

## SPACE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

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**Abstract:** *The paper deals with the concept of space in William Shakespeare's “The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark”. Not only is the play the most popular and the most internationally known creation of William Shakespeare, but it also attracts readers and critics for its complexity and up-to-datedness. We chose to analyse various aspects of space in this tragedy to underline their influence on different characters. The paper aims at proving that there is a relation between each character and a particular space whose features are partly reflected in the characters' personality or/and actions. Therefore, the main characters were analysed in connection with the spaces they appear in throughout the play. We were also interested in analysing whether the characters have the necessary power and/or ability to change these spaces, or not. We noticed that some of the characters had their spaces invaded by perpetrators, while other characters became perpetrators themselves. Observing the link between spaces and the characters' personality, we tried to scrutinize their deeds based on the features of certain spaces emphasizing aspects such as: private vs. public, natural vs. artificial.*

**Keywords:** *space, masculine vs. feminine, natural vs. unnatural, order vs. disorder*

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Motto: “Place is important, to the degree to which, the historical and geographic coordinates are significant to the action.”

Wood, 1987, p. 27

## Introduction

We cannot speak about the concept of space in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* without asking ourselves a very basic question: why is a prince from Denmark one of the most known Shakespearean protagonists of all times? In 1589, Thomas Nashe mentioned a revenge play called *Hamlet* that was being played on London stages. Revenge plays were very popular in Elizabethan and Jacobean times when vengeance was sought and always found, and bloodshed was necessarily part of the retribution (Bălinișteanu-Furdu, 2021, p. 153).

Shakespeare’s son Hamnet, who is likely to have been named after a baker, Hamlette (also spelled Hammett), died in 1595 at the age of eleven, leaving the writer bereft. We can easily imagine that Shakespeare was drawn to the story of Hamlet after that sorrowful event, especially considering the various examples of fathers and sons/children encountered in the play. Some critics have even considered the play as autobiographical, but the protagonist’s name and one or two concepts or ideas are not enough to define it as such. As stated, he did not invent the story, he delivered a more elaborated version of the old Danish story of Prince Amleth, probably originating from around year 500, whose traditional name is an anagram of “Lamleth”, a form of “Lamech” which means some sort of moral distinction (Gillies, 2013, p. 398).

According to the *Glossary of literary terms*, the entire setting of a dramatic writing is the “general locale” and the “setting of a single episode or scene within the work is the particular physical location in which it takes place.” (Abrahams, 2009, p. 330). Moreover, the German researcher, Habermas, known as a theoretician of the public sphere, analysed the concept of public space and its evolution throughout history. The initial separation of concepts between *public* and *private* occurred in Ancient Greece, where ‘polis’ which took place in ‘agora’ (the place for open interactions between free individuals) differed from ‘oikos’ (the domestic dimension, attached to the dwelling) (Habermas, 1991, p. 3). Later, the Romans further set a clear distinction between ‘publicus’ and ‘privatus’ (Habermas, 1991, p. 5). Habermas was certain that the German word ‘privat’ had its origin in the Latin language, and the meaning was almost similar to the English one (“private”) meaning the “exclusion from the state apparatus”. The word “public” appeared later, in the 17th century, in France, referring to the court, the spaces of the urban nobility, and the bourgeoisie (Habermas, 1991, p. 31). What we intended to analyse in this paper was the distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ spaces, how their characteristics

influenced the personality of people. Furthermore, we also aimed to demonstrate how William Shakespeare managed through his own version of the legend of the Danish Prince Amleth to endow spaces with traits which would help readers and spectators understand the characters' mentality and failings.

### **Denmark – a kingdom at the crossroads**

Shakespeare chose Denmark as the setting of the play, and as with some of his other plays, he borrowed the plot from an existing source. The original story is taken from *Gesta Danorum (The Deeds of the Danes)*, a 13th-century historical work by Saxo Grammaticus who wrote it as a history of the Danish kings and heroes. Despite containing the Scandinavian legend of “Amleth” (Gillies, 2013, p. 398), it seems the play itself was not fully accurate, since little in the play suggests the writer knew much about Denmark. For example, aside from Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern – the actual names of two noble Danish families – none of the characters' names are Danish.

Shakespeare was also inaccurate about Denmark's geography and like most of his contemporaries took little care for historical or geographical realities. Exotic locations were popular with the audience of the time and gave playwrights the chance to comment indirectly on current events in an effort to avoid censorship. The play takes place outside the boundaries of England – in Denmark, due to other reasons as well. All actions happen in a foreign country, “the actions that take place therein, could be justifiably considered ‘external’ or ‘exterior’ to the main hub of Elizabethan life” (Emmerichs, 2003, p. 48), especially since we are dealing with the shedding of a lot of innocent blood, corruption, and lack of virtues. England is able “to maintain its interiority and even elevate its status to superiority” (Emmerichs, 2003, p. 48) due to its distancing from criminality, wrongdoings and non-civilised acts occurring at the peripheries.

Even from the very beginning of the play, we are informed of that fact that “something is rotten” in Denmark (I.4.100). This means that Denmark's situation is comparable to a fish that rots from head to tail, and it implies the corruption from the very top of political hierarchy, a situation which “plunges the country and his family into complete disarray” (Bălinișteanu-Furdu, 2021, p. 167). Claudius and Gertrude's incestuous marriage is a sign of this rottenness as King Claudius “defies moral values by marrying his sister-in-law, by plotting to have his nephew killed” (Bălinișteanu-Furdu, 2021, p. 167). This marriage is morally suspicious, as it takes place only two months after the former King's death, and as it cannot be religiously accepted. These circumstances cause Prince Hamlet's anger, and the brevity of the Queen's mourning supports the idea of a suspicious death of the old King Hamlet. The phrase “There is something rotten in Denmark” (I.4.100) gains further significance in the play since it is uttered by a commoner, who knows that if the elite are corrupted,

the order of the state ceases to exist. The conditions prevailing in Denmark are highly intriguing and confusing. Amid this confusion, Hamlet's other remark "Tis an unweeded garden" (I.2.139) reinforces the idea of degradation and lack of order. When his father's ghost tells him a chilling story in Act 1, Scene 5, Hamlet realizes the extent of Denmark's internal chaos. This type of description is found in literature, politics, at the royal court, in economics and in everyday life, when referring to corruption. It perfectly signals a corrupt leader known for his misruling and corrupt administration, suggestion that something out-of-place is happening.

Denmark is a Northern European country, populated by less instinctual people than the Mediterranean people. It is a small but important country since it is an old kingdom, and we know that most of Germanic heroes from Old northern literature have their origins in this area. It is also a country and kingdom with a long history, known for its advanced level of culture, civilisation, and knowledge. The decay in meaning and representation, of the word "king" is also evident in the uses of the word "Denmark". The King and the country are one and thus the word "King" is often replaced by "Denmark" or "the Dane", as he is the symbol of the whole country. One example of such identification is the description of the old king's ghost: "that fair and warlike form/ In which the majesty of buried Denmark/ Did sometimes march" (I.1.56-7). It is a symbolic image of a central figure of a kingdom: "fair", "warlike" and "majesty" (I.1.55-6). That is why the famous line "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.1.100) points to a perverted/corrupt centre of the system. Also, when Horatio has a premonition that the ghost of Denmark will be responsible for "some strange eruption to our state" (I.1.68), his use of the pronoun "our" refers to all inhabitants of Denmark (Emmerichs, 2003, p. 42).

The events in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* famously occur in Denmark, but mostly within the constructed space of the castle Elsinore. Emmerichs (2003, p. 39) thinks that William Shakespeare intentionally insisted that "we know very little" about the scenery of the play, granting theatre directors a lot of freedom when choosing the way to set up the stage, as he did in many of his other plays. The details related to the space where the actions happen are also limited: the whole play takes place in a "room", "a castle", "a graveyard" within a "churchyard" and all these are situated in Denmark. Paton (p. 140) quoted by Emmerichs (2003, p. 40) thinks that "critics associate landscape with issues of power and possession of the external and of other", therefore, Ophelia, Hamlet, and the current king himself, Claudius "offer space a meaning" (LaFave, 2018, p. 8), but the nation-state is "rotten", and he perpetuates its rottenness. Horatio refers to the ghost as "the majesty of buried Denmark" and the ghost calls his own ear the "whole ear of Denmark" (I.5.43). Claudius continues this tendency of associating the king with the whole nation by replacing mentions of himself

with the concept of Denmark, the man becomes the space he controls, and the other way around.

It appears that each character shares an intimate and unique relationship with his/her space, but we should also consider the concept of “unity of space” (Wood, 1987, p. 27), as well as the characters’ proximity to each other. In this context, the place becomes a space of perpetual surveillance and vigilance, characters eavesdrop on each other, scrutinising the others’ behaviour to identify possible secret intentions, such as Polonius’s spying act from behind the curtains, which unfortunately led him to his death. This proximity leads to subtle judgements as if the characters are trying and even succeed in reading each other’s thoughts (Wood, 1987, p. 27).

### **Elsinore between private and public existence**

Elsinore is not an ordinary castle: it has its own name (like Heorot, from *Beowulf*) and it becomes a social construct as well, segmented between the private and the public life of the characters. The space itself transgresses its limits as a building and it soon becomes the embodiment of a human being; for example, the text abounds in adjectives when it comes to describing it. Elsinore is in fact the English spelling of Helsingør, a town on the eastern coast of Denmark that used to be an important military site; Emmerichs suggests that “a castle or a ‘court’ is representative of urbanity and city life” (2003, p. 48), therefore, Elsinore with its order, laws, rules, and regulations “provides a moral landscape” for the whole country which should leave “little room for ghosts or similar otherworldly apparitions” (p. 48) that might eventually cause confusion in the people’s set of moral values. Presumably, its prototype was the castle of Kronborg, the most modern castle in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and apparently even King James I (Great Britain’s future king) stayed there after his marriage to Anne of Denmark. A fortress had stood in the town since the Middle Ages, so the castle aimed at being the symbol for the nation’s stability and prosperity, especially when Frederick II of Denmark, who was actually very fond of theatre and actors, rebuilt the fortress, transforming it into an amazing castle (Stitt, 1984, p. 67).

Since the king was replaced in strange circumstances, Elsinore castle has become a less serene entity, the characters are always there to spy on each other, and the castle has adopted an air of suspicion and of constant scrutiny. It seems as if the walls of the castle had ears, nothing said in private stays private, the only secret remaining the apparition of the ghost, but Hamlet himself eventually discloses it to his mother.

Emmerichs (2003, p. 45) identifies a sort of dichotomy between the outdoor and the indoor in the Renaissance conventions, according to which each type of space draws upon itself a specific kind of behaviour: there seems to be a tendency

to locate “most vice in the towns and most virtue in the countryside” (Thomas, 1983, p. 246). In the Renaissance literature, nature appeared in its purity and the city is illustrated with its vicious depravity and wickedness. This play, however, constitutes a mixture of both types of landscape: “nature as ideal and perilous, and urbanity as lawful and lawless all at once” (Emmerichs, 2003, p. 47). We further concur with Thomas’ observations (1983, pp. 246-7) upon “life in the countryside [that] lacked the anonymity which made city a better setting for clandestine intrigue (...) [Nature] also offered an escape from urban vices and affectations, a rest from the strains of business, and a refuge from dirt, smoke and noise of the city”. Consequently, Elsinore’s urban character provides the appropriate atmosphere for Claudius’ surreptitious aims and atrocious deeds.

### *Hamlet’s home*

Many actions occur in individual spaces, which end up borrowing features from their inhabitants; however, Elsinore can be defined as a social construct because of its public character. The protagonists can be defined through the relationship they have with the occupied space, through comparison and occasionally through antithesis; their feelings and the unique way each perceives a particular setting help build one’s personality. Therefore, Elsinore becomes synonymous with Hamlet, a dominant space that deeply impacts the play, by emphasizing the built setting, as opposed to the natural one. The voices from the built, artificial (=unnatural) environment are masculine, fundamentally linked to death, murder, treason. The natural environment seems more like a feminine space, connected with life, fertility, birth, and re-birth (expressed in the motif of the orchard). The aforementioned spaces somehow work against each other. The masculine, monarchic power is associated with the social and mental meaning specific to the court. The most obvious aspect of the dichotomy masculine-feminine, however, can be observed in the depiction of Ophelia’s madness, which derives directly from pre-defined patriarchal order (Ronk, 1994, p. 21).

The hazards of nature were specifically highlighted when Queen Elizabeth I travelled to the countryside to watch a form of drama called “landscape entertainment” (Lesley quoted in Emmerichs, 2003, p. 43). The queen’s presence on premises such as: the heath, the field, the garden, the seaside, or the park was considered very risky since this setting could be quite dangerous; the monarch was outside the “architectural expression of authority” when she was mobile, because these spaces represented “decreasing safety and increasing loss of authority and control” mostly because “when royalty wanders, peril follows” (Lesley in Emmerichs, 2003, p. 43). It becomes therefore obvious that practical reasons lead to the distrust in a natural landscape, so, royals are generally afraid of going far away from the castle, to get out of their comfort zone.

For the main protagonist, however, the castle that once gave him comfort, suddenly becomes a “dungeon” (II.2.265). Elsinore also becomes for Hamlet an extension of the whole country. The protagonist tries hard to protect the castle and the country mainly for the sake of others, of his family and of his people. He speaks of both (the castle and the country) as if they were his best friends. This place, depicted almost like a horror-film setting, is still familiar to Hamlet; he trusts it, it is still his beloved home, and the dark atmosphere recently created does not scare him, but it brings him his internal turmoil/conflict. He is no longer at ease in his own home, he resembles a prince kept in a Gothic-like dwelling, which has lately turned into a prison. Elsinore functions as a private space to Hamlet and everything there is familiar to him (because it is his childhood home), although the castle remains essentially a public place. Hamlet, in his criticism of the new king, says that “Elsinore’s a dungeon” (II.2.265) because of the king’s terrible secret which transforms the whole country into a place filled with all sorts of criminals and even murderers. The new corrupted king sends his spies, Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, to find the truth about Hamlet’s madness, a “pretended insanity, for safety reasons” that “protects him from his enemies” and helps him “gain time to prepare for his goals” (Bălinișteanu-Furdu, 2021, p. 169). Therefore, Denmark’s image seems to be subjected to degradation which is acknowledged by everybody (the Danes, as well as the audience) through the allusion to “something rotten” and then through Hamlet’s own presentation of the Danish “drunkards”. And this negative representation of the state, in his opinion, starts from the King (Milica, 2014, p. 96):

The king doth wake to-night and takes his rouse,  
Keeps wassail and the swaggering up-spring reels;  
And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,  
The kettle drum and trumpet thus bray out  
The triumph of his pledge. (I.4. 9-13)

Elsinore’s space, built by human hands, however, blends with Hamlet’s mental space and creates a new hybrid space – the one defined by the land, as by the man who leads it. Thought, mentality, and opinion also help produce space. Elsinore is a prison because Hamlet conceives it to be so. LaFave (2018, p. 10) thinks that Elsinore’s built setting contrasts with the natural one, which is “synonymous with nurturing, abundance, and other feminine qualities”. Throughout the play, “the women are attached to nature while the men see nature not as something, they are willing to embrace or to understand, but something they use in creating their own environments.” (LaFave, 2018, p. 10).

Even when Hamlet addresses nature metaphorically, the result is “an unweeded garden, that grows to seed” (I.2.139). Hamlet’s representation of the natural environment is always associated with waste, concurring with Wilson’s opinion (2002, p. 112) who emphasizes how space in this tragedy appears as “a continuous

representation of filth” due to “Shakespeare’s dazzling language and his sense of tragic form” (LaFave, 2018, p. 15). Hamlet therefore mentions how “the court itself also seems *out of place*” (LaFave, 2018, 15), similar to his perception of time as being “out of joint” (I.5.210). Following Hamlet’s ideas, his perception of space, of other characters, such as the two women in his life – Ophelia and Gertrude, are also affected by this rottenness and sense of decay.

### *Gertrude’s defiance of private space*

Concerning Gertrude, all spatial details referring to her expose the private existence, women had to restrict themselves to in a patriarchal society. Rackin (2005, p. 129) says that it was only natural, “in that era to institute gender as the essential axis of difference between people and to confine women within the household, which was being redefined as a private, domestic space, separate from the public world of masculine activity”, therefore, Gertrude’s chamber is a strongly “feminized space (Racking, 2005, p. 50).” She somehow destroys its privacy when she allows Polonius and Hamlet – now a male adult, not a child anymore – to enter her chambers. But this attitude is in line with her tendency to ridicule the sacred institution of marriage and her approach transforms her into a precursor of the rebellious modern women, a subversive critic of the conservative approach to private and domestic life. Her moral beliefs are decaying. She no longer treats her private space as a sacred place, as the medieval women would, and she is not afraid of facing the consequences of her behaviour.

Elsinore plays a totally different function for her, than for Hamlet. Some critics go as far as to consider Gertrude the main reason for all the problems that Denmark was facing. Newman (1985, p. 602), however, sees in Gertrude and other Shakespearean female characters the “contradictions between the enactment of repressive social structures manifested in genre (courtship and marriage) and the representation of powerful female protagonists.” Ophelia is the total opposite of Gertrude. She still follows the moral conventions, maybe due to her naivety and age, she still values the conservative principles specific to the women of her era, she is obedient to a manipulative father, and her first encounter with the harsh and tough reality proves to be fatal to her. Despite having these two contrasting women in his life, Hamlet already links women with the tendency to ignore moral values: “frailty thy name is woman” (I.2.150). These different representations of women are signs of incipient female emancipation and were in fact the unheard women’s voices wanting “to express themselves and gain more power and a stable position in the social life” (Băliușteanu-Furdu, 2021, pp. 162-3). Newman (1985, p. 603) thinks that “by attributing to women power over language, such representation distances the play from its patriarchal ideology and thereby undermines and interrogates those repressive structures from which Shakespeare’s drama emerged.” Therefore, the common image of a woman as the guardian angel of the family, of the values and principles



specific to a patriarchal society, is replaced by a son, who is more interested in preserving morality than his own mother.

Even the Ghost in Act 1, Scene 5 identifies his former queen with lust, and tells Hamlet about her taste for “garbage”, comparing her “royal bed” with a mere place designed for sexual intercourse “a couch for...incest”. Mullaney (1994, p. 148) sees in the scene from her chambers the expression of misogyny, when Hamlet’s “act is in itself a violation of the queen’s presence”, and he has to “remind himself to use verbal rather than physical violence” therefore he decides to “speak <daggers> to her, but use none” (III.2.429). Apparently, the old King Hamlet blames only Claudius for the incestuous relationship, when he “considers his brother to be garbage, and lust” saying that he “will sate itself in a celestial bed and prey on garbage” (I.5.63-4). However, the negative connotation of the words he chooses to describe his wife’s personal space, also points a finger at her: “Let not the royal bed of Denmark be/ A couch for luxury and damned incest” (I.5.90). Some critics find Gertrude to be very similar to Eve, because of her complicity to murder and decay; but the stains on her very soul “Thou turn’st my eyes into my very soul,/ And there I see such black and <grained> spots/ As will not leave their tinct” (III.4.100-2) and this, in Gillies’ (2013, p. 416) opinion, “speak(s) the language of sin, not crime – the primal sin of Eve.”

We can easily identify a ‘garden metaphor’ which is the traditional image of Jesus Christ’s mother for nurturing all Christians and for trying to get them rid of the weeds (=sins). In total antithesis is Gertrude’s neglected garden, which “grows to seed” and is filled with “things rank and gross” (I.2.140). Here Hamlet is the one who has the motivation and the duty to redeem it, as Adams (1994, p. 230) identifies the two types of Shakespearian mothers as “normal and deviant”. She further believes that: “Gertrude becomes the active agent in old Hamlet’s murder, having corrupted Claudius and persuaded him to commit murder by seducing him. In this reconstruction, the lustful body of the sexualized mother is the source of chaos and death. Hamlet (is) given life within her body” (Adams, 1994, p. 230).

When he associates his mother’s space with “rank and gross” (I.2.140), this may be a connection with Gertrude’s fertility, and Hamlet is the one who sets boundaries to her garden, therefore to her space and implicitly to her sexuality, thus imposing a fence, perhaps taking the role of her gardener. Emmerichs (2003, p. 41) on the other hand, thinks Hamlet’s words “rank and gross” were “analogous to the perilous orchard in which his father had met his own treacherous death” and could actually describe his own life, rather than his mother’s space, seeing in the chosen metaphor a vivid connection to the space where old King Hamlet found his perfidious death: an orchard. Emmerichs (2003, p. 41) concludes that “none of these characters, Hamlet, (old) King Hamlet, or Ophelia, can rise above

the ineluctable force of nature to save themselves from ultimate ruin, yet we can see how each metaphor ties the natural world to a specific human characteristic or emotion grief, madness, revenge, betrayal.”

In William Shakespeare’s times, we hardly speak about the beginning of the woman’s emancipation. Many Shakespeare’s plays had an “uneasy relation to emergent notions of women’s nature” especially because “devoted mothers were difficult to find; mothers being usually considered unsatisfactory.” (Rackin, 2005, p. 134)

### *Claudius’s control over space*

Old King Hamlet was abusively removed, and the new king brought with him new rules, the corrupted rules of a murderer. Claudius “ascribe(s) meaning to space (...) and tie(s) social meaning to the nation-state, and [subjects the land to] the process of moulding (...) to fit that social meaning” (LaFave, 2018, p. 8). The castle has become a place of danger, like the dangerous, violent, aggressive new ruler, hence Prince Hamlet’s perception of his home and of his former space of comfort as his current “dungeon” (II.2.265).

Hamlet’s protective feelings towards the country and castle grow because he could eliminate the intruder that has abusively invaded his home and changed everything. Coming to power, Claudius imposes a new set of rules wishing he could transform Elsinore into his own place and home, making the place a scene of corruption, which is completely strange for Hamlet. The space puts pressure on Hamlet, like a burden, crushing/suppressing and suffocating him. The tension is now filling the air; there is no left space anymore in Elsinore which is void of this pressure. The whole space is under the influence of Claudius’s dictatorship which triggers Hamlet’s desire for revenge. Space changes the protagonist’s as well as other characters’ feelings, as if they were in pure osmosis. The phantasmatic spies, traitors, and false friends, as well as the spirit of the murdered, continuously haunt Elsinore. Claudius, however, does not atone his guilt by repenting or by improving his character and because of his power, he is able to change the space, and he follows a masculine “impulse to create a built, social space, intertwined with social hierarchy”, (LaFave, 2018, p. 9) something which was also specific to Old King Hamlet. This makes Claudius even more devious. After separating a young man from his father, he also steals his mother away from him, as well as his personal space – home.

Gillies finds that another example of Claudius’s “bad normality is his failure to stop Gertrude’s drinking from the poisoned cup. As far as Claudius is concerned, Gertrude is not expendable. But Claudius is incapable of seizing the one moment that he has to dash the cup from Gertrude’s hands because that would mean exposure.” (2013, p. 419).

Rot and material decay typically found throughout Hamlet's speeches depict both Elsinore's and Denmark's physical space and those in charge of these spaces. Furthermore, Claudius again totally identifies with the country (LaFave, 2018, p. 9) when he says that "Denmark drinks" (I.2.129), when referring solely to himself. Rot and material decay destroy Hamlet's own physical body, his mother's, uncle's, and everyone else's involved in this corruption.

Claudius' presence is noticeable in all spaces: he enters the castle from the garden, where he becomes guilty of fratricide and from those marginal premises he plunges into the centre, identifying with it, like a nucleus. Being obsessed with power, most of the times, he appears close to the room of the throne. He perverts the space he occupies, in a similar way the snake perverted Eden when it tricked Eve in committing the primordial sin. Gillies (2013, p. 419) sees in Claudius a Shakespearean version of Cain:

a conscientious and sympathetic villain, unusual in a genre specializing in unconscionable Machiavels. He will do what is necessary to become king, and then do what is necessary to stay king. But far from gloating, he is tortured by wrong, once he has done it. Two aspects of (...) [Cain's portrait] are suggestive of Claudius – hypocrisy and conscience. That Cain should be explained in terms of the same moral psychology as Adam and Eve.

The idea of water as a symbolic purifying factor is what Claudius refers to when he asks himself: "What if this cursed hand/ Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?/ Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens/ To wash it white as snow?" (III.3.47-50).

### *Ophelia's natural space*

If the male characters mainly get activated in so-called social spaces, Ophelia "embraces natural vitality, but this narrow-built space excludes and restraints her attitude, and her femininity. She is excluded from participating in the space of Denmark, fully defined by masculinity." (LaFave, 2018, p. 11). Throughout the play, Ophelia overcomes her dependency on male characters, approaching the natural by using flowers and later by converting elements from nature into her tower of strength, when she seems to lose her mind and senses. Her death is the path she chooses to take in order to return to Mother Nature, hence the graveyard scene as well as the imagery of mermaids, which pulls "her into an iconic realm of the idealized and transcendent" (Ronk, 1994, p. 35). The natural land engages with the masculine rules of the court, creating a place where the significances of the genders harmoniously combine for the first time ever during the play. Ophelia liaises "the natural and the unnatural, by committing an unnatural act: suicide, in a natural manner/assisted by nature" (LaFave, 2018, p. 11) or maybe aspiring to free herself, rather than committing a sin. Her desperate action is also in contrast with Christian dogmas, thus suggesting

paganism often identified with raw nature. She is willing to die because this is the way through which she will return to the initial state of purity and run away from the corrupted court; she perceives death as a tunnel, a passage towards freedom which was lost in Elsinore's process of decaying.

Using all these concepts when we talked about spaces initiates an ongoing antithesis throughout the play between the "process of creation in contrast to decay" (LaFave, 2018, p. 7): rottenness versus beauty, male versus female, built versus natural, and Ophelia's relationship with nature is opposed to that of Hamlet, who considers it as inferior (LaFave, 2018, p. 7). For Ophelia, "the natural world, the space not occupied by the social and mental world constructed by the king, prince, and his advisors, is one associated with death. Beyond Elsinore's stone walls lies, presumably, a natural world of grass, flowers, and mountains, all of which are mentioned in her songs" (LaFave, 2018, p. 21), especially when she mourns her father: "grass-green turf," "mountain snow," "sweet flowers", and "true-love showers" (IV.5.20-50) – all these attract Ophelia to develop a close relationship to nature.

While Laertes and other royal figures (the King and Queen) regard these as signs of madness, her throwing of flowers is also a way of "coping with her loss" (LaFave, 2018, p. 23) and of paying tribute to a loved, but now lost father. The dichotomy between the *feminine* and the *masculine* is evident in the depicting of madness, as many critics have observed. Elaine Showalter in her feminist criticism emphasizes how Ophelia's tragedy is undermined and "subordinated in the play; unlike Hamlet she does not struggle with moral choices or alternatives" (1985, p. 81). When talking about heroes and heroines, we concur with Edwards who believes that "we can imagine Hamlet's story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet" (Edwards, 1979, p. 36).

Therefore, the unhappy and distraught young woman returns to nature and even Gertrude believes that Ophelia belonged to the water. When she mentions how Ophelia spreads her clothes in a "mermaid-like" manner (IV.7.200), Gertrude again reinforces the idea that the young woman regained her freedom, innocence, and purity through death. Ophelia is back to her comfort zone and away from deception, disappointment, and treachery from the built, social space. Even the act of dying in water, by drowning, is substantially feminine due to the "female fluidity as opposed to masculine aridity" (Showalter, 1985, p. 81). Polonius and Claudius use her as a pawn, whereas Hamlet hurts her deeply by stabbing her father and hiding the body. Ophelia's madness and consequently her death are a result of these traumatic events that could only have taken place within the enclosed walls of the built-in man-made space which does not want to be very much feminine or favourable in general. Ophelia's death and her funeral are episodes that take place off-stage and outside the castle, making them "simultaneously natural and unnatural" (LaFave, 2018, p. 27). Goodman

(1996, p. 110), although he confirms that madness in literature has not been only a woman's attribute, addresses a very pertinent question: "if 'reason' was a person, would that person – according to the attributes and qualities attached to reason – be gendered as female or male?" (Goodman, 1996, p. 114).

### *The ghost's space: close to the sky*

The initial episode, involving the supernatural, takes place outside the castle with its man-made walls probably because nature is "innocent and pastoral" but also because it is the "realm of the unruly, the untamed, and the uncontrolled" (Emmerichs, 2003, p. 42). Throughout the play, the spectre is primarily seen by other characters, before he met his son, on the terrace, the open-space, outside the dungeon-like castle. The old King Hamlet's ghost seems to be in a transitional stage, the Purgatory, the final step one has to make before going to Heaven. There is quite a difference between events occurring outside the castle, surrounded by nature and the ones that happen 'inside' within the walls of the 'man-made structures'. The placing of the unnatural or 'nonhuman' either in the interior or exterior space can establish "the conceit of change or transcendence" (Emmerichs, 2003, pp. 41-43). Hamlet's father claims that "Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard/ A serpent stung me" (I.5.35-36), making a reference to the biblical story of Adam and Eve (Emmerichs, 2003, pp. 41-43). However, this occurs once human degradation has invaded nature. Human wickedness seems to have invaded the cities and has moved beyond the city walls into the wilderness. The ghost feels free to roam around the castle, at his own free will, considering:

It "becomes apparent that there is a great deal of anxiety regarding how such lines are crossed, anxiety that translates into the ever-present apprehension concerning foreign influences in England and its outward expansion. (...) The outdoor world is empty, drained of the unnatural, because the unnatural has moved inside. It has been replaced, however, with a human element; Hamlet is sent to England, is removed from the urban centre of Elsinore, and so his place, by means of this exchange, is filled by the ghost." (Emmerichs, 2003, pp. 48-49)

The ghost of Hamlet's father appears only one more time, in his former wife's chambers, without her seeing him, when she seems to worry about her son's state of mind. This can be seen as a symbol of her no longer considering him her husband. In the end of the play the spectre disappears, so, we can assume his soul has found peace, just by taking the dear ones with him. The ghost's moving from the margins (the terrace of the castle) to the centre (the interior of the castle) may be perceived as his gradual persuasion of his son to avenge his betrayal. In his wife's chambers, the spectre appears only to Hamlet, to his son, as opposed to the ghost's appearance in Act 1. This time Hamlet is "not nearly as happy or intrigued by the ghost's second appearance" (Emmerichs, 2003, p. 45). Therefore, he interrogates his father's ghost and Gertrude becomes

suspicious when she sees her son speaking to thin air, “Alas, he’s mad. [...] O gentle son,/ Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper/ Sprinkle cool patience./ Whereupon do you look?” (III.4.96, and III.4.115). Gertrude cannot see the ghost, so, it is only fair when she assumes that Hamlet is truly mad and experiences hallucinations. As for that aspect, Emmerichs (44) suggests that there are significant transformations in Hamlet’s behaviour, attitude, appearance and even in the manner of speech towards the ghost: from interrogative demands: “O answer me!” (I.4.26), “Why is this? Wherefore? What[...]?” (I.4.38), “Why?” (I.4.45) to the replacement of the initial polite address; in addition, “thou” and “thee” – the more polite forms are replaced by the familiar and formal “you”.

The shift of natural towards the unnatural is another sign of Elsinore’s decay. The Ghost avoids the churchyard for example, where such apparitions are usually known to occur. Probably because he is already an outsider and similarly to Hamlet who feels unease in the castle, so does the ghost of his father. The supernatural is presumably more connected to Mother Nature and his apparitions are his last moments on Earth, spent in the orchard or in the garden. As we have mentioned before, the garden depicts a biblical space reminding us of the story of Adam and Eve, but also of their children, Cain and Abel. Serpents commonly kill by injecting their prey with venom. People on the other hand, secretly administer poison, cowardly avoiding a face-to-face confrontation with their enemy; therefore, the concept of death through poisoning is frequently associated with treason and vile crimes, as was the case with the old King Hamlet’s death. In this play, the garden and the snake are recurrent images which depict the old King Hamlet as a good man (despite his sins), the victim of a viciously deceptive murderer, Claudius. This murder is particularly vile, because Claudius is old King Hamlet’s brother (just as Cain and Abel were siblings). The connections with the biblical story are two extensions of the theme of the original sin: the analogy derived from “the Fall narrative” even more striking in Genesis 3 and 4, together with the concept of “totalized taint echoed by Hamlet in the nunnery scene (...) powerfully fused” (Gillies, 2013, p. 411), where the Ghost tells Hamlet about his murder for the first time:

“Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,  
A serpent stung me – so the whole ear of Denmark  
Is by a forged process of my death  
Rankly abus’d – but know, thou noble youth,  
The serpent that did sting thy father’s life  
Now wears his crown” (I.5.35-9).

And of course, “Cain’s jawbone” (V.1.79), found in the graveyard is another direct hint to the biblical original sin. Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, kills his brother Abel, using the jawbone of an ass, and Hamlet, who is about to revenge a fratricide comes across his own ‘Cain’s jawbone’ in a graveyard, hours before finalising his act of vengeance. All in all, because of the court’s

sins and corruption, Hamlet feels that the world's garden has become suffocated with weeds, when talking to his mother about her marriage, he suggests: "Fie on't! O fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden/ That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature/ Possess it merely" (I.2.135-7) and later, when he warns her not to "spread the compost on the weeds/ To make them ranker" (III.4.151-2). Hamlet is thinking about how the absence of repentance *fertilizes* the sin, and perpetuates it, the same way the undesirable plant monopolizes a garden, similarly, maybe to aggravating a fault, when augmented with intent.

A very important aspect concerning spaces in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark* is the Christian universe, which strongly affects the ideas the characters believe in and act upon – they seem to be conscious of committing sins and apprehend God's final judgement and are deeply concerned with the final destination of their souls: heaven, hell or purgatory. In this context, "the heroes/heroines from the great tragedies see God as the authority they fear and from whom they ask protection" (Bălinișteanu-Furdu, 2021, p. 155) because "divinity shows the hero the dimension of anger caused by the mistakes and misjudgement" (Bălinișteanu-Furdu, 2021, p. 172). In order to gain forgiveness, the individuals need to confess their sins, repent and change their character, accepting the forgiveness made possible through Jesus' death. In response to true repentance, God will wash away all guilt and sins; in the context of the play even Claudius is aware of this. These beliefs interfere a lot with some of the characters' decisions – they might constitute the reason for Hamlet's procrastinating vengeance (he continuously questions the morality of his revenge) and they even make Claudius kneel to pray. (Rein, 1960, p. 9)

## Conclusions

William Shakespeare's control of space in his plays is an important factor in the audience's perception of it. The space in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, and in other Shakespearian plays, can be interpreted as dual, because many actions happen offstage. Therefore, some of the events are seen by the audience, whereas most of them are narrated by various characters. This style of presenting the dramatic events does not align with Aristotle's view on tragedy. However, it gives so much power to the spoken word. Jones, in *Scenic Form in Shakespeare*, reminds the readers that "plays are made of scenes before made of words...the scene is the primary dramatic unit." (Jones, 1971, p. 256).

At the end of the play, most characters die, thus the readers/audience can perceive space as empty. This is a good start for a new beginning, suggests Emmerichs (2003, p. 49) as the current vacancy can successfully be filled by Fortinbras, who is the promise of a better tomorrow and of lessons learned. The *inward* and *outward* movement from the *indoor* versus *outdoor* spaces in the play further creates a "fluidity and continuity of space" (Emmerichs, 2003, p. 49).

What we wanted to demonstrate in our paper is that each space seems to reflect the personality of its inhabitants, and based on their existence, the space is private or public. Sometimes, it can be both: the importance of the royal figures forces the transformation of their private space into a public one – the castle is private for its owners; however, it is public for the king’s subjects. The cultural values specific to that age are also emphasized in the description of spaces, hence the author’s frequent references to mythology or historical events within the soliloquies or dialogues between the characters. We placed great emphasis also on the dichotomy ‘nature-culture’ and how this influences the characters’ perception of spaces. For example, the garden, seen as a natural place, is expected to be innocent, untouched by human wickedness; yet old King Hamlet is killed in this Edenic garden proving that the intervention of culture (through the hands of the killer) can spoil nature’s beauty and purity. Though Aristotle’s recommendation concerning the unity of time and space is not necessarily taken into consideration by William Shakespeare, the British writer succeeded in creating a sort of unity between spaces and their dwellers focusing on those places which appear as social constructs because of the close connection between microcosm and macrocosm in this play. Events, betrayals, disappointments occurring within Hamlet’s family mirror the degradation of the whole nation; thus, re-establishing order in his family becomes for Hamlet a goal in life which will make him sacrifice himself for his country, not only for the dignity of his family.

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