

The Mystery of Hamlet

»Hamlet. Prince of Denmark« is a mysterious play. The prince is **no** shining hero failing tragically. The play's characteristics are of a negative nature: the crown prince, although prepared and old enough, has **not** become king, he does **not** plot against the usurper, he opens his dismal inwardness before us **instead** of winning our hearts by his deeds. This is a keen exposition for a tragedy. It bears the risk that we will **not** identify ourselves with the hero. And as all other characters are created to throw light on the fate of the hero the author is even in danger that we do not care **at all** for his play. Nevertheless the ›Why‹ of the perturbed spectator is left unanswered, the mystery is left alone: *but this mystery, after all, captivates us*, thus it is an essential part of the play. It becomes the very centre of it when the ghost requests the prince to revenge the murder. Hamlet *will* revenge his father but does not do so immediately. Here, at the beginning of the Second Act, to be precise, a point is reached at which *on stage the prince* is challenged to act but *before the stage we* shall look upon the situation in the light of the beginning: the crown prince that has not become king now does not kill the murderer. The strengthening of the situation is not only emphasized by repetition but, above all, by the fact that, his uncle slain and he being the only male member left of the royal family, he *would* become king. Who does not see this and, instead, fatally tries to answer the question ›why does Hamlet hesitate?‹ detaches himself from understanding the prince. The question is ›fatal‹ because it implies, without a proof, hesitation: *Hamlet does not hesitate one moment*, and what is more, there has been no need for revenge to make him go. He realized before that, as for his destination, there is something paralyzing him: not his uncle, but his own melancholy. And he even has taken the first step to overcome the cleavage of his soul: *the destination to become king blocked by his melancholy*. To be able to do so he has remembered his dead father (»My father, me thinks I see my father«) whom he resembles more than a little and who had found out a solution that the prince now tries to practice for himself: making friends with Horatio in a similar way king Hamlet had made an *alter ego* of Yorick, the king's jester. Horatio does not put on the fool's cap at once: it will be ›worn‹ (in antic disposition) by Hamlet himself in turns adding to his inky clothes to protect himself. His madness is ›jesting‹: a game of a deeply split up soul. Hamlet rushes through an egregious development, the nature of which makes it inactable. We must be prepared to view what's going on *as a charade only*, as ›transferring‹ his melancholy self to Horatio, in other words: as becoming prince throughout which tragically enough succeeds only while he is already bound to die. We must really become convinced of what Fortinbras says at the end that Hamlet was likely to have proved most royal.

How this is done and how I learned to view the tragedy my way is the subject of an essay which, at best, is fit to change the image of Hamlet, and, at least, to open up the discussion that has come to a point which is characterized by the words of Thompson / Taylor: »We suspect that any new or sensational theory would very probably be simply wrong« (Arden³ Hamlet, introduction). Alas for English readers, the essay is written in German, and I cannot translate it into English myself, which is also why I beg you, Reader, not to mind my clumsy English. The book to be printed on demand can be ordered directly:

<http://www.epubli.de/shop/buch/R%C3%A4tsel-Hamlet-G%C3%BCnther-Flemming-9783844258578/27747>

... or from Amazon. If you are interested in publishing an English edition please contact me: my address is given on the ›Impressum‹ page (pardon me for not giving my email address publicly).