

3-25-2015

# "Hamlet" and Marginality

Eduardo Barreto

*Florida International University, e9barreto@gmail.com*

**DOI:** 10.25148/etd.FI15032140

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Other English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Barreto, Eduardo, ""Hamlet" and Marginality" (2015). *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1859.  
<https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/1859>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the University Graduate School at FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dcc@fiu.edu](mailto:dcc@fiu.edu).

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

“HAMLET” AND MARGINALITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Eduardo Barreto

2015

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Eduardo Barreto, and entitled “Hamlet” and Marginality, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

---

James Sutton

---

Michael P. Gillespie

---

Vernon Dickson, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 25, 2015

The thesis of Eduardo Barreto is approved.

---

Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts and Sciences

---

Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2015

© Copyright 2015 by Eduardo Barreto

All rights reserved.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, without whose encouragement, confidence, and love, the completion of this work would not have been possible, and to my mother, who will probably never read this work but will praise me for it fervently nonetheless.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis took shape over a period of two years, during which a handful of classes and two professors set its conceptual foundation. Professor Gillespie's classes taught me, among many things, to look for the things people forgot, or ignored, or neglected – to look for the little things. Professor Milbauer's class taught me to appreciate and to care for those who have been exiled and marginalized. It is only sensible that the two would come together in this work during Professor Sutton's class, where the concepts would take form in "Hamlet." To all three professors, I am thankful.

This thesis would have been much more difficult without the support, advice and friendship of many classmates. Carmen, Hanna, Michelle, Rene, and Oscar, thank you. Also, to the many others who listened to me ramble on about my ideas, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation.

And most importantly, I am very grateful to Professor Dickson, my thesis advisor, who devoted time and effort to this research. I am thankful because the vital criticism with which he provided me strengthened my work tremendously, and demonstrated that he sincerely cared about my ideas. Without his encouragement, this work would only be a shadow of its present form.

To all, mentioned or not, thank you.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS  
“HAMLET” AND MARGINALITY

by

Eduardo Barreto

Florida International University, 2015

Miami, Florida

Professor Vernon Dickson, Major Professor

This research aims to explore the place of marginality (or that which is not the immediate focus of narrative) in the context of the play and through the examination of the characters of Fortinbras and Horatio, in William Shakespeare’s “Hamlet.” The intended outcome is to encourage diversified perspectives and approaches to the play by focusing on the marginal themes and/or characters.

The chapters address the characters of Fortinbras and Horatio; the first inverts the protagonist/foil relationship by reading Hamlet as a foil to Fortinbras, while the second uses Freud’s “The Uncanny” as a way to understand Horatio’s role in the play, as its uncanniest phenomena. Both are marginal to the text, but both are significant to the understanding of the text.

Essentially, the objective is to encourage readings of the play, and of narratives, that appreciate the complexity of marginality, in order to broaden the language for future research.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. CHAPTER ONE: Fortinbras: The Prince, The Foil, And Sometimes More.....	12
III. CHAPTER TWO: “Hamlet” and The Pageant of The Bizarre: Horatio and The Uncanny.....	27
IV. CONCLUSION .....	44
V. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	51

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Thinking from the margins rather than from the center gives me a fresh perspective.”

– Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*.

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* opens with a question that encourages the scrutiny of the play’s many ambiguities – “who’s there?” (1.1.1). Such ambiguities tend to become the usual subject of interest in related scholarly approaches, and often make final assertions of meaning difficult, (in some cases even impossible). Yet, like the play’s opening question, many sections of dialogue in Shakespeare’s plays intrigue because of the plurality of meaning they offer. On the surface, the question seems to pose a clear query, which Barnardo is asking upon hearing someone approach: much like, “who is out there?” The intention of the question is to identify who or what is approaching – to understand what is uncertain. However, the answer complicates the question when Francisco responds, “Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself” (1.1.2). His answer only returns the question to the one that asked it, and in doing so the possibility of a direct answer is truncated. Essentially, the simplicity of the dialogue between these characters betrays its intention, because the spirit of investigation that unfolds throughout the play is implied in the act of asking a question which is answered with its initial query. And by intimation, the play also opens the discussion on the way sections of dialogue can seem minor in substance, like the question, “who’s there?” (1.1.1), and yet be suggestive of something much larger, such as the play’s pattern of investigation.

Accordingly, the manner in which the play opens with a question unfolds into a series of other questions, many of which overlap, intertwine, and often remain

unanswered: is there a ghost? Is it old Hamlet's ghost? Can the ghost's accusation of murder be believed? Does Claudius' reaction during the play confirm his guilt? Is Hamlet mad or just a good actor? Etc. Since most of the questions are asked by or related to Hamlet, one may also suggest, as the title of the play suggests, that Hamlet and his questions, may be the central concerns of the play. After all, it is the brief discussion between the guards that establishes a pattern in the play for Hamlet's inquisitive attitude. Thus, his predilection for interrogation becomes a gravitational point of discourse about the play, and by denying the guards an immediate answer one may also suggest the same about Hamlet's questioning. However, the act of asking a question that is answered in an echo of itself may place the focus on the possible answer or on the one who asked the question, so Hamlet's unresolved questions do not necessarily have to become the focus of attention. Thus, the nature of unanswered questions and ambiguity suggest there is much more at work in the play, much more of larger significance beyond Hamlet, the character.

Some have suggested that the play's titular character is not only the most prominent, but he is the play's subject of study. Though critics have written about the other character of the play for many years, Hamlet still remains (for many) the central point of interest and discourse. Margreta de Grazia's book, "*Hamlet*" *Without Hamlet* implies as much. Although her interest is in studying the play without the modern psychological interpretations of the character, she makes it clear that to consider "*Hamlet* without Hamlet is absurd...since he is the most valued character in our cultural tradition" (De Grazia, 2007). Yet, why not consider the play without him? Not without the modern psychological approach De Grazia repudiates; rather, there is value in reading

*Hamlet* without Hamlet, the character. Certainly, Hamlet drives the plot of the play. While the narrative may presumably belong to Horatio, since he is charged with the telling of the story, the action is concerned with Hamlet. Still, there are other characters and other circumstance around Hamlet that too merit attention.

Critics have claimed Hamlet “is the chief character of the play” (Crawford 33) and that the play is “‘an arranged spectacle’ in which there are many persons, but one chief person” (Crawford 33). Although Crawford states “Hamlet is not the play in himself, but only a factor in the solution of the problem,” he also suggests Hamlet is “a factor so large that he soon dominates everything” (34). Others have suggested Hamlet’s predominance in the play by attesting that “the reader gradually becomes Hamlet, thinks like Hamlet and feels like him. In brief, the reader becomes immersed in the character of Hamlet only to find himself reflected in him” (Salami 40). Ernest Jones, for example, considers the “central mystery [of the play to be] the meaning of Hamlet’s hesitancy in seeking to obtain revenge for his father’s murder – [and calls it] the Sphinx of modern Literature” (22). Critics have concerned themselves with Hamlet in *Hamlet* – with his delay, with his lack of action, with his constant ruminating, with his Oedipal Complex. Understandably so, since he is the protagonist, Hamlet has been regarded as “a character in a play, a part only, if the most important part” (Wilson 218). William Richardson, for example, considers Shakespeare’s plot as having “slight importance” because the interest in the play “springs from our attachment to the person of Hamlet.”<sup>1</sup> Quoting Thomas

---

<sup>1</sup> (Qtd. in De Grazia 12)

Robertson, De Grazia also notes, that the character of “Hamlet eclipses the plot” (12) of the play.<sup>2</sup>

If such is the case, and Hamlet remains the center of a significant amount of discourse, then some may think the rich ambiguities in the play to revolve around the character of Hamlet; however, that would neglect the many other interesting ambiguities happening in the play, that concern other characters.

Hence, although the narration informs and frames Hamlet as the center of discourse, much more remains defined in the margins. It is true that Hamlet has a central role in the play; arguably, without him there is no story at all. The play, however, hosts many other intriguing characters, which seldom perform, and yet their absence demands attention. These are the characters mentioned, or simply onstage very briefly, but they are ultimately emptied of enough detail to become important centers of discourse. Horatio and Fortinbras, for example, are characters whose role in the play may seem marginal, yet their presence and function throughout the play suggest the opposite. These characters are habitually eclipsed in the text by Hamlet’s performance, but Horatio as well as Fortinbras provoke significant discourse. These *marginal* characters often receive insufficient attention because of their brief performance, but they are important – not so much for what they do, or think, but because the text does not allow them to do or think very much or very often.

Thus, chapters one and two of this thesis will concern themselves with the function and role of these two characters: Fortinbras and Horatio. They will serve to advance the importance of marginality in a play that is centrally concerned with its titular

---

<sup>2</sup> “Hamlet in his sole person, predominating over, and almost eclipsing the whole action of the drama” (Qtd. in De Grazia 12)

character. An account of the term and what it entails will also be established before dealing with the function of marginality in the play and how it contributes to the discussion.

Many studies of marginality may approach the word with a societal framework, in order to deal with factors like culture, race, economy, etc. Other studies may approach marginality from a geographical context in order to deal with places and their effect on human beings. This research does neither. Instead, this study deals with the conceptual implications of marginality in order to examine how its abstraction relates to *Hamlet*. The term of marginality (marginal, minor, peripheral, or not the immediate focus of the narrative) should be understood in its relationship to the play and the role of the characters, not socio-economically or politically. The term should also be understood in the context of a narrative-based approach to the play.

“The word margin comes to Modern English from the Middle English *margine*, the origin of which can be traced to the Latin *margo* [a border, edge, brink]” (Pakhomova 13). The word margin (marginal) is commonly used in English to mean edge or border. While the word may also refer to something “written or printed in the margin” (*Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology* 633), the preferred etymology for this study is the one that more readily connotes margin/marginal as that which is peripheral to the center and can sometimes be perceived as *without substance*.

Usually, while defining marginality, the word takes on a negative connotation, as if *marginal* is lesser because it is not the center. Also, marginality can sometimes be understood as being alienated or displaced from the center of the sphere. While considering such connotations, the aim of defining the term in this thesis is not to invert

their places, making the marginal central by replacing the one with the other. Rather, the connotation of marginality implicitly suggests the two (central and marginal) are interconnected in a kind of central-peripheral relationship. For example, Derrida's notions of deconstruction are conceptually useful as they provide a way to invert or restructure the different centers of meaning of the play and thus allow the *underprivileged* understandings an equal merit to the central ones. Such works as "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," for example, are theoretically useful in the discussion of structures and the relationship between centrality and marginality.

As a notion then, the center is the point around which everything else gravitates. It "has often been thought [of as] the very thing within a structure, which governs the structure" (Derrida 223). That is, the center helps create the margin. Hence, the margin is the conceptual frame of the center. Yet, margins are created alongside the center, to function as frames for the center (central idea/theme). Therefore, the margin is understood in its relationship to the center, and vice versa. Then, the existence of the center is what delineates the margin, and vice versa. The making of one creates the other. So, it follows, that margins cannot exist without the center, and that the center, by necessity of contrast, needs the margin to retain its centrality.

Conceptually, the margins are created with the existence of the center. Though the margins can shape the constitution of the center, the margins do not create the center, they only define the center. Thus, in the context of the play, the marginal characters help define and redefine Hamlet. Fundamentally, the margin and the center engage in a dialogue about the nature of perspective. By focusing on Hamlet, the others' performance

fades but the inverse may be true. All in all, the complex nature between the margin and the center speak of the negotiation between the two: centered and margin (un-centered). The negotiation between centrality and marginality is important because it speaks to the interpretatively fruitful relationship the two concepts share in the play *Hamlet*.

The discourse of marginality and centrality branches out into many subsequent questions, all of which will be addressed in the course of this research. For example, does the center speak by virtue of the margin? Or vice versa? Which speaks by virtue of the other? As a premise, margins are created alongside the center, to function as frames for the central idea/theme. In relation to *Hamlet*, the protagonist speaks most because others seldom speak, but both speeches are worth listening to. Arguably, the center enjoys a privileged status because of the assumption that centrality means having all the substance of meaning. Some may suggest the margin functions only directionally, pointing to the substance (the center), on account of its peripheral nature. But the discussion of *Hamlet* need not always center the discourse of the play around Hamlet, while the other characters simply serve to point him out or to point to him. There is substance of meaning and interpretation at the margins as well as the center.

Sensibly, the inquiry leads to the conclusion that centrality and marginality are not inherently at odds with each other; it is the different perspectives that impose the hostility on the terms. In *Hamlet*, for example, characters like Horatio and Fortinbras are as interpretively significant as the character of Hamlet. Therefore, to consider this hierarchy should not necessarily implicate power relations, respectively: central vs. marginal, significant vs. insignificant. Yet, what if this hierarchy was inverted and imposed? Meaning, how would a reading of *Hamlet* be without Hamlet? Essentially, that

is the very aim of this thesis – to consider the play’s other characters (Horatio and Fortinbras for example) and not so much its protagonist.

As referenced before, there is scholarly work that deals with the other characters of the play, like Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the Ghost of Hamlet’s father, Horatio, etc. Yet, “more has been written about the character [of Hamlet] than about any historical person,” (Crawford 21). “The Prince, Hamlet, cannot be said to be the play” (Crawford 33), but he is the “one person upon whom the action of the play turns” (Crawford 33). Hamlet still takes the bulk of the discussion and research about the play. Understandable, since he is the protagonist, yet the overwhelming focus on Hamlet may sometimes eclipse the interesting things that are happening with the other characters.

Hence, the aim of this research is to explore the role and function of marginality, in its relationship to the characters in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The goal is to shift from the discussion of the center (central characters and/or themes) to the margins – from Hamlet to Horatio and Fortinbras. Assumed in this research is that a thorough investigation of these two marginal characters can illuminate meaning through contrast with Hamlet, since the center, albeit privileged, speaks by virtue of the margins. The intended result of this study is to encourage the continued discussion on Marginality in literature and to widen avenues for future research – to look for the things few are looking for. The expected outcome, aside from a redefined center, is to encourage comprehensiveness and multiplicity in approaches to reading.

Therefore, the chapters of this thesis will respectively address Fortinbras and Horatio in order to demonstrate how they contribute greatly to the discussion of the play,

albeit from marginal positions. The first chapter deals with the character of Fortinbras, and discusses the relationship between his character and Hamlet's. The chapter argues that Fortinbras is an example of a *marginal character* whose importance in the play supersedes his function as Hamlet's foil. For example, throughout the play, he is only on stage, or mentioned five times: during Horatio's speech,<sup>3</sup> in Claudius' address from the throne,<sup>4</sup> in Voltimand's address,<sup>5</sup> in person leading his army to Poland,<sup>6</sup> and at the end of the play.<sup>7</sup> Although his presence is minimal, his importance to the play is substantial.

Often, Fortinbras is read as a foil to Hamlet because of the similarities and differences they share. Yet, a foil (albeit there are many types in literature) usually becomes the *absence* of characteristics that accentuates the *presence* of the protagonists' traits. If the protagonist, for example, is supposed to be a great leader, an ineffective one may foil him. Arguably, the opposite can be said of the leadership qualities between Hamlet and Fortinbras. This chapter contends that Hamlet exemplifies many deficient characteristics that point to the *absence* of a hero's qualities, which are in turn exemplified by Fortinbras. The aim is to demonstrate that Fortinbras can be read as more than a foil to Hamlet, in order to show Fortinbras' centrality to the play, even as a marginal character. The ultimate intention is to provoke discourse about the reexamined Fortinbras.

---

<sup>3</sup> (1.1.95-107)

<sup>4</sup> (1.2.17-39)

<sup>5</sup> (2.2.60-82)

<sup>6</sup> (4.4.1-8)

<sup>7</sup> (5.2.335-377)

The second chapter uses Freud's "The uncanny" as a starting point to discuss *Hamlet's* concern with the *uncanny*, usually understood as the experience of defamiliarizing the familiar. Customarily, relevant scenes like the ones that deal with the manifestation of king Hamlet's ghost and the gamut of deaths at the end of the play are not the direct aim of the second chapter. Rather, the power of the uncanny to intrigue the mind and elude definitive explanations is best exemplified in the character of Horatio. While Horatio is a minor character, speaking barely over one hundred times often in no more than a sentence at a time, his minority (or his *absence* in the play) begs for the reconsideration of his *presence* (that is the impact of his actions) on stage. The strangeness of his role rests partly on the fact that while he is marginal, for lack of speech, presence and self-assertion on stage, his uncanny ability to be crucial in the progress and in the interpretation of the play makes his character worth evaluating.

To consider Horatio's marginality is to consider the moment "when absence becomes presence – when absence becomes so glaring, so obvious, that it is transformed into a deeper, more tangible presence than presence itself" (De Beer 2). For example, Horatio simply delivers the news of the ghost's appearance to Hamlet, but by delivering the news he creates the conflict of the play. He also joins Hamlet's vendetta as his pithy listener, but by doing so, Horatio becomes the audience's ear. By the play's end, he is entrusted with representing the truth of Hamlet's story to Fortinbras, yet by recounting the story Horatio holds the unique opportunity and power to reshape truth. Thus, the goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the uncanniness of Horatio's role and presence in the play; as shown by the aforementioned example, Horatio's function, while seemingly

marginal, suggests he is the uncanniest phenomena of the play, and thus, an interest of discourse.

Ultimately, the two characters and their chapters are intended to generate discussion, in the absence of *Hamlet's* Hamlet. Fortinbras and Horatio are still minor characters. Hamlet is still the protagonist. Those are not being contested. The goal is to transcend their “marginality without [negating they are] marginal” (Lee 62). They are marginal and that is interesting. Essentially, Fortinbras and Horatio offer fresh perspectives of analysis by being examples of this project’s central objective; namely, the complexities and ambiguities of *Hamlet* do not only rest in the character of Hamlet. They are examples of how the marginal can contribute significantly to the central concerns of a narrative. To rephrase an earlier quotation by Jung Young Lee, marginal thinking allows for central ideas and fresh perspectives, and it is in the very discussion of marginality that new approaches to, and interpretations about the play emerge.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> See quotation by Lee at the beginning of the Introduction.

## II. CHAPTER ONE

### Fortinbras: The Prince, The Foil, And Sometimes More

William Shakespeare's Hamlet is arguably the play's most memorable character; certainly he is easier disregarded than unnoticed, since he rarely leaves the stage for too long. Yet, "in an endlessly ambiguous play" (Graves 51) Hamlet is not the only one with a claim to ambiguity; the play also hosts many other intriguing characters that seldom appear, or appear when needed, but their absence creates a presence not to be dismissed. These are the characters mentioned, named, alluded to, but emptied of enough detail to accurately differentiate interpretation from speculation. These *marginal* characters do not often become the centers of significant discussion due to their limited performance in the play, but they are important – not so much for what they do, or think, but because the text does not allow them to do or think very much or very often.<sup>9</sup>

Fortinbras is an example of this type of marginal character. Throughout the play, he is only on stage or mentioned five times: (1) during Horatio's speech (1.1.95-107), (2) in Claudius' address from the throne (1.2.17-39), (3) in Voltimand's address (2.2.60-82), (4) while leading his army to Poland (4.4.1-8) and (5) at the end of the play (5.2.335-377). Often he has been read as a foil to Hamlet because of the similarities and differences they share. Yet, a foil, albeit there are many types in literature, usually becomes the *absence* that accentuates the *presence* of the protagonists' traits. Most of the time a foil is *not* what the protagonist *is*, in order to draw attention to the protagonist. This chapter will develop the significance of these ideas of absence (what is not) and

---

<sup>9</sup> Marginal is meant narratively, as peripheral to the story.

presence (what is), while explaining that Fortinbras exemplifies the qualities of a protagonist and a prince.<sup>10</sup> The aim is to demonstrate that Hamlet can be read as a foil of Fortinbras, because the inversions of their functions as protagonist/foil will allow the underprivileged function of Fortinbras' character to become evident and provoke discourse.

The discourse of the foil begins with its function as a literary device, which is to elucidate the characteristics of another character, through contrast. "The simplest foil is an exact opposite: an evil [bad] personality to contrast with a good protagonist" (Galef 19). Hence, foil characters are often minor characters purposed to heighten the attributes and personality of the protagonist by becoming what the protagonist is not. For a character to foil another, similarities must exist, but differences must predominate so that the contrast can be more obvious. Now, the *absence* of the protagonist's qualities, embodied in the foil, needs not be negative for the expediency of contrast; sometimes, a cowardly character can make a temperate character seem brave, as much as a temperate one can make a brave one seem rash and zealous.

So, because the faculty of the foil rests on its ability to be an *absence* of the qualities the foiled character possesses, the foil usually plays a minor or secondary role; its qualities are juxtaposed with another's, so that the foil's *presence* in the narrative hardly ever overshadows the protagonist's. Meaning, the foil's presence serves as a backdrop to it. Herein is the foil's marginality – made to stand as the background of (or

---

<sup>10</sup> It is not profitable to read *Hamlet* in binaries, like Hamlet/Fortinbras as weak/strong, and this chapter is certainly not attempting to do so. However, many instances in the play (that are yet to be elaborated upon) suggest the "superiority" of Fortinbras over Hamlet in matters that concern action. In this matter, very few scholars suggest the opposite.

peripheral to) what stands in the center. However, something can only be marginal if there is something that is not. Thus, since the foil serves the function of contrast, then a foil's *place* in a narrative can be inverted with the one foiled, when the foil possesses the *preferable* qualities that the foiled one should have.

Of course, almost any story with multiple characters can contrast its characters, which is why Hamlet can arguably be foiled by almost every character of the play. For example, Ophelia's "madness" (4.5.156) foils Hamlet's feigned "antic disposition" (1.5.178-179). Hamlet's desire to avenge his father's murder is foiled by Laertes' impulsive attempt to rectify his father's death. Hamlet's unintended murder of Polonius makes him the object of Laertes' homicidal desire, which is foiled by Hamlet's own desire to murder his uncle for killing his father. Hamlet's willingness to accept and follow the commands of his father's ghost is foiled by Ophelia's own response to her father's commands. And on and on, the foils continue; however, of the different foils of Hamlet, the one between Fortinbras and Hamlet – the contrast of their personality and characteristics – has often been referred to as "too sharp to be accidental" (Lawrence 687). Hence, from the different possible foils Hamlet can be ascribed, the most pertinent to this chapter is the foil that concerns Fortinbras and Hamlet. The goal is to demonstrate that Fortinbras can be read in light of the inversion of the foil relationship with Hamlet, in order to see how central Fortinbras is to the play, albeit his function is marginal.

If one looks at the foil as lacking something the protagonist has, then Fortinbras should arguably be doing the same for Hamlet. In other words, to accentuate Hamlet's qualities, Fortinbras' character should demonstrate the opposite. For example, a weak Fortinbras would point to a strong Hamlet. However, as critics have expressed, Hamlet

has often been described as a weak character.<sup>11</sup> Hamlet is his own “obstacle [because] he procrastinates, [and] thus complicates the situation, allowing himself to be placed in compromising circumstances, which in the end bring about his utterly overwhelming downfall” (Condon 13). So, conversely, what Hamlet is not (strong), Fortinbras is. For example, Fortinbras enters the last scene, “not only straightforward and commanding, but also compassionate and modest in asserting [his place]” (Graves 52). Yet, arguably, Hamlet enters the play as he leaves it – in grief.<sup>12</sup> So, when Hamlet’s *presence* is contrasted with Fortinbras’ *absence*, the first lacks what the second demonstrates. Meaning, although Hamlet dominates the stage with his presence, he demonstrates the *absence* of the qualities Fortinbras does not have the extensive opportunity to display on stage.

So why not claim that Fortinbras is a foil that emphasizes Hamlet’s *weakness*? Why insist that Hamlet can be read as the foil? Simply, the criticism of Hamlet’s irresoluteness of character needs no foil. Often, when one claims “Hamlet is a weak character,” the *weakness* is the categorical term ascribed to his *inaction*. Others have claimed, “the question of ‘the weakness or strength of Hamlet’s character’ stands or falls on our answer to the question of ‘the inaction of Hamlet’” (Condon 11). This chapter, however, does not privilege this interpretation of weakness; as later examples will elucidate, there is more to his weakness than his *inaction*. For example, with or without Fortinbras, Hamlet still tends to act like “a victim of procrastination” (Crawford 23). If

---

<sup>11</sup> David Ignatius Condon writes *Is Hamlet a Weak Character?* In it, he observes the opinions of “great critics as Goethe, Schlegel, Vischer, Bazlitt, Coleridge, Dowden, and Bradleyo, [to say] that Hamlet was a weak character” (13).

<sup>12</sup> See Act I Scene II for Hamlet’s entrance to the play, especially Hamlet’s soliloquy (1.2.129-159). Act 5 Scene 2 (especially, lines 306-313) – “had I but time...”

Fortinbras is only read as a foil, he becomes like Laertes, who reacts to the news of his father's death with a desire for blood and revenge.<sup>13</sup> Meaning, Fortinbras would serve only to foil Hamlet's reaction, as Laertes does in this instance of the play. To read Fortinbras as a foil, even as one that represents the ideal, still minimizes his presence and maintains the focus on Hamlet. "As silence is sometimes more effective and meaningful than words, absence can also bear as much meaning as presence or even more. There comes a point when absence is present. When absence becomes so glaring, so obvious, that absence is transformed into a deeper, more tangible presence than presence itself" (De Beer 2). Therefore, Fortinbras must be reexamined as more than a foil to Hamlet because his very *absence* in the play "provokes discourse [and] demands being made present" (De Beer 2).

Even Hamlet's performance throughout the play has "encouraged the reading of Fortinbras as an active and forthright Renaissance ideal [prince]" (Graves 54). Quoting scattered scholars, Neil Graves observes "in general, Fortinbras has been called a man of 'uncomplicated forthrightness'; a 'sufficiently practical man'; a 'redoubtable' man of 'energy and valor'; and the 'the ideal combination of thinker and man of action'" (54).<sup>14</sup> Hence, reading Hamlet as the foil is not only fair, but also indispensable in order to allow Fortinbras the center stage. Reading Fortinbras as a foil, even as a foil with the more preferable qualities for a prince and a character, still leaves Hamlet at the center of discourse because he would be the point of contrast. Also, reading Fortinbras as a foil to

---

<sup>13</sup> "How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with: To hell, allegiance...I dare damnation. To this point I stand, that both the worlds I give to negligence, let come what comes; only I'll be revenged most thoroughly for my father" (4.5.130-136)

<sup>14</sup> (Qtd. in Graves 54)

the prince suggests different things from reading Fortinbras as the ideal prince, albeit marginal to the narrative of the play. And while this position can certainly be challenged, some of its initial merit stands on the grounds that such claims can be made, at all, of a marginal character like Fortinbras.

The discussion begins with the assertion that Hamlet and Fortinbras share similar circumstances; both are fatherless princes in search of vengeance and retribution. Both have usurping uncles who thwart their aspirations to the crown. Yet, the least of their similarities gives rise to a crucial difference – both sons have the same names as their fathers, but not the same characteristics. Fortinbras (the father) recklessly wagers his life and lands, in single combat, while his son patiently and strategically waits for his opportunity to recover what was forfeited.<sup>15</sup> Hamlet (the father) seems impetuous and courageous, and certainly a lot less cautious than his son.<sup>16</sup> The reversal of the fathers' characteristics in the sons creates discourse for the possibility of the reversal of foils in the sons.

While Fortinbras (the father) is a clear foil to Hamlet (the father) in Horatio's speech, the same is not true of the sons.<sup>17</sup> Instead, the second part of the speech inverts the two so that Hamlet (the son) appears to be a foil to Fortinbras (the son). Words like "valiant" and "esteemed," for example, surround Horatio's description of King Hamlet, which marks him at the center of the discussion, by (1) beginning and continuing with the discourse of king Hamlet's victory and (2) by using Fortinbras of Norway as the lesser in

---

<sup>15</sup> "Our last king...was...dared to the combat...by Fortinbras of Norway" (1.1.82-86).

<sup>16</sup> "Our valiant Hamlet...did slay this Fortinbras" (1.1.86, 88).

<sup>17</sup> See 1.1.82-97

the combat. So, Fortinbras of Norway is the foil to King Hamlet. However, Horatio's speech is divided into two parts,<sup>18</sup> the first of which was dealt with above. The second concerns Young Fortinbras, and it is bridged with the first part, by the mention of young "Hamlet" (1.1.97), who is used referentially to direct the attention to young "Fortinbras" (1.1.97). So, the latter part of the speech centers young Fortinbras in its discussion, and foils him with young Hamlet. What is more, King Hamlet's defeat of Fortinbras (the father) suggests the inverse in the sons. Instead, young Hamlet is succeeded by young Fortinbras, and this too, points to the inverse of the father's foils as represented in the sons. All of these instances suggest that the roles/characters of Hamlet and Fortinbras can be reversed so that the former foils the latter. In doing so, in reading Fortinbras as marginal to the narrative but central to the discussion and understanding of the play, allows for a fresh perspective on the play.

The most evident textual example of foiling between Hamlet and Fortinbras is present in his final soliloquy:

"HAMLET  
How all occasions do inform against me,  
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man?  
...A beast, no more.  
...Now, whether it be  
Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple  
Of thinking too precisely on th' event—  
A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom  
And ever three parts coward—I do not know  
Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do,"  
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means  
To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me:  
Witness this army of such mass and charge  
Led by a delicate and tender prince,  
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd

---

<sup>18</sup> See complete speech in 1.1.82-109

Makes mouths at the invisible event  
...Rightly to be great  
Is not to stir without great argument,  
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw  
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,  
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,  
Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
And let all sleep, while, to my shame, I see  
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,  
Go to their graves like beds  
...O, from this time forth,  
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" (4.4.33-67)

In his speech, Hamlet admits the implicit accusation behind the presence of Fortinbras' army, which "informs against him" for his "dull (and ineffectual) revenge." While Hamlet's speech implies the view of Fortinbras as his foil, also embedded in Hamlet's soliloquy is the possibility to reverse the roles. For example, Hamlet uses the army as a foil to his inaction; yet, his inaction appears more like a foil to the strength and determination of Fortinbras' army when Hamlet says, "To my shame, I see...twenty thousand men," because he makes "his shame" secondary to the "twenty thousand men." The "shame" is only an answer to the "seeing of twenty thousand men." So he uses his shame as a contrast and redirects the attention to the largess of the army. Like scholars have suggested, Hamlet's speech implies that "as a foil to [himself] Fortinbras represents an ideal" (Graves 54); after all, Fortinbras does "inform against him." However, the goal of this reading is not to amplify Hamlet's shortcomings as a character, instead, it is useful to see Hamlet as foiling Fortinbras because it amplifies Fortinbras' characteristics as an *ideal*.

For example, Hamlet calls man "one part wisdom and three parts coward" in his speech, confessing his predilection to think and not act. The self-imposed term of

“coward,” is his recognition that he does not act – hence, why he thinks himself a coward. Unquestionably, the phrase, “one part wisdom and three parts coward,” most directly means that he has not killed Claudius because it is not wise to kill the king (even if you’re the prince), but it is also his admission that he is scared to act. Yet, if some interpretative latitude can be allotted, his phrase can be read in relation to his the *three* failed attempts to avenge his father’s death. First, there is the mousetrap fiasco he places so much emphasis on – “the play’s the thing” (2.2.525) – that is interrupted before Claudius’ guilt can be fully ascertained. There is also the prayer/murder scene he postpones until Claudius is “about some act that has no relish of salvation in’t” (3.3.92). His implied goal is to kill him and damn him with the same sword. The last of his failures is the accidental murder of Polonius, whom he “took for [his] better half” (III.iv.33), Claudius. Fortinbras, on the other hand, successfully gathers an army,<sup>19</sup> uses his war against the Polack as an excuse to pass through his father’s lands,<sup>20</sup> and at the end, he wins them back. So the “one part wisdom” can be understood in reference to Fortinbras, while the ‘three parts coward’ may be read in reference to Hamlet.

In his speech, Hamlet also recognizes that he has “cause and will and strength and means to do it,” and yet does not *do it* on account of his “craven scruple,” or because he thinks “too precisely.” It is in that moment of self-reflection that he seems to address the audience with “examples that exhort [him],” and he says to “witness the delicate and

---

<sup>19</sup> “Now, sir, young Fortinbras...Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there shark’d up a list of lawless resolute...to recover of us...those foresaid lands so by his father lost” (1.1.97-106).

<sup>20</sup> When Fortinbras was discovered using his “preparation ‘gainst the Polack” (2.2.63) as diversion to lead an attack “against [Claudius]” (2.2.65), he promised his uncle to “never more give the assay of arms against [the king]” (2.2.70-71). Yet he still manages to secure a “quiet pass through [the] dominions [of Denmark]” (2.2.77-78).

tender prince.” Horatio echoes the phrase at the end of the play, by using a similar term of endearment when Hamlet dies – “Good night sweet prince” (5.2.333). Both princes are contrasted with the same phrase, and while this point offers no conclusive evidence, it is interesting in as much as it offers another reversal of the foil, as well as a strong connection between the two characters. As one “sweet prince” dies, another “delicate and tender prince” enters the stage. As one is defeated, by cause of losing his own life in the process of exacting his revenge, the other is victorious in exacting revenge by assuming power. The play implies as much by its very designed and structure, which is to focus on Hamlet, while keeping Fortinbras in the background of play (as a foil), so that at the end he can take center stage and close the play with authority. This very scene allows Fortinbras to become more central to the narrative, by taking hold of the throne at the end of the play.

Considering all the observations on Hamlet’s soliloquy, the contrast between Hamlet and Fortinbras, while intended for the sake of developing the protagonist’s (Hamlet’s) character, it also serves to create a dominant presence on the fringes of the play that make Fortinbras appear closer to the center than to the margins. For example, after denouncing his shame for his soporific reaction to his “father killed and mother stained,”<sup>21</sup> and after vowing to let his “thoughts be bloody or nothing,” Hamlet does very little to further his revenge when he returns to Denmark. Unlike Fortinbras, who is willing to “quarrel in a straw when honor is at the stake,” Hamlet recognizes he has not done enough to avenge the honor of his family, which serves as another example of Fortinbras drawing attention from the margins. So, while Hamlet uses Fortinbras’ quest

---

<sup>21</sup> “...and let all sleep?” (4.4.60).

and army as a foil to his particular situation, his perception need not be the only one. If foils serve to contrast by juxtaposing the *absence* and *presence* of qualities in different characters, then Hamlet's own speech reveals Fortinbras' virtues as a prince, as a son and as a man.

Hamlet foils Fortinbras in several ways, the most evident of which deals with Hamlet's prevarication and procrastination. Although Hamlet has been accused for his lack of action, he does cause the deaths of several characters, sets the mousetrap play, kills Polonius, and savvies his way back to Denmark. Hamlet is, in many ways, an *actor* (one who acts); however, the instances mentioned above consist of most of his actions on stage. Yet, his actions become types of *reactions* to the circumstances in which he finds himself. For the most part, his actions appear contingent upon external prompting. For example, he sets the mousetrap play because he doubts the truth of the ghost's words.<sup>22</sup> He kills Polonius by accident, not by design.<sup>23</sup> Also, the deaths at the end of the play are first instigated by Claudius and Laertes in their plot to assassinate him. Hamlet then, is not necessarily an *actor*, but one who reacts to other characters and circumstances. Whether it is a product of "bestial oblivion, some craven scruple, or thinking too precisely on the event" (4.4.41-42), it does not matter. What matters is that true to his father's vague command: "*howsoever* thou pursues this act" (1.5.84), Hamlet's attempt to exact revenge is equally vague, and arguably ineffective.

---

<sup>22</sup> Hamlet tells Horatio, "I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?" (3.2.268)

<sup>23</sup> After reacting to a noise with his remark, "How now! A rat?" (3.5.23), Hamlet wonders, "Is it the king?" (3.5.26), and then admits his mistake: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell! I took thee for thy better" (3.5.33).

However, Hamlet's ascribed "inaction" helps to highlight Fortinbras, who actively pursues what he has purposed. Albeit he is not the king, he gathers an army, conceals his plans from his uncle, and when discovered, he circumvents his uncle's commands, until he regains what was taken from his father in the end. Even Claudius says of him, "He hath not fail'd to pester us with message, importing the surrender of those lands lost by his father" (1.1.22-24). *Pestering* comes very close to what Hamlet does throughout the play. He pesters the characters (and some readers) with his "antic disposition," and his riddles, and his witty insults. However, judging by the end of the play, Fortinbras' "pestering" translates into persistence and tenacity when he regains his father's lands.

By the end of the play, Fortinbras becomes a symbol of consistency and structure, because of his appearances at the beginning, middle and end. Horatio introduces the Norway subplot after he sees the ghost of Hamlet's father.<sup>24</sup> King Claudius' address resumes and suspends the discourse of Fortinbras' presence, until Hamlet meets a captain and learns of Fortinbras' march to Poland.<sup>25</sup> Then, Fortinbras appears once more at the end to "embrace [his] fortune" (5.2.362), hear Horatio's account, and dispose of the bodies on stage. While his presence is limited, it does not go unnoticed. Fortinbras helps to shape the play in many ways: (1) he adds an element of the enemy, ever getting closer, (2) he and Hamlet mirror each other, so their actions and their results can be measured

---

<sup>24</sup> "Now, sir, young Fortinbras [intends to] recover of us...those foresaid lands so by his father lost" (1.1.104-106).

<sup>25</sup> See (1.2.28-30) "Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras, who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears of this his nephew's purpose."

through comparison, and (3) he gives closure to the plot by taking over the kingdom, otherwise the play could end with “the rest silence” (5.2.332).

Hence, Fortinbras gives stability to the play while Hamlet, on the other hand, can sometimes be a chaotic force in the play. Although factors, like the murder of Hamlet’s father and Ophelia’s apparent suicide, contribute to the chaos of the play, it is Hamlet’s madness or “antic disposition” (1.5.179) that encourages some of the disorder of the play.<sup>26</sup> At times, Hamlet creates confusion with his words, and obscures meaning with his enigmas. Fortinbras best recognizes this idea with his reaction to the bloody scene at the end, “this quarry cries on havoc” (5.2.338). Other instances point to the havoc Hamlet leaves behind, like (1) Ophelia, the spurned lover,<sup>27</sup> whose madness and death are debatably his doing, and (2) the impetuous murder of his “two schoolfellows” (3.4.205). While often pregnant with insight and at fault mostly for thinking too much on the right course of action, Hamlet perpetuates (perhaps unwittingly) the cycle of madness in the play, with his chaotic meditations of melancholy and death.

Another telling quality of Fortinbras is his brevity, both on stage and in his speeches. Hamlet’s introspective and longwinded performance, instead, serves as a foil to Fortinbras since Fortinbras’ speech commands action. Fortinbras is on stage only twice, and speaks six times, but his words all deal with commands: “Go, captain...” (4.4.1). “Tell him that...” (4.4.2). “Fortinbras Craves...” (4.4.3). “We shall express...” (4.4.6).

---

<sup>26</sup> The veracity of Hamlet’s lunacy is of little concern to this chapter. Nonetheless, it should be noted this chapter considers the possibility of Hamlet’s “madness” as performative.

<sup>27</sup> “I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers could not...make up my sum” (5.1.249-251). Also see 3.1.141-148.

“Let him know...” (4.4.7). “Go softly on” (4.4.9). His succinctness may be a product of the military environment, but it does show that even in words, he is a man of action. Unlike Hamlet, Fortinbras is not seen ruminating over what to do. In the last scene, for example, Hamlet says that Fortinbras “has [his] dying voice” (5.2.330), and with it Fortinbras “calls the noblest audience” (5.2.361) to hear the story, “embraces [his] fortune” (5.2.362), commands the soldiers to “take up the bodies” (5.2.375), and “bids the soldiers shoot” (5.2.377). With no more than nine lines in any of his speeches, Fortinbras’ actions speak for him.

Also, the presence of Fortinbras on stage, while brief, shows no clear signs of timidity. As stated before, he seems commanding. For example, Hamlet does not always “suits his actions to his words” (3.2.16), yet Fortinbras sends “message importing the surrender of those lands lost by his father” (1.1.22-24), and true to his word he regains the lands. Essentially, all of the examples provided thus far point to one thing: Fortinbras is marginalized by the narrative, by having limited involvement, and yet he offers such a significant contribution to the meaning of the play. The discussion of his role thus far, in this chapter, should *not* serve to minimize Hamlet in comparison to Fortinbras, but to highlight his qualities and contribution to the play.

For example, Fortinbras’ arrival in the last scene is “flushed with victory over the Poles, to claim the crown and close the play in high heroic fashion” (Lawrence 688). Although the scene focuses on the stage action – Hamlet killing his uncle and Laertes, while dying of a wound by a poisoned sword – the arrival shifts the focus of both the narrative and the audience. In a way, his name – *Fortin bras* – carries the dominant meaning of “strong-in-the-arm...not only “arm” but “force” or “puissance” [which

becomes] an unmistakable implication” (Graves 53) for his character. So, while Fortinbras may have been a thought unimportant (or an *absence*) in the beginning,<sup>28</sup> he certainly becomes a presence by the end of the play.

And as the play comes to its conclusion, Fortinbras enters with an overshadowing performance. It is befitting that the end of Hamlet should mark Fortinbras’ beginning, because it suggests, implicitly, that Hamlet’s *play* ends with Fortinbras’ *play* just beginning. It is also befitting that Horatio’s introductions of Fortinbras, the first in the beginning of the play (1.1.97) as the subplot and the second at the end, allows Fortinbras to move from the subplot to the main plot, and take charge of both. That which is “rotten in the state of Denmark” (1.5.90), as the soldiers’ speech anticipates in the beginning, is ended with Claudius’ death, which is suggested symbolically by Fortinbras’ arrival. In a way, the arrival of Fortinbras serves to rehabilitate the kingdom, and establish order. In a way, he is the new Hamlet. All in all, it is very telling that with one’s death (Hamlet), there is another’s birth (Fortinbras) as a ruler. With one’s absence, there is another’s presence. With one’s “silence” (5.2.332), there is another’s speech. And by foiling one, there is another center.

---

<sup>28</sup> See 1.1.82-109.

### III. CHAPTER TWO

#### “Hamlet” and The Pageant of The Bizarre: Horatio and The Uncanny

Usually, a word that represents the negation of another word tends to maintain its opposite meaning in mind; for example, *unclear* would negate how *clear* something is, as *unfair* would do with *fair*. So then, *uncanny*, one would assume, would be that which is *not canny* – canny being synonymous with words like: shrewd, prudent and skilled. It is worth noting then, that *uncanny* has assumed different connotations, to the extent that to say “this is uncanny” is not to say, “this is not canny.” In essence, the only relation between uncanny and canny is that they are derivatives of knowledge – *ken*. Yet, etymology is not the only interesting aspect of this word. Its concept, that is the question of the uncanny, problematizes notions of awareness in as much as it destabilizes the definitions of the familiar, what Freud calls “Heimlich.”<sup>29</sup> The *uncanny* calls into question what is known or accepted when what is accepted cannot explain the why of its acceptance.

The uncanny has the power to intrigue the mind and elude definitive explanations. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, for example, concerns itself with the uncanny, particularly in the scenes that deal with (a) the manifestation of king Hamlet’s ghost, (b) the circumstances

---

<sup>29</sup> Freud’s essay on *The Uncanny* observes, “the German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning “familiar,” “native,” “belonging to the home;” and we are tempted to conclude that what is “uncanny” is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar” (2).

surrounding Ophelia's death, and (c) the deaths by happenstance at the end of the play.<sup>30</sup>

Although those instances are not within the scope of interest of this chapter, Horatio's presence, juxtaposed with his absence in the play, is the end pursuit. This chapter will expand on the parameters of *the uncanny* in order to demonstrate the uncanniness of Horatio's role and presence in *Hamlet*. The aim is to demonstrate that the juxtaposition of Horatio's marginal function in the play and the necessity of his character to the play, suggests he is an uncanny phenomena of the play, because he seems of little significance and yet he is not.

The discussion of the concept begins with Freud's study of "The Uncanny." While the application of his theory concerns itself with E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sand-Man* and other aspects of psychoanalysis, some of his observations are useful for this chapter. As Freud explains, the uncanny "belongs to all that is terrible...and it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread" (1). However, the feeling of *uncanniness* is not to be understood only in its connection with horror and fear. While "the terrifying" can excite an uncanny sensation, Freud's initial postulation is that the uncanny "is a *class* of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (2). So the *uncanny* can be said to be the unfamiliar – *unfamiliar* not because it is foreign; rather, it is in its partial familiarity that its unfamiliarity shows. Hence, that which is uncanny is *unfamiliar* in as much as some degree of familiarity is present but not enough to maintain familiarity. So, for the language of this chapter, a working definition of the

---

<sup>30</sup> The deaths in the last scene seem to be accidental, or by happenstance. While Claudius ensures Hamlet's death by sharpening the blades, putting venom on their tips, and setting a poisoned cup for Hamlet to drink, he fails. This premeditated, well-orchestrated murder was arranged to kill Hamlet. Yet Hamlet eludes the traps, at least long enough to kill everyone else in the process.

uncanny can be, “an uncomfortable sensation that erupts when a subject, object or experience is encountered that is familiar, yet also foreign or unknown” (Brown 9). In other words, uncanniness happens when some *strangely familiar* moment causes some disturbance, some disruption that repels and intrigues the mind simultaneously.

While Freud uses the uncanny to explore unpleasantness and anxiety, his essay also suggests there is no universal uncanny; that is to say, uncanniness may be experienced universally, but it is not always because of the same reason(s). Then, the notion of the uncanny is explained in this chapter with a broader vocabulary than Freud’s so that it can be useful outside of psychoanalysis, and in its relation to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. For example, Freud points to the theme of “constant recurrence of similar situations” (9) as a key aspect of uncanniness; however, *uncanniness* as *strangeness* is the more advantageous appropriation of the concept for the purposes of this chapter. Also, the discourse of Freud’s *familiar* and *unfamiliar* points to the relation between *presence* and *absence* that this chapter will advance by using uncanniness separately from its privileged understanding.<sup>31</sup> Instead, this chapter uses the concept of the uncanny in relation to words like *strange*, *weird*, *odd*, and/or *disturbance*.

Certainly, the uncanny is a slippery concept, namely because it must be experienced, and often these can only be approximated, when in words. Nevertheless, in relation to *Hamlet*, uncanniness (as strangeness) is present when (1) juxtaposition and/or (2) disquietude occur. These two are composites of the *strangeness of uncanniness*,

---

<sup>31</sup> The word “privileged” is a reference to Derrida’s concept of “deconstruction.” It is used as an attempt to invert the different understandings of ‘the uncanny’ and allow the *underprivileged* connotation an equal merit over the privileged one. Freud’s use of the uncanny has often associated with *repressed infantile sexuality*, the *double*, and the *terrifying*, but this chapter focuses on the other underprivileged understandings of the word.

juxtaposition first, as initially stirring uncanniness by confronting the subject with blatantly dissimilar objects or experiences. At the moment of concurrent divergence of events or objects, uncanniness is realized because the subject attempts to understand the *untogether-ness* of said events as *together*. The question that most clearly pertains to juxtaposition is, “do these go together?” and by asking, negation, incredulity and uncertainty are combined. The second, *disquietude*, is the sensation felt the moment one recognizes the uncanny phenomenon. It comes with the inkling that “something is not right,” and it leads to the acknowledgement of strangeness – of uncanniness. So, while the first speaks to the eccentricity caused by contrast, the second points to the sensation *felt* when the signifier has yet to identify the signified.

Now, the character of Horatio elicits an uncanny sensation that creates both juxtaposition and disquietude in the text. He is presented as the kind of character who simply need not be looked at twice – because he simply delivers and receives news, because he is simply the personified pillow of Hamlet’s thoughts, because he is simply present when needed and absent when not – because the play needs a simple character like his for the expediency of the narrative. That is how he is presented. One could very well say that is how *it is*. But that is not the only way to read him. Arguably, his character actively creates uncanniness – strangeness, weirdness – by juxtaposing the short life of his dialogues and musings on stage, with his impact and function in the narrative. Namely, it is by the simultaneity of his presence and absence onstage, and over the course of the play, that the *strangeness* of his character is directly underscored. Of course, his strangeness, while birthed out of the uncanny, still begs for its inquisition – why is this or that strange? What makes Horatio such an uncanny character?

The first, and the uncanniest quality of Horatio's character, concerns his all-encompassing umbrella role as Hamlet's friend. One could argue that it is understandable for Horatio to become the ipso facto confidant throughout the play, and not Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, since Horatio lends his ear to Hamlet from the beginning. For example, unlike R and G, Horatio delivers the news of the ghost of Hamlet's father; the other two, however, act under the bidding of Hamlet's uncle (the newly accused murderer of Hamlet's father). But there is no clear reason why Horatio's friendship is never questioned. R and G, from the moment they enter the play, they are immediately accused of disloyalty: "why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me" (3.2.339-340).

Oddly enough, R and G also share some similarities with Horatio, in their relationship to Hamlet. All three share academic ties to Hamlet, and all three seem to share a similarly pleasant discourse with Hamlet upon their initial meetings.<sup>32</sup> So why do R and G share such a different end? Horatio is charged with telling Hamlet's "story" (5.2.323), while Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are sentenced to death – "to 't" (5.2.56). In effect, Horatio does not gain his status as Hamlet's friend; rather, his character is situated in the perpetual shade of friendship. Horatio begins and ends the play as Hamlet's friend, while R and G begin with Hamlet's suspicion,<sup>33</sup> and end with his

---

<sup>32</sup> See the latter end of Act 1 Scene 2 for Hamlet's conversation with Horatio. Also, see Act 2 Scene 2 for Hamlet's conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It should be noted, however, that this last conversation abandons pleasantry towards the end, when Hamlet discerns that his friends were "sent for" (3.2.291).

<sup>33</sup> See (2.2.236-271).

indifference.<sup>34</sup> The uncanny quality of his status as *friend* has no satisfactory response; simply, he is Hamlet's friend. Of course, one could argue that Horatio proves himself a friend after the *mousetrap* play by telling Hamlet what he could ascertain of Claudius' reactions. Yet, Horatio merely nods to Hamlet's conclusions – a gesture simple enough to convince the prince – probably indicating that Hamlet had already made up his mind on the verdict of his uncle's guilt.<sup>35</sup> So, Horatio uncannily remains the static friend throughout the play.

In some way, Horatio's role can be thematized in the following interaction:

“HAMLET  
What ho! Horatio!  
*Enter HORATIO*  
HORATIO  
Here, sweet lord, at your service.” (3.2.45-46)

Whenever Horatio comes onstage is for some reason, whatever the reason might be, and his entrance is as exclamatory as Hamlet's reception – “Horatio!” (3.2.45). His unexpected and often unexplained presence onstage can be tantamount to his agreeable answer, “Here, sweet lord, at your service” (3.2.46). Also, apart from Hamlet's self-reflective soliloquies, Horatio's character serves as an excuse for Hamlet to explain his plans. And when Horatio appears onstage is when or if Hamlet is onstage, and when or if

---

<sup>34</sup> See “They are not near my conscience” (5.2.57).

<sup>35</sup> Act 3, Scene 2, lines 268-272

“HAMLET  
O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?  
HORATIO  
Very well, my lord.  
HAMLET  
Upon the talk of the poisoning?  
HORATIO  
I did very well note him.”

someone needs him for something. Although he is present throughout most of the major scenes, Horatio is commonly addressed only by Hamlet, and even when other characters address him, they are almost always handing him something or telling him to do something. So it is understandable that Horatio's role can be described as Hamlet's aid and friend – in a way, a necessity of the play.

While, Horatio has often been described as a minor character, his minority (or his absence in the play) begs for the reconsideration in light of his presence (or the impact of his actions) on stage. On the surface, he can seem no more than a necessity of the narrative. Hamlet needs to learn of his father's ghost – Horatio. Hamlet needs a friend to confide in – Horatio. Hamlet needs to send his letter to someone in order to excuse his time offstage and his sudden return to Denmark – Horatio. Hamlet needs someone to tell his story after his death – Horatio.

On the surface, Horatio seems like a necessity. In fact, he does not seem to be an independent character; at least, he seems to harbor no distinctive qualities. On the surface, he seems like no more than Hamlet's friend, and the one entrusted with Hamlet's secrets, plans, and personal reflections. He seems all of these things on the surface, but Hamlet said it best, "Seems! Nay...I know not 'seems'" (1.2.76). Horatio's absence (his seemingly peripheral involvement) in the play demands to be made present. Meaning, he is more than what he seems – more than a necessity.

So the assertion now becomes a question, is he really only a "necessity" of the narrative? If yes, why not use him and dispose of him, as other characters often are? If Horatio is the character choice for initiating the conflict of the play, why not dismiss him after he has told Hamlet of his father's ghost, like it happened with Marcellus' character?

If Horatio is the character choice for the “fellow-student” (1.2.176) in whom Hamlet can fully trust, why does Hamlet hesitate upon their first meeting on stage?<sup>36</sup> While many other aspects of his character have yet to be discussed, Horatio certainly leaves an uncanny trace in the play. Other characters, like the messengers and the servants are *necessities*. They are needed to deliver things and say things, and do things. Horatio is not a necessity (meaning a tool) of the text; he is a *necessity* – a strangely important character – of the text.<sup>37</sup>

Undoubtedly, his character provokes discourse; it demands reconsideration. For example, Horatio’s age is disquietly uncertain; he appears to remember King Hamlet in battle “with that fair and warlike form in which the majesty of Denmark did sometimes march” (1.1.49-50), and with “the very armor he had on when he the ambitious Norway combated” (1.1.62-63). Yet, he knows Hamlet from the university; Hamlet calls him a “fellow-student” (1.2.176), when he asks what brings him “from Wittenberg?” (1.2.164). Of course, this disturbance does not have to equate uncanniness, if it can be explained. Horatio could be old enough to remember the last of the old Hamlet’s reign and still be in the university with Hamlet. After all, old Hamlet is but about a month dead when Horatio delivers the news of his sightings. This interpretation is harmonious with Horatio’s later description of the king’s beard, “a sable silvered” (1.2.241), and with his admission he had “seen him in [his] life” (1.2.240).

---

<sup>36</sup> “Horatio? Or I do forget myself?” (1.2.161). The beginning of their conversation seems hesitant, as a conversation with an acquaintance and not a friend.

<sup>37</sup> “Strangely important” is meant as uncanny because at a first glance he does not seem to be too important.

Still, Horatio's discourse creates an unsettling uncertainty about his age. When speaking to Hamlet, he says of old Hamlet, "I saw him once" (1.2.184), but when speaking to the soldiers he claims, "So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle, he smote the sledded Polacks on the ice" (1.1.64). According to the clowns (gravediggers), the day old "king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras" (5.1.127-128) is a day "every fool [knows because] it was the very day that young Hamlet was born" (5.1.130). Scattered details like these raise questions: how can Horatio remember the old king's "frown," and be Hamlet's "fellow-student," with approximately over two decades of difference? Of course, he could have been a child (old enough to witness the battle and remember it), and now as an *older* young adult, he attends the university with Hamlet. But this strained interpretation and the very fact that his age is disquietingly uncertain only raises more questions than what it answers.

Furthermore, Horatio's character is uncannily difficult to pinpoint in more ways than his age: his status and socioeconomic standing, for example. While Horatio seems friendly and familiar with the soldiers, to the extent of calling himself their "friend" (1.1.16),<sup>38</sup> Hamlet both receives and addresses him differently from Marcellus. For example, when Horatio introduces himself as a "poor servant" (1.1.162), Hamlet insists in "changing that name [to] my good friend" (1.1.163); Marcellus, on the other hand, gets a simple, "Marcellus?" (1.1.165). After the ghost's apparition, Hamlet addresses Horatio and the soldiers respectively, "scholars and soldiers" (1.5.147), so as to note the difference. Marcellus also notices the difference between himself and Horatio when he calls him "a scholar" (1.1.43), and even Hamlet alludes to Horatio's erudite tendencies

---

<sup>38</sup> Even if "friend" were simply meant courteously, the interpretation this section sets forth would not change.

when he tells him that “there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt in [his] philosophy” (1.5.174-175). Thus, the way Horatio navigates statuses, from his relationship with the soldiers and his relationship with Hamlet and the court is juxtaposing and odd.

Also, Hamlet says Horatio has “no revenue but [his] good spirits” (3.2.51), suggesting he is “poor” (3.2.52); however, his implied economic standing does not seem to impede him from directing prince Fortinbras and the ambassador to care for the bodies of the royal family, and to hear him speak of what transpired: “You from the Polack wars, and you from England, are here arrived, give order that these bodies high on a stage be placed to the view; and let me speak to the yet unknowing world how these things came about...” (5.2.350-354). The key verbs are *give* and *let*. With these verbs, he asserts himself. He has no apparent hold in the Danish court, nor is he ascribed any court standing, but a servant in the fifth scene of the fourth Act attends him, and a sailor addresses him as “sir” repeatedly. So what is he? Everyone else in the play has a *clearer* socioeconomic footing: the king, the queen, the princes, the king’s counselor and his children, the soldiers, the servants, the messengers and the others. Even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, of whom very little is certain, are described as childhood friends and school peers,<sup>39</sup> which is, at least, almost enough to justify their roles and conduct.<sup>40</sup> Yet, it is the very juxtaposition of socioeconomic qualities that make Horatio’s character uncanny. The other characters, in this respect, do not attract as much attention because enough

---

<sup>39</sup> Refer to (2.2.11) “That, being of so young days brought up with him”

<sup>40</sup> Refer to (3.4.205) “and my two schoolfellows”

consistent details are present to placate reader concerns, like “who are they?” and “where are they from?” Horatio, on the other hand, offers no gratification.

The nature of Horatio’s role in the play casts a shadow of such width and length that it draws attention itself; herein is the uncanny relation between his absence and presence. By way of example, consider what Hamlet says of Horatio:

“Horatio, thou art e’en as just a man  
as e’er my conversation coped withal” (3.2.47-48).

The break between the two lines makes for an interesting reading – “just a man.” That is what Horatio’s character seems to be – just a man – a man, whose presence onstage seems ordinary. He: (1) delivers news to a friend, (2) joins said friend’s quest for justice, (3) ascertains the alleged criminal’s guilt, (4) makes entrances and exits from the play, and (5) is entrusted with delivering the truth of Hamlet’s story. Then, “just a man” – *just, mere, common* – refers to one who is familiar enough to need no second thought. Yet, the instances just mentioned do not become Horatio’s “just-ness” when they are reconsidered; his character begs for a double take. He: (1) delivers news to a friend, *of a ghost*, (2) then joins said friend’s quest for *vengeance against the uncle who killed his father, married his mother, and usurped his place as the king*, (3) ascertains the alleged criminal’s guilt *by becoming the arbiter of said uncle’s reaction to a haphazard ruse*, (4) makes *convenient* entrances and *convenient* exits from the play,<sup>41</sup> and (5) is entrusted with delivering the truth of Hamlet’s story *to a foreign invader, which gives him the power to create truth*. None of these instances are just ordinary.

---

<sup>41</sup> “Convenient” should be not only understood as entrances and exits that are “needed or dictated by the needs of the narrative.” Instead, “convenient” implies that Horatio’s comings and goings are well timed, and that they advantageously serve as a way for him to further the plot. See from Act 2 to Act 3 Scene 2, where Horatio is absent, and then again from Act 3 Scene 3 to Act 4 Scene 5, for more examples.

Horatio's "just-ness of a man" is undoubtedly uncanny. His character possesses all that would make another character ordinary – minimal input, few actions, becoming the occasional foil to the protagonist – in short, anything that is within the parameters of a minor character's role and function. Yet, Horatio's "ordinary presence" is uncanny, not because he steps outside the parameters of his character; rather, his presence is uncanny because he has no definitive parameters. He eludes final interpretation, while his role negates the idea he is just a man.

Horatio, for example, is very suggestive in his commentary throughout the play. For instance, in his attempt to dissuade Hamlet from following after the ghost, Horatio asks, "[what if the spirit] draws you into madness? Think of it" (1.5.74). Hamlet does, in fact, "think of it" since that is exactly what he considers after speaking with his father's ghost. Immediately following the ghost's disappearance, Hamlet tells Horatio: "As I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on" (1.5.178-179). Whether consciously or not, decides to feign madness – "and antic disposition" – as inspired by Horatio's question. Perhaps Hamlet is unaware that the usual cloak for revenge is tailored with inconspicuousness, not with blatant witticisms that undermine the attempt of concealment. Nonetheless, his choice of madness is not a befitting response to the circumstances that surround him.<sup>42</sup> While it may be argued that Hamlet's decision meant to make him seem harmless to the king – that is, more like a raving lunatic than a blood bound prince – it is odd that his choice of the 'antic disposition' echoes Horatio's earlier idea. Now, one need not say Hamlet "plays mad" because Horatio unwittingly

---

<sup>42</sup> This chapter does not concern itself with the veracity of Hamlet's madness.

suggests it, but it is worth noting that Horatio's words subsequently become Hamlet's actions.

Also, Horatio's comments are strangely intuitive throughout the play. What Freud calls "presentiments" (12), forebode in his musings and echo throughout the play. For example, after Horatio's first encounter with the ghost, he reflects, "This bodes some strange eruption to our state" (1.1.71), and upon seeing the ghost again, he pleads, "If thou art privy to thy country's fate, which, happily, foreknowing may avoid, O, speak" (1.1.135-137). In both instances, he considers the possibility of Denmark's peril, and inadvertently perhaps, he discerns it, since the royal family (including the kingdom) ends with the play. Also, before Hamlet's duel with Laertes, Horatio tells Hamlet, "You will lose, my lord" (5.2.179), and as it turns out, Hamlet does. He loses the woman he loved, Ophelia,<sup>43</sup> his mother, the satisfaction of redressing his father's death without self-injury, his kingdom, and ultimately, his life. Like Horatio remarks, he loses.

The strangeness of his comments stands on their ability to foreshadow the events of the play. At first, an eerie comment may be dismissed, but when it materializes into an occurrence, it cannot be dismissed. Then it becomes uncanny, in retrospect. In a way, Horatio's foreshadowing serves as a "prologue to the omen coming on" (1.1.125). Yet, Horatio's type of foreshadowing lacks the subtlety foreshadowing usually has. For example, when considering the appearance of the king's ghost, Horatio remarks,

"Now, sir, young Fortinbras...Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there shark'd up a list of lawless resolute...to some enterprise that hath a stomach in't; which

---

<sup>43</sup> "I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum" (5.1.249-251)

is no other...but to recover of us, by strong hand and terms compulsory, those foresaid lands so by his father lost” (1.1.97-106).

A subtle foreshadowing would end with this part of his speech, “to some enterprise that hath a stomach in’t.” Had he stopped there, Claudius’ address to the messengers about Fortinbras’ “purpose” (1.2.28-30) a scene later,<sup>44</sup> would be a little more surprising because it would have been foreshadowed by Horatio’s enigmatic words. Yet, Horatio names the foreshadowing, instead of hinting, and by doing so, creates an uncanny response. However, there are other examples of amore type of subtle foreshadowing throughout the play, like the apparition of king Hamlet’s ghost, for example, which can foreshadow the ominous future of Denmark, or Hamlet’s remark to Horatio in the beginning of the play, “we’ll teach you to drink deep ere you depart” (1.2.175), which can foreshadow Horatio’s attempt to drink of the poisoned cup, at the end of the play.<sup>45</sup> These types of foreshadow differ from Horatio’s uncanny ability call attention to strange events.

For example, at the end of Act 1, after meeting the ghost, Horatio thinks aloud, “O day and night, but this is wondrous strange” (1.5.172); he names the strangeness of the situation, and by doing so he makes it stranger. The *uncanny* is partly contingent upon the reader’s willingness to accept the illusion of its reality, so the audience suspends reality when entering a story and acquiesces to the story’s reality. Hence, something may be strange on its own, say the apparition of a ghost; however, if the story normalizes it, by causing the “strange thing” to have no effect on the characters, then that which is

---

<sup>44</sup> “To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,  
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears  
Of this his nephew’s purpose” (1.2.28-30)

<sup>45</sup> See (5.2.314-317).

strange may no longer be strange. During Hamlet's conversation with the ghost he seems willing to accept that (a) it is his father's ghost speaking and (b) it is an actual ghost speaking. Thus the audience accepts it as part of the play. So when Horatio says, "this is wondrous strange," that incites an uncanny response because the audience (or the reader) can now respond similarly, by being aware that this event is, in fact, "wondrous strange."

Odder still, more than the example covered thus far, is Horatio's ability to seem so peripheral, marginal even, and still have such an instrumental role; simply, without him there is no play. For example, he informs Hamlet about his encounter with whom he thinks is "the king [his] father" (1.2.190), which leads the plot to unfold. He is entrusted with the power of truth and meaning, since he establishes the Ghost's reality for the audience and thus adds credibility to Hamlet's encounter with the ghost.<sup>46</sup> He observes and interprets Claudius' reactions during *The Mousetrap* play,<sup>47</sup> which renders Hamlet's conclusions valid. He also delivers the truth of the events to Fortinbras, and since he is the only character to survive the murders, he becomes the ultimate arbiter of meaning.<sup>48</sup>

In effect, it is this very juxtaposition of a seemingly marginal character that is essential for the play, which hints at the possible source of his uncanniness: multidimensionality. Horatio can be many things. For example, perhaps Horatio is the fictitious writer of the play. After all, Horatio dominates the opening scene and the closing scene, along with scattered entrances. This suggests a kind of omnipresence over

---

<sup>46</sup> Horatio sees the ghost and speaks to, so the audience can believe the ghost is not a fabrication of Hamlet's mind.

<sup>47</sup> "Observe mine uncle...Give him heedful note...And after we will both our judgments join in censure of his seeming" (3.2.73-80).

<sup>48</sup> "And let me speak to the yet unknowing world how these things came about...all this can I truly deliver" (5.2.353-359).

the play. He is left alive to tell the story, but he never relates it at the end of the play. Rather, he seems to begin his story as the play ends, which may imply that his absence of speech serves to indicate the commencing of the play. And perhaps, Hamlet's request of Horatio to tell his story elucidates the connection between his name, Horatio, and the Latin "orator." It may very well be an unintended coincidence that his name should relate to *speech* or in his case, *storytelling*, but it is one worth considering.

Or, Horatio's function may not necessarily have to be prince Hamlet's ghostwriter. Perhaps Horatio stands in for the audience of the play – stepping into the play to ask questions, to seek clarification, and to fill in the gaps of meaning. He can be seen as the conduit between the audience and the players – standing outside and observing. Yet, whatever he may be is not as important as the suggestion of being *those things*. Everything that has been written of Horatio thus far may be challenged, but it is still uncanny that those claims can be made of such a seemingly small character in the first place.

His presence constantly disrupts, and demands its inquisition. His speech is soft, yet it sounds loudly. As Barnardo asks, the audience (the reader) may also ask, "is Horatio there?" (1.1.21), and his enigmatic response adds to his uncanny claim – "a piece of him" (1.1.22). *Pieces* of him are scattered in the narrative, throughout the play, allowing his character to *de-familiarize* the familiar by only presenting pieces, and not the whole. A piece of him is in the juxtaposition of his character with the deaths of all the major characters, as he is the only one of the characters to survive the massacre in the

court.<sup>49</sup> A piece of him is in his ability to become the messenger of ghosts – first King Hamlet's and then for his dying son's. Pieces of him are scattered throughout the play, as he is a friend of one, virtually ignored by all, and a laconic speaker, and yet he is entrusted with relating Hamlet's story, and shaping of truth at the end of the play. Marginality is in the pieces. He seems so ordinary but proves extraordinary. When his textual input of speech and action during the play, is reconsidered he proves very important. He proves the importance of evaluating the marginal characters and circumstances. He proves that the small parts may very well have a tremendous impact onstage. He proves there is something uncanny in the state of Denmark.

---

<sup>49</sup> Even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern make their appearance via the ambassador's message, suggesting their deaths happen with the deaths of the other characters. See 5.2.345

#### IV. CONCLUSION

*Hamlet* does not end with Hamlet's death; rather, the play ends with Horatio and Fortinbras onstage – the first, carrying out his instruction to “tell [Hamlet's] story” (5.2.322-323), while the second inherits Hamlet's “dying voice” (5.2.330) and proclaims the bodies be moved off stage. In this last scene, Fortinbras and Horatio illustrate the exchange between centrality and marginality by literally and figuratively assuming the stage, in speech and in action, while Hamlet is carried offstage. Much like the end of the play, this thesis concludes on a similar claim: the exercise of shifting the focus from Hamlet to the stage performances of Fortinbras and Horatio has significant value to the understanding of the play. Although it is no novelty to claim that peripheral characters provide substantial discourse, and are often of central importance to a text, the claim is still worth making because (1) it shows how these characters contribute to the construction and completion of meaning in the text, by unsettling the development of the narrative, (2) it examines how they advance the discourse of a text's interpretive possibilities, by mystifying the narrative with their limited yet provocative presence, and (3) it adds to the general scholarly discourse of marginality in narratives.

The marginality of concern for this thesis is the one that asks of marginal (minor or secondary) characters, “what is so important about you?” and assumes the answer is not contingent upon the distribution of narrative attention. In a text like *Hamlet*, for example, the distribution of the narrative's attention is unbalanced; that is, Hamlet takes most of it. He monopolizes the attention of the audience “by speaking his thoughts in soliloquies, by reflecting on his own penchant for thought, [and] by giving others cause to worry about what he is thinking” (De Grazia 7). Hence, his actions and dialogue create an

uneven distribution of attention. The same is true of most (if not all) narratives, since an uneven distribution of textual attention is common, and such is therefore bound to marginalize a character.

Of course, Hamlet's constant presence in the play need not imply the insignificance of other minor characters. Critics have long since recognized and examined the way many of *Hamlet's* other characters are meaningful. For example, Carroll Camden writes, "On Ophelia's Madness," while Francis G. Schoff argues for Horatio's centrality in "Horatio: A Shakespearean Confidant." Baldwin Maxwell discusses Gertrude in "Hamlet's Mother," and Richard K. Parker writes "Polonius' Indirections: A Controlling Idea in *Hamlet*." Certainly, critics will continue to scrutinize many of the play's characters, besides Hamlet, which is why this thesis does not seek to prove that marginal characters are important; that much is self-evident. Instead, the focus on the marginal characters of *Hamlet* should serve as added discussion to the assertion that characters, though of a limited presence in a text, do not have a limited capacity to be meaningful. Yet, the limited performance of characters like Fortinbras and Horatio can sometimes render them as underutilized sources of discourse for some scholars. Herein is the very purpose of discussing marginality: to offer these underutilized (and under-recognized) characters and/or themes the opportunity to demonstrate how they contribute to the construction of meaning.

The chapters in this thesis explore the concept of marginality, in the context of and in relation to the characters of the play. The focus in the first chapter is the examination of Fortinbras' character in order to demonstrate how a peripheral character like Fortinbras can speak a total of six times in a play where the protagonist speaks over

three hundred and fifty times, and offer significant discourse and plurality of meanings, to the extent of inverting the foil/protagonist relationship he shares with Hamlet. The second chapter, on the other hand, engages the discussion of marginality with the character of Horatio and the theme of the uncanny. Its fundamental goal is to reflect on the peculiar resonance marginal characters can have throughout a narrative, like Horatio's character for example, which attracts a "peculiar kind of attention" (Woloch 40) from their audience – one that provokes discourse about the function of the character and the nature of his role in the text.<sup>50</sup> Essentially, it is the very *uncanny* quality of Horatio's character, discussed in the second chapter, that best exemplifies the premise on which this thesis pivots; marginal characters seem ordinary (perhaps *not as significant*) because of their nominal input in speech and in the action of the play, and yet they have an extraordinary impact on the development of the play.

Ultimately, both of these chapters advance the very *uncanniness of marginality* by suggesting it tends to make characters fade but never vanish from the narrative.<sup>51</sup> That is, the presence of marginal characters like Horatio and Fortinbras attracts attention because there is something and yet not enough about the characters that is intriguing and engaging. Similarly, Alex Woloch's observation about minor characters, can be applied to marginal characters, because they too are often "drowned out within the totality of the

---

<sup>50</sup> Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and The Space of The Protagonist In The Novel* deals with the presence of minor characters in specific texts. The phrase borrowed, above, when removed from the context of Woloch's discussion, serves to describe the impact Horatio has on the play.

<sup>51</sup> Woloch's Introduction states something from which the phrase used above, "fade but never vanish," derives: "The strange significance of minor characters, in other words, resides largely in the way that the character disappears, and in the tension or relief that results from this vanishing" (38).

narrative, and what we remember about the character is never detached from how the text makes us forget [about the character]” (38). Meaning, the essence of their marginality is in the very ability to break out of their secondary role and provoke discourse. For example, some characters, like Francisco who is relieved from his watch in the first scene of the play and is never heard from again, can be seen as *estranged* from the play. Unlike Marcellus, whose performance also ends after the first act, Francisco is merely useful to the narrative by serving as a display of the alternating military presence in the play’s Denmark. Yet, he is estranged from the rest of the plot. Also, there are other characters that are more *functional* in the play, like Marcellus who has more lines, more appearances, and a more active role during the first act. However, the implication is not that Marcellus is more useful to the narrative than Francisco because he features and speaks more often. Marginality is present in both, in their own particular ways, and both offer some contribution to the text’s interpretation.

For instance, Francisco introduces the theme of “unfolding,”<sup>52</sup> as mentioned in the introduction, which is echoed by the ghost of Hamlet’s father when he “unfolds” (1.5.6) his story to his son.<sup>53</sup> More than the thrice-repeated word, the recurrent theme of unfolding (disclosing and revealing) repeats throughout the play, and it is Francisco’s character that sets the stage for one of the play’s most important themes, albeit he only speaks eight times. Marcellus is also marginal, yet significant in other ways. For example, along with Barnardo, he “entreats [Horatio to see] the apparition” (1.1.28-30),

---

<sup>52</sup> See (1.1.2).

<sup>53</sup> Also repeated in (1.5.6).

and helps corroborate Horatio's account of the ghost's apparition to prince Hamlet.<sup>54</sup> Marcellus also becomes Horatio's listener for his retelling of Denmark's history, which in turn gives occasion to the audience to also listen, as Marcellus does. Similarly, both Francisco and Marcellus speak to the condition of the state and to another of the play's most important themes. Francisco, as a representation of government by nature of his role as soldier, anticipates the first indication of decadence in the play with his offhanded comment, "'tis bitter cold, and I am sick at heart" (1.1.8-9). Marcellus completes the theme with his remark, "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.90), after the ghost's initial apparition and in anticipation to the ghost's account of murder. Both characters, marginal in their own respects, contribute significantly to the leading themes of the play.

Furthermore, the discussion of marginal characters like Fortinbras and Horatio, and their effects on the play, extends the conversation to a general observation: the play *Hamlet* is concerned with marginality. In essence, the very history and the politics of Denmark are marginalized, conceptually and in the context of the play, by the play's focus on the stage action and on Hamlet, with his internal struggles. The Denmark in question is not the biographical Denmark from the history on which Shakespeare "set the play" (De Grazia 7).<sup>55</sup> Rather, the Denmark of *Hamlet* is the one in question, and the one on the margins. For example, the play begins with the remark of distant war between two nations, a hostile transition of power between two kings, and the threat of a spurned prince who is bent on reclaiming his father's lost kingdom. Yet, Hamlet draws attention

---

<sup>54</sup> See (2.2.13).

<sup>55</sup> De Grazia writes extensively about the text and the history on which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is based. See beginning on page 7 for more information.

away from the state of the kingdom, and turns it instead “to what is going on inside him” (De Grazia 7).<sup>56</sup> Of course, the very structure of the play suggests that Hamlet is (or in some way should be) the main interest of the audience. Nonetheless, the fact that the history of the play’s Denmark, and perhaps by implication that of the play’s origin, is moved backstage, creates a sub-plot about “the state of Denmark” that keeps running through the play until it assumes the stage at the end, along with Fortinbras. Although the characters and the dialogue of the play are, for the most part, unconcerned with Fortinbras’ advancing army, it is the sub-plot that becomes central as the main plot resolves. Illustratively then, the play’s own design implies the value of allowing marginality the center stage.

Thus, marginality is a multifaceted and versatile phenomenon of literature that not only contributes to the multiplicity of meanings in a text, but it also becomes a factor of remarkable importance. In a way, all of the discourse of this thesis points to an underscoring premise: the suggestions that marginality is inevitably present in narratives, and perhaps even, that marginality is a necessity of narratives. Perhaps it is the very nature of a narrative to marginalize, by selecting its focus of narration. And if marginality is always present, then it should never be ignored, because without it, the narrative is incompletely fruitful in meaning. As this thesis has endeavored to show, marginality has a place in the discussion of a text, alongside central themes of discourse, because it contributes meaningfully to the text’s understanding. Although it seems like everything that is worth saying about the play has already been said, marginality still offers

---

<sup>56</sup> “Hamlet draws attention to what is going on inside him by speaking his thoughts in soliloquies, by reflecting on his own penchant for thought, by giving others cause to worry about what he is thinking” (De Grazia 7).

significant discourse about *Hamlet*, even considering the landslide of scholarly work. Marginality still offers a fresh perspective on the play. In essence, it is the discourse of marginality that leads to creative centers of meaning and to a broadened and comprehensive approach to literature.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barnhart, R.K. and Sol Steinmetz. *Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*. Bronx, N.Y.: The Wilson Co. 1988.
- Brown, Adi. *Uncanny Urges: The Familiar Made Strange*. Diss. 2013.
- Camden, Carroll. "On Ophelia's madness." *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1964): 247-255.
- Crawford, Alexander Wellington. *Hamlet, An Ideal Prince: and Other Essays in Shakespearean Interpretation: Hamlet; Merchant of Venice; Othello; King Lear*. RG Badger, 1916.
- De Beer, Stephan. "Absence, Presence, Remembrance: A Theological Essay on Frailty, the University and the City." *Verbum et Ecclesia* [Online], 34.1 (2013): 9 pages. Web. 16 Apr. 2014. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i1.855>
- De Grazia, Margreta. *Hamlet Without Hamlet*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *A Postmodern Reader* (1993): 223-242.
- Jones, Ernest. *Hamlet and Oedipus*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1949.
- Freud, S. (1919) "The Uncanny," In: Strachey, J. (ed. and trs.). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, XVII*, (London: Hogarth 1953), pp. 219–252. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>
- Galef, David. *Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters*. Penn State Press, 2005.
- Graves, Neil. "'Even For An Eggshell' Hamlet and The Problem of Fortinbras." THE VPSTART CROW II (1979): 51-63.
- Lawrence, William Witherle. "Hamlet and Fortinbras." 61.3 (1946): 673-698.
- Lee, Jung Young. *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*. Fortress Press, 1995.
- Maxwell, Baldwin. "Hamlet's Mother." *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1964): 235-246.
- Pakhomova, Natalia. *Marginal Voices: Sergei Dovlatov and His Characters in the Context of the Leningrad Literature of the 1960s and 70s*. 2001.
- Parker, Richard K. "Polonius' Indirections: A Controlling Idea in *Hamlet*." *English Journal* (1968): 339-344.

Salami, Ismail. "The Contradictory Nature of the Ghost in Hamlet." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*: 40.

Schoff, Francis G., "Horatio: A Shakespearean Confidant," *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 1956), pp. 53-57.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Robert S. Miola. New Edition. Norton, W.W. & Company, Inc., 2010.

Wilson, Dover. *What Happens in Hamlet*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1936.

Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and The Space of The Protagonist In The Novel*. Princeton University Press, 2009.