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Bending one's eye on vacancy? Stage ghosts, Shakespeare and the question of visibility in English drama

Pierre Kapitaniak

Introduction

- 1 If the Ghost of *Hamlet* famously appears in 'such a questionable shape',¹ and even though its objective existence has been established in the first act of Shakespeare's tragedy, it is its very visibility that is questioned:

QUEEN. Alas, how is 't with you,
That you doe bend your eye on vacancie
And with th' incorporall air do hold discourse?
Foorth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
[...] Whereon doe you looke? [...]

HAMLET. Doe you see nothing there?

QUEEN. Nothing at all; yet all that is I see. (III.iv.115-32)

- 2 The Queen's insistence on the sense of seeing saturates the exchange, just as the resemblance of the apparition with the late king has in the opening scene.
- 3 The problem is not new. Medieval *exempla* often mention encounters with invisible ghosts, the most famous of such stories being recounted by the Dominican Jean Gobi in 1324. A week after her husband died, a widow from Alès started to hear a male voice, which she later identified with her late husband's.² The nocturnal context of most of such apparitions makes the problems of visibility even more preoccupying as the sense of vision is partly impaired by the absence of light. But if such doubts and questionings perfectly fit the textual medium, creating impressions of uncertainty in which lexical

games allow for a wide range of uncanny effects, the stage makes such effects much more difficult to create, especially in broad daylight.

Evolution of the ghost figure through the prism of visibility and corporality

- 4 There are 59 plays staging ghosts that survive from the period of activity of the London theatres between 1582 and 1642. If we include the variations on fake apparitions, the number reaches 75 plays.³ It is therefore safe to consider that the theatre ghost was a popular and quite frequent device on English stages. This contribution intends to scour the six decades of the English dramatic production between 1582 and 1642 through the prism of what is perhaps most questionable for a ghost – namely its tangibility or materiality and consequently why and how it may be seen.
- 5 On the one hand, theatre is a medium ‘through which the invisible makes itself visible’, to paraphrase Gabriela Dragnea Horvath.⁴ On the other hand, the etymology of many terms designating the apparitions of the dead are linked with seeing. Spectre derives from the Latin *spectrum*, or what is seen; phantom comes from the Greek φαντασμα meaning appearance, and is itself derived from φαίνειν or to show; umbra is Latin for shadow, that is the effect of obstructing light. And they all belong in the category of ‘vision’.
- 6 Yet this contribution will not tackle the transcendental invisible – that hidden content of dramatic art which is the essence of theatre, and which has been amply studied by François Lecercle and more recently by Yannick Tauliaut.⁵ Instead, I would like to focus on the more pragmatic ways of showing ghosts on stage, rather than investigating the realm of the ‘insensible théâtral’ (that which eludes the senses). For it seems to me that what works for Ibsen or Strindberg, does not necessarily work for early modern drama.
- 7 Despite the claim of the ghost of Malindo in John Stephens’s *Cynthia’s Revenge* (1613) – ‘My shadowed spirit walkes invisible’ (II.iii.50)⁶ – no spirit actually walks invisible on stage, since it takes an actor to play the ghost even if it is invisible to other characters. The only exception is the ghost speaking from under the stage such as appear in *Hamlet* and *Antonio’s Revenge*, but they are still visible in other scenes and it still takes an actor to speak their lines. Unlike different degrees of visibility examined by Daniel Sangsue in his study of 19th century literature, theatre only allows a binary code of representation: either the presence of an actor or the lack of it.⁷ In the absence of any further evidence, we have to accept that any stage direction mentioning a ghost implies the presence of an actor on the stage, whatever the modern staging practice of such plays may be. In other words, Renaissance drama does not allow for ghosts played by no actors at all. We may have invisible daggers of the mind, but ghosts always have their entrances.
- 8 The visibility of an apparition becomes a privileged way of addressing the question of representation on the Elizabethan (or for that matter any other) stage, as shown by some conventions that bring nuance to the initial binary. Indeed, to play on the ghost’s visibility requires a device or a code understood by the audience who have to recognize that the actor whom they see is not seen by other characters. There are three situations for an actor playing a ghost. (1) It may be visible to the audience alone without any interaction with the plot, by means of a prologue, a dumbshow – what we call a protatic ghost; in some cases, conventions are required when such a ghost assumes the role of a

spectator. (2) It may remain fully visible to all (audience and characters alike), being part of the plot, and has to be characterised accordingly so as to convey its ghostliness beside other characters who are alive. (3) It may be visible to the audience and to some characters in the plot, depending on its will to communicate with selected addressees; in the latter case, such selective visibility can be problematized to ponder upon the mechanisms of representation.

- 9 The order in which these three situations are presented corresponds to the evolution of the representing patterns in English Renaissance drama. Of course, such evolutions are not linear and those three patterns of visibility coexist more or less during the entire period. Yet they also correspond to three degrees of complexity in treating the ghostly presence on stage, as each requires a more elaborate pact with the audience.

Few interactions with demonology

- 10 One of the conclusions of my own research on theatre ghosts was that it would be wrong to seek too many correspondences with the learned theories developed by demonologists.⁸ Most demonological treatises devoted to ghosts follow the same outline, established by Ludwig Lavater in 1569,⁹ starting with establishing the reality of apparitions, then discriminating between good and bad visitors to conclude with the reasons for such phenomena to happen and what a good Christian should do. The angle privileged by those authors is linked to spiritual guidance, trying to discern good from bad spirits but also true apparitions from superstition (in the original sense that word had at the time), treating as secondary questions about corporality or visibility of such apparitions. The only exception to this pattern is found in Reginald Scot who throughout his essay on spirits appended to the famous *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584)¹⁰ discusses at length the reality and corporality of the phenomenon only to discard any such possibility and conclude that spirits are always either illusion or fraud. No doubt, Scot became the main influence among playwrights as his reflection neatly matches their own theatrical preoccupations. However, his impact remained an exception. To cut a long ghost story short, for demonologists illusion leads to the devil; for playwrights it is a handy metaphor for the theatre.
- 11 Of course, it is important to situate the dramatic figures in the broader context of enquiries about the physical nature of apparitions, especially as affected by the rise of reformed doctrines that rejected not only the return of purgatorial souls but also the corporality or materiality of the devil. Yet, all in all, most of the arguments in this debate remained inconclusive, as was their variety, ranging from tangible body to thickened air to incorporeality, all subject to the manipulation of the senses by the devil. Although the interiorised model of the protestant devil never totally took hold of popular folklore, the increased psychologisation of demonic temptation provided playwrights with new material to explore human emotions like fear or guilt.

Shakespeare as a common thread

- 12 There is a reason why Shakespeare is so often thought of when talking about ghosts. Although he does not always innovate, his treatment of ghosts seems to have left an unparalleled mark on the dramatic figure, rivalled only by Thomas Kyd. After all, of the 60 or so ghost plays, Shakespeare wrote 5 (or 6 if we include *Henry VIII*), which is more

than any other playwright of the period (Thomas Goffe coming second with 3).¹¹ This must, at the very least, denote a specific and even idiosyncratic interest in revenants.

- 13 Given Shakespeare's undeniable importance, I shall use his ghosts as landmarks in my overview of the six decades of ghost staging in England. I shall start with his early plays from the 1590s, which are mainly reworkings of extant material as far as ghost figures are concerned, where Shakespeare rather follows than sets a trend. At the turn of the century, *Hamlet* coincides with a turning point in the dramatic treatment of ghosts providing its most complex expression. As for the ghosts conceived after *Macbeth*, in his later plays, now as then, they do not seem to have met with comparable success, nor were they in keeping with the succeeding fashions on the Jacobean stage.

1. From Kyd's protatic ghost to early Shakespeare

Protatic ghosts

- 14 The first ghost ever to tread on an English stage is that of Don Andrea, in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, which most critics agree to date around 1587, though it might have been written as early as 1583.¹² Inspired by Seneca's *Thyestes*, the ghost of Andrea, accompanied by the allegorical figure of Revenge, serves as both prologue and chorus for the tragedy. It is vaguely possible that the infernal couple remained on stage for the entire duration of the play but the stage directions are too inconsistent to support conclusively such a claim.
- 15 *The Spanish Tragedy* was immediately successful and provided a model or inspiration for many plays including *Hamlet*. It set a fashion for ghosts and especially for protatic ghosts. Indeed, 13 other plays between 1588 and 1628 stage ghosts in prologues or separated dumb shows or interludes (like Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*).

Table 1. Senecan ghosts

1587	<i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	Thomas Kyd
1588	<i>The Misfortunes of Arthur</i>	Thomas Hughes
1589	<i>The Battle of Alcazar</i>	George Peele
1591	<i>The True Tragedy of Richard the Third</i>	
1600	<i>Alaham</i>	Fulke Greville
1600	<i>Grim the Collier of Croydon</i>	William Haughton
1601	<i>The Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants</i>	William Percy
1607	<i>The Alexandrian Tragedy</i>	William Alexander
1611	<i>Catiline His Conspiracy</i>	Ben Jonson
1611	<i>If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is in It</i>	Thomas Dekker
1613	<i>Cynthia's Revenge</i>	John Stephens
1625	<i>Fuimus Troes or the True Trojans</i>	Jasper Fisher
1627	<i>Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery</i>	Thomas Randolph
1628	<i>The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina Empress of Rome</i>	Thomas May

- 16 Some playwrights chose a classical subject like Ben Jonson for his *Catiline* or Thomas May for *The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina*, but many, following Kyd, preferred to accommodate such Senecan ghosts in contemporary plots, as Dekker's *If This Be Not a Good Play, The Devil Is in It*. Table 1 shows that such Senecan ghosts were not a majority (14 out of 59) and that they were more fashionable in the first half of our period (11 plays by 1613; only 3 between 1615 and 1642). In all those plays, the ghosts clearly appear to the audience alone, in scenes separated from the plot, existing on a different plane. Their metadramatic potential is used not for their deceased or immaterial status, but for their role as spectator or commentator, thus mirroring the audience.

Ghosts in flesh and blood

- 17 Just as the first English ghosts are Senecan, the first ghosts fully inscribed within the main plot are beings of flesh and blood, closer to folklore and ballads than to any literary or historical sources. In the case of George Peele's *The Old Wives Tale* (1590) and *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* (1591), the corporality of the ghosts that appear is beyond question since they physically interact with the living.
- 18 In *The Old Wives Tale*, Peele stages the ghost of Jack, who helps the knight Eumenides in his quest to thank him for providing for his burial.¹³ On the one hand, Jack retains his body (though unlike ballads featuring corporeal ghosts, there is no mention of its decay) and therefore his part does not play on the paradox of the actor performing a disincarnate figure. On the other hand, Peele is the first to play with a ghost's invisibility, although his treatment does not yet establish the convention of 'selective apparition'. Clearly, he is experimenting and his Jack is a flesh-and-blood fellow whose invisibility is problematic: for one may wonder how the audience is actually meant to perceive it. Jack's first appearance, pinching Eumenides, is hardly different from someone creeping from behind and nothing in Eumenides's reaction indicates that Jack is different from any other living character. As for the second occurrence, when Jack kills Sacrapant, it could go unnoticed were it not for the stage direction: '*Enter Jack invisible...*' (l.783).¹⁴ And if Jack is invisible, he is so to all characters (Sacrapant and Eumenides) and only the audience can see him. The major difference with protatic ghosts here is that Jack is visible to others in several scenes and that he physically interacts with characters despite being invisible. This, of course, requires a specific understanding from the audience, which is achieved here through Sacrapant's reaction: 'What hand inuades the head of Sacrapant?' (l.784). We may assume that the actor playing the conjuror added a corresponding body language, looking in all directions in order to convey such invisibility.
- 19 The following year another play staged a material ghost – *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* (1591). Despite the mention of W. S. on the front page, which led to the inclusion of the play into the Shakespearean canon in the *Third Folio* (1664),¹⁵ Robert Greene is currently the most favoured candidate for authorship.¹⁶ The play recounts the story of the legendary foundation of England by a group of Trojans led by Brutus, and the wars against Scythians led by his three sons: Locrine, king of the Britons, Camber and Albanact. The tragedy is Senecan in its structure, but the prologue and chorus are taken on by Ate, a goddess of mischief and folly, while the author incorporates the ghosts of Albanact and of Corineus into the plot. Most of the play is devoted to the Trojans trying to defend England against the Scythian invasion. At the end of Act II, after losing a battle, Albanact kills himself to avoid defeat in combat. In Acts III and IV, his ghost returns several times to haunt Humber, king of the Scythians, whose victory caused his death.
- 20 Here as well the use of visibility/invisibility is at the core of Albanact's apparitions. In Act III, scene ii/iii, his first visit goes unnoticed by other characters including Humber, and only the audience associates Humber's vision with the ghost's presence. At the end of the same Act, the ghost returns to curse Humber who, this time, sees and talks with him. The next apparition at Act IV, scene iii fully focuses on materiality and visibility. The ghost of Albanact appears to his enemy Humber and to Strumbo, a clown enrolled

in Locrine's army. The paths of these two characters randomly cross and the starving Humber threatens Strumbo into giving him 'meat'. The ghost physically assaults Strumbo to prevent him from feeding his enemy, so that the latter can die of starvation:

He makes as though he would give him some, and as he putteth out his hand, enter the Ghost of Albanact, and strikes him on the hand, and so Strumbo runs out, Humber following him. (IV.iii.84)

- 21 Here, it is not clear whether Strumbo actually sees Albanact, since there is no reaction or comment about the vision of a ghost, as the short scene is summed up in a stage direction like a dumbshow. Yet, whether visible or invisible, Albanact is undoubtedly a corporeal ghost since it is his blow on Strumbo's hand that makes the living characters leave the stage. The ghost of Albanact returns once more at the end of Act IV to relish on Humber's suicide after Humber '*Flings himself into the river.*' (IV.v.34).
- 22 The last Act introduces the ghost of Corineus, Brutus's loyal general, who serves as a second chorus, a typically Senecan ghost lamenting about his fate and calling for revenge. Corineus then stands aside to watch the denouement, most likely remaining on stage until the end of the play, not unlike Don Andrea. It is also the first ghost whose entrance is accompanied by '*thunder & lightning*' explicitly mentioned in the stage direction (V.v.0), which is surprising given that Corineus no longer interacts with the plot but witnesses it from outside.¹⁷ Who is supposed to hear the storm? Is it the audience alone, since at that moment no other character is present on stage?
- 23 What *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Locrine* have in common is the experimentation with ghostly figures by integrating them into the plot and therefore testing the interactions with the living characters such 'incorporation' allows. While Peele clearly draws on popular folklore staging a living, breathing ballad-like ghost, *Locrine* is the first play to offer the combination of a Senecan protatic *umbra* with a ghost inscribed in the plot with implications about its interactions with other characters articulated mainly along the criterion of visibility and materiality.

Dream ghosts

- 24 Whether Shakespeare actually revised *Locrine* in 1595 and was partly responsible for reshaping its ghost or not, when he set on writing *Richard III* around 1592,¹⁸ he already did so in the midst of a new fashion for ghosts on stage. His early art lies not so much in the sheer innovation as in perfecting others' less effective inventions. Indeed, his early plays featuring ghosts are improvements on less successful plays on the same subjects staged a few years earlier. *Richard III* closely follows the anonymous *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (1591), while *Julius Caesar* echoes the equally anonymous *Caesar and Pompey or the Tragedy of Caesar's Revenge* (1595).¹⁹
- 25 In the two plays, Shakespeare's treatment of the ghost motif does not reach the complexity of *Locrine*'s plot, but significantly transforms the initial apparitions. *The True Tragedy* starts with a prologue by 'the Ghoast of George Duke of Clarence' as the play's plot begins later than Shakespeare's. As in *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Locrine*, the ghost of Clarence is not the only protatic figure and is accompanied by the allegorical figures of Truth and Poetry that joke on their incorporeal status:

POETRIE. Truth well met.

TRUTH. Thankes Poetrie, what makes thou vpon a stage?

POETRIE. Shadowes.

TRUTH. Then will I adde bodies to the shadowes... ([Prol].3-6)

- 26 Later, the anonymous play's merit is to transpose 'a dreadful and terrible dreame' described by Raphael Holinshed in his chronicle and to turn the 'terrible divels'²⁰ (or 'raging fiends' ([sc.xiv].1264) as a first mention of the dream in the play has it) into 'ghoasts', though without representing them on stage. Indeed, Richard confides in Lovell a dream that haunts him with remorse:

Meethinkes their ghoasts comes gaping for reuenge,
Whom I haue slaine in reaching for a Crowne.
Clarence complaines, and crieth for revenge.
My Nephues bloods, Revenge, revenge, doth crie.
The headlesse Peeres comes pressing for revenge.
And every one cries, let the tyrant die. ([sc. xviii].1713-18)

- 27 Shakespeare's tour de force is to transform this dream vision beyond a simple stage device. Indeed, the scene becomes a reflection upon the nature of representation. By appearing not only to Richard but also to Richmond, the ghosts of Richard's victims can no longer be merely interpreted as a figment of the tyrant's imagination but are objectified for the audience through a shared dream that is as intriguing as the return of a trespassed soul. Conversely, as if to balance the addition of this scene, Shakespeare reduces the apparition of Clarence's ghost into a prophetic dream that Clarence tells his Keeper in the Tower in Act I, scene iv, just before being murdered.
- 28 The symmetrical relationship of the ghostly theme between the two plays may be additional evidence of the fact that Shakespeare worked with his predecessor's play in mind.
- 29 Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is seldom elaborated upon in studies about Shakespearean ghosts, and perhaps rightly so²¹. When one compares *Caesar's Revenge* with Shakespeare's version written several years later, little remains of the spectral motif developed in the anonymous play. Indeed, throughout Act III of *Caesar's Revenge*, proleptic allusions to Caesar's death are often formulated with spectral images and a scene is inserted in which a 'bonus genius' (III.ii.112) appears to Anthony to goad him into action. In the next Act, the ghost of Caesar first appears alone, addressing a long Andrea-like speech to the audience (IV.iii.1-45), before being joined by 'Anthony, at on dore, Octavian at another with Souldiers' (45). He then spends the rest of the scene talking them at length into uniting against the conspirators. As the accompanying soldiers remain silent, we have no clue as to whether they too see the ghost. In the last Act, the same ghost appears to a Brutus tormented with guilt and condemns him to hell after disclosing the manner of his forthcoming death. And in the final scene Caesar's ghost witnesses Brutus's suicide fulfilling his 'reuengfull thirst' (V.i.408). The Ghost is then accompanied to hell by the allegorical figure of Discord that has served as Prologue and Chorus throughout the play. Again, the inclusion of the ghost into the plot is reminiscent of *Lochrine's*, the innovation here consisting in the shift within the same scene from a Senecan ghost to an integrated one, thus abolishing the metadramatic divide.
- 30 Perhaps sensing that this plentiful display of ghostly apparitions might endanger the loftiness of the Roman tragedy, Shakespeare reduces Caesar's ghostly apparition to the original episodes in Plutarch's *Lives*, focusing the play on the moral and political aftermath of the assassination. Yet there seems to be an inconsistency between Act IV

where the Ghost of Caesar appears only once and the remark in Act V, where Brutus explicitly confides in Volumnius that:

The Ghost of Cæsar hath appear'd to me
Two seuerall times by Night: at Sardis, once;
And this last Night, here in Philippi fields: (V.v.17-19)²²

- 31 Earlier in the Act, the expected second apparition is replaced with Brutus's commentary on the ghost's haunting powers, but no stage direction mentions any apparition:

O Iulius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet,
Thy Spirit walkes abroad, and turnes our Swords
In our owne proper Entrailes. (V.iii.94-6)

- 32 The visibility and the reality of the ghost are not pretext for any questioning here as Shakespeare encourages the audience to interpret the ghost of Caesar as a mere dream vision in the absence of any other witness or of a second visible apparition. Yet at the same time, one may see *Hamlet's* rich reworking of the spectral figure anticipated in the lines Brutus addresses to the ghost:

Art thou some God, some Angell, or some Diuell,
That mak'st my blood cold, and my haire to stare?
Speake to me, what thou art. (IV.iii.277-9)

- 33 In *Julius Caesar*, though, Brutus's initial doubts will play no role in the development of the tragedy and even those doubts about the ghost's nature already echo a similar preoccupation in *Caesar's Revenge*:

Stay what so ere thou art, or fiend below,
Rays'd from the deepe by inchanters bloody call,
Or fury sent from Phlegitonticke flames,
Or from Cocytus for to end my life,
Be then Megera or Tysiphone,
Or of Eumenides ill boading crue. (V.i.153-8)

- 34 In both plays, Shakespeare draws away from the Senecan/Kydian tradition of protatic ghosts, which he does not seem to favour in his more realistic approach to the dramatic construction. He prefers dream ghosts²³ that are closer to the expression of the murderers' guilty conscience, than to allegorical figures of revenge, and whose reality he does not feel the need to ascertain. And eventually, in these two early plays, Shakespeare's treatment of ghosts does not yet out-Herod his contemporaries.

2. Exceptional Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and the spectral revolution

- 35 The case is altered the following year with the ghost of *Hamlet*, which immediately becomes a huge success. A pre-existing version of *Hamlet*, hypothesised by some critics,²⁴ makes it tempting to see a continuity in the rewriting pattern, which I have discussed for *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*. That there was an earlier play on Hamlet is attested by a remark in Thomas Lodge's *Wits Miserie* (1596): 'and looks as pale as the Visard of the ghost which cried so miserally at the Theator like an oister wife, Hamlet, revenge.'²⁵

An early Q1?

- 36 In recent years, a new theory has emerged about the status of the First Quarto of *Hamlet* published by Nicholas Ling in 1603. In 2014, Terri Bourus claimed that Q1 might actually be an early version of the play written by Shakespeare in the late 1580s.²⁶ Indeed, Q1 is advertised on its title page: 'As it hath beene diuerse times acted by his Highnesse seruants in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and else-where'. If the play was written and first performed in the late 1580s, the mention of the city of London could mean a revival before 1594 when theatres were banned from the City's jurisdiction, as well as later performances outside the City, most likely during plague outbursts that forced the company to travel around the country.²⁷ In her book, she starts by refuting the diverse piratical theories about Q1 and then shows the numerous personal and contextual ties to the story and the name of Hamlet that put together make Shakespeare the best candidate for authorship of the *Ur-Hamlet*, which she equates with the Q1.
- 37 Yet, however attractive Bourus's theory might sound, P. J. MacDonald has convincingly demonstrated that most of the passages identical between Q1 and Q2 (which includes the majority of ghost scenes) stylistically belong to the 1594–1604 period; and thus would be unlikely to have been written in the late 1580s.²⁸
- 38 Moreover, the popularity of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is deduced from the number of allusions to the ghostly figure in other plays. Yet all such allusions only start in 1602:
- Why comst thou in this sterne and horred shape?
Not in familiar sort as thou wast wont. (*The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, 1.32–3)²⁹
- 39 This matches a *Hamlet* text performed around 1600 rather than 1588. Yet, Dennis McCarthy has shown that there are several indisputable allusions to *Hamlet* in the controversy between Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey, spanning from 1589 to 1598.³⁰ The quoted phrases like 'to be and not to be' or allusions to the gravediggers' scene make it difficult not to think of Shakespeare, unless we assume that he copied his most famous soliloquy opening from an earlier version of the play. On the other hand, those four different allusions to *Hamlet* in the controversy do not concern the ghost, while it is one of the most stable elements between Q1 and Q2, as all the ghost scenes are already present in the first version.
- 40 The absence of allusions before 1600 is not decisive, for a quick survey of the same dramatic corpus reveals a similar absence of allusions to the other archetypal ghost play – *The Spanish Tragedy* – before John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, where the ghost of Andrugio echoes the distich of *Revenge* about sitting down to watch the play:
- Here will I sit, spectator of reuenge,
And glad my ghost in anguish of my foe (*Antonio's Revenge*, V.iii.54–5)
Heere sit we downe to see the misterie,
And serue for Chorus in this tragedie. (*The Spanish Tragedy*, I.i.90–1)
- 41 We are therefore left with two possibilities, if we accept the existence of an earlier version of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare to replace an *Ur-Hamlet* by Kyd or any other playwright: either it took the revival of ghost plays in the late 1590s to create a more general fashion for ghosts in the early seventeenth century, or Q1 might not be a truthful reflection of the early play by young Shakespeare but an intermediate state of the text, integrating several changes brought over the years, and bearing the traces of the London, Oxford and Cambridge performances. Q2 would then be a cleaner text

revised by Shakespeare around 1604 and meant expressly for print. But then, we find ourselves in a situation quite close to that of *Ur-Hamlet*, not knowing exactly what elements the initial version contained.

Debate about chronology between Marston and Shakespeare 1599–1601

- 42 To make things even more complicated, there has been an ongoing debate about the relationship and precedence of *Hamlet* and John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*.³¹ Three options have been put forward by the critics: the anteriority of *Hamlet*, the anteriority of *Antonio's Revenge* and an independent debt to *Ur-Hamlet* (whether by Kyd or by Shakespeare). It is the first option that is usually most favoured.³² The two plays display similarities that are sufficiently numerous to discard coincidence. Table 2 lists only those related to the spectral figures.

Table 2. Common features between *Hamlet* and *Antonio's Revenge*

	<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Antonio's Revenge</i>
Father appears to son	Old Hamlet => Hamlet	Andrugio => Antonio
Murdered by poison	Claudius has poisoned Old Hamlet (I.v)	Piero has poisoned Andrugio: 'I was impoyson'd by Piero's hand' (III.i, III.v)
Apparition early in the play	Ghost walks on battlements (I.i)	Antonio has a dream of ghosts: 'The other ghost assum'd my fathers shape' (I.iii)
Murderer covets the wife	Claudius marries Gertrude (I.ii)	Piero spends the whole play trying to seduce Maria
Winding sheet (not staged)	'Why thy canoniz'd bones hearsed in death / Have burst their cerements' (I.iv.26–7)	'Thy pangs of anguish rip my cerecloth up' (III.ii.32)
Verb stalk	'See it stalks away' (I.i.50) 'With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch' (I.i.66)	'Look, look where he stalks, wrapt vp in clouds of grief' (A&M II.i.255–72) 'whilst Signior Simile stalked most prodigiously' (I.ii.126)
Cellarage scene	'Ghost cries vnder the Stage: Swear' (I.v)	Ghosts of Andrugio and Felice: 'murder' - 'From above and beneath' (III.ii.124SD). Andrugio: 'From under the stage agroane' (III.ii.194SD)
Ghost visits his wife	Ghost appears in Gertrude's closet but only Hamlet sees it (III.iv)	'Maria draweth the courtaine: and the ghost of Andrugio is displayed, sitting on the bed.' (III.iii.58SD)

- 43 If some of those common traits are well integrated into the plots of both plays and are therefore inconclusive, others speak indeed in favour of *Hamlet's* precedence. Three main arguments may be singled out here.
- 44 The first one concerns the way the two playwrights anticipate and recount their ghosts' apparitions. Shakespeare has Horatio and the guards narrate their meeting with the ghost to Hamlet before he actually meets the ghost himself, while Marston introduces a dream featuring two unnamed ghosts, which are later to be recognized as Andrugio and Felice, when they appear on stage in Act III. If Andrugio is clearly mentioned as 'my fathers shape', Felice is described by Antonio as:

The on's breast seem'd fresh pauncht with bleeding wounds:
Whose bubling gore sprang in frightened eyes. (I.ii.107–8)

- 45 The audience has already seen his murderer Piero enter 'smeer'd in blood, a poniard in one hand bloodie' (I.i.0SD), so they could still think of Felice. But in Act III, scene ii, when Felice cries from beneath the stage, it would be very difficult for the audience to recognize the voice. The ghost is clearly identified in the text as '*Fel.*', but for a theatre audience this initial dream is all that enables to link Felice to the second ghost. This structural difficulty makes it more likely that *Hamlet* should have inspired *Antonio's Revenge*, rather than the other way round.
- 46 The second argument relates to the cellarage scene, which, some critics argued, must have been an element borrowed from the *Ur-Hamlet* because of its success.³³ I have shown elsewhere that the threefold oath may have been more likely inspired by a late mystery play *Balaack and Balaam*.³⁴ Of course, Shakespeare's cellarage scene is the most impressive treatment of the three, which Marston might have kept in mind when working on his own scene. Moreover, Marston's cellarage scene focuses on Antonio's sacrifice promising revenge, and the ghosts first cry 'murder', and only then Andrugio returns in the following scene to call for 'revenge' and urge Antonio to murder Piero's son. The structural coherence and unity of the scene is lost, and these elements may be viewed as a combination of *Hamlet's* cellarage scene for the location of the ghost and such plays as Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* or *The True Tragedy of Richard III* for the cries of 'Revenge' or 'Vindicta'. Additional evidence suggesting Marston's borrowing may be found a few years later in *The Malcontent*. Marston evidently echoes Shakespeare's scene by textually recycling several expressions about the ghost: 'Illo, ho, ho, ho, arte there olde true penny?' (III.i.127). Would he have done so, if he was the one to inspire Shakespeare for the cellarage scene?
- 47 My last argument to privilege *Hamlet's* anteriority is the parodic vein of *Antonio's Revenge*. The description of Antonio's dream is immediately followed by Balurdo's improvised parody transforming the ominous elements into a mix of Rabelaisian allusions and metalinguistic considerations.

Table 3. Balurdo's parody and Antonio's dream

Balurdo (I.ii.125–33)

Verely, sir Gefferey [=Balurdo] had a **monstrous strange dream** the **last night**. For mee thought I dreamt I was **asleepe**, and me thought the ground yaun'd and belkt up the abhominable **ghost** of a **mishapen** Simile, with **two ugly Pages**; the **one** called master, even as going before; and **the other** Mounser, even so following after; whil'st Signior **Simile** stalked most prodigiously in the midst. **At which** I bewrayed the fearefulnesse of my nature and being readie to **forsake the fortresse of my wit**, start up, called for a cleane shirt, eate a messe of broth, **and with that I awakt**.

Antonio (I.ii.103–24)

Last sleep, my sense was steep't in **horrid dreames**...

...when to my **slumbring powers**...

Two meager ghosts made apparition. **The on[e]'s** breast seem'd... **The other ghost assum'd my fathers shape**...

... **At which** my trembling joynts...

... **deluded by erroneous sense**...
At which, my nose straight bled:
Then doubl'd I my word, **so slunke to bed**.

- 48 Indeed, Balurdo is not content with the scatological wordplay between 'bewray' (reveal) and 'beray' (beshit), as 'a cleane shirt' suggests, replacing Antonio's 'cold sweate'. He further weaves an elaborate extended metaphor on 'Simile': 'Misshapen Simile'/'Signor Simile' comments on the fact that the ghost that 'assum'd' the shape of Andrugio ('my fathers shape') is also a dramatic metaphor for Antonio's conscience. 'Stalk' used here by Marston might also indicate a debt to Shakespeare, the only author in the period to have directly used the verb to describe the gait of a ghost on stage.
- 49 Marston had already reserved a similar treatment to a love scene in *Antonio and Mellida* where Balurdo and Antonio use the image of the ghost in a wooing scene. Such echoes suit the satiric nature of plays written for boys' companies, but also undermine the seriousness of their ghosts represented in such plays. In *Hamlet*, the cellarage scene also works as comic relief, except that Shakespeare makes fun of the ghost after exploiting and exhausting the dramatic potential of the figure in the first Act. On the contrary, Marston's parody precedes the actual apparition (and even anticipates it in *Antonio and Mellida*).³⁵
- 50 All these differences in the treatment of ghosts speak in favour of *Hamlet's* anteriority, as it makes more sense that a parodic version should follow a more tragic one, rather than the other way round. All the more so as *Hamlet* does not seem to be written with the war of the theatres in mind. One could argue that Hamlet famously alludes just to such children's companies or 'little eyases' in his discussion with the players (II.ii.337), but the allusion is inserted only in the Folio of 1623 and Roslyn Knutson suggested that it could refer to a later series of plays between 1604 and 1608.³⁶

Selective visibility

- 51 So what does really make the ghost of *Hamlet* an original figure? Shakespeare does not innovate in terms of materiality, visibility or inscription in the plot. By 1600, all these aspects have already been tested on London stages. He is not the first to have a ghost speak to other characters (cf. *Lochrine*); he is not the first to make it appear several times in the play (cf. *Lochrine* and *Caesar's Revenge*); he is not even the first to introduce selective visibility. Even if we overlook Jack's example in *The Old Wives' Tale*, at least one other play from the period³⁷ develops such a pattern and a source for Shakespeare, Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* printed in 1599:

*Enter Doctor Shaw pensively reading on his booke, after him followes the Ghost of Frier Anselme, with a lighted torch. (Part II, l. 2274)*³⁸

- 52 Their long exchange is interrupted by the arrival of a messenger who fails to notice the Friar's ghost:

Enter a messenger to Shaw.
 MES. Where is M. Doctor Shaw?
 SH. Here friend, what is thy will with me?
 ME. K. Richard praies ye to come to him strait,
 For he would be confest.
 SH. I cannot come, I pray thee take that Frier,
 For he can do it better farre then I.
 MES. A Fryer M. Doctor? I see none.
 SH. Doost thou not? no, thy vntainted soule
 Cannot discern the horrors that I do. (Part II, l. 2325–34)

- 53 Thus Heywood's precedent not only possibly provides Shakespeare with the idea of selective visibility, but also associates such (s)election with the moral state of the witness. The main difference is that Shakespeare reverses the logic of the selection in the 'closet scene' in *Hamlet*, as it is Gertrude's 'tainted' soul that prevents her from seeing an 'honest ghost.'

Discernment

- 54 Many critics have commented on how *Hamlet* is by far the most demonological play of all. I have tried to show elsewhere how being so demonological is actually an exception in the canon.³⁹ No play before *Hamlet* is concerned with establishing the moral status of the ghost, and this preoccupation actually becomes one of the traits that William Heminges imitates in Shakespeare's wake a quarter of a century later. In *The Jews' Tragedy* (1626),⁴⁰ the son of John Heminges, christened after his father's famous friend, elaborates upon Hamlet's famous tirade of discernment, which had been inspired by Lavater's pastoral treatise on ghosts:

Table 4. Hamlet's tirade of discernment and its elaboration in *The Jews' Tragedy*

<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>The Jews' Tragedy</i>
<p>Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd, Bring with thee ayres from heaven, of blasts from hell. Be thy intents wicked, or charitable, Thou com'st in such a questionable shape, That I will speake to thee, Ile call thee Hamlet, King, father, royall Dane, o answere mee (I.v) [<i>Horatio</i>. by heauen I charge thee speake. I.i.]</p>	<p>Be thou infernal feind confined here, To dwell in darkness for a thousand year, Or be thou some sad soul enfor't to dwell Within this place, till thou return to hell, Or be thou Goblin, Fairy Elf or Hag, Or Witch in shape of wolf that lov'st to drag Poor infants to the den; what ere thou be If thou have power to speak, I charge thee answer me (l. 1052–9)</p>

- 55 But even here, the need to categorise is very different from Shakespeare's, as it returns to the typical Senecan netherworld, opposing several kinds of hell, and not heaven and hell. Christian *discretio spirituum*⁴¹ thus remains proper to Shakespeare and does not popularise a new motif of the ghostly figure among later playwrights.

Armour and face

- 56 Visually, Shakespeare's most striking idea is to have his ghost appear 'Armed at poynt'. There has not been a ghost in armour before *Hamlet*, and the few authors who reproduce the garb later clearly echo Shakespeare's creation⁴². This is probably the reason why Shakespeare provides so many lines describing and mentioning the armour repeatedly. His 'faire and warlike forme' (Q2, I.i.47) first implies armour, which is instantly commented upon by Horatio after the ghost's first departure:

Such was the very Armor he had on,
When he the ambitious Norway combated (Q2, I.i.60-61)

- 57 It is then recalled by Barnardo who tries to interpret this 'armed' figure (I.i.112-13). In the next scene, the description is developed at length when Horatio and the guards recount their previous experience to Hamlet:

HOR. ... a figure like your father
Armed at poynt, exactly Capapea
Appeares before them [...]
HAM. Arm'd say you?
ALL. Arm'd my lord.
HAM. From top to toe?
ALL. My lord from head to foote.
HAM. Then sawe you not his face.
HOR. O yes my Lord, he wore his beaver up. [...]
HAM. My fathers spirit (in armes) all is not well (Q2, I.ii.199-257)

- 58 Like Barnardo, Hamlet cannot help interpret the armour as an ill omen, and when he finally addresses the ghost, he again mentions the armour as one reason for his doubts:

what may this meane
 That thou dead corse, againe in compleat steele
 Revisites thus the glimses of the Moone [...]
 Say why is this, wherefore, what should we doe? (Q2, I.iv.30–6)

- 59 So much insistence on the device betrays something unusual both in the play and in the English dramatic tradition. Even though the armoured spectre becomes quite famous, very few plays after *Hamlet* represent their ghosts in armour, preferring the usual paleness (achieved with the help of a little flour) and blood stains. In fact, if we except another of Shakespeare's ghosts in *Cymbeline* (to which I shall return below), only one play explicitly mentions a ghost 'in compleate armour, and with swords drawne' (*Fuimus Troes*, Prol.0).⁴³ William Heminges's *The Fatal Contract* (1639),⁴⁴ may also be mentioned here, for it offers a parodic re-enactment of an armoured ghost, which is a direct tribute to Shakespeare, amply elaborating on the text of *Hamlet*'s first two scenes:

QU[EEEN]. Thy brothers Ghost, young Clovis Ghost in armes
 Has thrice appear'd to me this dismall night [...]
 CLOT[AIR]. O see, it comes!
 QU. Fear it not, Son.
 CLOT. What art thou that usurp'st this dead of night,
 In metal like the age? why art thou sent
 To cast a horror on me? If thy soul
 Walks unreveng'd, and the grim Ferriman
 Deny thy passage, i'l perform thy rights. [*the Ghost points to his wounds.* (III.i.40–54)
 [...]
 CLOT. This is a damned spirit I have seen,
 And comes to work my ruine.
 EU. What spirit?
 CLOT. My Brothers spirit in Arms, I swear it came forth here
 Out of my Mothers Chamber as I knockt.
 EU. Was it in Armor said you?
 CLOT. Yes, in that Armor he was us'd to wear
 When we have run at Tilt, till our cleft Spaeres
 Have with their splinters scar'd the Element. (III.i.95–103)

- 60 Here the armour and nearly verbatim quotations clearly identify the ghost as *Hamlet*'s ghost, except it is not a ghost but the Queen's lover Landrey disguised with the armour of Clovis, murdered in the previous scene. Still, even two instances in a corpus of nearly sixty indicate that the feature never really caught on. Moreover, an anonymous play performed around 1659 seems to confirm that the armoured ghost never became a cliché:

these Spirits come from the Low Countries: and though at first sight very frightful,
 yet, appearing unarmed, they become less fearful (*Lady Alimony*, III.iv.27–30)⁴⁵

- 61 Because of the armour, we may also notice particular emphasis on the precise description of the ghost's face, which allows identification with the deceased King. This trait is also Shakespeare's innovation, unheard of on stages before *Hamlet*. On the one hand, it is in keeping with the discernment approach to the ghost's status; on the other hand, it is dictated by the fact that the ghost has no living antecedent in the plot. Unlike protatic ghosts who present themselves in the prologue, here the ghost's

identity is established by other characters and becomes in itself an important element of the plot.

- 62 This leads us to the third major innovation: the implication of the spectral figure in the laying out of the plot, as Hamlet's revenge first needs the ghost to be revealed and then its legitimacy depends on establishing the ghost's earnestness. Shakespeare delves into demonological lore to fuel his revenger's hesitation about the ghost's moral nature, which accounts for his delaying his actions. Similarly, Marston has Antonio 'flag' his revenge, though not for doubt, but for the sake of his love for Mellida (III.ii.170), and therefore unrelated to the ghost.
- 63 Just like Kyd's Don Andrea, Shakespeare's Old Hamlet quickly becomes an iconic figure for other playwrights to allude to or parody. Examining the later allusions to *Hamlet's* ghost, we may observe that it is not necessarily the most original traits of the figure that ensured its success, and that our perception of its popularity is biased by the subsequent history of the play's reception. Thus, for instance, the armour may have become emblematic thanks to Nicolas Rowe's famous illustrated edition of Shakespeare's works in 1709. For the author of the *Merry Devil of Edmonton*, as we have already seen, but also for Alexander Brome in *The Cunning Lovers* (1638), it was the resemblance with the living figure.⁴⁶ For Cyril Tourneur in *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1611), it was the 'haire stand[ing] almost an end' (IV.iii.65-66).⁴⁷ For John Fletcher in *The Woman's Prize* (1611), it was the cellarage scene.⁴⁸ Thomas Heywood in *The Captives* (1624) retains Horatio's call to the ghost to speak.⁴⁹ For William Sampson in *The Vow-Breaker* (1625), a play that combines allusions to many of Shakespeare's plays, it is the selective visibility and the beckoning ghost.⁵⁰
- 64 Consequently, it is the bulk of *Hamlet's* ghost – both in terms of scenes and of spoken lines – that can explain the fact that so many other authors think of *Hamlet* when wishing to quintessentialize the stage ghost. This success may also partly explain why the new elements like the armour or the discernment little affected the tradition of representing revenge ghosts with flour and winding sheets... They were too original and specific not to be recognized.

3. Mature Shakespeare: *Macbeth's* psychological ghost and after

- 65 The mature Shakespeare seems to have freed himself from the competitive output in producing a play of his own about *Macbeth* and breaking the rewriting pattern (which was still the case for *King Lear* the previous year, following on an anonymous *King Leir*).⁵¹ There is no earlier play about King MacBethad.

Macbeth's psychological ghost

- 66 After experimenting with a very complex ghost in *Hamlet*, in *Macbeth* Shakespeare returns to his all-time favourite: the psychological ghost triggered by guilt. In fact, this is one of the frequent explanations of spectral visions that demonologists acknowledge along demonic illusion and real visitations from beyond (when the authors are Catholics). After all, in 1588, the French Franciscan monk, Noël Taillepied, entitled his answer to Ludwig Lavater's treatise on ghosts *Psychologie ou Traité de l'apparition des*

esprits... thus setting a precedent in French for a word that was going to become very fashionable by the end of the 18th century for studying the mind of the living rather than the souls of the trespassers.⁵² All authors writing on the subject concede that an important share of apparitions are due to the illusions of the senses, engendered by fear, guilt or melancholy. Of course, even though protestants were not supposed to believe in the possibility of souls returning from heaven or hell – none would from the former, or could from the latter and Purgatory was no longer an option – they suspended their doctrine when they saw a ghost, just as they did their disbelief when they went to hear a play.

- 67 We know that Shakespeare was familiar with Lavater's and Scot's treatises (whether he read them or discussed them with his friend Thomas Nashe, whom we know with certainty to have read them). It is as likely that he also knew the translation of Pierre Le Loyer's *Treatise of Spectres* that had just been published in 1605, when Shakespeare was working on *Macbeth*. For it might be there that Shakespeare found the idea for the ghost of Banquo that he added to the plot, since there was none in Holinshed's or other chronicles:

And upon the declining of the Roman Empire, Thierry king of Italy, (being a Goth by nation) after he had slain Simmachus and Boetius his son in law, two Roman Senators, born of a most noble family in Rome, and who had been in former times Consuls: on an evening as he sat at supper, (as Procopius rehearseth it) it seemed unto him, that he saw in the head of a fish served in upon the table, the face of Simmachus in a most horrible shape and fashion, with great mustachoes, knitting his brows, frowning with his eyes, biting his lips for very anger, and looking awry upon him: the conceit whereof, struck the king into such a fear, as he fell sick and died thereof soon after.⁵³

- 68 If he did not, he may also have remembered the same anecdote from his earlier reading of Lavater's treatise, which we know he used for writing *Hamlet*:

Procopius in the beginning of the warres of Italie declareth, that as *Theodoricus* sate at meate, after he had put to death *Boethius* and *Symmachus* his sonne in lawe, a fishes head being brought before him, he sawe in it the countenance of *Symmachus* looking horribly, which biting the nether lip with lowring eyes seemed to threaten him, wherewith the King beeing sore abashed fell into a greuous sicknesse, wherof he afterwards died.⁵⁴

- 69 As for the bloody aspect of the ghost, it is reminiscent of Antonio's description of Felice's ghost in *Antonio's Revenge*:

Two meager ghosts made apparition.
The on's breast seem'd fresh pauncht with bleeding wounds:
Whose bubling gore sprang in frighted eyes (I.ii.106-8).

- 70 Shakespeare might be borrowing more than just the description as both plays make blood the running metaphor of the whole play. In addition, Andrugio's final apparition in Marston's play could also have inspired Shakespeare to have Banquo sit at the banquet table:

Here will I sit, spectator of revenge,
And glad my ghost in anguish of my foe (V.iii.54-5)

- 71 Of course, Marston himself echoes the famous opening scene of *The Spanish Tragedy*, but here the ghost sits alone, invades the plot of the play and takes pleasure in watching his enemy suffer.

- 72 This 'psychological' ghost, conveying Macbeth's guilt, benefits from the playwright's experimentation in *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* – the former two for his reflection on guilt, and the latter's 'closet scene' for Banquo's selective visibility. For Richard and Brutus who remain alone during the apparition, there is no conundrum about the ghost's reality, which is equated with the murderer's psychological state. In *Hamlet*, on the other hand, Shakespeare took the whole of the first act to establish the ghost's objective existence beyond the shadow of a doubt, only to undermine it in Act III, scene iv, where Gertrude, unable to see anything, insists on interpreting the ghost as a figment of Hamlet's imagination.
- 73 In *Macbeth*, the position of the scene at exactly the same central moment in the play offers a very different reading. In *Hamlet*, the ghost appeared to the revenger, not the murderer, and his being invisible to the Queen may be interpreted in moral terms. Macbeth's situation, on the other hand, returns to the initial pattern of a guilt-ridden murderer having visions. Even though the possibility of the supernatural is validated in the play by the several apparitions of the three weird sisters, Procopius's template and Lady Macbeth's comments insist on the unreality of the ghost. Again, the repetition of the apparition during the banquet makes the hesitation between two modes of interpretation dramatically more intense, the audience being offered a choice that is never resolved.⁵⁵
- 74 Interestingly enough, after *Macbeth*, most plays that stage selective visibility directly allude to Shakespeare, often conflating several of his plays, with *Hamlet* remaining the most frequent: *The Atheist's Tragedy*, *2 Iron Age*, *The Vow-Breaker*, *The Jews' Tragedy*, *Messalina* (actually referring to *Richard III*), as if gradually his ghosts had merged into one identifiable tradition. Thus, even if Shakespeare did not initiate such a dramatic device, his rendition of it in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, seems to have become a model for the following generation of playwrights.

After Shakespeare: fake ghosts

- 75 One may wonder whether it is a coincidence if the first plays to put on a fake phantom – Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and John Mason's *The Turk* – were both staged in 1607, that is barely a year after *Macbeth*. Beaumont's comedy specifically refers to *Macbeth*, when Jasper pretending to be a ghost describes his future haunting of the Merchant:
- And never shalt thou sit, or be alone
 In any place, but I will visit thee
 With gastly looks, and put into thy mind
 The great offences which thou didst to me.
 When thou art at thy Table with thy friends,
 Merry in heart, and fild with swelling wine,
 I'll come in midst of all thy pride and mirth,
 Invisible to all men but thy self,
 And whisper such a sad tale in thine ear,
 Shall make thee let the Cup fall from thy hand,
 And stand as mute and pale as Death it self. (V.i.18–28)⁵⁶
- 76 In the case of *The Turk*, the scene of the false apparition contains obvious echoes of Hamlet's exchange with his father's ghost:

[TIMOCLEA]. In this alone I will great Venice prove,
Do it as ever thou didst Julia love.

VEN[ICE]. I will.

TIMO. Whilst I borne upon aire attend my blisse.

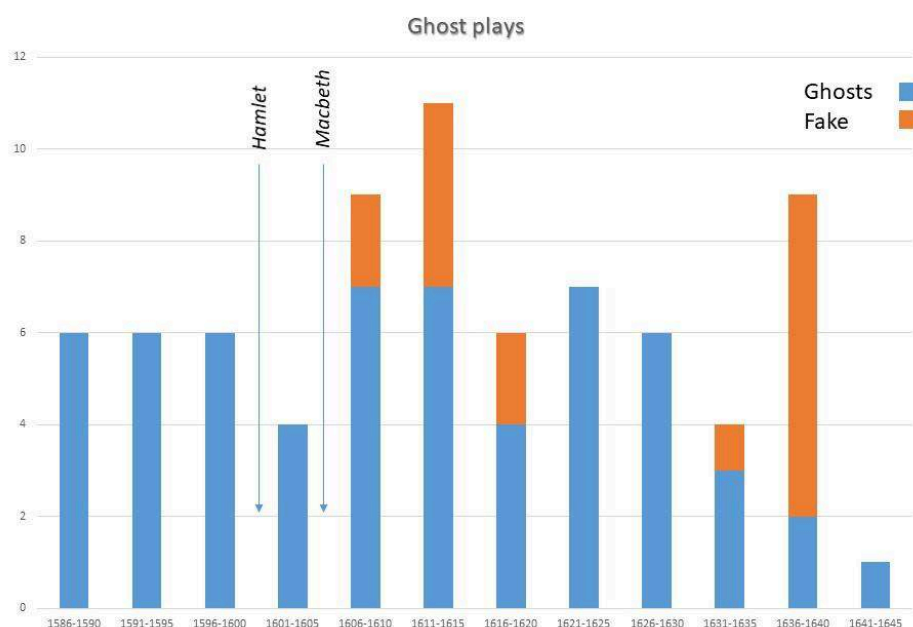
VEN. Peace to thy soule: Adieu. *Exit.*

TIMO. Remember Julia. (III.i.95-100)⁵⁷

77 More generally, there seems to be a renewed interest in staging ghosts around 1604-1606, though the reasons for such a vogue are many. It is tempting to ascribe the regained fashion to the success of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which the playwright enhanced with the equally successful *Macbeth*. George Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois* was written in 1604, John Marston's *Sophonisba* premiered in late 1605, followed by Barnabe Barnes's *The Devil's Charter* in 1606/07, *The Alexandrian Tragedy* and *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* in 1607 and probably William Rowley's *The Birth of Merlin* if we retain the composition date of 1608 rather than 1620. Of course, such enthusiasm for ghosts went along a similar taste for witches and devils, and might be better accounted for by the accession of James I to the throne of England in 1603, which was probably the main reason why Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in the first place. The King's interest in things supernatural had indeed been common knowledge since the publication in 1597 of his *Daemonologie* and, even if the monarch seems to have changed his mind about the reality of supernatural events during his move from Edinburgh to London, in the eyes of the playwrights and their audiences, he was still the demonologist-king.

78 Table 5 situates *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* within the wider production of plays featuring ghosts and fake phantoms during the period. It may be noted that 9 out of the 50 plays after *Macbeth* allude to Shakespeare's ghostly tragedies, while 4 other allusions may be found in plays not staging any ghost.

Table 5. Plays staging ghosts and fake phantoms, 1586-1642



- 79 Similarly, the extensive replacement of ghosts with fake apparitions in the 1630s⁵⁸ may be explained by both the evolution of the dramatic figure towards the parodic vein and a more general baroque turn of English theatre, as well as by the context of the reign of Charles I, whose interest in the supernatural was the polar opposite of his father's. This was translated judicially by a decline in witch trials, while it coincided with a wider growing scepticism across Europe, especially after the publication of Friedrich Spee's *Cautio criminalis* (1631), which denounced the abuses of torture and the inconclusiveness of evidence thus obtained.⁵⁹

***Cymbeline* and *Henry VIII*: Shakespeare gives up the ghost**

- 80 As for Shakespeare, after *Macbeth*, he returns to his early preference for dreams in staging his ghosts. Even though there are no ghosts in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), Shakespeare alludes in the play to his earlier *Julius Caesar* apparition by coining a new verb for Caesar's visitation: 'since Julius Caesar, / Who at Philippi the good Brutus ghosted' (II.vi.15).⁶⁰
- 81 In the dream sequence in *Cymbeline* (1609), the guilt is gone, the fear is gone and the ghosts that people Posthumus's dream are appeased and implore Jupiter to help their living kin:
- Solemne Musicke. Enter (as in an Apparation) Sicillius Leonatus, Father to Posthumus, an old man, attyred like a Warriour, leading in his hand an ancient Matron (his wife, and Mother to Posthumus) with Musicke before them. Then after other Musicke followes the two young Leonati (Brothers to Posthumus) with wounds as they died in the warrs. They circle Posthumus round as he lies sleeping. (V.iv.29SD)*⁶¹
- 82 Shakespeare capitalises here on his invention of an armoured ghost by having Posthumus's father appear 'attired like a warrior', and the multiple ghosts are reminiscent of *Richard III*. What changes is that the ghosts in *Cymbeline* are no longer revenge ghosts and appear to help Posthumus. Writing 15 years later, having preached that brevity is the soul of wit, Shakespeare creates a more economical way of toying with illusion and reality by having the ghosts leave a 'Tablet' given them by Jupiter, which Posthumus discovers when he wakes ('A Book?'). While in *Richard III*, the objectivity of the ghosts was partly established by having them appear to Richard and then to Richmond, their reality was still questionable as in both cases they were seen in a dream. Here, it is the material trace left by the dream that defies the logic of the apparition.
- 83 *Cymbeline*'s dream ghosts are also related to Shakespeare's earlier creations through the clearly archaic meter of their lines. There is indeed a clear contrast between the iambic pentameter of the living and the lines of three and four feet adding up to make heptameters that were fashionable two decades earlier. Only the ghosts speak in this manner, while Jupiter uses rhymed iambic pentameter. It is possible to see this stylistic archaism as a deliberate marker for the older generation of characters (Posthumus's parents), for the remote period to which *Cymbeline* belongs (together with *Lear* and *Pericles*), and for an earlier period of his own production in the 1590s.
- 84 After Jupiter's departure, the ghosts adopt the blank verse causing Posthumus to wake up. His immediate reaction is to reject the vision as a dream, but when he finds the material proof of their visit, he opts for madness:

'Tis still a Dreame: or else such stuffe as Madmen
Tongue, and braine not: either both, or nothing,
Or senselesse speaking, or a speaking such
As sense cannot untye. (V.iv.116–119)

- 85 Here Posthumus goes one step further than Macbeth in his interpretation of the vision, where the apparition of Banquo was construed as being caused by guilt and by the lack of sleep.
- 86 The perambulation through Shakespeare's ghostly work would not be complete without one of his last plays, *Henry VIII* (1613), on which he collaborated with John Fletcher. The play revisits the motif of a dream apparition, though the passage in question has been attributed to Fletcher. Still I would argue that Shakespeare, being the elder and the more experienced of the two, supervised the whole work and therefore agreed with such a scene. Here, it is difficult to ascertain that the 'Personages' of the vision are technically souls of the trespassers:

GRIF. She is asleep: Good wench, let's sit down quiet, For feare we wake her. Softly, gentle Patience.

The Vision.

Enter solemnly tripping one after another, sixe Personages, clad in white Robes, wearing on their heades Garlands of Bayes, and golden Vizards on their faces, Branches of Bayes or Palme in their hands. They first Conge unto her, then Dance: and at certaine Changes, the first two hold a spare Garland over her Head, at which the other foure make reverend Curtsies. Then the two that held the Garland, deliver the same to the other next two, who observe the same order in their Changes, and holding the Garland over her head. Which done, they deliver the same Garland to the last two: who likewise observe the same Order. At which (as it were by inspiration) she makes (in her sleepe) signes of rejoycing, and holdeth up her hands to heaven. And so, in their Dancing vanish, carrying the Garland with them. The Musicke continues.

KATH. **Spirits of peace**, where are ye? Are ye all gone?
And leave me heere in wretchednesse, behinde ye?

GRIF. Madam, we are heere.

KATH. It is not you I call for,
Saw ye none enter since I slept?

GRIF. None Madam.

KATH. No? Saw you not even now a blessed Troope
Invite me to a Banquet, whose bright faces
Cast thousand beames upon me, like the Sun?
They promis'd me eternall Happinesse,
And brought me Garlands (Griffith) which I feele
I am not worthy yet to weare: I shall assuredly.

GRIF. I am most joyfull Madam, such good dreames
Possesse your Fancy... (IV.ii.81–95)⁶²

- 87 Even though it is a dream, the spirits of Katherine's vision come upon the stage in a dumbshow, and are not seen by those characters who are awake. Shakespeare seems to revisit the pattern of selective visibility he so much enjoyed in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, except here the device is used as a marker of the limit between sleep and waking, and the invisibility is commented upon after the departure of the 'spirits'. We have therefore come full circle to the prophetic dream we started with in *Richard III*, where the apparition was clearly a figment of a character's imagination given shape on stage.

Conclusion

- 88 My aim has been to set Shakespeare's idiosyncratic interest in ghosts against the backdrop of the evolution of the spectral figure on London stages before, during and after his career. I hope to have shown that as for many other aspects of his production, his ghosts became important and influential in the developing of the dramatic tradition, though not necessarily determinant in shaping its trends.
- 89 Shakespeare clearly displays an inclination for associating ghosts with dreams, an inclination which goes well beyond ghosts, since he develops 29 dreams in 19 of his plays.⁶³ Shakespeare's ghostly dreams, as we have seen, are projections of emotions like fear or guilt, or both. He starts and ends with dream ghosts (*Richard III*, *Cymbeline*, *Henry VIII*) and the staging of ghosts in *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* encourages the psychological interpretation of their apparitions, not very different from what he first confined to dreams. Only *Hamlet* constitutes a laboratory for spectral experimentation.
- 90 After *Macbeth*, Shakespeare returns not only to dream ghosts, but to a more remote past both in themes and in style. And although I did not retain *Pericles* in my corpus, Shakespeare includes a prologue cum chorus played by John Gower 'from ashes ... come'. At a time when protatic ghosts are already on the decline, Shakespeare favours for the first time a figure of a dead poet to frame his play, though not once does he use 'ghost' or 'spirit' or any such term to designate Gower.
- 91 His ghosts are resolutely not comic in essence and in his later plays he misses the parodic turn, at least as far as ghost scenes are concerned, even though that very turn may have been ironically inspired by his own *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, New Cambridge Shakespeare Third Edition, ed. Philip Edwards, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, Liv.43. Though line references are to modern editions, all Shakespeare quotations are kept in the original spelling to avoid creating a difference with other contemporary plays.
2. See Jean Gobi, *Dialogue avec un fantôme*, ed. Marie-Anne Polo de Beaulieu, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1994.
3. See Pierre Kapitaniak, *Spectres, ombres et fantômes : Discours et représentations dramatiques en Angleterre, 1576-1642*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2008.
4. Gabriela Dragneau Horvath, *Theatre, Magic and Philosophy: William Shakespeare, John Dee and the Italian Legacy*, London, Routledge, 2019, p. 145.
5. François Lecercle and Françoise Lavocat, *Dramaturgies de l'ombre*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005 and Yannick Tauliat, *L'Invisible théâtral: De Shakespeare à Ibsen et Strindberg. Pour une nouvelle dramaturgie de l'intériorité*, Paris, Orizons, 2013. See also F. Lecercle's article in this issue.
6. John Stephens, *Cynthia's revenge: Or Mæanders extasie*, London, Printed for Roger Barnes, 1613.

7. Daniel Sangsue, *Fantômes, esprits et autres morts-vivants: Essai de pneumatologie littéraire*, Paris, José Corti, 2011.
8. P. Kapitaniak, *Spectres, ombres et fantômes*, pp. 859-69. A similar conclusion in favour of folklore correspondences is reached by Diane Purkiss, 'Shakespeare, ghosts, and popular folklore', in Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes (eds.), *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture*, London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2006, pp. 136-54.
9. Ludwig Lavater, *Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght*, London, Henry Benneyman for Richard Watkyns. 1572. A second edition was printed by Thomas Creede in 1596. The original German version was published in 1569.
10. 'A treatise upon the nature and substance of spirits and divels', in Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, London, William Brome, 1584, p. 489-560.
11. See Elisabeth Lacombe's article in this issue.
12. See Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, New Mermaids edition, ed. J. R. Mulryne, 1989, p. xiv; Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, Arden Early Modern Drama, ed. Clara Calvo and Jesus Tronch, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 13.
13. For a detailed treatment of this ghostly figure, see Charles Whitworth's article in this issue.
14. George Peele, *The Old Wife's Tale*, New Mermaids Edition, ed. Charles Whitworth, 1996.
15. *The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine, the eldest sonne of King Brutus, discoursing the warres of the Britaines, and Hunnes, with their discomfiture, The Britaines victorie with their Accidents, and the death of Albanact. No lesse peasant then profitable. Newly set fourth, ouerseene and corrected, by W.S.*, London, Thomas Creede, 1595. Locrine is the last play in *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, histories, and tragedies. Published according to the true original copies. The third impression*, London, Printed for P. C., 1664, p. 82 sq.
16. Darren Freebury-Jones, 'Determining Robert Greene's dramatic canon', *Style*, 54(4), 2020, pp. 377-98.
17. A similar device is used at the play's opening when Atë comes on stage: 'Enter Atey with Thunder and Lightning...' (1.i.0).
18. William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, Arden Shakespeare Third Edition, ed. James R. Siemon, 2009, pp. 44-5. Although critics differ on the exact date, their estimates all fall within the range of 1591-94.
19. *The True Tragedie of Richard the third*, London, Thomas Creede, 1594; *The Tragedie Of Cæsar and Pompey Or Cæsars Reuenge*, London, printed for Nathaniel Fosbrooke and John Wright, 1607. I shall use the short title *Caesar's Revenge* to differentiate this play from a later play bearing the same title: *Caesar and Pompey: A Roman Tragedy* (1631).
20. Raphael Holinshed, *The Third volume of Chronicles, beginning at duke William the Norman, commonlie called the Conqueror*, London, John Harisson, George Bishop, Rafe Newberie, Henry Denham and Thoms Woodcocke, 1587, p. 755.
21. A noticeable exception is E. Pearlman, 'Shakespeare at work: The invention of the ghost', in Arthur Kinney (ed.), *Hamlet: New Critical Essays*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 71-84. Pearlman sees in Caesar's ghost the preparation of the coup that Shakespeare achieves with *Hamlet's* ghost, but he insists on the relation with Plutarch and does not mention *Caesar's Revenge* at all.
22. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Arden Shakespeare Third Edition, ed. David Daniell, 1998.
23. See the recent PhD thesis by Chloe Owen, "'My dream was lengthened after life": Sleep, hallucinations and the supernatural in early modern drama', PhD thesis, Loughborough University, Loughborough, 2021.
24. There is a long tradition for the existence of an 'Ur-Hamlet' as German scholars had termed it. I will mention selectively Lukas Erne's chapter on *Hamlet*, in his *Beyond the Spanish Tragedy*, in which he ascribes the play, as many others before him, to Thomas Kyd, but quotes topical circumstances for writing a *Hamlet* play shortly after 1587. Indeed, after the execution of Mary Stuart, a manuscript Latin poem about the Ghost of Darnley addressing his son James VI

circulated between Paris, Scotland and London. Mary's first husband had been murdered in 1567, and the Queen's remarriage three months later to the earl of Bothwell fuelled suspicions of her possible complicity in the plot (Lukas Erne, *Beyond The Spanish Tragedy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001, pp. 154–5).

25. Thomas Lodge, *Wits Miserie, and the Worlds Madnesse: Discovering the Devils Incarnat of this Age*, London, Adam Islip, 1596, p. 56.

26. Terri Bourus, *Young Shakespeare's Young Hamlet: Print, Piracy, and Performance*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

27. Dennis McCarthy, 'Harvey's 1593 'To be and not to be': The authorship and date of the first quarto of *Hamlet*', *Critical Survey*, 31(1/2), 2019, p. 94.

28. P. J. MacDonald, 'Vocabulary, chronology, and the first quarto (1603) of *Hamlet*', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 31, 2018), pp. 17–42.

29. *The Merry Devill Of Edmonton. As it hath beene sundry times Acted, by his Maiesties Seruants, at the Globe, on the banke-side*, London, Henry Ballard for Arthur Iohnson, 1608.

30. McCarthy, 'Harvey's 1593...', pp. 91–4.

31. For references to *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio's Revenge*, *The Malcontent and other Plays*, The World's Classics, ed. Keith Sturgess, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997.

32. See for instance P. J. MacDonald, 'Morphew, leprosy, and the date of Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*', *Notes & Queries*, 1998, pp. 358–60; Charles Cathcart, 'Hamlet: Date and early afterlife', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 52(207), 2001, pp. 341–59.

33. See S. A. Blackmore, *The Riddles of Hamlet*, Boston: The Stratford Company, 1917, p. 156; I. J. Semper, 'The Ghost in *Hamlet*: Pagan or Christian?', *The Month*, 9(4), 1953, p. 232.

34. P. Kapitaniak, 'Demons & puns: Revisiting the "cellarage scene" in *Hamlet*', in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, ed. Victoria Bladen and Yan Brailowsky, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2020, pp. 88–90.

35. See Barnabe Barnes's *The Devil's Charter* (1607) for a similar pattern.

36. Roslyn Lander Knutson, *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 118–19.

37. Another play from the same year offers a similar pattern – *First part of Hieronimo* (1599) but its evidence is hardly conclusive as there is little certainty as to its date. For some critics, it might be a revision of a play dating back to the mid-1580s and written by Kyd; for others it is a parody written around 1600, to capitalise on the success of the revival of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

38. Thomas Heywood, *The First And Second partes of King Edward the Fourth*, London, I. W. for John Oxenbridge, 1599.

39. P. Kapitaniak, *Spectres, ombres et fantômes*, pp. 631–6.

40. William Heminges, *The Jewes Tragedy, or, Their Fatal and Final Overthrow by Vespasian and Titus his Son*, London, Matthew Inman for Richard Gammon, 1662.

41. See François Lecercle's article in this issue.

42. R. A. Foakes, 'Arm'd at point exactly': the Ghost in *Hamlet* », *Shakespeare Survey*, 58, 2005, pp. 34–47; P. Kapitaniak, *Spectres, ombres et fantômes*, pp. 264–6.

43. Jasper Fisher, *Fvimvs Troes Æneid. 2. The Trve Troianes, Being A Story of the Britaines valour at the Romanes first invasion*, London, I. L. for Robert Allot, 1633.

44. William Heminges, *The Fatal Contract, A French Tragedy*, London, J. M., 1653.

45. *Lady alimony; or, The Alimony Lady. An Excellent Pleasant New Comedy Duly Authorized, daily Acted, and frequently Followed*, London, Printed for Tho[mas] Vere and William Gilbertson, 1659.

46. Alexander Brome, *The Cunning Lovers. A Comedy. As it was Acted, with great Applause, by their Majesties Servants at the private House in Drury Lane*, London, Printed for William Sheares, 1654, V.i. 285–93.

47. Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist's Tragedie: or The honest Man's Revenge*, London, printed for John Stepneth and Richard Redmer, 1611. Also in *Four Revenge Tragedies*, ed. Katharine Eisaman Maus, 'World's Classics', Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.
48. *The Womans Prize: or, The Tamer Tamed*, V.iii.50-51, in *Comedies and Tragedies Written by Francis Beaumont and Iohn Fletcher*, London, printed for Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1647.
49. *The Captives*, Malone Society Reprint, IV.iii.120-7, 1953.
50. William Sampson, *The Vow Breaker. Or, The Faire Maide of Clifton*, London, Iohn Norton for Roger Ball, 1636, III.i.85-97 and III.i.328-50.
51. As recently as 2018, Brian Vickers tried to attribute the anonymous play to Kyd. Brian Vickers, 'Kyd's Authorship of *King Leir*', *Studies in Philology*, 115(3), 2018, pp. 433-71.
52. Noël Taillepied, *Psychologie ou Traité de l'apparition des esprits*, Rouen, Michel Le Deutre, 1588.
53. Pierre Le Loyer, *A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Sights, Visions and Apparitions appearing sensibly vnto men*, London, Val. S. for Mathew Lownes, 1605, chap. xi, p. 242-3.
54. Lavater, *Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght*, bk. I, chap. iii, p. 15-16.
55. Significantly, cinema directors often decide to leave the choice unresolved by alternating shots of the ghost with shots on an empty seat (Welles, Polanski...). See Sarah Hatchuel, "'Prithee, see there! Behold! Look!'" (3.4.69): The gift or the denial of sight in screen adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*' <https://borrowers-ojs-azsu.tdl.org/borrowers/article/view/83/165>, accessed 29 October 2022.
56. Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. Michael Hattaway, New Mermaids, London, A & C Black, 1993.
57. John Mason, *The Tvrke. A Worthie Tragedie. As it hath bene diuers times acted by the Children of his Maiesties Reuels*. London, E. A. for Iohn Busbie, 1610. The corresponding lines in *Hamlet* are: I.v.2, 23, 91.
58. See Christopher Salamone's article in this issue.
59. Friedrich Spee, *Cautio criminalis seu De processibus sagas*, Rinteln, Petrus Lucius, 1631. The book was published anonymously as 'Incerto theologo romano'. See also Marcus Hellyer's translation as *Cautio Criminalis, or a Book on Witch Trials*, University of Virginia Press, 2003.
60. *Antony and Cleopatra*, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, ed. David Bevington, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015.
61. William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, Arden Shakespeare Third Edition, ed. Valerie Wayne, London, Bloomsbury, 2017.
62. William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, Arden Shakespeare Third Edition, ed. Gordon McMullan, London, Bloomsbury, 2000.
63. R. Robidoux, A. Dale, A. Lafrenière, and J. De Koninck, 'Progress in examining dreams in Shakespeare's plays with modern scientific dream theories and techniques', *Sleep Medicine*, 40(supp.1), 2017, p. e77, DOI: 10.1016/j.sleep.2017.11.221. On supernatural dreams in Shakespeare, see also C. Owen, "'My dream was lengthened after life"....

ABSTRACTS

From our 21st-century standpoint, we are used to seeing in the ghost of *Hamlet* the paragon of the spectral figure on the early modern stage. But how well or how little is this ghost representative

of the numerous other plays and the ghosts they stage? How do Shakespeare's ghosts relate to the history of shadows that stalked the English stages for more than six decades? One of the essential aspects of the returning soul of the dead is its condition of being seen (or at least heard), as most terms used for ghosts (apart from the English one derived from fear) testify. For what is a ghost if it cannot communicate? And how must an actor convey with his body the fact that he is supposed not to have one? On the one hand, the present paper will try to retrace the evolution of the central question of tangibility and visibility of ghosts on a theatre stage, using Shakespeare's contributions as landmarks in a broader tradition of staging apparitions. On the other hand, it will confront this general trend with Shakespeare's own development of that supernatural figure.

De notre point de vue au XXI^e siècle, nous sommes habitués à voir dans le fantôme d'*Hamlet* le parangon de la figure spectrale sur la scène du début du XVII^e siècle. Mais dans quelle mesure ce fantôme est-il ou non représentatif des nombreuses autres pièces et des fantômes qu'elles mettent en scène? Comment les fantômes de Shakespeare se rattachent-ils à l'histoire des ombres qui ont hanté les scènes anglaises pendant plus de six décennies? L'un des aspects essentiels du retour d'une âme de trépassé est sa condition d'être vue (ou du moins entendue), comme en témoignent la plupart des termes utilisés pour désigner les fantômes. Car qu'est-ce qu'un fantôme s'il ne peut pas communiquer? Et comment un acteur doit-il transmettre avec son corps le fait qu'il est censé ne pas en avoir? D'une part, le présent article tentera de retracer l'évolution de cette question centrale de la tangibilité et de la visibilité des fantômes sur une scène de théâtre, en utilisant les contributions de Shakespeare comme points de repère dans une tradition plus vaste de mise en scène des apparitions. D'autre part, cette tendance générale sera confrontée au développement propre à Shakespeare de cette figure surnaturelle.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Shakespeare, spectres, invisibilité, mise en scène, tragédie de la vengeance

oeuvre citée *Hamlet*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Antonio's Revenge*, *Macbeth*

nomsmotscles William Shakespeare, Thomas Kyd, John Marston

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