

**History 1010: *Western Civilization to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century***  
Prof. Lester • Fall 2008

Final Paper: *Hamlet* – Religion and the Self in 1600

**Due:** At the beginning of class, **Wednesday December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

For the final paper you are asked to write a 5-page essay in response to one of the questions below. Do a close reading of William Shakespeare's play Hamlet and craft a well thought out essay. This is meant to be an analysis of the play within its historical context. One of the goals of this assignment is to consider the play with an eye to understanding the effects of the Protestant Reformation. Your paper should have a clear thesis, should integrate quotations from the text to support your argument, and end with a focused and insightful conclusion. You **DO NOT** need to do any outside reading or research for this paper! I am looking for your own interpretation of this text, in your words. You may, of course, draw from the textbook, lecture and discussion to help craft the historical context and to support your thesis.

FORMAL GUIDELINES:

- Papers must be 5-pages in length, 12-point font, double-spaced.
- For this final written exercise I ask that you use **formal footnotes** (see the example given below as well as the information for citation style given on the CU History Department webpage <http://www.colorado.edu/history/students/undergrad/refdoc.htm#ref>).<sup>1</sup>
- In addition you must include a list of **works referenced**, or a **bibliography**, which should list the edition of the text as well as any other sources relevant to the paper, including websites that you consult in any way. Let me stress for an assignment such as this that emphasizes your own close reading and interpretation, it will not help you to rely upon information or interpretations drawn from the web.
- Be sure to indicate which **question** you have answered and be sure to **title** you paper.

QUESTIONS:

1. In what way is Hamlet's anxiety and "madness" a critique of the Protestant worldview that abandoned the ideas and doctrines of Catholic Christianity? Consider explicitly the figure of the ghost as emblematic of these anxieties, particularly the concern over the place of purgatory in the Protestant view.
2. When, and more importantly, *why* do the characters in Hamlet turn to books and learning to explain and order their worlds? Analyze how such a reliance on books reflects the changing humanist sensibilities of the early modern period.
3. Hamlet is a play framed by questions. Fundamental to this is the question of the nature of existence ("to be or not to be"). Consider why this question was so pressing in the minds of men and women by 1600? Was there any sense of comfort or consolation derived from the process of self-scrutiny according to the play? Consider the historical context very carefully.

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, Hamlet, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Signet Classics, 1998). Act 1, scene 3, line 90-95 [or 1.3:90-95].