

"Review of Margreta de Grazia *'Hamlet' without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) ISBN 978-0-521-69036-2 (paperback) xii+265 pp. by Gabriel Egan

*Hamlet* is widely received as a play about the main character's inwardness that "passes show". As ever concerned (like Michel Foucault) with the great intellectual changes around 1800, Margreta De Grazia points out that for the first 200 years of the play's reception this was not the issue. Instead, the play was understood--as it was indeed written--to dramatize the dispossession, seemingly approved by the court, of Hamlet the rightful inheritor. Hamlet can joke about this ("I lack advancement") but not say it seriously. Instead of looking at the time schemes the play is concerned with--imperial, generational, epochal, eschatological--the post-1800 criticism focussed on just the time of Hamlet's supposed delay, not realizing that this is part of the Clown act he is performing.

This core argument is summarized in the first five pages and explains De Grazia's title: she wants us to read the play without the falsely-modern, psychologically super-subtle 'Hamlet' construct imposed on it in the second half of its 400 year afterlife. The rest of the book provides the detailed support for De Grazia's claims and is thoroughly convincing. A highpoint is a fascinating argument from intellectual history showing why it was around 1800 that Hamlet acquired his murky and unconscious inner drives: they helped explain his wicked plot to damn Claudius's soul by deferring the murder until the king was steeped in unconfessed sins. This is a richly intellectual engagement with the play that wears its learning lightly. Anyone, at any level, interested in how drama engages with models of the mind will benefit from its author's combination of sophisticated and sensitive close reading with compendious knowledge of the history of ideas and criticism.