

# Supernatural Elements in the Renaissance Theatre

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# Supernatural elements include:

- Ghosts: The spirit of a dead person.
- Apparition: Something similar to a ghost but not necessarily the same. They look strange and sometimes lack human characteristics.
- Sylph: An airy creature or spirit. They are often harmless.
- Ghoul: An evil spirit that feeds on freshly buried dead people.
- Phantom: A ghost who haunts lonely roads and places.
- Goblin: An imaginary, small, and evil creature.
- Furies: Three goddesses that seek vengeance of the death of an innocent person (Greek Mythology).
- Witches: a woman thought to have magic powers, especially evil ones.

# Did the Renaissance writers and people, in general, believe in the existence of Ghosts, Apparitions, & Spirits?

- Yes, they did!

The way that they believed in the idea of having supernatural elements was like the way that a modern man believes in the idea of God.

There was a religious turmoil going on in England at that time and people were “somehow” lost between the conflicting entities.



After Christian Reformation in England, Two religious entities became popular: They were Catholicism and Protestantism.

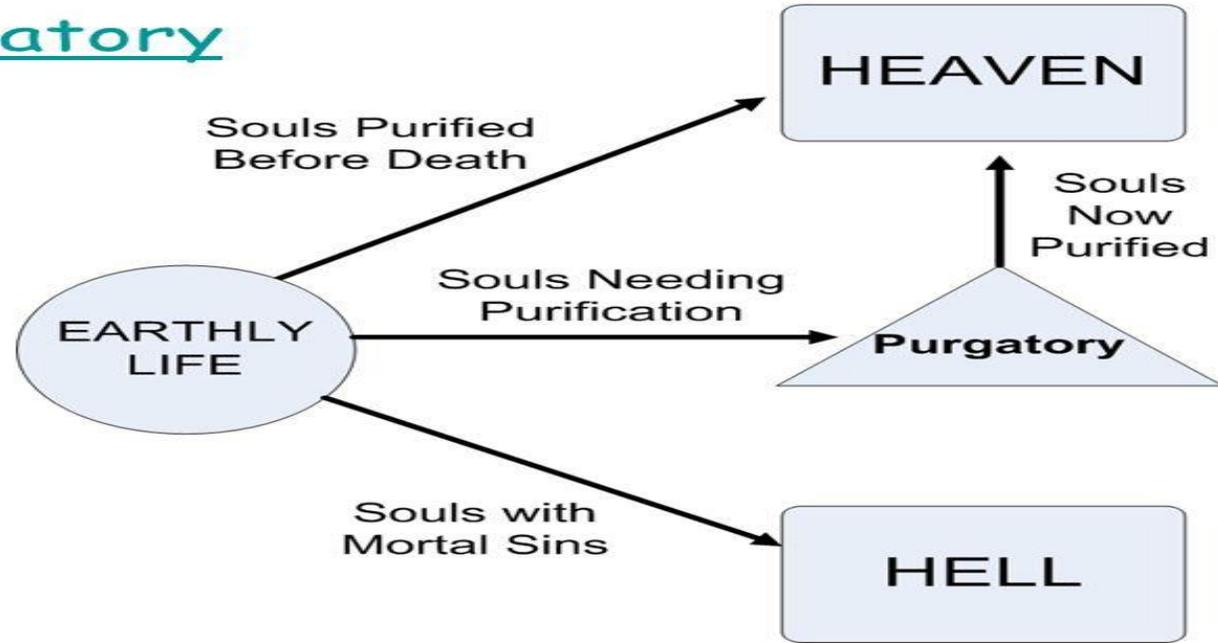
- For the Catholics, there were three places where human souls would go to after death. They were Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell.





- The **Catholics** believed that the good people would normally go to heaven, the bad to hell, and those who were not good enough to go to heaven or bad enough to go to hell will be trapped in a place of temporary sufferings which is no other than **Purgatory**.
- The souls trapped in **Purgatory** would normally seek redemption or do good deeds so that they would be allowed to go to **Heaven**.

## Purgatory



- However, the Protestants, had a different viewpoint. They believed that there are only Hell and Heaven. The souls or ghosts seen on earth could have escaped from Hell to do bad to humans or come from Heaven.
- The Church men usually advised people not to make contact with any ghosts because it is impossible to tell from where a ghost has come.

# *Hamlet*

## by William Shakespeare

- Shakespeare cleverly introduces the ghost of Hamlet's father because he avoids telling any information about the place where the ghost came from.
- The ghost of Hamlet's father says:

I am thy father's spirit,  
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,  
And for the day confined to fast in fires,  
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature  
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid  
To tell the secrets of my prison house,

# Hamlet says:



Angels and ministers of grace defend us!  
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd  
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,  
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,  
Thou comest in such a questionable shape

These words by Hamlet confirm Hamlet's (and Shakespeare's) Protestant background because Hamlet doesn't consider Purgatory. He simply talks about Hell and Heaven.

Horatio, a character who witnesses the ghost when he is with Hamlet, says:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,  
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff  
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,  
And there assume some other horrible form,  
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason  
And draw you into madness? think of it:

He, as a protestant, believes that the ghost has come from hell and has some evil intentions.

# Summarization:

- The supernatural elements on stage that were indirectly supported by religion (Christianity) took the attention of the English Renaissance audience.
- Plays that included supernatural elements were as popular on the Renaissance stages as the science fiction movies, supported by science and technology, in the contemporary cinemas and movie houses.

Thank you for

your

Attendance