Creating the Ghosts of Modernity: Magic and Memory in *Hamlet* and Cien *Años de Soledad*

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Abstract Modernity's impulse to control both collective and individual memory in an effort to shape a more marketable persona parallels a shift in the regard of magic—a shift that characterizes the postcolonial revolutions that invigorate Gabriel García Márquez's Cien Años de Soledad as much as the early modern renaissances that inspire Shakespeare's Hamlet. While Hamlet struggles with the irruption of magic in a world that no longer has room for ghosts, the Buendías of Macondo suffer the extinction of a magic that stitches their world together. In both cases, ability to control memory represents modernity's sublimation of magic and the means to its reconstruction of the world.

Key words magic memory postcolonial Shakespeare identity

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Gabriel García Márquez begins his novel *Cien Años de Soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude) in the middle of things: "Muchos años despues, frente al pelotón de fusilamiento, el coronel Aureliano Buendía había de recordar aquella tarde remota en que su padre lo llevó a conocer el hielo." (*Cien Años* 9; "Many years later, facing the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía happened to recall that distant afternoon in which his father took him to encounter ice.") By beginning *in media res*, Márquez invokes the nostalgic, somewhat prophetic tone and the time-bending, cyclical structure of his narrative. But he also reveals the principal problem that faces the inhabitants of Macondo; memory.

Memory, for the modern individual, allows a person to mentally reconstruct events to suit a conception of the self. It is, in that sense, a mechanism for self-preservation, analogous to language and by extension—if C. S. Lewis's definition of *magia divina* can be stretched slightly—the sublimation of magic. ² It follows, perhaps not too distantly, that the ability to control images, whether of events (history) or people (selves) fulfills the promise of magic to wield over nature an absolute control. For this reason, Plato in *The Republic* (10.831 –833) fears the "spell" and "mag-

ic" of poetry; Philip Sidney, more optimistically, in *The Defense of Poetry* notes the connection between *carmina* (song, poem) and *charm* and its relationship to the Delphic oracle, celebrating the ability to delight and teach. Memory, insofar as it can be controlled, managed or even stimulated by language, operates like puppet strings for an individual. Rhetoricians, orators, advertisers all claim as much influence over their audiences—sometimes without exaggerating. But as Renaissance and Romantic scholarship has shouted for years, the real power comes in the ability to write one's own meaning, one's own memory, one's own place in the world. If memory can be harnessed, one can reshape the past and present, or one's identity, according to one's will; one need not be the casualty of birth, class or circumstance—the fact of history: one can be a more desirable fiction. This is modernism—literacy, history, science, religion—the crushing blow to Macondo.

Hamlet, even excluding the vast historical and cultural gap, seems to stand in complete contrast to the Colombian novel. Yes, there are ghosts in both, but they are treated much differently. Hamlet begins where Cien Años de Soledad ends. Hamlet's is a peculiarly modern struggle, feeding off the tempestuous rise of modern politics and humanist education. In the dark winter of Denmark, the dying embers of a superstitious past give way to a new kind of hero—the stark individual who adapts himself to the shifting dramas of courtly life; college-educated, an actor, soldier, lover, all-around Renaissance courtier. Hamlet's problem is not a lack of memory, but too much. In Cien Años, Márquez describes the origin of memory (in the modernist sense)—the capture of the pre-modern or non-modern magic of a town like Macondo into history, which is memory, a place where only ghosts exist. Cien Años de Soledad is about the reduction of magic and people and nature into ghosts—words, history, philosophy, religion. What faces Hamlet is precisely this consequence of modernism, and the question Shakespeare asks is what happens when one of those ghosts escapes.

In Cien Años de Soledad, Márquez portrays the short-lived and turbulent history of Macondo, a small Colombian town. He traces the town's rise and fall from the perspective of its first and founding family, the Buendías whose own beginning and ending coincide with that of Macondo. Setting the novel rougly between 1830 – 1930, Márquez paints nostalgically the fabled memories of his grandparents while marking in his own generation the termination of the old way of life. His story follows Macondo through the swirling times of pioneering colonialism, civil war, American capitalist imperialism, discovery and—more intimately—the enchantment of the author's own childhood.

Cien Años is ultimately a story of loss, but equally a story of conquest. It is the loss of uncontained magic, of inexplicable but equally accepted connections between human moral actions and their supernatural consequences—quite literally the effects over nature of the moral capacity of humanity. But the other side of this loss is a conquest, a taming, a sublimation in both senses—in the psychoanalytical, meaning the displacement of desires in order to fulfill them in a constructive, society-friendly way; and in the physical, comparable to the endothermic process in which a solid changes directly into gas. Not only does the modernist conquest claim to provide in the decipherable text the acceptable evaluation of that creative magic that for a century floats

uninhibited throughout Macondo, that ciphering turns the solid reality of the supernatural into a gaseous abstraction—into memory.

One can hardly imagine a performance of Shakespeare's tragedy, which hinges on the tension between guise and reality (and banking significantly on the understanding that ghost equals guise and not reality), in Macondo, where the supernatural is not an irruption into the natural order, but instead a continuation of the not-yetcontained energies of a young earth. "El mundo era tan reciente, que muchas cosas carecían de nombre, y para mencionarlas había que señarlarlas con el dedo." (Cien Años 9: "The world was so fresh, that many things lacked names, and in order to mention them, one had to signal them with a finger.") Unboxed by language, nature expands freely, naturally, disencumbered by the strictures of sophisticated society. As if in union with nature, José Arcadio Buendía learns the name Macondo in a dream: "Preguntó qué ciudad era aquella, y le contestaron con un nombre que nunca había oído, que no tenía significado alguno, pero que tuvo en el sueño una resonancia sobrenatural." (Cien Años 36; 'He asked what city it was, and they responded to him with a name he had never heard, which had no significance at all, but which in the dream had a supernatural resonance.') It is the supernatural resonance of the uncharted, non-literal Colombian-jungle reality that characterizes the narrative of Cien Años de Soledad and specifically the nature of the life in Macondo. Hamlet, in contrast, begins with the highly ritualized changing of the guards at Elsinore castle.

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BERNARDO: Who's there? FRANCISCO: Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself. (Hamlet 1.1.1 – 2)
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It seems from the exchange that something is out of order, and the ensuing scene, where the guards discuss the appearance of ghost that looks like the late King Hamlet, reveals that the supernatural irruption threatens to unravel the entire fabric of the Danish court. Francisco's response is only the first of many attempts to re-establish the order that presumably preexists the play.

Cien Años, whose beginning is also prodded by the appearance of a murdered ghost, handles the haunting much differently. José Arcadio and Ursula move and found Macondo as the direct result of their interaction with the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar, a man José Arcadio kills for insulting his manhood. Rather than fear the ghost, Ursula pities him; and José Arcadio, recognizing the ghost as the direct extension of his own action, cannot escape the overwhelming feeling of responsibility: "Lo atormentaba la inmensa desolación con que el muerto lo había mirado desde la lluvia, la honda nostalgia con que a? oraba a los vivos, la ansiedad con que registraba la casa buscando el agua para mojar su tapón de esparto." (Cien Años 34; "The immense desolation with which the dead man had watched him from the rain tormented him, the deep nostalgia with which he yearned for the living ones, the anxiety with which he scoured the house looking for water to moisten his straw plug.") Here begins the 100 years of solitude, the 100-year struggle against insomnia and forgetfulness, the 100-year reign of unrestrained magic. While José Arcardio tries to appease the ghost

(not unlike Hamlet), the ghost makes no demands: it simply is. The ghost, for as long as the Buendías fail to harness the power of memory, will be a fact of their community. Cien $A \tilde{n} o s$, in this sense, relates the struggle to lay that ghost (and several other manifestations of their magical reality) to rest. Ironically, that rest will be the literal perpetuation of Macondo as ghost-town in Márquez's melancholic reminder of the pre-modern community.

Macondo's lack of distinction between the natural and supernatural gradually slips into a special modern category that safely orders magical reality as fantastic fiction. Until then, it is the ironic efforts of the inhabitants to unravel the fabric of an adolescent world and an encroaching modernity that ultimately weave them into a garroting net. Charmed by the inventions and scholarship of Melquiades, the Buendías strive for their own mastery of the brave new world only to be repeatedly rebuffed by outside competition, an indecipherable manuscript, isolation, or the distractions of their own physical appetites. Macondo begins high in the mind of its founder, José Arcadio Buendía; it represents a place of promise, hope and possibility. José Arcadio dreams of lasting city of modern sophistication and future. When he visits the gypsy tent of Melquiades, he pays for his sons to see and touch a magical block of ice and he remembers his dream upon founding Macondo of a city with walls made of mirrors. He thinks then that he can interpret the "profound significance" (Cien Años 36) of his dream, and he imagines building houses with enormous blocks of ice, beating the heat of the Colombian jungle and turning Macondo into refrigerated city. Of course he misinterprets the mirrors, which rather foreshadow the inbred solitude of the fated community, but his attempt to rationalize the significance of the ice with the memory represents the endemic flaw of the Buendías. And not only do they fail to craft their identities--individual and communal--according to a pragmatic application of memory, but as a family they repeat their mistakes like stitches in their own death shroud.

Both of José Arcadio's sons try to link their fates to the same event of seeing ice for the first time, and Márquez frames their recollections in exactly same way: "frente al pelotón de fusilamiento" (Cien Años 9, 112, 120). For Aureliano, the attempt is conscious and rational, and his acknowledgement of his failure is equally explicit: "Él mismo, frente al pelotón de fusilamiento, no había de entender muy bien cómo se fue encadenando la serie de sutiles pero irrevocables casualidades que lo llevaron hasta ese punto" (Cien Años 120; "The same, facing the firing squad, was not to figure out how the series of subtle but irrevocable coincidences had gone enchaining themselves together such that they had carried him to this point."). His inability to make sense of his life's history is mirrored by his brother's similar recollections when he faces a firing squad. José Arcadio's (II) mind is flooded with more sensual memories than his brother's; he feels the nostalgia that plagued him during his life evaporate: he hears Melquiades' songs, feels the steps of Santa Sofía, and he experiences the same coldness of the ice in his nose that he also noticed in the corpse of Remedios. But in that moment, as his life is flashing before him and feels himself completing his life, he suddenly thinks of some unfinished business, the sense of fulfillment vanishes, and he is once more accosted by that unshakeable nostalgia, the yearning to go back and find that something forgotten: "Entonces, acumulado en un zarpazo desgarrador, volvió a sentir todo el terror que le atormentó en la vida" (*Cien Años* 149; 'Then, engulfed in a heartbreaking swipe, went back to feeling all the terror that had tormented him in life').

While both Buendía sons recall the same event, they are unable to memorialize it in the constructed identity of their selves. What should be a formative memory of childhood is actually a distant and indecipherable sign that resists meaning. Márquez describes the meeting of the ice not diachronically, or as a step in the evolution of an identity or character, but as the indelible thing Aureliano and José Arcadio think of "many years later, when facing the firing squad." What seems to the modern reader as memory—meaning that mechanism of self-preservation—is mere recollection. Neither can understand, much less control, the supernatural aura that seems to guide them to their fates.

Memory is the power not only to resuscitate the particulars of the past, but to capture the passage of time in a single, timeless image—that image being identity. But in Macondo, there exists a magic that the Buendías fail to contain; it is a magic of mirrors that determines the identities of the Buendías at birth. Seeing and touching the ice, for Aureliano, did not inspire his curiosity and prod him into becoming the curious, cold Colonel Aureliano anymore than seeing and not touching the ice led his brother to travel the world; the event merely provided the stage to demonstrate their intrinsic qualities. This immutability in the Buendía offspring leads Ursula to fear that the names Aureliano and José Arcadio trap every male into the same two personality types and their inevitable conclusions; "Mientras los Aurelianos eran retraídos, pero de mentalidad lúcida, los José Arcadio eran impulsivos y emprendedores, pero estaban marcados por un signo trágico" (Cien Años 221; "While the Aurelianos were introverted, but of an enlightening intelligence, the José Arcardios were impulsive and enterprising, but were marked by a tragic sign"). Unable to escape their own names or write for themselves new futures, the Buendía line is guided by nostalgia, an incessant grasping—but never reaching—at the meaning of the past.

From the beginning the Buendías seem always to repeat the same two stories, according to the two namesakes, the Aurelianos and José Arcadios. Repeated names, repeated personalities, repeated ventures, mistakes, and fortunes all represent repeated prisons in their 100-year solitude. Every Arcadio follows his passionate whims, throwing himself into sex, travel, music, food, or flashy new technology; while every Aureliano seeks a way to evade the cyclical boundaries of time by social or academic advancements—war, philosophy, literature, or science. Where one follows his heart, the other follows his head, both championing a severely independent spirit; they pursue orgasm and epiphany, seemingly cursed against a lasting impact—unable to fulfill their parents' dreams or build foundations for their children's. Despite their attempts to achieve permanence, they exists on the margins of time, unable to tap in and join the trajectory of the modern world.

Hamlet, like the Buendías, exists in a world that will eventually destroy him. At the beginning of the play, he finds himself marginalized by his grief over his father's recent death. But while his uncle and mather want to welcome him back as Denmark's "chiefest courtier," he refuses to re-assimilate into this new fatherless world. When his uncle, the new king, questions his continued mourning, Hamlet reveals that his world has been turned upside down and that he can no longer make sense of the court.

KING. How is it that the clouds still hang on you? HAMLET. Not so, my lord. I am too much in the sun.

In the one line, Hamlet's loaded reply potentially indicates that the sun does not suit his grief, that he can no longer bear to be among the living, that he can no longer bear to be in the new king's presence, and perhaps also that he is blinded by what once shone light and truth. Of course, not imagining any rebellion or treason, his mother and uncle believe that Hamlet is depressed, wishing to cover himself in shadows and all other trappings of grief. But when the queen asks Hamlet to explain himself, he contends that his marginalization comes from a much deeper, much less conventional urgency.

QUEEN. Why seems it so particular with thee? HAMLET. Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not "seems."

Hamlet proceeds to protest the suggestion that he has any sort of control over his grief, that it is neither his behavior (seems), his clothing (seams), or his words (semes) that "denote [him] truly." His particular, distinct and individual grief mean in a more primitive reality than can be arrested by courtly gestures or written laments. At this point, Hamlet has not yet seen the ghost of his father, but alread Shakespeare is preparing the stage, demonstrating Hamlet's readiness for an encounter with something that cannot be conventionally satisfied, something that cannot be denoted truly by the tools of modernity. Unable to make sense of his uncountable nostalgia, Hamlet will drift away from the rationality of the court, swallowing a magical reality and appropriating its ghostly character as he plots his revenge.

Hamlet's yearning for some meaningful expression of his emptiness meets its strangest promise of fulfillment when his father's ghost shows up. From his first interaction with the ghost (or the undead memory of his father), Hamlet compounds his marginalization, always harboring an intensely personal and distrustful grief. He insists on meeting the ghost alone, ignoring the warnings of his friends and councilors and trusting only in his increasingly disturbed judgment. He holds conversations and debates with himself seven times throughout the play for a total of 208 lines, and spends much of his other time on stage either joking or feigning madness; much of his public dialogue seems always subject to his own machinations of revenge, his constant mousetrapping and baiting for reactions. Rather than tap into the community of advisors, Hamlet steels himself for his task of killing Claudius. With doubt and inaction weighing heavily against his plans, he knows he must construct a more courageous and resolute identity; he must swallow whole the reality of the ghost. His soliloquy after meeting his father's ghost reveals his plan of action; as the ghost retreats repeating the mandate "remember me," Hamlet resolves to make the ghost the base of his new

identity:

Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there. (Hamlet 1.5.95 - 99)

That memory, the haunting memory of an undead father, conflicts with all else that Hamlet knows, and so he must empty his mind of all his other memories and found himself solely on the memory of the ghost. ⁴

Hamlet's Lady Macbeth-like determination to change his identity seems to stand in complete opposition to the Buendía dilemma. Every Aureliano struggles to memorize the books of Melquiades, the forms and learning his schooling offers; while every Arcadio seems ever-bent on focusing all his passions and energies on the pressures of youth and the "trivial fond records" of songs and lovers and ecstasies. But if the Buendías will ultimately be enveloped by history, becoming the the memory they so long tried to contain, Hamlet too will be reinserted into the organized rationality of Elsinore. His ironic effort to unburden himself of modernity only gives modernity the means to reorder the court. Cien Años de Soledad tells the story of the sublimation of magic into the table of history's memory; Hamlet tells the story of one man's attempt at the opposite—at deposition, the change from a gas into a solid, or in this case, from the abstract memory into a real ghost. In the attempt, Hamlet succeeds and appropriates a peculiar isolation, singling himself out to be carefully re-appropriated by a world that does not believe in ghosts. Like Macondo, he will die after his five acts of solitude.

While Hamlet is perhaps in a knowing struggle against the "seems" of Elsinore—the pretentious reduction of grief and loss in a customary show—the Buendías unwittingly bring the net of modernity over their own heads. Theirs is a constant struggle to control memory so their identities can become movable tools in the survival of the new world. Claude Levi-Struauss has said that "Remembering is one of man's great pleasures, but not insofar as memory operates literally, since few individuals would agree to relive the fatigues and sufferings that they nevertheless delight in recalling. Memory is life itself, but of a different quality" (Tristes Tropiques 63). Time and time again, the people of Macondo suffer memory loss and fail to achieve any kind of permanence. Often, as in the case of Aureliano and José Arcadio, it is a personal memory that fails to be included in the whole image of the self. But other times, the community itself forgets. In one episode, an epidemic of insomnia afflicts the inhabitants of Macondo, leading to amnesia:

Quería decir que cuando el enfermo se acostumbraba a su estado de vigilia, empezaban a borrarse de su memoria los recuerdos de la infancia, luego el nombre y la noción de las cosas, y por último la identidad de las personas y aun la conciencia del propio ser, hasta hundirse en una especie de idiotez sin pasado.

(Cien Años 60; "It meant that when the sick person would get used to his condition of wakefulness, the records of infancy would begin to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of the self, until sinking into a kind of idiocy without a past.")

Unable to sleep, the victims go on living without pause until the blur of their perpetual and meaningless existence completely erases the mind, resulting in a kind of idiot without any connection to a past. Against this eventuality, José Arcadio begins to label everything in the town, even writing out their uses and implications. When this fails to work, he decides to construct a "memory machine," which functions on the basis of reviewing the events of every morning. (Cien Años 65) His attempts to hold the magic of memory in language, not unlike modern history and literature, only prolong his decreasing life. The town is only saved when Melquiades, the wandering gypsy, shows up with a cure. It is this injection of magic that keeps the town from fading away, and allows the syncopated dance of magic and ghosts and nature to continue for the duration of 100 years.

It is Melquiades also who delivers to the Buendías a prophetic, but illegible manuscript that puzzles the Aurelianos until the end of the book. Representing the efforts to capture the essence of Macondo in the written word (an inky cloak), the Aureliano Buendías spend hours studying with, or in the library of, Melquiades trying to decipher the text. Even after he dies, the ghost of Melquiades returns to help Aureliano Segundo in his studies; but he tells him that no one will be able to read the manuscript until the end of the 100 years. They each begin confident that their studies will expose them to an outside world of possibility and freedom; if they can stand back and see everything at once, understanding it fully, then they will no loner be the pawns of this magical chess board. It is not until the last of the Buendías is born that the child's father, Aureliano Babilonia, figures out how to read Melquiades' ancient words. And in a moment of epiphany, he recognizes himself and the entire line of Buendías in the story on the parchments. As a supernatural storm rages outside, he reads his own end in the last page—"...como si se estuviera viendo en un espejo hablado" (Cien Años 495; "... as if he were seeing himself in a spoken mirror"). Before he even gets to the final line, he understands that he will never again leave the room, that the storm will wipe Macondo away—". . . pues estaba previsto que la ciudad de los espejos (o los espejismos) sería arrasada por el viento y desterrada de la memoria de los hombres..." (Cien Años 8; "... so it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or of mirages) would be razed by the wind and dismissed from the memory of men...) Aureliano Babilonia realizes that the entire existence of the Buendías is a moment in time that only enters history in its passing, a burial shroud woven in the ironic attempt to live forever, a consequence only revealed at the end their ironic attempt to write themselves into history.

By the end of the play, *Hamlet* approaches quite closely to the Colombian novel. Hamlet, like the last Aureliano, realizes his house is finished and that he has brought about the tragic end. Every member of Hamlet's family lies dead on the stage, effec-

tively terminating the haunting of Elsinore and sewing up the stitch where escaped the bit of pre-modern magic. ^⑤ But although Melquiades' manuscript ends with the statement that Macondo has been erased from the memory of men, Márquez in *Cien Años de Soledad* resurrects Macondo and reanimates the ghosts of past. Modernity may in the end win, having managed to reduce the magic of Macondo to a book and having replaced the fallen house of Hamlet with Fortinbras. But it is not an emphatic victory. From the perspective of modernity, there is no actual memory, no history. But there will always be a ghost in the machine, a potential return of the magic. Márquez turns Macondo into a wistful fiction, the simulation of memory. He does not rue the loss as much as cherish the ghosts that take the place of a memory, turning experience into myth, capturing the fabled reality of a lost way of life in which actions and events sparkle with magical significance. Perhaps Shakespeare too points to another perpetuation of ghosts: Hamlet's dying command, worrying that the one thing that will continue to live after him will be his bad name, is

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain To tell my story. (*Hamlet* 5.2.333 – 334)

It may not be the "dream" that keeps Hamlet from killing himself, but something about Hamlet survives with every performance of the play. The end, like sleep, allows the memory its appropriate place in a world that, as Ursula explains, "va acabando poco a poco." (*Cien Años* 224;"... is finishing [or coming to an end] little by little").

[Notes]

- 1. All translations are my own.
- 2. Lewis argues in the first chapter of English Literature in the Sixteenth Century that magic, specifically high magic (as opposed to necromancy or witchcraft and other dark magic) generally referred to a non-mechanic mastery of nature, and in the Renaissance, involved "books" and "terrible words." (8) He further suggests that through the medium of a Christianized "Platonic theology", magia divina, at least in its goals for power, found much in common with the eventual scientists who won the age. (13–14). Frederic Jameson also addresses the shift away from a romantic conception of magic and its implications then in literature. Since the magic can no longer be accepted as belonging explicitly to "the realm of interpersonal or inner-worldly relations," he argues, it must be "projectively reconstituted into a free-floating and disembodied element [...]" This shift, I suggest, is partially at stake in Hamlet, the ghost bearing the brunt of evil and magical reconstitution. (The Political Unconscious 119)
- 3. 1.2.64 -65, 74 -75, 83. In line 76, Hamlet says "'Tis not alone my inky cloak," referring most obviously to his black mourning cloak; but I think the significance of "inky" can perhaps be taken literally to suggest a page of written words. A few scenes later, Hamlet confesses to Ophelia that he has no skill for writing verses; and his teasing exchange with Polonius about the words in his book seems also to suggest at least Hamlet's distrust of language if not also his deeper feeling of something inexpressible.
- 4. Part of this reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* derives from Akira Kurosawa's film adaptation, *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960). Without including any real ghosts, the Japanese director charges the drama

with a ghostliness that exerts a pervasive urgency on the Hamlet character (Nishi) as he works out his revenge plot. While Nishi creates his ghosts—a "mousetrap" wedding cake, an anonymous tip to the police, leaked headlines to the press, a faked death—the power of the ghosts begins to act independently, eventually effecting the noirish conclusion that leaves Nishi caught in his own trap, unable to maneuver between an unexpected love and the moving parts of his scheme.

5. While there is certainly suggestions of magic in Shakespeare's text of Hamlet, I owe some of my attention to its presence to Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (1990), which amps up the magical tone of the drama in order to increase the tension between an encroaching modernity and a lingering romantic worldview. For a better examination of these aspects of the film, see Charles Ross, "The Banquet as Cinematic Romance" (Asian Shakespeares on Screen: Two Films in Perspective. Ed. Alexander C. Y. Huang. Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation 4.2 (Spring/Summer 2009). < www.borrowers.uga.edu > Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. Ed. Constance Jordan. New York; Pearson, 2005. Print.)

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