporary events. Bullough also notes, however, that the motif of pirate capture has affinities "with Mediterranean romances like *Apollonius of Tyre* and Sidney's *Arcadia*," adding to Shakespeare's treatment of those contemporary events a somewhat picturesque dimension.<sup>16</sup>

A further possibility is suggested by Raymond B. Waddington, who speculates "that Shakespeare used Martin Luther as a prototype in constructing the character of the prince." Waddington points to the similarity between Hamlet's capture and Luther's abduction while returning to Wittenberg after being deemed a heretic in the Edict of Worms:

Appearances to the contrary, however, these attackers dealt with Luther "like thieves of mercy" and "knew what they did," the kidnapping having been arranged by Luther's protector, Frederick the Wise, so that he could

13. Lawrence, 54.

14. Bullough, 7:41–42, 184.

15. Karl P. Wentersdorf, "Hamlet's Encounter with the Pirates," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34 (1983): 436.

16. Bullough, 7:47.

be rescued from the danger of assassination or imprisonment and placed in the protection of Wartburg Castle.

Hamlet's new perception of divine Providence following his return to Denmark enacts a Lutheran shift, "from reason to faith—*sola fide, sola gratia*," that is appropriate to the parallel between the two stories.<sup>17</sup>

The possible sources identified above—Plutarch, contemporary events, the biography of Luther—are not mutually incompatible; none is so obviously the principal source as to exclude the eventuality that Shakespeare drew on others, or to prevent early modern theatregoers from having others in mind when thinking about the play. However, a somewhat different Hamlet comes into focus depending on which we use as the lens through which to view the pirate episode. Hamlet-as-Caesar is the man of action who emerges in the face of peril and boards the pirate ship single-handed, in contrast to the notoriously dilatory prince of the earlier part of the play. Caesar's treatment of the pirates after being ransomed may give a grim implication to Hamlet's promise to "do a good turn" for his captors; at any rate, it is in keeping with Hamlet's ruthlessness towards Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who, he says loftily, "are not near my conscience" (5.2.59). Hamlet-as-Luther, on the other hand, is the Wittenberg-educated Protestant whose capture by pirates demonstrates the hidden hand of the same providence that worked through Frederick the Wise.<sup>18</sup> This turn of events, "so improbable, and so unnecessary to the plot," as Alan Sinfield puts it, shows Hamlet that "There's a divinity that shapes our ends" (5.2.10) and prepares the ground for the fatalistic prince of the final act who will observe that "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all" (5.2.165–68).<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, if one remembers the role of Frederick in arranging Luther's capture, one might wonder if Hamlet's abduction, too, was arranged in advance, a possibility advocated by David Farley-Hills among others and suggested by Hamlet's promise in the Second Quarto to "delve one yard below their mines / And blow them at the moon" (Additional

17. Raymond B. Waddington, "Lutheran Hamlet," *English Language Notes* 27.2 (Dec. 1989): 32, 38.

18. A recent discussion of the significance of Wittenberg is Suzanne H. Stein, "Hamlet in Melanchthon's Wittenberg," *Notes and Queries* 56 (2009): 55–57.

19. Alan Sinfield, "Hamlet's Special Providence," *Shakespeare Survey* 33 (1980): 92.



Passage H, 7–8).<sup>20</sup> Finally, interpreting the episode in the light of Elizabethan North Sea piracy reveals a Hamlet at the mercy of a contemporary hazard to shipping—although, as Mary Floyd Wilson points out, the Danes’ association with sea piracy went back to Viking times. If the pirates “embody the qualities of [Hamlet’s] heroically Gothic ancestors,” his time with them may be seen as representing “the recuperation of his ethnic identity.”<sup>21</sup>



To the possible sources identified above I would like to add a further text whose relevance to *Hamlet* has already been noted by Roland Mushat Frye: the sermons of the Zurich theologian Heinrich Bullinger, printed in 1577 in a translation by “H. I. student in Diuinitie” as *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons, diuided into fiue Decades, conteyning the chiefe and principall pointes of Christian Religion* and reprinted in 1584 and 1587 with revised spelling and punctuation on both occasions.<sup>22</sup> Frye repeatedly cites the “influential Henry Bullinger” to illustrate Protestant orthodoxy on a number of theological issues that relate to *Hamlet*, but the sermon that is of particular concern to the current essay is the last of the fourth decade, “Of the reasonable Soule of man, and of his most certaine saluation after the death of his bodie.”<sup>23</sup> Frye uses it in support of his assertion that Protestants “typically interpreted lifelike specters as demons in disguise who assumed human form in order to achieve a devilish purpose,” such as convincing the living of the existence of purgatory, and it hardly needs to be said that

20. David Farley-Hills, “Hamlet’s Account of the Pirates,” *Review of English Studies* 50 (1999): 320–31. Farley-Hills also cites G. H. Miles, *A Review of Hamlet* (Baltimore: Kelley, Piet & co., 1870) and Martin Stevens, “Hamlet and the Pirates: A Critical Reconsideration,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26 (1975): 276–84. A recent discussion of the question of pre-arrangement is in John E. Curran, Jr., “Hamlet,” *Protestantism, and the Mourning of Contingency: Not to Be* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 219.

21. Mary Floyd Wilson, “Hamlet, the Pirate’s Son,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 19 (2009), paragraphs 10, 7, <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-19/floyhaml.html>.

22. References to this text use the 1587 edition: *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons, Divided into Five Decades* (London, 1587). The type of the copy reproduced on *Early English Books Online* (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>) is more legible than that of 1577, and this is the edition used in *The Decades of Henry Bullinger, Minister of the Church of Zurich*, ed. Rev. Thomas Harding, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849–52).

23. Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 19. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, 754.

the relationship between the living and dead, the reliability of ghosts, and the doctrine of purgatory are themes and questions that are important to *Hamlet*.<sup>24</sup>

Bullinger's sermon begins with a discussion of the nature of the soul, which he defines as "a spirituall substance, powred of God into mans bodie, that being ioined thereunto, it might quicken and direct the same: but being disseuered from the body, it should not die, but liue immortall for euer."<sup>25</sup> The soul is substantial, but bodiless; being imperfect, it is not part of God, but it is created by God out of nothing and poured into the body when the child is in the womb. It gives life to the body, it is able to feel, and it is able to reason. However, it does not die with the body, and those who say it does are malicious liars, since the immortality of the soul is proved by scripture and by Christ's resurrection, as well as being attested to by classical authors.

At this point, however, Bullinger enters more controversial territory by considering "where the soules when they are destitute of the dwelling place their bodies, leade their life and are conuersant"—and, no less problematically, *when they go there*.<sup>26</sup> Bullinger's argument that souls go immediately to heaven or hell following the death of the body places him in conflict both with the heretical doctrine of mortalism and with the Catholic doctrine of purgatory:

For you shall finde some will say, that the soules departing from the bodies, goe not by and by the right and readie waie to heauen, but that being as it were taken with a slumbering lethargie, they sleepe vntill the last daye of iudgement. You shal finde other some contending that soules can not come into heauen, vnlesse they bee perfectlie purified with clensing fire, which they call purgatorie, as though they were intercepted by pyrates and robbers in the midst of their iourney, and cast into tormentes, vntill

24. Frye, 17. The relevance to *Hamlet* of these points of difference between Catholics and Protestants continues to interest literary scholars. Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Curran are two studies that have been invaluable to the current essay; for a more recent example, see Vladimir Brijak, "An Allusion to Purgatory in *Hamlet*," *Notes and Queries* 57 (2010): 379–80. For a corrective to the tendency to read the Ghost in confessional terms, see Catherine Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter: *Hamlet* and the Tradition of Fireside Ghost Stories," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61 (2010): 8: "these accounts ignore the long tradition of popular ghost lore that successive doctrinal prohibitions and appropriations were unable to suppress."

25. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, 756–57.

26. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, 767.

either they themselues make satisfaction, or other for them haue paide as it were the debt which they had else-where borrowed.<sup>27</sup>

The image of being captured by pirates and robbers is not the translator's invention: it appears in Bullinger's Latin as "Quasi intercipiantur a piratis & praedonibus medio in itinere."<sup>28</sup> Its resonance with *Hamlet* may, of course, be coincidental; but before discarding it as merely fortuitous, it is worth noting that Bullinger's rejection of purgatory takes him in directions that are strikingly suggestive of Shakespeare's play.

One implication of the non-existence of purgatory is that prayers for the dead are not efficacious. As Bullinger explains, if we believe that the souls of believers go directly to Heaven, "why then doo we as yet being carefull for the saluation of the soules of the dead, pray and make supplication for them, as though they had not yet obtained saluation?" The argument is like that of Feste in *Twelfth Night*: if Olivia knows her brother's soul is in heaven, she is "The more fool, madonna, to mourn" for it (1.5.66). Bullinger continues: "The steedfast faith truely and assured hope of those that beleuee and stay them selues vppon the promises of Christ, doo forbid vs heere to take and weare blacke mourning garmentes, in offerings for the dead, whose soules wee beleuee to haue alreadie put on white garmentes."<sup>29</sup> The idea that *Hamlet* is informed by contemporary debates about proper ways of remembering the dead is a familiar one, and as John Curran has argued, Gertrude's request that the black-clad Hamlet "cast thy nightly colour off" (1.2.68) and Claudius's injunction that Hamlet's continued mourning "shows a will most incorrect to heaven" (1. 95) both reflect "a Protestant 'rigorist' position" on the issue.<sup>30</sup>

A second effect of rejecting purgatory concerns the reliability of ghosts: if the souls of the dead go directly to heaven or hell, and stay there, then ghosts cannot really be the souls of the dead. Bullinger quotes a long passage from Chrysostom's twenty-ninth homily on Matthew that considers how we ought to respond to their claims:

27. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, 769.

28. Heinrich Bullinger, *Sermonum decas quarta* (Zurich, 1550), fol. 85r. See also Heinrich Bullinger, *Sermonum decades quinque de potissimis Christianae religionis capitibus* (London, 1587), fol. 336v.

29. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, 774.

30. Curran, 42.

What then shal we answere to those speaches? I am such a soule: He answereth. It is not the soule of that dead body which speaketh these things, but the diuell, who deuise these things, to decieue the[m] that hear him. [...] the soule whe[n] it departeth from the body can not wander heer with vs: & that not without cause. For if they which go a iourney chauncing into vnknown countries, knowe not whether they are like to goe, except they haue a guide: how much more shal the soule be ignorant whether it shall go, after it hath left the body [...].<sup>31</sup>

The scenario Chrysostom imagines is very pertinent to *Hamlet*, where a ghost announces itself as “thy father’s spirit” (1.5.9) and its hearer later observes that “The spirit that I have seen / May be the devil,” who “Abuses me to damn me” (2.2.600–601, 605). The comparison of death to a journey is commonplace, but given the context—a discussion of whether the dead can come back—Hamlet’s description of death as “The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (3.1.81–82) resonates noticeably with Chrysostom’s words.

Finally, Bullinger responds to a biblical instance that appears to confirm the reliability of ghosts: 1 Samuel 28, where the woman of En-dor raises the spirit of Samuel at Saul’s request. In Bullinger’s words, however, “that disguised masker which seemed to be Samuel was called Samuel by a trope or figure, but in verie deede he was not Samuel. For of a certaintie it was a spirite, a iugling and delusion of sathan.”<sup>32</sup> Although the rejection of this spirit as a “disguised masker” does not call to mind any specific line in *Hamlet*, Bullinger’s theatrical metaphor is of a piece with the situation in Shakespeare’s drama, where the possibility that the Ghost may be the Devil makes it only one of many role-players: the politic Polonius, the smiling villain Claudius, Hamlet with his “antic disposition” (1.5.173).

These points of contact between Shakespeare and Bullinger, however, are inconclusive, as is the parallel Frye notes between Horatio’s last words to the prince and Bullinger’s comment that the souls of the blessed are immediately taken to heaven “by angels carrieng vp our soules with a most swift flight or

31. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, 777. Greenblatt notes that in the late 1540s Chrysostom’s homily was included in a compilation made by or for Archbishop Cranmer to demonstrate the unreliability of apparitions, although he does not mention Bullinger’s citation of it. Greenblatt, 145.

32. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, 778.

moouing.”<sup>33</sup> Against them one has to set the fact that a thousand-page work of theology does not, on the face of it, look like the most probable source for Shakespeare’s drama. Accordingly, the next section of this essay is concerned with the likelihood of Shakespeare knowing Bullinger’s text.



Born in 1504, Heinrich Bullinger became leader of the church in Zurich following the death of Ulrich Zwingli in 1531, from which period until his death in 1575 “his importance in Reformed circles was unsurpassed, except perhaps by Calvin.” Not only did he assure “the essential theological unity of Reformed Protestantism with the First and Second Helvetic Confessions”; during the reign of Mary Tudor he welcomed numerous exiles who went on to occupy prominent positions in the Church of England, and he later corresponded by letter with Elizabeth as he had her father and brother.<sup>34</sup> To students of early modern literature his best-known work is probably *Der Christlich Eestand* (1540), which in Miles Coverdale’s translation as *The Christen State of Matrimonye* had seen eight editions by 1575 and profoundly influenced later domestic conduct books such as John Dod and Robert Cleaver’s *A Godlie Forme of Hovseholde Government* (1598) and William Gouge’s *Of Domesticall Dvties* (1622).<sup>35</sup> However, the *Decades*—first published in Latin between 1549 and 1551 and translated into English in 1577—seem to have received particular official sanction. The editor of the Parker Society edition cites an order “for the better increase of learning in the inferior Ministers” by Archbishop John Whitgift at the 1586 Convocation of the Providence of Canterbury:

Every minister having cure, and being under the degrees of master of arts, and batchelors of law, and not licensed to be a public preacher, shall before the second day of February next provide a Bible, and Bullinger’s Decads in Latin or English, and a paper book, and shall every day read over one chapter of the Holy Scriptures, and note the principal contentes

33. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, 769; Frye, 271.

34. J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), xi.

35. Carrie Euler, “Heinrich Bullinger, Marriage, and the English Reformation: *The Christen State of Matrimonye* in England, 1540–53,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34 (2003): 367–68.

thereof briefly in his paper booke, and shall every weeke read over one Sermon in the said Decads, and note likewise the chief matters therein contained in the said paper; and shall once in every quarter (viz. within a fortnight before or after the end of the quarter) shewe his said note to some preacher nere adjoyning to be assigned for that purpose.<sup>36</sup>

In Whitgift's plan for clerical education, Bullinger's sermons apparently serve as the virtual incarnation of orthodoxy, to be both noted and seen to be noted. This primacy may in part have been due to Bullinger's beliefs about the role of the magistracy in administering discipline, perhaps more amenable to the Church of England than Calvin's ascription of authority to a consistory.<sup>37</sup> But it is also the case that the *Decades*' "Preface to the Ministerie of the Chvrch of England, and to other well disposed Readers of Gods word" emphasizes the volume's usefulness in regenerating a priesthood that has still not recovered from the effects of Mary's reign.<sup>38</sup> There are "Ministers, which either not at all, or very mennely vnderstand the Latine toong," and who complain "that Caluins maner of writing in his Institutions, is ouer deepe and profound for them: Musculus also, in his common places is verie scholasticall." They cannot afford to buy learned commentaries; "Therefore questionlesse, no writer yet in the hands of men can fit them better, than Master *Bullinger* in these his Decades, who in them amendeth much Caluins obscuritie, with singular perspicuitie: & Musculus scholasticall subtiltie, with great plainnesse and euen popular facilitie."<sup>39</sup>

The preface not only emphasizes the translation's accessibility to those whose Latin is not up to the original, and for whom Calvin and the German Lutheran Andreas Meusel are too difficult: it presents it as a text to be disseminated publicly.

For in very deede, this booke is a booke of Sermons: Sermons in name, and in nature: fit to be read out of the pulpit vnto the simplest and rudest people of this land: the doctrine of them very plaine, without ostentation, curiositie, perplexitie, vanitie, or superfluitie: verie sound also, without

36. *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, ed. Harding, 1:viii.

37. Baker, xxii.

38. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, sig. ¶2r.

39. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, sig. ¶3r.

Poperie, Anabaptisme, Seruentianisme, or any other heresie: & in number, 50. euery Decade containing (as the word importeth) ten: so that they may easily be so diuided, as there may be for euery Sunday in the yeere one.<sup>40</sup>

It is quite possible that the text was used in this way. Although the 1562 preface to the better known (and royally sanctioned) Book of Homilies enjoins clergy to read from that volume “euery Sunday and Holyday in the yeere,” this instruction seems to have been interpreted with some latitude. As the Homilies’ modern editor Ian Lancashire notes,

Item 12 of Edmund Grindal’s injunctions for the clergy of York in 1571 (repeated for Canterbury in 1576) say[s] only: “Ye shall every Sunday and holy day, when there is no sermon in your church or chapel, distinctly and plainly read in the pulpit some one of the Homilies set forth by the Queen’s Majesty’s authority [...] .” Thus no clergyman actually needed ever read from the homilies if he or another preached another sermon of their own.<sup>41</sup>

Bullinger’s writings were evidently regarded as suitably homiletic by the Elizabethan compilers of the second Book of Homilies (1563): as Stephen Buick writes of “An Homily Against Peril of Idolatry and Superfluous Decking of Churches,” “Most of it is taken from the second edition of Heinrich Bullinger’s treatise, *De Origine Erroris in Divorum et Simulacrorum Cultu*.”<sup>42</sup>

None of this proves, of course, that Shakespeare knew Bullinger’s *Decades*, but it does establish that the *Decades* were a set text for trainee Elizabethan clergy, who were expected to show that they had read it, and that the sermons therein were, at the very least, amenable to use in English churches. Ideas that are linked in decade 4, sermon 10 are similarly linked in *Hamlet*: remembrance of the dead, black mourning clothes, death as foreign country, the question of

40. Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons*, sig. ¶3r.

41. Ian Lancashire, “A Brief History of the Homilies,” *The Elizabethan Homilies* (1623), ed. Ian Lancashire, Renaissance Electronic Texts (Toronto: University of Toronto Library, 1997), accessed 8 November 2013, <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/ret/homilies/elizhom3.html>.

42. Stephen Buick, “‘That Purpose Which Is Plain and Easy to Be Understood’: Using the Computer Database of Early Modern English Dictionaries to Resolve Problems in a Critical Edition of *The Second Tome of Homilies* (1563),” *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Special Issue 1 (1997), paragraph 6, <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-01/si-01buick.html>.

whether we go to purgatory after death (as the Ghost apparently claims) or are carried by angels to our rest, the question of whether spirits claiming to be the souls of the dead are really the Devil, the theatrical metaphors that are used to describe this possibility. If there is a link between the two texts, it may be because Shakespeare had read Bullinger's sermon, but it may alternatively be because he heard a sermon given by a clergyman who had.



The previous sections of this essay go as far as one can in positing Bullinger's *Decades* as a source for *Hamlet*, noting their wide currency in Elizabethan England, the consequent possibility that Shakespeare knew them directly or indirectly, and the relevance to Shakespeare's play of several debates that are considered together in the sermon "Of the reasonable Soule of man." In a play centrally concerned with the validity of purgatory as a doctrine, Bullinger's comparison of it to pirate abduction—a feature that Shakespeare apparently adds to the story of Hamlet—is extremely suggestive. At this point, however, the evidence runs out: there is not, for example, the kind of clear verbal similarity that would allow one to say with confidence that Shakespeare was familiar with Bullinger's work. The final part of this essay therefore enters more speculative territory. Holding in suspense the proposition that the pirate episode was influenced by Shakespeare's knowledge of Bullinger, it asks what the consequences of such a proposition might be for our understanding of *Hamlet*.

In the first place, I would argue that we should resist any temptation to relate it to the author's own putative religious views. In two books from 2010 that give considerable attention to the way Shakespeare's writing engages with early modern religious discourses and controversies, both David Womersley and Alison Shell conclude that (in Shell's words) "Shakespeare's religious beliefs are probably irrecoverable."<sup>43</sup> I am inclined to share this cautious position in the present case, since any use of details from the plays as evidence faces the problem that the same material can be interpreted in different ways according to preconception. As Womersley argues, the changing manner in which Shakespeare's histories engage with "the dramatic forms most closely associated with English Protestantism" may variously be read as proof of "strengthening

43. Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2010), 9.



recusant sympathies,” of “an enduring and sympathetic engagement with the issues raised by, even perhaps the cause of, reformed religion,” and of “fastidious withdrawal [...] from the disclosure of confessional loyalties” on the dramatist’s part.<sup>44</sup> In the case of *Hamlet*, one might suppose that acquaintance with a sermon by an important Protestant theologian attacking a central Catholic doctrine would be evidence for the author’s own Protestantism. But it can be read differently: if Shakespeare were, for example, an outwardly conforming “church papist,” as has been suggested by Gary Taylor, he could easily have encountered Bullinger’s text at a Church of England sermon.<sup>45</sup> The recycling of Bullinger’s metaphor does not necessarily indicate the acceptance of his argument, any more than Hamlet’s injunction “Lay not a flattering unction to your soul” (3.4.136) indicates that Shakespeare rejected Catholic teaching on the Last Rites.<sup>46</sup>

A more productive way of reading Shakespeare’s debt to Bullinger is the one suggested by Stephen Greenblatt in his 2001 book *Hamlet in Purgatory*, and to which Shell gives qualified assent.<sup>47</sup> There, Greenblatt makes the argument that “the power of Shakespeare’s theater is frequently linked to its appropriation of weakened or damaged institutional structures,” and that in the case of *Hamlet*, these structures include the doctrine of purgatory, a centuries-old Catholic concept dismantled by the Reformation.<sup>48</sup> The mockery of purgatory by Protestant polemicists who accused their Catholic opponents of describing it in self-contradictory terms is transformed by Shakespeare into a different form of theatrical energy: “in *Hamlet* the same contradictions that should lead to derision actually intensify the play’s uncanny power.”<sup>49</sup> In particular, Greenblatt cites an attack on Thomas More’s *The Supplication of Souls* by John Foxe, who ridicules purgatory by linking it with fanciful works of art: “I doe not, nor cannot thinke [...] that there is any such fourth place of Purgatory at all (vnlesse

44. David Womersley, *Divinity and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

45. Gary Taylor, “Forms of Opposition: Shakespeare and Middleton,” *ELR* 24 (1993): 298.

46. Frye takes this line as an indication that Hamlet, however, is to be understood as rejecting the sacrament of Extreme Unction. Frye, 261.

47. While sharing Greenblatt’s interest in the aesthetic effects Shakespeare achieves in alluding to matters of religious controversy, Shell questions the assumption she attributes to him “that purgatory belonged to the past at the time Shakespeare was writing” (Shell, 113).

48. Greenblatt, 253–54.

49. Greenblatt, 252.

it be in M Mores Utopia) as Mayster Mores Poeticall vayne doth imagine.”<sup>50</sup> Foxe’s technique is similar to that of Bullinger, whose insertion of “pyrates and robbers” into a theological argument seems designed to work as an unexpected change of idiom: purgatory is made to sound ridiculous through comparison with the kind of events one might expect in a romance narrative rather than a sermon or treatise. Shakespeare’s transformation of this rhetorical device into an actual plot event is wholly in keeping with Greenblatt’s perception of some of the roots of *Hamlet* as lying in satirical attacks on purgatory.

If Greenblatt is right, though, to say that the play gains part of its “uncanny power” through the recycling of Protestant polemic, then that prompts the question of how it might do so in this particular instance. One answer may lie in Sigmund Freud’s association of the uncanny, in his 1919 essay of that name, with (among other things) the “idea of the ‘double’” and the “factor of involuntary repetition,” a perception that Marjorie Garber has applied to *Hamlet* in *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers*.<sup>51</sup> The fact that, as Lisa Hopkins puts it, the play *Hamlet* constantly “doubles and redoubles its situations, its characters, its events and, ultimately, its meaning,” with its multiple fathers and sons and its recurring murders, has frequently been noted by critics.<sup>52</sup> But Garber more specifically identifies the Ghost as the “agent of repetition” in the play:

(1) The ghost of old Hamlet appears to young Hamlet and urges him to revenge; (2) the ghost of young Hamlet, “pale as his shirt,” “with a look so piteous in purport / As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors” (2.1.78–91) appears to Ophelia in her closet and, in dumbshow, raising a sigh both “piteous and profound,” returns from whence he has come; (3) the ghost of Ophelia, mad, appears before her brother Laertes and incites him to revenge for the death of their father Polonius.<sup>53</sup>

50. Greenblatt, 50. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of Matters Most Speciall and Memorable* (London, 1583), 1017.

51. Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” *The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 14: Art and Literature*, ed. Albert Dickson, trans. James Strachey and others (London: Penguin, 1990), 357, 359.

52. Lisa Hopkins, “Parison and the Impossible Comparison,” *New Essays on “Hamlet,”* ed. Mark Thornton Burnett and John Manning (New York: AMS Press, 1994), 153.

53. Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 129. Garber’s references are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

Garber sees the ghost's appearance as triggering a sequence of hauntings in which Hamlet and Ophelia are, as it were, the ghosts of themselves. But in so doing she underscores the parallel that Shakespeare sets up between Hamlet, who looks as if he has just been let out of hell, and the apparition that claims to be

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. (1.5.9–13)

This pattern is consistent with the other ways in which Shakespeare doubles the two characters: for example, in giving Hamlet's father the same name as the prince (rather than Horwendil, as in the source), and in having both meet their deaths as a result of Claudius's poison. It is also a pattern to which Hamlet's capture by pirates conforms. If the incident, as per Bullinger's metaphor, makes Hamlet comparable to a soul that goes to purgatory rather than taking "the right and readie waie to heauen," then it also makes him like his father's spirit, which instead of going directly to its final destination has allegedly been diverted to a "prison-house" (1.5.14) where it is confined for a determinate period of purification. Like a good Protestant, Ophelia describes the ghastly Hamlet in a way that does not entertain the possibility of purgatory's existence. The Ghost, however, seems to claim otherwise, and its indirect spiritual journey is echoed on an earthly plane in Hamlet's unfinished voyage to England, and to the death Claudius intends for him there.

This parallel between Hamlet and the Ghost, suggested both by the pirate episode and by Ophelia's reaction to Hamlet's intrusion into her closet, seems to be confirmed by another incident that takes place in between Horatio's reading of Hamlet's letter in act 4, scene 6 and Hamlet's narration in act 5, scene 2. In act 4, scene 7, Claudius explains to Laertes his reluctance to act publicly against Hamlet after the death of Polonius, concluding with an intimation that he has already arranged something unpleasant for his nephew: "You must not think / That we are made of stuff so flat and dull / That we can let our beard be shook with danger, / And think it pastime" (4.7.30–33). Two lines later, a Messenger enters:

KING CLAUDIUS How now? What news?  
MESSENGER Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.  
This to your majesty; this to the Queen.  
KING CLAUDIUS From Hamlet? Who brought them? (lines 36–38)

The king appears discomfited, as well he might be, since Hamlet is supposed to have passed on to “The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns”—or to put it another way, England. His reaction recalls that of Hamlet when hearing news of his father in act 1, scene 2:

HAMLET A was a man, take him for all in all,  
I shall not look upon his like again.  
HORATIO My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.  
HAMLET Saw? Who?  
HORATIO My lord, the King your father.  
HAMLET The King my father? (1.2.186–91)

The two episodes follow a similar pattern: a character is talking of an individual whom he supposes to be dead, only to hear of a sighting of the deceased. In both cases, (understandable) surprise is expressed through the repetition of the messenger’s words.

The similarity continues as Claudius goes on to read Hamlet’s letter:

KING CLAUDIUS (*Reads*) “High and mighty, you shall know I am  
set naked on your kingdom. Tomorrow shall I beg  
leave to see your kingly eyes, when I shall, first  
asking your pardon, thereunto recount th’occasions  
of my sudden and more strange return.  
Hamlet.”  
What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?  
Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?  
LAERTES Know you the hand?  
KING CLAUDIUS ’Tis Hamlet’s character.  
“Naked”—and in a postscript here he says  
“Alone.” Can you advise me? (4.7.42–52)

Hamlet's odd turns of phrase magnify the uncanny effect here, especially if we recall Freud's reference to the opinion of Ernst Anton Jentsch that "a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not."<sup>54</sup> By "naked" Hamlet apparently means "destitute of means" (Hibbard's gloss) rather than "unclothed," but the more usual meaning of the word lurks in the background, as is implied by Claudius's unsettled repetition of it, while "set" implies an object that has been deposited rather than a living being who has come of his own accord.<sup>55</sup> There is also something strange about Hamlet's words "to see your kingly eyes": not just the lack of physical deference to the monarch that they anticipate but also, perhaps, the lack of any sense of interaction indicated by "see," and the peculiar focus on a particular body part.<sup>56</sup> We can sympathize with Claudius's question "What should this mean?": not only is Hamlet supposed to be dead, but he has adopted a writing style that does not entirely reassure one to the contrary. For the reader or audience member, this effect is heightened by the way the letter's emphasis on the gaze recalls Hamlet's own earlier questions to Horatio about the Ghost:

HAMLET	What looked he? Frowningly?
HORATIO	A countenance more In sorrow than in anger.
HAMLET	Pale or red?
HORATIO	Nay, very pale.
HAMLET	And fixed his eyes upon you?
HORATIO	Most constantly. (1.2.229–32)

Hamlet seems to remember these words in his letter to Claudius, and in doing so casts himself in the role of staring ghost, albeit one that is "naked" rather than armed "From top to toe" (line 226). Even Laertes's enquiry, "Know you the hand?" recalls a feature of the earlier scene, namely Horatio's comment on

54. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 354. Ernst Anton Jentsch, "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen," *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8 (1906): 195–98, 203–05.

55. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.7.43n.

56. If one wanted to carry a Freudian reading further here, one might note that Freud in "The 'Uncanny'" interprets "the idea of being robbed of one's eyes" that is central to Hoffman's tale "The Sand-Man" in terms of Oedipal castration anxiety. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 351–53.

the Ghost's likeness to Old Hamlet, "These hands are not more like" (line 212). In both cases, the hand—the part that writes, the writing itself—is used as a marker of identity.<sup>57</sup>

There are various ways in which one could read the parallel between father and son that is being set up here. One is in terms of the play's confessional position: in being diverted from his journey to England, Hamlet enacts a symbolic passage through purgatory that identifies him as, ultimately, returning to the faith of his father. Such a reading would modify a view of Hamlet in the final act as submitting Calvinistically to the dictates of Providence—for example, Curran's argument that following his return from the sea voyage, Hamlet "embraces the dictates of Protestantism and all the philosophical ramifications they entail."<sup>58</sup> It would also be at odds with Waddington's view of the pirate capture as re-enacting the planned abduction of the arch-Reformer Martin Luther—not necessarily with fatal repercussions either for Curran's or for Waddington's argument, but in a way that precluded definitive statements about the prince's religious allegiance at the end of the play.

This interpretation, though, is itself destabilized by an inherent paradox. If a comparison of act 4, scene 7 with act 1, scene 2 implies a parallel between Hamlet and the Ghost, it must also imply a parallel between Claudius and Hamlet as recipients of news about these apparent revenants. This pattern corresponds to the self-defeating quality that Janet Adelman finds in Hamlet's attempt at "assuming masculine identity" by "taking on the qualities of the father's name [...] by killing off a false father." As Adelman notes, Hamlet is no more able than Claudius to live up to his own idealized image of the old king: "Difference from the heroic ideal represented in Old Hamlet becomes the defining term common to Claudius and Hamlet: the very act of distinguishing Claudius from his father—'no more like my father / Than I to Hercules' (1.2.152–53)—forces Hamlet into imaginative identification with Claudius."<sup>59</sup> One can see this identification in Oedipal terms: Freud proposed Hamlet's unconscious awareness that Claudius has fulfilled Hamlet's own repressed desires to kill his father and

57. The connection between Horatio's words and Laertes's is made by Jonathan Goldberg, "Hamlet's Hand," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988): 313.

58. Curran, 3.

59. Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to "The Tempest"* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 12–13. Adelman's references are to Jenkins's edition of *Hamlet*.

have sex with his mother as a possible reason for his delay in taking revenge, an interpretation developed by Ernest Jones.<sup>60</sup> Alternatively, one might offer the more pragmatic interpretation that in order to defeat a Machiavellian regicide, Hamlet must become a regicidal Machiavel. As Terence Hawkes has pointed out, the play offers a protagonist “who, in the name of ‘justice,’ will impulsively commit violent murder before our eyes: the same crime that he is dedicated to revenge.”<sup>61</sup> But at any rate, there are details of the play that seem intended to highlight the similarities between Hamlet and Claudius that coexist with those between Hamlet and his father: for example, the fact that the killer in *The Murder of Gonzago* is not the brother but the nephew of the king, so that the playlet (in Nigel Alexander’s words) mirrors both “the murder that is past, the murder of a king by his brother, and the murder that is yet to come, the killing of a king by his nephew.”<sup>62</sup> The twofold structural correspondence in the scenes under discussion—Hamlet as Ghost, but also Claudius as Hamlet—is in keeping with this aspect of *Hamlet*; and it complicates any reading that would straightforwardly deem Hamlet his father’s spiritual inheritor.



As the remarks of Alexander, Hawkes, Jones, Freud, and Adelman indicate, we do not need to argue that *Hamlet* is informed by its author’s reading of Heinrich Bullinger in order to notice that its protagonist has points of similarity both with his father and with his uncle: plenty of critics have been able to make this case without reference to the Swiss theologian. However, I would contend that reading the play in the light of Bullinger’s comparison of purgatory to being “intercepted by pyrates and robbers” in the midst of a journey reveals one important aspect of Hamlet’s relationship to his father that seems to have gone unnoticed, namely the structural parallel between Hamlet’s unfinished voyage to England and the alleged trajectory of his father’s spirit. In turn, this parallel reveals a further correspondence between the scene where Claudius receives a

60. Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904*, ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 272–73. See also Garber, 124–25; Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949).

61. Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2002), 74.

62. Nigel Alexander, *Poison, Play, and Duel: A Study in Hamlet* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 22.

letter from Hamlet, whom he had supposed dead, and that where Hamlet hears news of his father's ghost. These episodes seem to exemplify Greenblatt's argument that Shakespeare uses the contested idea of purgatory to achieve uncanny effects within the play; in particular, they show Shakespeare endowing the living Hamlet with the ghostly aura of his dead father, while simultaneously emphasizing Hamlet's inability to identify fully with Old Hamlet rather than with Claudius.