

# Hamlet = Apostasy

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If *Hamlet* is possibly the most puzzling, probably the most interesting, and certainly the most modern amongst all 37 of Shakespeare's stage plays, it is all for the same reason – there is an elephant in the room. That elephant is England's apostasy from the Catholic Faith which was being hammered home by the English government when Shakespeare wrote the play, around 1600 AD, and which was driving him to despair because he was a devout Catholic. So (1) *Hamlet* is the most puzzling of his plays for the mass of post-Catholic readers or theatre-goers or critics who have no inkling of the "Reformation" as being the greatest disaster ever to befall England. (2) It is the most interesting of the plays because it is pivotal and conflictual between the past Middle Ages and the coming Modern Age. (3) It is the most modern, because over the last 400 years virtually the entire world has come to share in England's apostasy.

(1) But who cares about apostasy today? How many people even know what the word means (a falling away from the Catholic Faith)? There was a time, like 1600 in England, when the Devil fiercely persecuted the Faith, so that Shakespeare had to disguise the Faith in his plays in order not to be hanged, drawn and quartered. But today the Devil ruins many more souls by making them take it for granted that religion is of so little importance that anybody can choose any religion he likes, or none. The vile media are so awash in error and immorality that the mass of people do not even notice them any more. See Clare Asquith's book *Shadowplay* for the Catholic coding in all Shakespeare's plays. But if Hamlet's incestuous mother, Queen Gertrude, does indeed represent England committing incest with Protestantism, his uncle, is it any wonder if our contemporaries can see no proportionate reason for Prince Hamlet's melancholy?

(2) The play is pivotal and conflictual because, like no other of Shakespeare's plays, it is suspended between the medieval world and the New World Order, because Shakespeare himself was being shaken to the core by the seeming success of the stamping out of the Faith in his beloved country, as can be read in the play from the bitterness of the Prince towards almost everyone around him, especially his true love, Ophelia. Now a Catholic is not bitter, but Shakespeare was bitter, in writing *Hamlet*. It did not last. Read John Vyvyan's immensely valuable book, *The Shakespearean Ethic*, if you want to discern that moral pattern underlying all the plays which was Shakespeare's glorious heritage from medieval England. It is even present in *Hamlet*, notably in the Prince's spurning of Ophelia to make room in his heart for revenge, but in *Hamlet* as in no other play the corruption of society – by apostasy, no less – is so terrible that the anti-social Prince comes over as an absolute hero, the first in a long line of anti-authoritarian heroes (cf. Hollywood) needing to override all natural respect for social authority. Apostasy kills society.

(3) And so *Hamlet* is the most modern of the Shakespeare plays because it is the play which most departs from, or overlays, the medieval model. Shakespeare wrote many plays after *Hamlet*, but he was never again tempted to replace love by vengeance, or to return from the New to the Old Testament. He regained his calm and balance while still writing superb plays, but in 1611 he abandoned the stage and London to leave the Puritans to take over England and lead eventually all the world away from God. By today generations of young men suckled on anti-heroes have turned into anti-men, with little to nothing left in them of their medieval heritage. But human nature has not changed, and human beings still need men to lead, which is why the girls are trying to make themselves into men, and the two young sexes more and more spurn one another. In a line from *Macbeth*, "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece."

If you read *Hamlet*, beware of the Ghost in Act One. If you are

Catholic you know that Almighty God would never let out of Purgatory a soul to pursue revenge. Then where can the Ghost come from, other than from Hell? In which case, is the Prince really such a hero? Shakespeare's bitterness was understandable, but it twisted his theology. Young men, adore and love Jesus Christ, love His Mother, pray her Rosary and lead the girls. That is what they need you for.

Kyrie eleison.