Deconstruction of ghosts in Shakespeare's plays

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1. Introduction

When it comes to ghosts, there is no greater author from European literary tradition than William Shakespeare. His portrayals of ghosts of Hamlet's father and Banquo offer great insight into the human psyche, especially that of a murderer. Ghosts are often associated with esoteric knowledge, heresy, and occultism, but Shakespeare goes beyond that; if a ghost is incorporated into the play, it is not merely a ghost from antiquity asking for revenge, but a complex mechanism which enables the play to metamorphose into something entirely original and worthy of studying.

By close reading of Shakespeare's plays with the focus on the ghostly matters, one can gain great insight on the function of ghosts if one allows for a deconstruction of the text. Started by the famous philosopher Jacques Derrida, deconstruction is often mistakenly referred to as a method; it is simply an act of close reading which engages with the presupposed relations of the text and reveals the inconsistencies and imperfections of those relations. To deconstruct Shakespeare and his ghosts is to read the plays closely, with attention to the inner logic and the complex network of signifiers present not only within the text of the play, but also within the surrounding discourse – religious, linguistic, philosophical etc.

The purpose of this paper is not to answer the cryptic questions which haunt the theory of deconstruction or the philosophy concerning ghosts; instead, it hopes to reveal a fresh perspective, to find another path of interpretation and navigate the uncertain terrain of ghosts. Deconstruction is most suitable for this goal because it exposes the language behind ghosts, how and why they are used in the context of literature. Deconstruction of ghosts is a valuable process because it isolates the ghosts as a cultural and linguistic phenomenon which pervades Shakespeare's plays and literature in general. Thus, this paper claims that a ghost is a linguistic entity which, by its auto-referential nature, deconstructs the text and the language of the text.

But why a Shakespeare's ghost? It seems that Shakespeare anticipates the key movements of deconstruction, although in different circumstances. The political and religious connotations of his ghosts are as relevant as ever. Shakespeare examines the monarchies and pokes at the holes, the inconsistencies and misunderstandings of the world and stages his plays as worlds of ghosts, of individuals haunted by their own ghosts. The most ambitious and valuable goal of this deconstruction is, of course, to gain greater insight into the very nature of our existence, inside or outside the scope of literature and language.

2. What is a ghost?

It is a question which has been repeated ad nauseam in various contexts, but the answer is never satisfactory. The most common understanding of the ghosts is directly related to the concept of afterlife, with spiritual and religious connotations included. Their primary function was to augur some evil, to instil fear into the minds of the God-fearing – there are numerous accounts of false poltergeists throughout history that were used for taking advantage of the haunted individual. The religious aspect of ghosts was also immensely important for the Christian West. According to Greenblatt,

> there are three fundamental perspectives to which Shakespeare repeatedly returns: the ghost as a figure of false surmise, the ghost as a figure of history's nightmare, and the ghost as a figure of deep psychic disturbance. Half-hidden in all of these is a fourth perspective: the ghost as a figure of theater.[1]

However, the modern times are now, maybe more than ever, haunted by this very same question. Technology deals with ghosts on a daily basis: television, telephones, internet,

[1] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), 157.

portable music – media of ghosts. Therefore, the question requires exploring the various contexts in which ghosts appear.

2. 1. Ghosts in historical and religious context

During the Elizabethan era, ghosts were confined to the realm of religion which was already teeming with its own ghosts, as the conflicts between the Catholics and the Protestants in England resulted in many violent upheavals. Despite the political differences (and at the time, the political always went hand in hand with the spiritual), the existence of ghosts was widely accepted as a truth:

> That the ghosts of criminals, suicides, or murdered persons, walked the earth after death, that they sometimes entered into compacts with the living, that they appeared at midnight and 'faded on the crowing of the cock,' and that at their approach the lights grew dim – all this is a part of a primitive ghost-lore common to most European nations. In these primitive beliefs the Church of the Middle Ages found substantial support for its doctrine of a purgatorial state and for inculcating the duty of offering up masses for the souls of the dead.[2]

It is interesting to note that the medieval Church exploited this "in-betweenness" of the souls; the existence of Purgatory justified the existence of indulgence which, in turn, based itself upon the concept of accumulation of sins, a certain debt to be repaid in this (or next) life. The concept of a ghost is therefore closely related to the concept of Purgatory because they both imply a certain debt, a metaphysical postponement of the soul's departure elsewhere. Ludwig Lavater, a Swiss Protestant theologist, confirms this in his (at the time) well-known work *Of Ghostes and Spirites, Walking by Night, And of Straunge Noyses, Crackes, and sundrie forewarnings,*

[2] F. W. Moorman, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," *The Modern Language Review* 1, no. 3 (1906): p. 197, https://doi.org/10.2307/3713608.

which commonly happen before the death of men: Great slaughters, and alterations of Kingdomes:

> The Papists in former times haue publikely both taught and written, that those spirites which men somtime sée and heare, be either good or bad angels, or els the soules of those which either liue in euerlasting blisse, or in Purgatory, or in the place of damned persons. And that diuers of them are those soules that craue aide and deliuerance of men.[3]

Protestants found the implications of the concept of Purgatory particularly troublesome; Martin Luther exposed the exploitative nature of Church in his *Ninety-five Theses,* publicly criticizing the indulgences, but also questioning a number of religious dogmas.[4] For the Protestants, the question of ghosts had a clear answer: "Touching those that go hence in a right beliefe, their soules are by and by in possessiō of life euerlasting, and they that depart in vnbelief, do straightway becom partakers of eternal damnatiō. The souls do not vanish away & die with the bodie,"[5] but ultimately, they remain either in heaven or hell. Therefore, a ghost can only be a spirit from heaven or hell, a good or an evil Angel.

Shakespeare played with the concept of a Catholic and a Protestant ghost in *Hamlet*. By masking the true nature of the ghost of Hamlet's father, Shakespeare mocks the classical tradition of Senecan revenge tragedy by linking it to the Catholic concept of Purgatory. As Jonathan Bate claims, if the ghost speaks "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder"[6], it cannot be a Catholic ghost, as revenge is a sin disadvantageous to one's existence in Purgatory; furthermore, the ghost seems to undergo a progression "from a Senecan ghost calling for

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[3] Ludwig Lavater, *Of Ghostes and Spirites, Walking by Night, And of Straunge Noyses, Crackes, and sundrie forewarnings, which commonly happen before the death of men: Great slaughters, and alterations of kingdomes* (London: Thomas Creede, 1596), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/51038

[4] L. G. Duggan, "indulgence." *Encyclopedia Britannica,* November 25, 2015. https://www.britannica.com/topic/indulgence

[5] Lavater, *Of Ghostes and Spirites, Walking by Night*.

[6] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Cedric Watts (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), 30.

revenge and an equally classical ghost-as-harbinger to a Catholic ghost coming from Purgatory to, in the third act, a Protestant ghost-imagining that is a mental state, a coinage of the brain."[7] It seems that

> Shakespeare never depicts unreal ghosts as deliberate deceptions, only as mistakes or delusions. If this type of depiction associates his plays at least in part with a skeptical challenge to ghost sightings (…) it does not constitute evidence of full-scale skepticism, nor does it link Shakespeare at all with the Protestant argument that ghosts, when they are not simply frauds, are demons.[8]

The third act ghost is wearing a nightgown and is only seen by Hamlet; the first act ghost is wearing armour and is seen by multiple people, yet only talks to Hamlet. Shakespeare's ambiguous depiction of the ghost may possibly signal an examination of the religious dogmas, but it also shows the modernity of Shakespeare's characters; the ghost becomes much more than a mere apparition from the afterlife, as the religious aspect is now directly tied to the psychological development of the characters. It is important to contextualize this religious aspect when talking about Shakespeare's ghosts as it is often a very important detail which helps with interpretation and deconstruction of the text.

2. 2. Ghosts in the context of theatre

What Shakespeare wrote on paper was meant for performance on the stage; however, one must reconsider the principle of mimesis and the nature of theatre itself when it comes to ghosts. Jonathan Bate asks a series of questions:

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[7] Jonathan Bate, "Walking Shadows," in *How the Classics Made Shakespeare* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020), 248-249.
[8] Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 158.

> What is a ghost? An emanation from the past. For which another word is a memory. Remember me. What is a historical play? An emanation from the past, in which the actors are shadows – which is to say ghosts – of their historical or fictional originals. When do ghosts most frequently appear? In dreams, or dream-like nocturnal states. What is a dream? An imaginary world pieced together from memory. What is a play? An imaginary world pieced together from memory. A shared dream. "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep." What is an actor? The ghost or shadow of the part that he is playing.[9]

In a certain way, theatre has always been a medium for conjuring ghosts. Even though the play text "comes alive" on the stage, it does not necessarily correspond to the original text in the same manner as one comprehends the text itself in relation to the world it imitates. In other words, if one takes reality at face value, a written text of a tragedy can only be a shadow of the reality, an imitation – a ghost. Likewise, performance of the play text on the stage is but a shadow of the text – another ghost. If theatre is inherently ghostly, what does the presence of a ghost (as a character) on the stage entail?

One possible answer for this question is the existence of a metatheatrical element. The ghost can be observed as an element of a play which simultaneously disrupts the mimetic process and establishes itself firmly as the arche-origin of the play. The disruption stems from the implied mimetic nature of a ghost; if there is an appearance of a ghost on a stage, it inevitably must imitate a character, a "real" person. But even outside the context of the stage, a ghost is most commonly understood as an image of a previous life, an imitation of an individual. One can observe a ghost and remain aware of this mimetic process; in the context of a play, interacting with ghosts entails interacting with this process, which subsequently extends to the entirety of the play. Essentially, ghosts expose the other actors as ghosts themselves, the performance becomes a ghost of a ghost (text).

[9] Bate, *How the Classics Made Shakespeare*, 249.

One may call a ghost the arche-origin of the play because theatre allows an infinity of perspectives. The viewer (or the reader) of the play witnesses the ghost of Banquo together with Macbeth, but other actors do not see it:

> This is the very painting of your fear:
> This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,
> Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts
> (Impostors to true fear) would well become
> A woman's story at a winter's fire
> Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself.
> Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
> You look but on a stool.[10]

Although this passage if often interpreted as a powerful psychological analysis of guilt, it can also be interpreted in the context of this arche-origin. "The very painting of your fear" and the "air-drawn dagger" are nothing but constructions of the mind incorporating a visual form. Is not *Macbeth* then a construction from Shakespeare's mind, incorporated on the stage? Or, if the text is allowed complete freedom from the author, is *Macbeth* not a construction of a reader's mind, incorporated on the stage? "O, these flaws and starts / (Impostors to true fear)" never cease to be impostors, they pile upon each other, and one experiences them as if they were real; and who is to say they are not? The charm of the theatre is hidden within this conjuring of ghosts. Macbeth's guilt is conveyed through the ghost of Banquo, Lady Macbeth is depicted as a more rational character, but ultimately, the "ghosts and spirits are actors no more and *no less* than all the other characters in the plays are actors."[11] The jarring (non)existence of a ghost

[10] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Cedric Watts (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2005), 69.
[11] Bate, *How the Classics Made Shakespeare*, 250.

paradoxically allows one to interpret every character on multiple metatheatrical levels. "When all's done, / You look but on a stool" and there is no one sitting on that stool, neither Macbeth nor ghost of Banquo; it was always just an empty stool. One does experience the play as a physical manifestation of a text, but one must also consider the very nature of this art form:

> the theatre audience is put into the position of Macbeth at the banquet, the drowsy Brutus, and the sleeping Posthumus, Richard, and Richmond: the ghosts seem real at the time, but are subsequently discovered to be mental phantasms. Which, rationally speaking, is the experience of anybody who dreams or imagines that he or she has seen a ghost.[12]

At the end of the play, one knows the events of *Macbeth* (or any other play) did not happen and that they are not true, but it is still often experienced and analysed as if it were an absolute truth integral to our existence. One always deals with ghosts on multiple levels. The theatre (or writing) is a medium; the essence of *Macbeth* lies not inside Shakespeare's head, his text, nor the stage adaptations – it is somewhere else, one can only access its ghost precisely because the ghost makes this process possible. One conjures ghosts and one places them on that stool with each act of reading, viewing, or performing the play. That is, after all, the beauty of the theatre.

2. 3. Ghosts in the context of language

The most complex problem of theorizing ghosts is the problem of language. Derrida's famous work *Of Grammatology* opens up a completely different perspective on the (post)structuralist understanding of language. His critique of logocentrism and opposition between writing and speech (and consequently, signifier and signified) is an excellent way to

[12] Ibid, 243.

understand the ontology (hauntology) of ghosts because it exposes the bias hidden within the opposition:

> In oppositions such as meaning/form, soul/body, intuition/expression, literal/metaphorical, nature/culture, intelligible/sensible, positive/negative, transcendental/empirical, serious/nonserious, the superior term belongs to the logos and is a higher presence; the inferior term marks a fall. Logocentrism thus assumes the priority of the first term and conceives the second in relation to it, as a complication, a negation, a manifestation, or a disruption of the first.[13]

Logocentric understanding of writing and speech works like this: speech is referred to as presence, directly related to the meaning or significance, while writing is merely an absence of speech. What Derrida wants to emphasize is the fact that the signifier is not directly connected to the signified; instead, one signifier always leads to another, creating a chain of signifiers which work together to produce this meaning of the signified. This is of crucial importance for theorizing ghosts, as one cannot escape the discourse of language when interpreting Shakespeare's plays. The most basic interpretation of a ghost would imply that the appearance of the ghost (his spectral form, the event of haunting) is merely a signifier for the actual body of the deceased (signified); Banquo dies, and his ghost merely signifies the physical manifestation of Banquo, the way he interacted with the world around him.

However, deconstruction of this opposition reveals that this might not be completely true. This logic implies that a living person is, by itself, a signifier of its spirit or soul, of its metaphysical essence, especially in the context of religion, which is not the correct approach to deconstruction. This soul or essence is often mistaken for the origin, the *logos* which connects all other possible signifiers (like a living person or a ghost). In fact, every potential

[13] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 93.

emanation of a person is merely another signifier. What is a ghost, then? We must employ Derrida's term *trace* which, by itself, does not exist, but it enables the process of signification. It is the very thing which allows us to interpret something as present or absent. It functions because it is a potential (or rather, a potentiality of a potential) remnant, a remnant of presence which could have been present instead of the already present. Traditional interpretations describe the body and the voice as the presence of the soul, but the soul never comes forward – it is forever signified by other signifiers, it can only be accessed by trace, in writing, in ghosts. And to manipulate the order of significations and oppositions is not productive, because they interact with each other as a totality of meaning, a chain of signification endlessly circulating on multiple levels. One must consider the ghost not as a mere signifier, but as the harbinger of trace, because it is the (dis)embodied difference; observing it is paradoxical, as it does not exist, yet it indicates the inherent possibility of differentiation between the modes of existence. Essentially, deconstruction of ghosts allows new interpretations because it decentralizes the *logos* and removes the restriction of a solitary origin of meaning.

Other important linguistic efforts by Derrida also pervade the discourse on ghosts. Directly related to the previously mentioned *trace*, the term *différance* is especially important for understanding the basics of deconstruction. Derrida understands it as

> *pure* movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is différance.* It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude. Although it *does not exist*, although it is never a *being-present* outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign (signified/signifier, content/expression, etc.), concept or operation, motor or sensory.[14]

[14] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 62.

In other words, language functions because it is based on differences, but the meaning is continuously being deferred because there exists an infinite number of possible meanings; that is, there is always an invisible trace which enables this difference to manifest itself. It follows that each reading of a text produces a certain meaning which is produced precisely because every other meaning possible is continuously being deferred or removed. This is a useful concept for analysing the identities of Richard or Hamlet's father, as they both seem to deceive the reader with their usage of pronouns, masking and deferring the real identity behind.

2.4. Ghosts in other contexts

If one speaks of a ghost, the inevitable question arises: is such a thing even possible? It also entails a number of other similar philosophical questions. In the context of this paper, a ghost is always indirectly a philosophical entity most closely related to the religious context of Shakespeare's time. At the same time, Shakespeare's plays posit many philosophical questions, some of which entail the existence of ghosts.

The philosophical often merges with psychological and political. Shakespeare's plays (and his ghosts) are especially susceptible to Lacan's psychoanalysis, specifically his teachings on the notion of a subject which will be further developed in this paper. As for the political dimension of Shakespeare's ghosts, it is important for the historical context of the plays; Shakespeare deals with kings and monarchies which, if not directly relevant to the modern interpretation, still allows an examination of ideological processes occurring throughout the history. If one includes ghosts in politics, like Derrida did with his *Specters of Marx*, one is able to interpret phenomena such as Marxism or capitalism in a completely different light. History is life's teacher; the ghosts of Macbeth's and Richard's political ambition haunt the political world even today.

3. *Richard III* and the ghostly psychology

Richard III is a play about duality – houses of Lancaster and York, Richard and Richmond, politics and psychology, the body and the spirit. The two tents scene (Act 5, Scene 3) makes this explicit, as Richmond's tent is pitched on the opposite side of Richard's. The ghosts address both Richard and Richmond in their dream, encouraging Richmond ("Good angels guard thy battle! Live, and flourish!"[15]) while discouraging Richard ("Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow"[16]). This structure is repeated multiple times with each ghost that appears, strengthening the opposition between Richard and Richmond. In order to penetrate the issue of ghosts, it is important to cross-examine both the political and the psychological aspect of Richard's character. In his first soliloquy, Richard establishes that he is "curtailed of this fair proportion, / Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature"[17], which serves as a motivation for political success. Richard's frustration with his hunchback appearance coincides with the struggle of the English monarchs, or perhaps the very concept of monarchy; a weak, fragile body seeks to solidify its position in the world by obtaining the crown. It follows that every monarch, by virtue of possessing a human body, must uphold the tradition and the symbolism of the concept of a monarch. Ernst Kantorowicz, in his work *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, describes the dual nature of a monarch by incorporating them into two separate bodies – the natural and the politic. It is interesting to observe the process of transformation of these two bodies, as the succession to the throne is mostly regulated by bloodline, but sometimes also by violence:

> The king that "never dies" here has been replaced by the king that always dies and suffers death more cruelly than other mortals. Gone is the oneness of the body natural

[15] William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. Cedric Watts (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2015), 141.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid, 43.

> with the immortal body politic (…) Gone also is the fiction of royal prerogatives of any kind, and all that remains is the feeble human nature of a king.[18]

Although Kantorowicz dedicates a chapter to *Richard II*, this passage functions exactly the same in the context of *Richard III*. A king may never die, as he is replaced by a new one; therefore, king is a highly symbolic position. On the other hand, a king always dies, as he is a mortal being. Moreover, *the king always dies and suffers death more cruelly than other mortals* because he experiences the loss of immortality embodied in the crown. It is Richard's desperation: "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"[19] – or rather, a ghost? Richard's hypothetical offer – an exchange of the kingdom for a mere horse – posits a heavy dilemma inside the play centred around a character who murders his way to the throne. If Richard is ready to throw away a lifetime of effort just to survive, it proves that the political structure's stability is ensured only when the most primal needs are satisfied. In other words, a king is content with embodying the ghost of the monarchy only on the condition that he enjoys the benefits of the earthly body; when threatened, a king is ready to drop the ruse because the natural body has the authority.

My kingdom for a – ghost, for it is the kingdom haunted by the ghosts of endless violence. In theory, a kingdom wants to establish a peaceful, cyclical structure where the king's heir claims the throne after the king's death. In practice, however, this cycle is often violently interrupted which leaves a traumatic imprint on the kingdom. The majority of Shakespeare's literary monarchs desperately hold on to the symbolic power of the monarchy precisely at the moment when this power is endangered. Even though Richard is the violent element of the play, he cannot escape this symbiotic relationship between the "oneness of the body natural"

[18] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 30.
[19] Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 148.

and the "immortal body politic". Richard's struggle is the struggle for self-realization among the ghosts of his sins; he desperately wants to separate his conscience and the body ("O, coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!"[20]) because of his frustration with the natural body. Richard's downfall lies in the fact that the appearance of ghosts in Richard's dream is an epiphanous moment at the time when Richard desperately clings to the ghost of the kingship he is about to lose:

> What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
> Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
> Is there a murtherer here? No; yes, I am:
> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why –
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
> O, no. Alas, I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself.
> I am a villain; yet I lie, I am not.[21]

Interplay between the personal pronouns *I*, *me* and the reflexive pronoun *myself* leaves a certain trace in the language, a trace of many potential and divided personalities occupying the same subject. Lacan describes this as a split subject. "The subject is split (…) between conscious and unconscious, between an ineluctably false sense of self and the automatic functioning of language (the signifying chain) in the unconscious."[22] The subject (Richard) has a false sense of self precisely because the language fails him. Why does the *I* fear *myself*? If "there's none else by", then Richard looks inward and recognizes this split. However,

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[20] Ibid, 142.
[21] Ibid, 143.
[22] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 45.

> to say what the Lacanian subject is comes down to the following: *The subject is nothing but this very split*. Lacan's variously termed "split subject," "divided subject," or "barred subject" (…) consists entirely in the fact that a speaking being's two "parts" or avatars share no common ground: they are radically separated.[23]

If Richard's avatars share no common ground, the unconscious *I* does not correspond to the conscious *I*; likewise, the automatic functioning of language in the unconscious does not correspond to the conscious person – Richard. By rejecting the ghosts and embracing the truth about his character, Richard rejects the notion of being *nothing but this very split* while simultaneously subscribing to the very same model of the being split between the natural and the politic body. Since Richard cannot find pity even for himself, there is no repentance; he merely acknowledges the ghosts. The greatest tragedy stems from the missed opportunity; the ghostly intervention allows Richard to examine himself as a subject split between the actual world and the world of ghosts. Instead, he chooses to do nothing, there is no positive movement; Richard remains trapped by language because he believes that *I* is really *I*. By opening up one's mind to the ghost, one can, by the very virtue of ghostly nature of language, discern the truth about the split subject; *I* is never really *I*, but an emanation of the unconscious, a constant deferral of the subject – a ghost.

4. *Macbeth*'s walking shadows

Macbeth is, essentially, a story about ghosts, *walking shadows*. Not only does it explore the slow descent into evil, followed by unbearable guilt caused by ambition and murder, but it also interprets existence as a spectral experience on a metatheatrical level:

[23] Ibid.

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.[24]

Macbeth observes life as one observes a play upon the stage, he is aware of the fact that he is, symbolically speaking, a character in a play. Richard rejects the notion of ghosts, whereas Macbeth accepts and embraces the ghost that he is, showing considerable psychological development (unlike Richard). The "brief candle" casts a shadow which disappears after the light is out, sound which signifies nothing – it is easy to draw parallels to the underlying linguistic process of signification. That which is ephemeral – the sound – vanishes into nothing and signifies nothing. One is already at the crossroads here. To follow the sound is to follow a tale by an idiot which signifies nothing; to follow this idiot (a walking shadow) is to engage with a ghost. What Shakespeare seems to say is that a story (therefore, life understood as a play, or vice versa) does not necessarily need a real meaning, a concrete reference to real life. Instead, one is watching shadows play roles – and who is to say that life itself is not merely a play of shadows as well? This mirrors Macbeth's psyche as he descends into despair because the ghostly promise of the witches signifies and results in nothing – death. He thinks that this

[24] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 97-98.

shadow of a life holds no promise of a light, every action or ambition is but a ghost unable to grasp the world around itself:

> Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
> Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
> Which thou dost glare with![25]

It seems that Macbeth is also rejecting the ghost like Richard, but it is exactly the opposite; he confirms the existence of a ghost but denies him the qualities of an individual. For Macbeth, there is no speculation in the eyes of a ghost, it is not a being capable of speculation by its very nature. It glares, but there is no substance behind the glare. Macbeth even denies the ghost the power of speech: "Thou canst not say I did it: never shake / Thy gory locks at me."[26] In the end, Macbeth understand that he too is a victim of this ghostliness, as his numerous speculations about the prophecies and kingship prove to be insubstantial. With the betrayal of Banquo for the principle of ambition, Macbeth conjures his ghost, a psychological emanation of guilt. By observing the ghost of Banquo, Macbeth's ambition crumbles. Is not Banquo's ghost just like

> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
> I see thee yet, in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw.[27]

[25] Ibid, 70.
[26] Ibid, 69.
[27] Ibid, 49.

But this palpable form is a shadow by itself, one is always a false creation, created by the unconscious and the language. As stated earlier, this "nothing" is the very nature of theatre, it is merely another mode of existence in which life is experienced as it is, bounded by language and the unconscious. One must briefly consult with Derrida again:

> the unconscious is not, as we know, a hidden, virtual, or potential self-presence. It differs from, and defers, itself; which doubtless means that it is woven of differences, and also that is sends out delegates, representatives, proxies; but without any chance that the giver of proxies might "exist", might be present, be "itself" somewhere, and with even less chance that it might become conscious. In this sense (…) the "unconscious" is no more a "thing" than it is any other thing, is no more a thing than it is a virtual or masked consciousness.[28]

Macbeth's unconscious sends out a delegate in the form of Banquo's ghost to embody the guilt, which explains why one can see the ghost only through Macbeth's eyes; other characters do not see it. If the unconscious itself is not a present entity, *no more a "thing" than it is any other thing*, it follows that an individual is always a delegate of one's unconscious, but one does not always register the multiplicity of delegates it is sending out. When one encounters a ghost, like Macbeth does, one (or one's unconscious) looks at the mirror.

5. On *Hamlet*

A simple line, a question of two words – "Who's there?"[29] opens the infinite world of *Hamlet*. When Barnardo utters this question, and it is both a practical and a philosophical question which perplexed many a scholar, one is not yet aware of the gravity of the question; it will remain unanswered. Perhaps this person, or this *thing*, and it is not Francisco, will answer

[28] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 20-21.
[29] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 39.

someday. It is much easier to rephrase this question: who is there, acting as a ghost? Who is there, in the afterlife? Who is there to arbitrate the boundary between being and non-being? This chapter seeks not to answer the question, but to reveal the complexity and the importance of ghost of Hamlet's father, for it is perhaps the most famous ghost in Western literature. It haunts not only the culture, but also the politics, the linguistics, and other aspects of everyday life. Such was the case "in 1993, when it seemed that Marxism had once and for all been consigned to history"[30] when Derrida wrote *Specters of Marx,* dedicating a portion of his work to the ghost of Hamlet's father while drawing parallels to the political situation in Europe. What *Specters of Marx* and *Hamlet* have in common is the openness to deconstruction which allows a continuous re-examination of (political) ideology precisely because they both allow the ghost to return. By speaking to the ghost, Shakespeare (and Derrida) refuse to remain stagnant (politically, culturally, philosophically), which makes them perfect companions for understanding the very basis of the question posited at the beginning. Who is *who* and where is this *there*? Why is Derrida drawn to *Hamlet*¸ especially when he talks of language and ghosts?

Hamlet stands in contrast to other "ghostly" plays (*Macbeth, Richard III* and perhaps *Julius Caesar*) because of its unique structure. When one speaks of a structure of a play, one is concerned with two types of structures, but mainly with a structure which is built around the plays' ghosts, ghost sightings and interaction with ghost, the elements of which are especially susceptible to deconstruction. One can imagine that each encounter with a ghost creates a specific network of signifiers; in turn, that network is interacting with the existing (non-ghost) network of signifiers which is the totality of the play itself. This will allow a twofold observation of the play, the first scope concerning the "mundane" structure and the second scope concerning the "spectral" structure. To exemplify, let us take the basic plot of *Macbeth*

[30] Chiara Alfano, *Derrida Reads Shakespeare* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 173.

and *Richard III*, extremely simplified for the sake of illuminating the ghosts in the mundane structure. There is always a clear distinction between the murderer and the victim; after the murder, the murderer encounters the ghost of the victim and eventually gets killed. This is how those plays are structured and the ghosts are arguably the crucial turning point of the plot where the murderer realizes the gravity of his sins, which ultimately results in the death of the murderer. Macbeth's descent into madness truly starts with Banquo's ghost, multitudes of ghosts augur Richard's downfall; in *Julius Caesar*, Caesar's ghost augurs downfall of Brutus and the conspirators. Obviously, there is great importance in the appearance of the victims' ghosts, as it is a moment of epiphany, psychological revelation; of course, from the mundane point of view, such events do not necessarily need to be the central point of the plot structure, but a play consists of many such "centres". The spectral structure of these Shakespeare plays revolves around this single moment of haunting because it can be distinctly pinpointed and associated with the drama occurring before and after the moment. In other words, if one observes the ghosts of Richard's victims or Banquo, one observes the main body of the play itself.

Hamlet, however, does not follow the same pattern. The only ghost in the play is Hamlet's father, murdered by Claudius before the beginning and off the stage, already haunting Elsinore. In other words,

> everything begins by the apparition of a specter. More precisely by the *waiting* for this apparition. The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated: this, the thing ("this thing") will end up coming. The *revenant* is going to come. It won't be long. But how long it is taking. Still more precisely, everything begins in the imminence of a *re-*apparition, but a reapparition of the specter as apparition *for the first time in the play*.[31]

[31] Jacques Derrida, "Injunctions of Marx," in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.

Most logically, one cannot observe the process of creating the ghost (the murder itself, a certain culmination of actions and faults of characters involved) in *Hamlet*; one is left in the dark, with no light to illuminate the true character of Hamlet's father and the circumstances of his murder. Instead, Shakespeare seeks to recreate the ghost by centralizing Hamlet's psychological development. Naturally, Hamlet seeks to resolve this problem for his own peace of mind, but the reader is always one step behind him as "the time is out of joint"[32]. Yet, "the *revenant* is going to come". It is a constant process of retracing one's steps, looking back to enable moving forward; one must reconcile the ever-present inconsistency of a ghost from the past with the hectic future built upon this very uncertainty, this mysterious past event haunting the future, lest the whole play become susceptible to an infinity of similar temporal ghostly interventions. Essentially, one can easily get carried away with the interpretation, therefore it is crucial to constantly refer to the original moment of haunting. Since there is no true original moment of haunting in *Hamlet*, one then follows the *revenant*.

The uncertainty pervades the air of Elsinore yet on another level. Even the play itself is haunted, as the play's original form haunts the Shakespeare's version: "*Hamlet*¸ the play, is a palimpsest; new material has been superimposed on old, and the old shows through with confusing effect"[33], but that is merely a mundane issue; the spectral figure of Hamlet's father is superimposed on the play itself, a trace of himself present in every scene. *Macbeth* and *Richard III* can be understood as a complete process of creating a palimpsest, we can read the original text (that is, understand and "read" Banquo and Richard's victims) and witness the erasure of the previous text (murder), replaced by the new text superimposed by the murderer. In *Hamlet*, one can never hope to gain insight into the original text, both in the literal and figurative sense. Each ghost can therefore be interpreted as a text being inscribed into the

[32] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 64.
[33] Cedric Watts, introduction to *Hamlet* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 14.

network of signifiers and simultaneously being scratched out, depending on the interplay of the signifiers. As Lacan puts it, the "subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers, whether he knows which signifier he is the effect of or not. That effect – the subject – is the intermediary effect between what characterizes a signifier and another signifier."[34] The subject (the ghost) is at the mercy of language, and language hesitates to reveal the essence of the subject by deferral.

The famous hesitation – a certain delay in action – stems from the very first return of the ghost, as the questions of true nature of the ghost, his intentions, the political and religious implications of his appearance all pile upon the play. When Hamlet hesitates, it is the act of hesitation (a certain non-act, that which precedes the act or the non-act) comprehended as a spectre of an act, or rather a spectral (non-)act, haunting him both from the past (his father's ghost) and the potential future. Hamlet's goal is revenge, and that entails murder. However, since the deceptive nature of Old Hamlet's ghost troubles Hamlet's mind, he needs solid proof. He finds it after he orchestrates *The Mousetrap*. Since "time is out of joint", Hamlet hopes to resynchronize by corporealizing the spectre of the act of murder ("I'll have grounds / More relative than this. The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King"[35]), so the play within the play "places a supplement of the excluded other, the originary violence absent from the play's representation, at the very centre of the scene"[36]. The play is the *thing*, but so is the ghost of Hamlet's father ("What, has this thing appeared again tonight?"[37]) and both are spectres, spectral vision of murder (a real one) and a corporeal vision of murder, that is, the

[34] Jacques Lacan, "Love and the Signifier," in *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Book XX, Encore 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (Norton, 1999), 50.
[35] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 84.
[36] Simon Ryle, "Ghost Time: Unfolding Hamlet," in *Shakespeare, Cinema and Desire: Adaptation and Other Futures of Shakespeare's Language* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 130.
[37] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 40.

play within the play playing with ghosts. Obviously, there are layers and layers of haunting, but there is "method in 't"[38]; one must understand that

> the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some “thing” that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter. There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed.[39]

What is a play? In one way, it is a "becoming-body" of the text of the play; it gives a "carnal form" to the text, but it is also deceptive. One finds "neither soul nor body" on the stage, but "both one and the other" in the text, and vice versa. The play text precedes the play, so each performance of the play reconjures the spectre of the play text. Naturally, the performance departs from the text, but in doing so, loses something inherent to the text it is supposed to reconjure. The opposite is also true; the text itself wants to summon and conjure spectres – it is the very nature of theatre – or else it loses its purpose. Hamlet draws out the ghost by setting up *The Mousetrap*, but the haunting is multiple. One cannot speak of a single ghost or spectre anymore. Much like Derrida conjures the spectres of Marx, "*plus d'un* [More than one/No more one] (…) a crowd, if not masses, the horde, or society"[40] of spectres, the conjuration in *Hamlet* results in various ghosts:

a) ghosts of *Aeneid*: "One speech in't I chiefly loved, 'twas Aeneas' tale to Dido, and thereabout of it especially where he speaks of Priam's slaughter"[41], here Hamlet asks the player to invoke the ghosts who are already, in a way, invoking ghosts with the story of Priam's slaughter. The central moment, however, is the murder of Priam, the father of Hector, Paris and many other.

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[38] Ibid, 74.
[39] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 5.
[40] Ibid, 2.
[41] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 80.

The classical works echo throughout this segment, the epic tradition interlocking with the theatrical.

b) ghosts of *The Mousetrap* (*The Murder of Gonzago*): recreation of true events, desperately needed for Hamlet's reassurance, this ghost is the (non-)act of murder iterated another time (by act, we understand the whole sequence of events and circumstances which surround Hamlet's family before the beginning of *Hamlet*).

c) the ghost himself (Hamlet's father.)

It is already established that the (return of the) ghost of Hamlet's father is the central point, at least in the spectral structure of the play. If one observes repetition as a literary device, one is drawn to it precisely because it can be easily located in multiple places, for example a motif in a novel or phonemes in a word echoing throughout a poem. Ghosts carry this repetition within themselves, as they are often understood as a repetition, a renewal of one's existence; therefore, one is drawn to a ghost precisely because one expects it to pervade multiple locations inside the text. So, the ghost returns, but he returns multiple times in two ways: physical (as in, interacting with other characters, mainly Hamlet) and spectral (through the play within the play, together with the other "ghosts"). Physically, Hamlet sr. only haunts the platform on the battlements and the queen's closet, but he is otherwise omnipresent, his very presence as a ghost (and absence as a living king) "bodes some strange eruption to our state"[42]. Derrida adds that "this first theatrical apparition already marked a repetition, it implicated political power in the folds of this iteration"[43], which encompasses the whole state of Denmark. It seems, however, that location is not of the utmost importance, it is perspective; the king observes the others through his visor and remains invisible beneath the armour. He can observe Elsinore both from inside (queen's closet) and outside because he is a "thing", independent from the

[42] Ibid, 41.
[43] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.

desynchronized time and origin of his essence. One cannot grasp the unconscious, it always wears some armour; and if one grieves after that which is no longer a thing of the present, one inevitably clothes the thing in armour, for it cannot defend itself from the gaze of the present, thus forever remaining opaque. Almost like a trauma effect, Hamlet shields this "thing" from the violence of the present time because, on the unconscious level, he is not ready to tackle the truth. Paradoxically, by doing so, Hamlet can never look directly at the ghost as a presence (of the present time), it is always a remnant of the past, an absence. The essence of the ghost, the unconscious, is granted the privilege of observing clearly because it cannot be observed clearly itself. Time is desynchronized, which influences the other events of the play; the ghost of Hamlet sr. becomes the signifying sequence which paradoxically enables and survives on its iterability, ability to repeat itself infinitely, the only way to fill in the space left by the absence. Jonathan Culler explains it this way:

> Something can be a signifying sequence only if it is iterable, only if it can be repeated in various serious and nonserious contexts, cited, and parodied. Imitation is not an accident that befalls an original but its condition of possibility (…) for features to be recognizable one must be able to isolate them as elements that could be repeated, and thus the iterability manifested in the inauthentic, the derivative, the imitative, the parodic, is what makes possible the original and the authentic. Or, to take a more pertinent example, deconstruction exists only by virtue of iteration[44].

The murder of Hamlet's father can be (and is) repeated indefinitely, for there is no murder if there is no repetition of the (non-)act; Claudius' guilt is signified by *The Mousetrap*, otherwise it would not manifest and the signifying chain would not operate (if Claudius had remained unimpressed by the play, the ghost would prove to be false). It does not operate purely on the basis of the trace, of something departed; for Lacan, "the first network, that of the signifier, is the synchronic structure of the material of language insofar as each element takes on its precise

[44] Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 120.

usage therein by being different from the others"[45]. *The Mousetrap*, the player's speech, the ghost's account of the murder, the *actual* murder – they all obviously differ from each other and are not the same; they all *refer* to the same thing, but that is only known to Hamlet. If understood as signifiers (of an event), they all take on meaning purely on the basis of difference from each other and the rest of the play's signifiers. How does this happen?

> Here anachrony makes the law (…) Since we do not see the one who sees us, and who makes the law, who delivers the injunction (which is, moreover, a contradictory injunction), since we do not see the one who orders "swear", we cannot identify it in all certainty, we must fall back on its voice. The one who says "I am thy Fathers Spirit" can only be taken at his word. An essentially blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin: this is a first obedience to the injunction. It will condition all the others. It may always be a case of still someone else. Another can always lie, he can disguise himself as a ghost, another ghost may also be passing himself off for this one.[46]

The ghost becomes much more of a linguistic phenomenon. "What dominates here is the unity of signification, which turns out to never come down to a pure indication of reality [*réel*], but always refers to another signification"[47], this is Lacan's network of signifiers (dis)embodied in a ghost, one can only deal with the ghost's voice, his own word – there is no knowing what or who is behind. When one reads *Hamlet*, does one look for the original body (much like everyone looks for Polonius' body) or the original voice? Either way, one must submit to the voice to lead him elsewhere. If one obliges this utterance of the spectral voice (and takes revenge), is it not an iteration of the signifying sequence? "I am thy father's spirit" – I am this very apparition, this very voice, for I have nothing else – this is the only indication of reality, but because of that it signifies something else. *I* am thy father's spirit; I am *not* or *no longer* your father. *I* and *father* echo, but the father is nowhere to be found, the impostor has taken over, the *spirit* talks. "Thou com'st in such a questionable shape / That I will speak to thee. I'll

[45] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 345.
[46] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 7
[47] Lacan, *Écrits*, 345.

call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane. O, answer me!"[48]. It is interesting how Hamlet must resort to speaking and naming the ghost; the very first encounter with the spectral entity urges him to differentiate it from other things, to place a signifier, to make sense of the nonsensical. It is important to remember, as Derrida reminds us: the ghost wears armour, it has a visor, it can see us, but we cannot see it directly[49]. Much like the signified escapes us, the entity underneath the armour escapes us as well. One must name it, lest it escapes.

One must briefly return to a), the ghosts of *Aeneid* and the hesitation. The story of *Aeneid* does not need retelling; it suffices to list the crucial details of this segment. Pyrrhus, whose father Achilles was killed in the Trojan war, murders the Trojan king Priam at the altar in front of Priam's wife Hecuba. The obvious parallel stands – Pyrrhus as Claudius, Priam as Hamlet's father and Hecuba as Gertrude. Jonathan Bate develops this even further:

> There is further significance to Pyrrhus's pause. Shortly after the king breaks up the play within the play, the audience is presented with the powerful stage image of Claudius kneeling in penitential prayer and Hamlet standing over him with sword drawn. This is a clear echo of Pyrrhus standing over Priam. It enacts precisely the freeze-frame moment that the Player has described[50].

Hamlet must play the part of Pyrrhus, but Claudius is already Pyrrhus to his Priam – that is, murderer of Hamlet's father. It is a manifestation of the cyclical nature of revenge and murder pervading the play, except for the fact that Hamlet does not act. Here we return to the already mentioned (non-)act and its philosophy of hesitation; the strike of the sword, being already in motion, suddenly stops and "as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood, / And like a neutral to his will and matter, / Did nothing."[51]. This pause is not a true pause, as Bate argues it is merely a literary device characteristic for the epic poems, where the meter (and consequently, the action) skips

[48] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 57.
[49] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 7
[50] Bate, *How the Classics Made Shakespeare*, 143.
[51] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 81.

a beat in order to achieve a dramatic effect[52]. It is now a case of Hamlet lifting the sword above Claudius, metaphorically speaking, but it is also himself frozen in time, inside the false pause, merely falsifying an act of mercy. After the ghost of his father first appears to him, Hamlet is in the process of taking revenge. His sword, therefore, is (metaphorically) already lifted and this act of hesitation is merely a delay, a non-act preceding the final act. But why does he mask it, then, with the intention of catching Claudius "At game, a-swearing, or about some act / That has no relish of salvation in't"[53]? Is it truly a Christian motivation or something else? For now, we know that

> the Ghost seeks to impose a stereotype on the Prince, that of the dedicated revenger; but Hamlet repeatedly displays a very credible resistance to that stereotype, by expressing plausible doubts and misgivings and by seeking to escape into introspection and into actions which are not immediately relevant to the task of revenge[54].

And now there are two kinds of acts opposed to each other – acts which have "no relish of salvation in't" and acts "not immediately relevant to the task of revenge". The first kind of act is a bloody act, but an act of *knowledge*. When Claudius asks himself "May one be pardoned and retain th'offence?"[55], he knows that "'tis not so above; / There is no shuffling, there the action lies / In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled / Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults / To give in evidence. What then? What rests?"[56]. These are the actions which are marked as true and solid, with no possible misinterpretation; the "above" is perhaps Heaven or a place of judgement, but linguistically it is a place where the performance of an act correlates only with one, true event. In other words, in a perfect world, one cannot hide the sin (refer to another signification), the truth (meaning) is always there, plain and visible to everyone.

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[52] Bate, *How the Classics Made Shakespeare*, 142.
[53] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 105.
[54] Watts, introduction to *Hamlet*, 17.
[55] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 104.
[56] Ibid.

Unfortunately, that is not possible. One cannot be pardoned because one *always* retains the offence, that is, the difference between the other signifiers, the truth *never* exposes itself and instead must be interacted with through the play of chains of signifiers. Therefore, there is only one kind of act (the second one) – act not immediately relevant to *anything*, let alone revenge. Each act is a result of the previous (non-)acts, and it is an impossible chain to contemplate; since one cannot find *the* original act, one hesitates. Hesitation is the empty space between acting and non-acting, effaced action, much like *différance* operates; Hamlet seeks to efface every other possible action (and therefore the consequence of such action) before he comes to the ultimate act of revenge. To hesitate is to consider every possible outcome, to break the authority of reiteration, to doubt – Pyrrhus does not doubt, Hamlet does, for Pyrrhus is merely a ghost from antiquity resonating through the other conjured ghosts. Hamlet is therefore mistaken because, at that point of the play, he still believes there is a possibility of finding the origin, the true nature of the ghost, a transcendental signified, he "does not measure himself against an exemplar – whether Hercules or Nero, the Player or Fortinbras. He represents himself as the quintessence of the individual, alone with his 'conscience', a man thinking, making decisions for himself without the crutch of precedent or example. Ultimately, Shakespeare seems to be saying, we cannot rely on comparisons."[57] What Bate emphasizes here is not only the individuality of Hamlet, but also the reliance on the precedent and the exemplar, following the already established classical models (or revenge plays). Unfortunately, this act of expressing one's individuality does not affect the tragedy of the play, as the individual is inevitably part of the whole society influenced by the ghost. Ironically, "the task set by the Ghost is completed just at the time when he is no longer worrying about it but seems content to be carried along by Providence"[58] – "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If

[57] Bate, *How the Classics Made Shakespeare*, 144.
[58] Watts, Introduction to *Hamlet*, 18.

it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all."[59] The ghost echoes again in these words, the revenant is (not yet) to come, it will come – but who knows when? It seems that Hamlet internalizes the ghost, the ghost of revenge, by examining the ghost, speaking to it, acting and refusing to act. This refusal to act is futile, as Hamlet cannot escape the ghost, which means that he cannot escape language itself. This is the very painting of one's psyche, to internalize and to interpret oneself within the boundaries of language; when one encounters a ghost which seems to defy these boundaries, one comes to an impasse.

6. Conclusion

A certain space is now left open, not by the effect of deconstruction and the ambiguity of the possible readings of Shakespeare, but precisely by those neglected readings which are not central to this analysis of ghost. Inside this space, or rather on the margins of the space in general, exists a ghost. What this deconstruction fails to achieve is complete closure of the subject, the ghost paradoxically escapes definition because a study of a ghost is, for the most part, preoccupied with defining its subject. It is not a failure of deconstruction per se, but a limitation of language which opens this space in the first place.

And is there a better manipulator of language than Shakespeare? By analysing his plays, one is already at the advantageous position where the conventions of theatre help corporealize the text, which draws an obvious parallel to a ghostly form embodied in something concrete. Moreover, each ghostly appearance in Shakespeare's plays is a carefully constructed event which draws attention to the language of the play and the relations inside the corporeal world which resemble the relations present inside the language. Thus, Richard's duality (over the body natural and politic) and Banquo's guilt become an analysis of the process of signification,

[59] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 146.

a constant deferral of the signified. The ghost of Hamlet's father shows that even the ghost itself cannot escape the limitations of language. At last, one can recognize the success of this deconstruction: it is the knowledge that the very concept of a ghost, shrouded in language and (dis)embodied by language, always adds a disruptive and destabilizing element to a text precisely because it forces the text to describe the ghost as a linguistic element, thus revealing the inner workings of a text and the ghostly nature of language. With this, one returns to the opening question of *Hamlet – Who's there?* Derrida answers – "Language"; Lacan answers – "The split subject"; Shakespeare, in turn, commands: "Nay, answer *me*. Stand and unfold yourself.[60]

7. Summary

The subject of this paper is deconstruction of ghosts in Shakespeare's plays. It is explained that deconstruction is not merely a method of analysis, but close reading of the text which exposes the inconsistency of the observed elements in the text. The various contexts in which ghosts appear are explained in order to approach Shakespeare's plays and understand the potential interpretations. Of great importance are Catholic and Protestant interpretations of ghosts in the context of religion and history. A ghost can function on a metatheatrical level when analysed in the context of theatre, much like it can be understood as a linguistic phenomenon in the context of language. Political, philosophical and psychological implications of a ghost greatly influence Shakespeare's works. Richard III, Macbeth and Hamlet are chosen as the main body of deconstruction of ghosts. In Richard III, the focus is on the duality of the protagonist as a Lacanian subject. In Macbeth, the psychological aspect is explored further and directly connected to Derrida's interpretation of the unconscious. In Hamlet, the limitations of language show that not even ghosts can escape that same language. The end result of this deconstruction

[60] Ibid, 39.

is knowledge that a ghost is a linguistic phenomenon which destabilizes the inner workings of the text and reveals the ghostly nature of language.

8. Sažetak

Predmet ovog rada jest dekonstrukcija duhova u Shakespeareovim dramama. Dekonstrukcija je objašnjena ne kao puka metoda analize, već kao pomno čitanje koje razotkriva nedosljednosti uočene u elementima teksta. Različiti konteksti u kojima se duhovi pojavljuju objašnjeni su kako bi mogli pristupiti Shakespeareovim dramama i razumjeti potencijalne interpretacije istih. Od velike su važnosti katolička i protestantska interpretacija duhova u kontekstu religije i povijesti. Duh može funkcionirati na razini metateatra kad je analiziran u kontekstu kazališta, na isti način kao što se da razumjeti kao lingvistički fenomen u kontekstu jezika. Političke, filozofske i psihološke implikacije duha od velikog su utjecaja na Shakespeareova djela. Drame *Rikard III, Macbeth* i *Hamlet* odabrane su kao glavni predmet dekonstrukcije duhova. U *Rikardu III*, fokus je na dvojnosti protagonista kao lacanovskog subjekta. U *Macbethu*, psihološki aspekt istražen je dublje i izravno je povezan s interpretacijom podsvjesnog koju je iznio Derrida. U *Hamletu*, ograničenja jezika pokazuju da čak ni duhovi ne mogu pobjeći od tog istog jezika. Rezultat ove dekonstrukcije jest spoznaja da je duh lingvistički fenomen koji destabilizira mehanizme u tekstu i razotkriva bestjelesnu prirodu jezika.

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Split, 19.9.2022

Potpis

OBRAZAC I.P.

IZJAVA O POHRANI ZAVRŠNOG / DIPLOMSKOG RADA U DIGITALNI REPOZITORIJ FILOZOFSKOG FAKULTETA U SPLITU

STUDENT/ICA	Stijepan Franjić
NASLOV RADA	Deconstruction of ghosts in Shakespeare's plays
VRSTA RADA	završni rad
ZNANSTVENO PODRUČJE	humanističke znanosti
ZNANSTVENO POLJE	anglistika
MENTOR/ICA (ime, prezime, zvanje)	izv. prof. dr. sc. Simon Ryle
KOMENTOR/ICA (ime, prezime, zvanje)	
ČLANOVI POVJERENSTVA (ime, prezime, zvanje)	1. izv. prof. dr. sc. Simon Ryle 2. izv. prof. dr. sc. Brian Willems 3. izv. prof. dr. sc. Gordan Matas

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c.) rad dostupan široj javnosti, ali nakon proteka 6/12/24 mjeseci (zaokružiti odgovarajući broj mjeseci)

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Split, 19.9.2022

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