Some Biblical and Mythological Allusions in *Hamlet*

**Act I**

Julius Caesar - Roman emperor who was assassinated (I.i.114)

Satyr - creature, noted for its lust and promiscuity, that was half-man, half-goat (I.ii.140)

Niobe - boastful Queen of Thebes who wept when her fourteen children were killed (I.ii.149)

Hercules - hero of Greek and Roman mythology who was known for his great strength (I.ii.153)

Nemean Lion - a powerful beast that Hercules had to defeat (I.iv.83)

Lethe - river in Hades in Greek mythology (I.v.33)

Patrick - Saint who proved the existence of purgatory to the doubting Irish (I.v.137). Saint Patrick was regarded as the keeper of Purgatory because he found an entrance on the island of Lough Derg which he used to prove the existence of an intermediate state to the "doubting Irish". This is evidence of a Catholic interpretation of the ghost as a just spirit at this point. (Wilson, 79-80)

**Act II**

Hyperion - Greek sun god sometimes also named Helios or Apollo (II.i.140)

Roscius - Roman actor in the time of Julius Caesar (II.ii.388)

Jephthah - character from the Old Testament who sacrificed his daughter to keep a vow (II.ii.400). An illegitimate son, Jephthah was denied his inheritance until the elders of Gilead asked him to return from exile to lead their army against the King of Ammon. In Judges 11 he sacrifices his daughter to his Lord:

30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt withoutfail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,
31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.
32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them: and the Lord delivered them into his hands.
33 And he smote them from Aroer even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.
34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.
35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my
daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.
36 And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.
37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: Let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.
38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.
39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,
40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

Hyrkanian beast - tiger native to a region of ancient Persia (II.ii.447)

Dido - Carthaginian queen who was seduced by Aeneas who then left her (II.ii.443)

Aeneas - founder of Rome who made love to Dido then abandoned her (II.ii.443). Aeneas, son of Anchises and Aphrodite, was a Trojan prince who married Creusa, the daughter of King Priam. Fleeing from the defeated city of Troy, Aeneas was separated from his wife. He set sail for Italy. During a seven year voyage he took refuge in Carthage but declined offers of marriage and the throne from Queen Dido. He sailed onwards, eventually reaching Italy and founding the city of Rome.

Priam - king of Troy who was killed by Pyrrus (II.ii.444). Priam, the last King of Troy, twice witnessed the destruction of the city. The first time was when Heracles sought revenge after Laomedon failed to honour a promise made to the hero. The second time was as a result of the Trojan war. Priam was humiliated during the siege of Troy when he had to beg Achilles for the return of the body of his favorite son, Hector. When Troy was sacked, Priam was killed on the altar of Zeus by Pyrrhus (Neoptolemus), the son of Achilles.

Cyclops - one-eyed giant from ancient Greek mythology (II.ii.486)

Mars - Roman god of war (II.ii.487)

Hecuba - wife of Priam, the king of Troy (II.ii.497). Hecuba was the wife of Priam, the last King of Troy. She had nineteen of his children, most of whom died during the Trojan War. Paris and Hector were the eldest of her children.

Act III

Vulcan - Roman god of the furnaces or blacksmith of the gods (III.ii.83)
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Phoebus - Greek sun god (III.ii.151)

Neptune - Roman god of the seas and oceans (III.ii.152)

Hymen - god of marriage in Greek and Roman mythology (III.ii.155)

Hecate - goddess of witchcraft (III.ii.253)

Damon - famous for being the faithful friend of Pythias (III.ii.276)

Nero - Roman emperor who was rumoured to have murdered his mother (III.ii.385)

Cain – murdered his brother Abel and was condemned to a life of “a fugitive and a vagabond” (III.iii.41). This is an allusion to the Biblical story of Cain and Abel:

Genesis, Chapter 4

1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.
2 And she again bare his brother Abel: and Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.
3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.
4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering:
5 But unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect: and Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.
6 And the Lord said unto Cain, "Why art thou wroth?" and "Why is thy countenance fallen?"
7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door: and unto thee shalt be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."
8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.
9 And the Lord said unto Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" And he said, "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?"
10 And he said, "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.
11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.
12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength: A fugitive, and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."
13 And Cain said unto the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear.
14 Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me."
15 And the Lord said unto him, "Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be
taken on him seven-fold." And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.
16 And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

Mercury - Roman messenger of the gods (III.iv.60)

Act V

Adam - the first man according to Genesis in the Bible (V.i.36)
Alexander - greatest emperor known in western antiquity (V.i.192)
Pelion - high mountain mentioned in Greek mythology (V.i.247)
Sparrow - a small bird in a Biblical story whose fate is determined by God (V.ii.210-211).
This is an allusion to Matthew 10 in The Bible where it reads:

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.
30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.
32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.
33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.
34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.
35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.
36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.
37 He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.
38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.
39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it.
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“The readiness is all” is an allusion to Matthew 24:44:

No One Knows the Day or Hour

36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven,[e] but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour[f] your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.