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Between Nature and Eternity: (Present)ing Absence in Theatrical Representations of Shakespeare as the Ghost of Hamlet

by

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A poem that was published in The London Magazine in the summer of 1750 depicts an episode in which the ghost of Shakespeare appears to the actor David Garrick, inciting him to avenge the wrongs done to his works by those who would mutilate his natural genius through their own vainglorious adaptations. As Michael Dobson notes in his study, The Making of the National Poet, the poem capitalized upon the popular mid-eighteenth century representations that mythologized the relationship between the ghostly poet-playwright and the actor who was doing so much to expand and promote Shakespeare's position at the zenith of the literary pantheon as analogous to that of the famous Danish prince (incidentally Garrick's most famous theatrical role) and the Ghost of Hamlet Senior. So celebrated was this analogy that it became the victim of parody when Garrick became the prodigal son and disobeyed his spiritual father's orders and he proceeded to stage his own adaptations of Hamlet and the representation of Shakespeare as the Ghost of Old Hamlet was made even more explicit as he returned to haunt Garrick, chastising him for bringing his work 'upon the stage/With all your horrible imperfections on my head!' (cited in Dobson, 1992, 173). Garrick's supporters retaliated with a piece called, 'Shakespeare and Garrick, a New Dialogue, occasioned by the Alterations lately made in the Tragedy of Hamlet, as acted at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane', in which Shakespeare again appears as the ghost of Old Hamlet to an awe-struck Garrick/Hamlet/Claudius:

[The Spirit of Shakespeare arises]

[Garr.]	Angels and Ministers of Grace! –
Shakespear.	Proceed;
	And let my organs spiritually feed
	From those harmonious lips, whose quick'ning breath
	So oft hath chear'd me in the arms of death;
	And now by potency of magic sound
	Calls up my spirit from the deep profound:
	Speak to thy Shakespear –
Garrick.	Hail, much honour'd name!

Friend of my life and father of my fame:
If whilst I draw each weed, that idly creeps
Around the tomb, where thy lov'd Hamlet sleeps,
Incautiously I have forgot to spare
Some flower, which thy full hand had scatter'd there,
Impute it not –

Shakespear.   Freely correct my Page:
I wrote to please a rude unpolish'd age;
Thou, happy man, art fated to display
Thy dazzling talents in a brighter day;
Let me partake this night's applause with thee,
And thou shalt share immortal fame with me.

(Cited in Dobson, 1992
175)

This was not the first time that Shakespeare had appeared as a ghostly illusion – many times before the spectre of the Bard had been summoned from beyond the grave to serve as a prologue to various performances of his plays and their adaptations, and yet it was the analogy between Shakespeare's authorship and the Ghost in Hamlet that persistently haunted the stage in the late seventeenth century and early to mid-eighteenth century. There is even a rumour, which started courtesy of Nicholas Rowe, the first editor of Shakespeare's plays, and which is still in circulation today that Shakespeare himself was the first performer to play the role of Old Hamlet. Neither is this alignment between Shakespeare and Hamlet's Ghost innovative in terms of more contemporary critical perspectives on the text, and Marjorie Garber in her study, Shakespeare's Ghost Writers speaks of how the authorial presence of Shakespeare persistently haunts his corpus of plays: 'The Ghost is Shakespeare…the one who comes as a revenant, belatedly instated, regarded as originally authoritative, rather than retrospectively canonized, and deriving increased authority from this very instatement of authority backward, over time' (1987, 176), and Garber boldly substantiates Rowe's assertion, '[w]e know that Shakespeare played the part of the Ghost in Hamlet. What could not be foreseen, except through anamorphic reading, was that he would become that Ghost' (1987, 176). Whether or not there was any veracity behind Rowe's claim, the alignment between author and spectre draws explicit attention to the uncanny function that both entities bring to the act of theatrical performance. This essay will explore the connotations of this association between ghost and author when each entity simultaneously enacts both its presence and absence in the liminal realm of representation, wherein ghost becomes author; author becomes ghost, and performance becomes a kind of séance, conjuring up the spirits of the dead and materializing them through the performer's body. In order to do this, I will explore the extent to which stage representations of Old Hamlet from the sixteenth century onwards have been haunted by contemporary appropriations and attitudes towards the playwright. In so doing, I argue that the production choices made regarding the appearance of the Ghost of Hamlet's father say less about contemporary attitudes towards the supernatural than they do about existing perspectives and exploitations of Shakespeare, his authorial status and how it is permitted to haunt the

theatrical event. In so doing I confess that I make no attempts to present a comprehensive history of Hamlet in performance. Such a task is beyond the remit of a single essay. However, the present project is offered to the reader to be accepted as a provocation to inspire further thought rather than to be received as an end in itself. I must further stress that my study consciously recognises its limitations, and for this reason I have confined my focus to a study of productions of Hamlet on the English stage. This is not to disparage future considerations of the representation of the Ghost on more international stages and in wider global contexts.

The Elizabethan stage ghost had its roots in the classical drama of Aeschylus, Euripides and Seneca wherein we meet the 'revenge-ghosts' who would have such an impact upon the function of the stage ghosts in the English Renaissance and the Senecan influence can be seen in the vengeful ghosts of Don Andrea in Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy (1587) and Andrugio in John Marston's Antonio's Revenge (1599-1600).[11] The Ghost of Hamlet (1599), however, in(corp)orated (if readers will allow the pun) the Senecan tradition as well as drawing upon medieval and popular folklore that surrounded the appearance of supernatural spectres.

The Ghost of Hamlet's father has attracted much recent critical attention. Stephen Greenblatt's Hamlet in Purgatory led the way, providing a historicist account of the lore and belief systems that surrounded the existence and post-Reformation eradication of Purgatory and its impact upon Shakespeare's play in the sixteenth century whilst other studies from Stanley Wells (1991), Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass (2000) and R. A. Foakes (2005) have explored the staging and costuming of the Ghost and the impact upon the reception of the play in performance. The post-Reformation conflicts between the dominant Protestant hegemony and the residual beliefs in ghosts from the outlawed Catholicism created an emergent sense of ambiguity as to what such spirit actually were. Whilst Catholic doctrine offered the explanation that the ghost was a spirit of the dead, temporarily released from the confines of Purgatory where it would burn in fires until all sin had been cleansed away to eventually permit the purified soul to enter into heaven, the Protestant faith, conscientiously striving to expose the fallacy of the Catholic Church by rendering the existence of Purgatory a mere fabrication and yet unable to discredit the appearance of such supernatural apparitions altogether, explained spectres as the Protestant Louis Lavater asserted, 'not as the souls of the dead as some men have thought', but 'either good or evil Angels' (cited in Moorman, 1906, 199). The exact nature of the Ghost remains uncertain and even Hamlet himself questions whether the Ghost is really his father's spirit, suffering in the fires of Purgatorial torment, 'a spirit of health or goblin damned'(1.3.21). The appearance of the Ghost in Hamlet was tuning into contemporary and acutely conscious belief systems through an anxiety towards what the ghost represented – the possibility of life beyond the grave, thereby feeding into what Greenblatt has called the 'cult of fear' (2001, 68): a consciousness or even subconscious concern that despite Protestant reassurances, a place called Purgatory might exist after all. Even if the Protestant thought systems prevailed over the suppressed Catholic beliefs and the spirit could be explained as a demon, this could not diminish the fear

of hell and devilish tricks, and the Ghost would serve as a reminder of the devastating havoc that such spirits could wreak amongst the living, as witnessed by the eight characters who meet their grisly demises during the course of the play. The appearance of the Ghost of Old Hamlet is ambiguous. In any case, whatever the Ghost was, its appearance in Hamlet would have provoked questions about how the audience should negotiate the existence of the supernatural in Elizabethan England. The ghost was a residual component of belief traditions in England, and it was still negotiating its position within that culture. It is perhaps in this context appropriate to perceive the appearance of the Ghost of Old Hamlet as a method of attempting to control it. Whether or not the audience would have been genuinely frightened by the spectre and what it represented, the act of translating the spiritual unknown onto the material actor's body was certainly a way of drawing explicit attention to the conscious artifice of the representation as the staged ghost became a figure of spectacle – and an exhibition of overt theatricality – sometimes to crude effect, and the Induction to the anonymous play, A Warning for Fair Women (c.1599), draws attention to the mockery that was levelled at the stage ghost's transparent theatricality and opaque materiality. As the personified figure of Comedy mocks the formulaic conventions of her tragic counterpart, she taunts:

> Then, too, a filthy whining ghost,
> Lapt in some foul sheet or a leather pilch,
> Comes screaming like a pig half sticked,
> And cries, 'Vindicta! Revenge! Revenge'!
> With that a little rosin flaseth forth,
> Like smoke out of a tobacco pipe or a boy's squib.
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> <div align="right">(Cited in Moorman, 1906, 94)</div>

According to this derisive description, the staged ghost, dressed in 'some foul sheet or a leather pilch', and accompanied by a stagy effect of smoke squibs, is described in explicitly material terms that sacrifice its mystery and represent it as very much a figure of the playhouse.

Another play written at the turn of the century, Cyril Tourneur's The Atheist's Tragedy (1609), also alludes to the materiality of ghosts and the crude artifice of their representations as the character Languebeau Snuff seeks to assume a ghostly disguise as he 'pulls out a sheet, a hair [wig] and a beard' (4.3.55). According to Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, by drawing attention to the clothing and material culture of the representations of ghosts the stage sacrifices the ethereal mystery of the apparition:

> The most prominent feature of Renaissance ghosts is precisely their gross materiality. They appear to us conspicuously clothed. Not only are they clothed, but after they leave the stage, their clothes, having a vulgar material value are carefully stored away or resold. The inventory of the Admiral's men taken in 1598 thus records 'j payer of yellow cotton sleves, j gostes sewt, and j gostes bodeyes' as well as 'j gostes crown.' Ghosts' clothes are just as substantial and recordable as yellow cotton sleeves, although we are left in the dark as to what their

materials or colours were. Ghosts as much as living persons, required suits or bodices.

<div align="right">(2000, 248)</div>

The materiality of the ghost's garments serves as a reminder that behind the spectral vision is a material, living human body, and that potently the ghost, for it to appear as a representation relies upon this materiality for its very stage existence. Whilst the materiality of the stage ghost spectacle became the subject of parody and laughter for some, other playwrights sought to exploit its theatricality, drawing attention to this self-conscious theatricality by using it as a meta-theatrical device such as a prologue or even a chorus like the Ghost of Don Andrea in Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, the Ghost of Will Summers, Henry VIII's court jester who was revived from the dead in Thomas Nashe's Summer's Last Will and Testament (1592-3), Machevil in Christopher Marlowe's The Jew of Malta (1589), and later John Gower in Shakespeare's Pericles (c.1606-7). In Nashe's play particularly, there is no attempt to conceal the materiality of the stage performer – the very much living human player who comes to represent the Ghost of Summers, and the performer enters 'in his fooles coat but halfe on', (Nashe, 1905, Vol 3., 233), demonstrating how the ghostly representation was subject to very material apparatus. By sharing the construction of the representation with the audience, the performer who plays Summers and even Nashe the playwright who has designed the play to accommodate such allusions to the artifice of the representation, share a wink with the audience and invite them to participate in the game of make-believe and the creation of the ghost.

The Ghost of Don Andrea in Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy is another interesting example. Brought back to life as a meta-theatrical prologue and chorus, Don Andrea along with the allegorical figura of Revenge, mediates between audience and dramatic narrative. However, whilst the ghost here is very much Senecan in origin, the representation also embraced a popular tradition that departed from the humanist snobbery that censured the materiality of the body in performance and what the playwright Joseph Hall, in his Virgidemiarum (1597-8), disdainfully called the actor's 'self-resembled show' (the blatant self-conscious display of the performer and his personality that overwhelmed the dramatic representation of the role that he was playing (1.3.44)). Instead, as Robert Weimann says of the prologue to Kyd's play,

> …the author's pen guided the actor's voice to a 'thund'ring' display of signifying sound and fury. For the products of the pen fully to goad the voice and body of the actor stipulated a reverse movement whereby the author's pen in actor's voice had to be supplemented by, simultaneously, the actor's voice infusing the writing of the dramatist. In other words, whatever reservations the humanistically educated playwright might have entertained vis-á-vis Robert Greene called 'puppets', vulgar 'grooms', and mere 'antics', the liaison of writing and performing in the late 1580s and early 1590s, for all its potential of friction and conflict, amounted to more than just a temporizing,

makeshift alliance.   (Bruster and
Weimann, 2004, 86)

Although the Ghost of Old Hamlet does not appear as a prologue or choric device, and unlike Will Summers, Don Andrea, Gower and Machevil, it appears as part of, not external to, the dramatic narrative of the plot, Hamlet's Ghost too is forced to embrace its own theatrical materiality. Clad in heavy and therefore noisy armour (as R. A. Foakes points out, Hamlet's Ghost is unique in its appearance 'armed at all points exactly' (1.2.200)), the Ghost is consciously fettered by the tangible conditions of its stage representation. Moreover the Ghost would have been consciously subjected to the temporal and spatial laws of physics and the materiality of the Globe playhouse itself. For example, after creating a mysterious spectacle in Act One, Scene Five, the Ghost seems to disappear from the stage, only to be heard from beneath the stage in the cellarage moments later. The Ghost could not be literally 'hic et ubique' (1.5.158) as Hamlet would have it, but instead was very firmly positioned 'under the stage', in a physical location that would allow for the sensation that the Ghost's disembodied presence (reduced here to the sound of its verbal incantation, 'Swear') could shift from one space to another. As Rosalind Jones and Stallybrass infer, '[w]e would note…that the haunting of ghosts emerges as part of a theatrical apparatus. That is, it is manifestly contrived: it requires the costumes, the trapdoors, the special effects of the new professional theatre' (2000, 261). Moreover, Lisa Gaughan has even suggested that the 'joust[ing]' that takes place between Hamlet and the Ghost in this episode is part of a 'structured joke' (2004, 32, 36) which hinges upon the recognition that, as Lars Kaaber asserts, the Ghost is a 'mere actor shouting his lines from under the stage' (2003, 51) and that because he is realised as a 'mere actor', he has been made more 'real' in the process (Gaughan, 2004, 37). Both Gaughan and Kaaber convincingly argue that the scene may manifest a comic impulse as despite Hamlet's very real onstage presence, 'it is the ghost who holds the physical space, despite its lack of onstage presence' and that, '[h]e forces Hamlet to move, to attempt to escape the ghost who is 'here and everywhere'' and that 'the comedy then lies in this incongruous battle between command of a physical space and command of a verbal space' (Gaughan, 2004, 38). The joke only works, suffice to say, if both actor and ghost embrace a playfulness with the material space of the playhouse and their physical position within it.

The association between ghosts and such self-conscious theatricality became so familiar that John Gee, a steadfast Protestant of the day described in his New Shreds of an Old Snare (1624) an attempt of a group of Jesuits to capitalise on the impact of ghost-lore, turning 'heavenly and holy things' into 'theatrical and fabulous tricks'. Gee relates tales of the attempts the group initiated to convert impressionable young Protestant girls to Catholicism. To each of the young women, a pale '[w]oman all in white' would appear claiming to be either a spirit from Purgatory or a Saint from Heaven, warning the young woman that in order to avoid the torments of Purgatory, she must either join a nunnery or make a substantial donation to the Catholic Church. Gee sardonically suggests that 'the Jesuites being or having Actors of such dexteritie' should form a theatrical company (cited In Rosalind Jones and

Stallybrass, 2000, 261). However, his most pressing complaint is that in commanding their fair spectators to pay such a substantial sum to the Catholic Church for staging such spectacles, 'that they make their spectators pay too deare for their income' and that for a mere penny 'Representations and apparitions from the dead might be seen far cheaper at other Playhouses' (cited in Greenblatt, 2001, 256). Having cited the above instance, Greenblatt ventures, 'as Gee perceives, the space of Purgatory becomes the space of the stage where Old Hamlet's Ghost is doomed for a certain term to walk the night' (2001, 257). Consequently, according to Greenblatt's argument, the ghost, like other elusive characters of Shakespeare's plays becomes a figure of the theatre, wholly dependent upon its possession over the material body of the actor, an immaterial sign of character in performance, doomed by the theatrical imagination to haunt the stage and only freed from the tortuous fires by the applause of the audience. Moreover, Gee's complaint can certainly be used to demonstrate the significance of the explicit theatricality of ghosts and, moreover, the liminal status that the representation of the ghost offered in terms of negotiating the presence of authorship in performance.

The ghost's dependence upon its material body reveals a paradox in which the spectral absence of one who would direct the story depends upon the material human actor to perform its will. This paradox reflects a relationship reminiscent of that between playwright (the invisible and disembodied authority) who requires the material, living bodies of the playhouse performers to bring the ghosts (as well as all of the other fictional creations) to life, to speak his words and perform his prescribed course of action. The Ghost of Hamlet represents a fusion between what Weimann, appropriating a line from Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, calls 'author's pen and actor's voice' (Prologue.24; Weimann 2000) wherein Shakespeare's authorship embraced the materiality of its theatrical production and reproduction. A shareholder in the newly erected Globe theatre in which Hamlet was most likely amongst the first of various new plays to be performed, Shakespeare could not be an autonomous author, detached from and disinterested in the act of performance. The ghost offers a paradox: although, through its appropriation of the Senecan tradition, it was inspired by humanist writers that sought to deny the 'self-resembled show' of the performer's material body, the Ghost in Hamlet, like Don Andrea, embraces that very materiality to form what Weimann that 'makeshift alliance between author's pen and actor's voice'; as 'the authority of the word' was matched with 'the sensuous impact and validity of its bodily delivery' (Bruster and Weimann, 2004, 60). The Ghost of Old Hamlet demonstrates a hybridism between neoclassical tradition, folklore, and popular culture, as well as a fusion between theatrical and literary cultures. The Ghost/Shakespeare authorizes the story but is also wholly dependent upon the actors in his drama to assign authority to his words and drive the action forward to its corporate conclusion and the Ghost of Hamlet demonstrates the play's nexus of literary and theatrical cultures, neoclassical and popular cultures as both spectre and spectacle, creator and creation, an absent revenant and an explicitly theatrical device dependent upon the material and living body of the performer and the material conditions of theatrical production to enflesh the absent and rouse those who perform its work to the 'name of action' (Hamlet 3.2.90).[2]

It may then, if there was any truth behind Rowe's speculation, have been particularly appropriate if Shakespeare had performed the role of the Ghost of Old Hamlet in the original performances. As a playwright, performer and shareholder in the new Globe theatre, he was very much a man immersed within these two traditions, and to appear as both absent author and present performer to communicate the corporal reality of the Ghost's presence in the original performances of the play would have been entirely apposite.

Sixty years later, on the Restoration stage, it was, perversely, the very materiality of the stage ghost that proved problematic and clumsy in performance. John Evelyn in 1661 commented, 'I saw Hamlet Pr: of Denmark played, but now the old playe began to disgust this refined age,' (cited in Dobson, 1995, 28), and in Nicholas Rowe's 1709 frontispiece to the play, that is purportedly a contemporary depiction of Thomas Betterton's performance of Hamlet in which the Ghost appears in Gertrude's closet, the Ghost appears to be crude and awkward in its stiff, antiquated armour of a bygone age. Potently, such embarrassment regarding the materiality of the performer's body further reflects the corpus of Shakespeare's works. Although Shakespeare's genius was appreciated, there was a sense that his work had suffered from the influence of a more uncouth age and prominent figures such as Dryden and Davenant set out on a mission to rescue Shakespeare's natural genius from the barbarity of its historical moment of production, as the poet and dramatist Richard Flecknoe ruminated, 'as another [said] of Shakespeare's writings, 'twas a fine Garden, but it wanted weeding' (cited in Dobson, 1995, 31).

Henceforth the Shakespeare that appears as a ghostly prologue to introduce Dryden's revision of Troilus and Cressida (1679), in which Dobson observes, 'Shakespeare has metamorphosed into a contemporary Old Hamlet, a royal ghost…impatient with the feeble efforts of his heirs' (1995, 74), is conscious of the 'barbarity' of the Elizabethan age. However, although the ghost potently replaces Shakespeare's own prologue to the play in which a figure appears, clad in armour (like the Ghost of Old Hamlet), and humbly proclaims, 'hither am I come,/A prologue armed, but not in confidence of author's pen or actor's voice' (Prologue.23-4), this ghostly prologue is assuredly confident of his authorial status:

Prologue (spoken by Betterton)

SEE, my lov'd Britons, see your Shakespeare rise,
An awfull ghost confess'd to human eyes!
Unnam'd, methinks, distinguish'd I had been
From other shades, by this eternal green,
About whose wreaths the vulgar Poets strive,
And with a touch, their wither'd Bays revive.
Untaught, unpractis'd, in a barbarous Age,
I found not, but created first the Stage.
And, if I drained no Greek or Latin store,
'Twas, that my own abundance gave me more.

On foreign trade I needed not rely
Like fruitful Britain, rich without supply.
In this my rough-drawn Play, you shall behold
Some Master-strokes, so many and so bold
That he, who meant to alter, found 'em such
He shook; and thought it Sacriledge to touch.
Now, where are the Successours to my name?
What bring they out to fill a Poets fame?
Weak, short-liv'd issues of a feeble Age;
Scarce living to be Christen'd on the Stage!

<div align="right">(Cited in Dobson, 1995, 74)</div>

To place the ghost of Shakespeare in the position of the prologue, a liminal and uncanny figure to occupy the inception between audience and play rather like the poet Gower in his own play, Pericles, or Machevil in Marlowe's The Jew of Malta, complicates the representation of Shakespeare's ghostly authority here. Douglas Bruster, in his exploration of the theatrical function of the early modern prologue, asserts that the prologue shared the characteristics of an 'usher' – with the characteristics of a 'go-between' and one that experienced a 'paradoxical relationship to power…vested with a kind of authority, yet an authority that was not simply a given' and that 'the early modern prologue could be – and often was – alternately deferential and commanding' (Bruster and Weimann, 2004, 32, 33). The early modern prologue was reliant upon the audience's goodwill, attention and patronage, but was similarly responsible for leading their engagement with and attention towards the play. A similar kind of authority surrounded the authority of the prologue figure on the Restoration stage. Whilst appealing to the audience's good-will, the Restoration prologue was often similarly rude, offensive and provocative towards its audience – surely the measure of a coterie audience in which such jibes were presumably intended and received with amity. It is, presumably, in this spirit that the ghost's haughty arrogance is to be taken, as he disclaims the artistic endeavours of those who would promote his work through their own appropriations and adaptations to brazenly assume that the audience will unreservedly embrace their ownership over 'their Shakespeare'. Furthermore, although the Ghost of Shakespeare materializes as the prologue here, and in doing so materially embodies the actor's body as a device that conventionally embraced its theatricality as a mediation between 'author's pen and actor's voice', (and in so doing, demonstrates the polyphonic status of Shakespeare's authorship and the extent to which literary authority depends upon revision, adaptations, actors, editors, and performance culture to bring it to life), this Ghost of Shakespeare fails to embrace this polyphony and whilst his authorship is still ostensibly dependent upon its material stage production, it revels in the glory of having been solely-attributed with the creation of the English stage. Paradoxically, whilst the Ghost of Shakespeare is summoned on to the stage through a polyphonic appropriation of his work and a dependency upon the materiality of his literary authorship upon its alliance with actor's voice, craft-man's theatre, and entrepreneurial management, he simultaneously manifests an autonomy and a conceit that discounts the roles of many actors, craftsmen, playwrights and entrepreneurs like John Brayne, the Burbages and Phillip Henslowe in the creation of the theatre. Thus begins

a divide between the mystical spirit of Shakespeare's sovereign authorship and his material body of the plays' theatrical production. It is painfully ironic that this parting of the body and soul should be made manifest in the words of an actor performing the ghost of Shakespeare's authorship before the audience are bound to watch Dryden's adaptation of Troilus and Cressida in performance – itself the product of an alliance between authors' pens and actors' voices.

This was certainly not the last time that Shakespeare would appear as a prologue to his plays. The practice continued into the early eighteenth century, and as Dobson observes, the mystification of Shakespeare's authorship and its autonomy from both the era and apparatus of its material production, was supplemented by a segregation of the 'soul' of the plays from their material bodily elements: '[r]evived in prologues as a disembodied author, Shakespeare, from the Glorious Revolution through the 1730s, is rewritten as such, his plays increasingly purged of their grosser, fleshlier comic details as he becomes a proper, and proprietary, Augustan author' (1995, 13-4). Those scenes containing clowns and their scatological and crude wordplay and rough and tumble routines were interred to free the plays from any embarrassing concerns with the corporal world and what Bakhtin refers to as 'grotesque realism' (1984). Similarly, a number of details about Shakespeare's life and his flawed humanity that cut against the direction of his canonisation were also proving embarrassing, as Margreta de Grazia notes; apocryphal tales of Shakespeare's deer-stealing and philandering provoked 'a certain unease about his particular bent of genius: its unruliness, or, in the terms repeated in commentary of this period, his "extravagance" and "licentiousness" (1991, 75-7; cited in Dobson, 1995, 117). In order to deify Shakespeare and his works, the canonisation process depended upon the spiritualization and mystification of the soul of Shakespeare's works, cleansed of the sins of the material body and Shakespeare's ghost, like that of Old Hamlet, was condemned to purge away the sins of the flesh before it could ascend to the celestial heights, worthy of its idolisation. Henceforth, the analogy between Shakespeare and the Ghost of Old Hamlet was entirely pertinent and it is possible to trace a distinct alignment between the contemporary representations of Shakespeare and Old Hamlet, as both were purged of their coarse humanity and gross materiality.

Rosalind Jones and Stallybrass assert, 'as the materiality of ghosts' clothes became embarrassing, so too did the materiality of stage ghosts' (2000, 245). In a display of self-promotion and self-indulgence indicative of the various dramatists of the age who used their reactions to Shakespeare's works (their adapted texts), in order to draw attention away from the crass materiality of the Elizabethan ghost, some of the actors in the late seventeenth, eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries would over-compensate through their reactions of Hamlet towards the spectre. When Thomas Betterton, for example, played the Danish prince in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, there were some critics who lauded his performance of terror on encountering the Ghost, as one description illustrates,

I have lately been told, by a gentleman who has frequently seen Betterton perform Hamlet, that he observed his countenance, which was naturally ruddy and sanguine, in the scene of the third act where his father's ghost appears, through the violent and sudden emotion of amazement and horror, turn, instantly, on the sight of his father's spirit, as pale as his neckcloth; when his whole body seemed to be affected with a tremor inexpressible; so that, had his father's ghost actually risen before him, he could not have been seized with more real agonies. And this was felt so strongly by the audience, that the blood seemed to shudder in their veins likewise; and they, in some measure, partook of the astonishment and horror with which they saw this excellent actor affected.

(Davies, Dramatic Miscellanies, cited in Salgādo, 1975, 236)

This spectacle of awe was so potent that Barton Booth, the actor who played the ghost to Betterton's Hamlet was recorded to have claimed, 'instead of my awing him, he terrified me' (cited in Foakes, 2005, 40). Even David Garrick, that spiritual son of Shakespeare, in a famous painting of his performance as Hamlet and his literally hair-raising encounter with the Ghost (Garrick would wear a specially designed wig that employed the use of hydraulics to create the impression that Hamlet's hair was literally standing up on end with terror), denies material presence to the spirit and instead he dominates the entire focus of the painting with his own reaction to the spectre – a vision that the spectator is forced to imagine to be so alarming that it warrants Garrick's expression of horror (see Foakes, 2005, 40 and Holland, 2001, 72).

Moreover, the staging of Hamlet's reactions in the ghost scenes became formulaic, contrived and rigidly controlled by prescription, so much so that any actor who was brave enough to take on the role of Hamlet was constantly in peril of being meticulously compared with the last celebrated performer to play the role. The focus was now firmly on the performer who reacted to the Ghost rather than the Ghost itself. If a performer challenged the convention, the success of the risk that he took was measured by the audience's applause as acceptance, as one description of John Phillip Kemble's 1783 performance of Hamlet attests:

Having drawn his sword, to menace the friends who prevented him from following the Ghost, every Hamlet before Mr. Kemble presented the point to the phantom as he followed him to the removed ground. Kemble, having drawn it on his friends, retained it in his right hand, but turned his left towards the spirit, and drooped the weapon after him – a change both tasteful and judicious…The kneeling at the descent of the Ghost was censured as a trick. I suppose merely because it had not been done before: but it suitably marked the filial reverence of Hamlet, and the solemnity of the engagement he had contracted. Henderson [another actor of the day] saw it, and adopted it immediately, - I remember he was applauded for doing so.

(Boaden, Life of J. P. Kemble, cited in Salgādo, 1975, 242)

Kemble's reaction to the ghost, although seemingly organic in departing from convention also encouraged a startling degree of conservatism, subjected to mechanical reproduction, a tendency encouraged by the austere, controlled and formulaic delivery of the movements:

> Hamlet's requisite 'start' upon first catching sight of the Ghost was, in Kemble's interpretation, a model of boldly conceived yet classically harmonious movement. Gilbert Austin's Chironomia; Or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery (1806), which outlines a system of 'notation for gesture', observes (p.421) that at this moment Kemble moved suddenly into the strong position
> Bvhf
> St. Li. X
> i.e., he stretched both hands horizontally forward, with the palms vertical, the fingers pointing upwards (Bvhf); he started (st.); and his left foot was advanced, his weight clearly on his right, and his feet apart (Li. X).
>
> (Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, 1975, 118)

The studied movements suggest a denial of the actor's individual emotional consciousness in performance and the formulaic approach to the presentation of the scene would no doubt have encouraged subsequent actors to follow suit. However, as the reaction of Hamlet became more and more mechanical and prescriptive in terms of the actor's material and corporal display, the materiality of the Ghost, as Rosalind Jones and Stallybrass assert, became a source of derisive mockery as George Cruikshank's 1844 drawing of the ghost illustrates. Entitled 'Alas, poor Ghost!' to spoof Hamlet's pity for the spirit, the sketch inspires a mock-sympathy for the wretched actor who is rising from a trapdoor on to the stage. Whilst above the surface of the stage he looks an awe-inspiring vision of dignified consternation, underneath the stage, we see several gentlemen using long rods to whip and tickle the performer. Apparently, Cruikshank's sketch was inspired by a similar incident that actually happened (see Foakes, 2005, 40). A further example of the embarrassing materiality of the stage ghosts is provided in Charles Dickens's Great Expectations (1860-1861) wherein the protagonist Pip watches a production of Shakespeare's play in which the Ghost of Old Hamlet is played by an actor suffering from a persistent cough and one who entered armed with a 'ghostly manuscript round its truncheon, to which it had the appearance of occasionally referring, and that, too, with an air of anxiety and a tendency to lose the place of reference which were suggestive of a state of mortality' (cited in Rosalind Jones and Stallybrass, 2000, 245). Rosalind Jones and Stallybrass who cite this particular episode, comment,

> It is particularly absurd that the Ghost should not have properly memorized his lines because a spirit should be beyond the vulgar materialities of theatricality itself. Dickens's ghost, as if not embarrassed enough at having to appear at all, brings with him an all-too-material cough. And the Ghost whose fixed command is

"Remember me" is in fact an actor who cannot remember his
lines.   (2000, 245-6)

The stage ghost in Hamlet was another casualty of Bardolatry, who, like its authorial creator should apparently be above and beyond the vulgar materiality that brings disgrace to their spiritual essence (appositely, Dickens himself celebrated the benefits of the mystery shrouded over the material details of Shakespeare's life, and in a letter he lauded, '[i]t is a great comfort, to my way of thinking that so little is known concerning the poet. The life of Shakespeare is a fine mystery and I tremble every day lest something should turn up' (cited in Garber, 1987, 10-11). Moreover, the embarrassment attached to the material theatricality of the Ghost may even be seen as a much more general denigration directed towards the materiality of theatrical presentation when figures like Charles Lamb disparaged the staging of Shakespeare's tragedies to experience, claiming that their true power could only be realised in the reading of the play, not its theatrical performance. When the Ghost did appear on the stage, it was not, as Eleanor Prosser argues, 'the questionable spirit that had so terrified Betterton and Garrick' but a spirit that 'became transmuted by sentimentalism into an unquestioned spirit of health who aroused not horror but reverence…[that]…as a result the Ghost became a conscious bore' (1971, 247).

In the mid to late nineteenth century, the increasing sophistication in stage technology meant that the stage effects could be used to inject some mystery and excitement into the Ghost's appearance, and to represent the spiritual manifestation of the Ghost rather than the material presence of the actor himself (Foakes, 2005, 40-44). However, rather than adding to the mystery of the Ghost, this had the rather crude effect of making the representation of the Ghost appear even more theatrical, reducing its presence to an ostentatious trick of the light. R. A. Foakes muses that '[s]pectral innovations since the nineteenth century have tended to create an immense gap between old Hamlet the ghost and old Hamlet the father' (2005, 43), and that 'it seems we can have materiality or the supernatural, but not both convincingly at the same time…' (2005, 44). The same may be said of the play's author. Whilst a contemporary vogue for popular biographical literature that arose in the mid-nineteenth century (and has continued to the present day as evident in John Madden's 1998 film, Shakespeare in Love), attempted to restore Shakespeare's humanity by imagining his daily existence (see O'Sullivan (1987)), it simultaneously added to the Shakespeare myth by serving as a reminder of how little is actually known of Shakespeare's material life and consciously had to confess its fictional status. Shakespeare the actual, living, human had been forgotten – a sacrilege to the man who once placed the words 'Remember me' into the mouth of his Ghost and perhaps spoke them aloud to seventeenth century audiences. The nervousness that this negligence provoked led to the authorship controversy that erupted in the mid-nineteenth century wherein the identity of Shakespeare as writer of the corpus of work was suddenly open to question when the potential genius as it had derived from a lowly glove-maker's son was prime target for the sceptics (see Garber, 1987, 1-27). Shakespeare could apparently either be a supernatural genius or an 'ordinary' human – a common man, incapable of

such heights of glory. Worse still, perhaps, as these tricks of the light seem to provoke the question: was he ever really there at all? Was he merely a fictional spectre of the imagination or a mask to hide the real authorship of the plays?

Advancing into the twentieth century, and again, in apparent reaction to the vulgar materiality of the Ghost, there arose a performance paradigm of what Greenblatt refers to as 'an overwhelming emphasis on the psychological dimension, crowned by psychoanalytical readings of the play [which] has the odd effect of eliminating the Ghost as ghost, turning it into the prince's traumatic memory or alternatively, into a conventional piece of dispensable stage machinery' (2001, 229) and as Neil Forsyth hints, there has been a tendency to replace the supernatural with the psychological, and 'where the supernatural is suppressed, the rationale is obviously that the psychological has replaced the supernatural just as psychoanalysts have replaced priests' (2000, 290). John Barrymore's Hamlet in 1922, Richard Burton' s prince in 1964, and Nicoll Williamson's Hamlet in 1969, were all confounded by invisible ghosts, making it unclear whether the ghost is in fact an external phenomenological reality or a subjective figure that Hamlet's subconscious has created. Another such example is Richard Eyre's 1980 production in which Jonathan Pryce's representation of Hamlet suggested that he was actually possessed by the Ghost, and that, as Anthony Dawson asserts, '[n]o longer an objective, if ambiguous fact, he [the Ghost] became an inner torment speaking in a strange, distorted voice, which was wrenched out of Hamlet in the midst of extreme pain and violent retching' (1995, 163). However, the denial of the Ghost's visibility leaves its autonomous existence open to question and it is unclear whether Pryce's Hamlet was being involuntarily possessed by the 'greatness' of the spirit or had created it through his own imagination, like the actor himself. To this end, perhaps it is fair to surmise that the representation of Old Hamlet's Ghost on the stage has become indicative of the contrariness that belies our changeable relationship with Shakespeare himself as the past century has witnessed the devastating assault of critical theory (whether psychoanalytic, deconstructionist or poststructuralist) upon the life and the stability, the subjectivity and the existence of authorship. Furthermore, the subjective act of directorial, dramaturgical or the dramatist's interpretation and appropriation of the play demonstrably leads to a rewriting and revising of the play so that, as Dawson indicates, the original narrative of the play no longer makes sense, and 'what exactly Horatio and the others might have seen on the battlements, if anything, never became clear' (1995, 163). By denying the visibility of the Ghost's presence, and reducing its materiality to an act of Hamlet's 'performance', Eyre's production, like in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century endeavours of Dryden and Garrick, undertook a considerable effort to rewrite the text of Hamlet to accommodate his own directorial vision and perspective, rather than strictly adhering to the narrative prescribed by the semantics of the script and thereby, in this act of desecration, creating a polyphonic dialogue with the playwright who haunts the play. Other adaptations of the play such as Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildernstern Are Dead (1966) and Howard Barker's Gertrude (2002) in which the dramatists rewrite the play from the perspective of the more marginal or

marginalised figures, the Ghost seemingly disappears altogether, and the audience only witness the causality of the Ghost's appearance, not the Ghost itself.

To conclude: this essay has endeavoured to demonstrate how it is possible to align the representation of the Ghost in Hamlet with attitudes towards Shakespeare himself and his authorial presence. As Foakes complains, there is a problem with unifying the humanity of the Ghost with its supernaturalism – a problem that can appear to reflect our relationship with the play's authorial creator himself. The production choices regarding the Ghost's appearance are often predictable, and in order to honour the authorial text – the 'corpus of the author', directors are forced to adopt a conservative approach to the Ghost, employing tried and tested methods of dressing an actor in armour or spirit drapery or by presenting a showy trick of the light, or by denying the Ghost any material existence altogether. Such methods are often overly-exhausted and such easily forgettable ghosts are often in danger of appearing antiquated, inaccessible and remote from popular culture as well as popular belief systems, perhaps not unlike the author himself.

However, historicizing the play may have its virtues as Michael Boyd proved in 2004 wherein his production of Hamlet sought to explore the idea of Purgatory that so vehemently antagonised the Protestant belief system in the sixteenth century. Greg Hicks, the actor who played the ghost entered on to the stage through a pathway through the audience, created a striking figure, as one reviewer describes the sight:

> …Instead of the usual stern but fatherly figure, in the "fair and warlike form" of his living self, old Hamlet here hauls himself into the play as a bowed, deathly-white, half-naked spook, with hollow red sockets for eyes, scraping his broadsword along the ground to nerve-shatteringly ominous effect. He hawks up his speeches in an agonised vomit of vengefulness. That he seems to hail from an alien belief system as well as from another world is entirely deliberate.   (Paul Taylor, Independent, 29.7.04)

Drawn from descriptions and sixteenth century paintings that depicted the appearance of ghosts from Purgatory, Hicks's Ghost was a haunting creature. The fact that the Ghost is said to have departed from the 'usual stern but fatherly like figure' marks what Taylor perceives as the subversion of a tradition of the representation of the ghost. The alien belief system this ghost belonged to again seemed to place the familiar and dusty text of Hamlet within an unknown context. In an act of simultaneously historicising and rendering an alteric materiality to the ghost, Boyd had succeeded in creating a sense of the uncanny through the performance, forcing the audience to confront Shakespeare anew and to unsettle our ownership of Shakespeare, so that we, like Barnardo, search for a figure in the darkness, anticipating a familiar ghostly figure, and ask of the ludic shadows; 'Who's there?' (1.1.1).

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[1] See Moorman (1906).

[2] See Weimann (2000) on how the play itself raises questions about this dialectic between 'author's pen and actor's voice'.

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