

# **GHOSTS AND THE RENAISSANCE:**

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Giving credit where credit is due, most of this information originates in "Renaissance Ghosts and Demons" by Raymond Nighan. See <http://stjohns-chs.org/english/Renaissance/Ren-gh.html>. There were many explanations of a ghostly visitation during Shakespeare's time. A ghost could be . . .

- \*an hallucination (*phantasma*) brought about by stress, poor diet, or exhaustion.
- \*a specter seen as a portent or omen
- \*a spirit of a dead person returned to perform some deed left undone in life
- \*a spirit of a dead person returned from the grave or from purgatory by divine permission (the Catholic position)
- \*an angel disguised as a dead person, or a devil disguised as a dead person to tempt a living relative into eternal damnation (the Protestant position taught to Hamlet and Horatio at Wittenberg)

## ***MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE THEORIES OF GHOSTS AND DEMONS***

### **ST. AUGUSTINE: (THE CITY OF GOD)**

1. The devil may transform himself into an angel of light.
2. The devil (with God's permission) may transform a "man's phantasm into a bodily shape."
3. The devil can do nothing without God's permission.

### **ST. THOMAS AQUINAS: (SUMMA THEOLOGICAE)**

1. The dead may appear to the living only with God's permission.
2. Demons may punish sinners and doubters as part of God's plan.
3. Demons may reveal the truth to men, but their purpose is to punish and damn a soul.
4. Purgatory exists with the pain (fire) of hell, except it is temporary.

### **LEWIS LAVATER: (OF GHOSTS AND SPIRITS WALKING BY NIGHT)**

1. Men who are mad or melancholic might see apparitions that are not there.
2. What appears will either be a good or evil angel.
3. Spirits that are good appear to comfort the living.
4. A good spirit will ask that masses be said for its comfort.
5. Spirits sometimes playfully or horribly appear to miners.
6. Spirits may appear in the shape of a man recently killed in a in a pleasing or horrible form.
7. Spirits are allowed to come from hell only for a time; there is no purgatory.
8. There are four tests which the church uses to determine if a spirit is good or evil:
  - a. good spirits terrify initially, but ultimately comfort.
  - b. good spirits associated with light; evil with darkness.
  - c. evil spirits command that which is counter to the church's doctrine.
  - d. good spirits profess humility; evil spirits will threaten and use vile language.
9. Evil spirits will often speak the truth.
10. Spirits of men killed without benefit of sacrament will return to beg for it.
11. It is best to avoid all contact with spirits.

### **THOMAS NASH: (THE TERRORS OF THE NIGHT)**

1. To fool men, a spirit will often return in the guise of one's parents.

### **KING JAMES I: (DAEMONOLOGIE)**

1. A spirit will return to one who seeks revenge, is ignorant, is evil or who hates God.
2. An evil spirit finds it easy to work on a melancholic mind.
3. A spirit may cause madness, an imbalance of the humors; they may cause the evil to suffer or the good to be tested.

### **SCOT: (THE DISCOVERIE OF WITCHCRAFT)**

1. Devils will encourage us to follow our base inclinations (appetites)
2. Those who are proud, angry, or lustful will fall to evil spirits.

### **BURTON: (ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLIE)**

1. The devil can cause madness by first affecting fantasy; he can terrify the mind.
2. In melancholy individuals, fantasy is especially strong, made worse if terrified by something objective.

