

Suzanne (Horatio) Delage

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 12 May 1998

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William H. Ansley — 12 May 1998, 00:38

Craig Christensen wrote:

Peter Westlake wrote:

The Hamlet, at least, is easy:

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

...

It's a very well-known quote (no offense!), hence "Hamlet's hackneyed precept".

None taken. Yes, it is a very well-known quote, even to me. But, aren't there many familiar quotes from Hamlet? I haven't read the play for a couple of years and didn't make the effort to check it myself. I guess because I was so taken with the notion that forgetting was central to the story, I was trying to recall a quote about memory. ...

One thing I am sure of (perhaps the *only* thing I am sure of) in this story is that the "Horatio" quote is the one intended here. (Of course, just because I'm sure doesn't mean I'm right.) Look at the passage in question:

The idea which had so forcibly struck me was simply this: that every man has had in the course of his life some extraordinary experience, some dislocation of all we expect from nature and probability, of such magnitude that he might in his own person serve as a living proof of Hamlet's hackneyed precept -- but that he has, nearly always, been so conditioned to consider himself the most mundane of creatures, that, finding no relationship to the remainder of his life in this extraordinary experience, he has forgotten it.

Notice that I have used underscores to indicate the beginning and ending of the use of italic text (at least its this way in the paperback copy of Endangered Species I am referring to).

(The use of italics seems odd, if it is not a mistake. It seems as if either too much or too little is italicized. I would guess that it is an error and that all the text in the quote above, after the colon, was meant to have been in italics; the whole thing is the striking fact, after all.

Wait, maybe Wolfe did this deliberately--maybe we're supposed to read everything in italics as meaning the opposite [italics--Italy--Romans--Greeks--Beware of Greeks bearing gifts!] So the striking fact is that everyone really is perfectly ordinary and they have forgotten it!

Nahhh!)

Anyway, my point is that the narrator mentions Hamlet **after** he talks about the "extraordinary experience" but **before** he says anything about forgetting it. So "Hamlet's hackneyed precept" is about the unusual, not about memory, making the Horatio quote most probably the one intended by far.

Actually, the only other line from Hamlet that is so well known as to be hackneyed (that I can think of) is: "To be, or not to be- that is the question..." Hmmmm, maybe this fits if we take it to mean existence and not suicide.

Oh, well.

William Ansley