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Reading Journal Assignment #7

*Hamlet* takes place at Elsinore Castle, Denmark in medieval times and written in 1602. Guards and Horatio see the ghost of the recently deceased King Hamlet. They are doubtful, but the ghost wears the armor and facial expression of the king. The next morning, the new King Claudius announces his marriage to Gertrude, the old king's wife. Fortinbras, the prince of Norway has declared that he will attack Denmark. Claudius sends messengers to settle the dispute. King Claudius and Laertes's father, Polonius, grants Laertes permission to return back to school. Hamlet, King Hamlet's son, is depressed. He will not return back to school and he wishes to die. Horatio tells Hamlet of the ghost. Laertes tells Ophelia, his sister, not to fall in love with Hamlet, as does Polonius. Hamlet sees the ghost and follows it into the woods. He learns that Claudius killed his father and vows to avenge his father. Hamlet will pretend to be insane.

Plays and films always have difficulty portraying intangible characters. Plays are limited to simply using character played by a person or having an offstage voice play the character of the ghost. Films have the option of special effects, such as creating a computer image that is more ghostlike than can be attained on the stage. Thus, the most difficult part of any *Hamlet* play or film would be the believability of King Hamlet's ghost.

The foremost way a play would deal with the difficulty of King Hamlet is simply by using a character to fulfill his role. This is an advantageous and simple way to create the character. This creates an easier understanding of why Hamlet would believe the ghost. If the character was humanlike and resembled his father, it would be understood why Hamlet would not believe the spirit was a demon. The entire play hinges on whether Hamlet is to believe the ethereal creature, which tells him that Claudius has killed his father. However, in Shakespeare's work, he has created an element of mystery about these events. We are unsure whether Hamlet is carrying out the deeds of his father's ghost or of a demon. Because the ghost speaks to no one else, it is entirely possible that the ghost words are those of Hamlet's insanity. Throughout the entire play, we are unsure whether Hamlet is insane or whether he is just pretending to act irrationally. It is an interesting twist because, while his actions are completely rational, they are completely motivated by the words of a ghost, of unknown loyalty. This aura of mystery is somewhat lessened by a human playing King Hamlet because a human does not give the audience the feel of possibly being a demon. Thus, a human would counteract the intent of Shakespeare's mystery about King Hamlet and the driving force of the play.

Conversely, voiceovers are immensely popular in plays and films. Using a voiceover would give the sense of something ethereal happening without having to use a person to portray the ghost. Since ghosts are prototypically transparent, it is understandable that you would not be

able to see the ghost. However, the explanation for how the guards can see the ghost, but not hear it would be slightly difficult to explain. Using smoke machines to create the illusion that an ethereal creature is in the fog and simply use the lines to reveal its presence could solve this problem. This would simplify the believability versus a human playing the character. However, it would create a doubt opposite that of a human playing King Hamlet in the audience. The audience would be more skewed to believe that this ghost was simply a hallucination or more demonic than the human played character. Similarly, this skews the doubt that Shakespeare wishes to create in the audience towards Hamlet's insanity instead of total doubt and thus is not the perfect solution to the problem of King Hamlet.

Finally, the age of technology and the decline in live performances has allowed directors to create computerized characters. This would serve the best solution to the problem of King Hamlet's ghost because there can be an image of King Hamlet, while still appearing demonic. The characters will be able to interact with the ghost and the audience will be able to determine whether they believe this character is good or evil. This allows the audience to receive the doubt that Shakespeare had desired to place in his audience about the sanity and motivation of Hamlet's actions. Since this method remains true to the intention of Shakespeare, it is by far the best choice a director could make in creating a Shakespearean film.

While ghostly characters are complex to represent in plays and films, there are solutions to the problem. Plays have the option of having a human play the character, but this makes the ghost seem more humanlike. Alternatively, the play or movie could use a voiceover to represent the ghostlike nature of the character, however it creates too much doubt in the audience. Finally, the best solution lies in special effects and computer generated images because it stays more true

to Shakespeare's intention. While a difficult dilemma, the problem of King Hamlet's ghost can be solved.