

## MARK ROBSON

### **“Trying to pick a lock with a wet herring”: *Hamlet*, film, and spectres of psychoanalysis**

“There *are* phantom effects, even if phantoms do not exist.”<sup>1</sup>

Why are there so many versions of *Hamlet*? This seemingly straightforward question can lead us in many directions. What seems to be surprising, even dizzying, is not just the appearance of aspects of the text in theatres, in educational establishments, in literary criticism, on film, on radio, in visual culture, in novels and other plays, and within every facet of popular culture, but that there are so many versions within each of these areas. Why, for example, are there so many different film versions of this particular play? There are, of course, reasons for the production of each individual film, which may be commercial, artistic, biographical, or otherwise. But the identification of such motivating factors does not necessarily help us to address the totality of films, let alone the relationship of those films to the *Hamlets* of other media. Such a task of interpretation and explanation seems interminable, not least because of the continued proliferation of material to explain. Yet, if the idea of a complete explanation is, and has always been, a myth, this does not mean that it is impossible to identify places to begin.

What follows is not a conventional, linear narrative, and for several reasons. I have chosen to focus upon the fact of the proliferation of material, and to work around a central example, Kenneth Branagh's film of *Hamlet* (1996). This film exemplifies an obsession, found in the play, with doubling, repetition, mimicry and reflection. Most obvious here is the recurrent use of mirrors and the emphasis on symmetry in the design of Elsinore, but this extends further, into the nature of filmic representation, and into the handling of this film's relationships to its contexts. Focusing on repetition can take us further still. For Branagh's film is also concerned with *not* repeating, with the relationship between originals and copies, with its own feeling of belatedness. Part of this is expressed through the treatment of the inheritance of psychoanalysis, which means (for shorthand) with the Oedipal reading of the play. This is one of the strongest features of the film versions of both Olivier (1948) and Zeffirelli (1990). Notably, however, it is recent work influenced by psychoanalysis which offers productive routes into thinking about the motivations for repetition, especially within trauma theory. Stepping away from psychoanalysis, Branagh's film distances itself from both a cinematic heritage and a particular interpretative framework, and this is a move that is made more than once. Branagh's film is thus aligned with a common, almost compulsive, refusal to interpret the play and its repetitions. What follow, then, are short passages which indicate areas in which it is possible to begin to resist this avoidance of interpretation, not in the name of a new explanatory narrative, but rather in order to indicate some of the reasons why such narratives would necessarily be outflanked by that which they are trying to explain. These passages (on writing, film, ghosts, tragedy, Branagh's film, monuments, trauma, technology, the end of history, and inheritance) all return in specific ways to the same central relationships between fathers and sons, authors and

texts, living and dying, plagiarism and originality, doublings, copies and appearances, if often in an oblique manner. In precisely this way, my text is necessarily repetitive, anachronistic and out of joint.

## Writing

No doubt the most pervasive recent image of Shakespeare as writer is presented in *Shakespeare in Love*.<sup>2</sup> Curiously, however, one of the early scenes in which the nature of this activity is most clearly apparent depicts an analysis which comes about due to Shakespeare's *inability* to write. This scene is explicitly identified with psychoanalysis in the published screenplay ("What we have here is nothing less than the false dawn of analysis"), and it centres upon a character identified as an "interpreter of dreams."<sup>9</sup> Like the scriptwriters, many critics seem to have dreamed of the possibility of getting Shakespeare on the analyst's couch as an aid to interpreting his words, but part of the irony is that here Shakespeare's use of language is precisely what betrays him. He begins with a weary "Words, words, words," lamenting his inability to write of love, and ironically Dr Moth, the analyst, then asks him to describe his problem: "Tell me in your own words."<sup>10</sup> Talking cures double the problems for those who cannot adequately express themselves. The halting explanation that comes is a series of thinly-veiled sexual puns, climaxing in the wonderful comment: "It is like trying to pick a lock with a wet herring."<sup>11</sup><sup>3</sup>

Speech as a form of repetition or citation is central to the depiction of Will in this film. Just as we see Shakespeare plagiarising a Puritan preacher on his way to the analyst's office, so Will also seems to be portrayed in the film as a self-plagiarist. Yet, this plagiarism is complicated by the fact that the temporal sequence is always in doubt. The Shakespeare of *Shakespeare in Love* constantly quotes lines from works

which in the world of the film he is yet to write, but which for the audience have a ring of familiarity, and this is a familiarity exploited on many occasions to produce the film's jokes. We already know what he will have written, but the lines are spoken by Will as if for the first time. In an ingenious move which itself seems to owe something to Shakespeare's analysis of the problematics of time in *Hamlet*, then, Stoppard and Norman's plunderings from Shakespeare's life and works are seen to be a borrowing *by Shakespeare* of the lines which *they* give him. Shakespeare is again the "upstart crow", and we are returned to the primal scene of Shakespeare criticism.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Freud is portrayed here, through the character of Dr Moth, in an equally enfolded manner. Let's return to the list of titles that Moth is given. In addition to being an interpreter of dreams, he is also an apothecary, alchemist, astrologer, seer, and "priest of psyche." These occupations hardly lend credit to Moth's qualifications, and the link between Moth as an apothecary and the apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet* leads us towards death (and its simulation), and towards money, since the play's apothecary is played in the film by Fennyman, "the money" (and also a torturer). This scene of analysis ends with the payment of Moth. The scriptwriters' distaste for psychoanalysis is clear, yet the analyst is shown to be accurate in his assessment of Will's dilemma. Dr Moth, an oneirologist given the name of one of Titania's fairies from that other *Dream*-book, is quick to get to the "root" of the problem: Will has been "humbled in the act of love." Whilst the identification of Will's symptoms is sound enough, the proposed solution inspires less confidence. Giving him a bangle in the shape of a snake, Moth tells Will that "The woman who wears the snake will dream of you, and your gift will return. Words will flow like a river." (12) The interpreter of dreams here produces another dream, and this is a dream

that (by some unexplained and perhaps inexplicable means) will allow Will to write again.

Yet, in terms of his attitude to writing and the role of the writer, this Shakespeare is concerned with distinctly post-Romantic problems, namely the “organ” of his imagination and the “proud tower” of his genius.<sup>(10)</sup> Certainly a connection between writing and spirit, or inspiration, is not entirely alien to Shakespeare, who suggests elsewhere: “What’s in the brain that ink may character / Which hath not figured to thee my true spirit?”(Sonnet 108)<sup>5</sup> This scene from *Shakespeare in Love* is about inspiration, but through the relationship established between writing and sexuality we have to hear in this spirit the breath of an expenditure (his talent is spent, at least temporarily): perhaps the breathlessness of an “expense of spirit in a waste of shame.”(Sonnet 129)

*Shakespeare is thus the writer of the Romantic imagination*, hearing that genitive in as many ways as possible.<sup>6</sup> Writer’s block is figured as a psychological disturbance, as a failure of will (and, indeed, of Will) that plays upon that sexualised sense of “Will” that Shakespeare himself exploits in the sonnets. Creativity is seen, in this scene of interpretation, as an erotic act of lock-picking, which can itself be read as a metaphor of reading. Writing is very much an embodied act, and imagination is figured as an organ. But this body is seen as alien, as not subject to the control of its supposed possessor, as a machine that has broken down. Although the problem may be somatic, the remedy is not physical; this is a malady of the spirit.

## **Film**

Contrary to what we might believe, the experience of ghosts is not tied to a bygone historical period, like the landscape of Scottish manors, etc, but...is accentuated, accelerated by modern technologies like film, television, the telephone. These technologies inhabit, as it were, a phantom structure....

When the very *first* perception of an image is linked to a structure of reproduction, then we are dealing with the realm of phantoms.<sup>7</sup>

As Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle have suggested: “In a film, everyone is a ghost.”<sup>8</sup> In this sense, Michael Almereyda’s attempts to technologise *Hamlet* in his 2000 film amount to little more than a tautology, in that it is the nature of film, even in its most hyperreal manifestations, to produce phantomatic repetitions for which there is no “original.” This underlines, perhaps, the irony that Almereyda makes the ghost speak through the *answering* machine. Almereyda’s *Hamlet*, and the film’s Hamlet, respond to a call at a distance, a tele-phonics. But such repetitions, for reasons which will become apparent, should not be read simply as the recurrence of the same. Just as the Shakespeare “created” by Stoppard and Norman plagiarises lines which have yet to be written, so the temporality of this call and response also needs to be considered in a resolutely non-linear fashion.

The paradox of film is that it is often intended to be a permanent record, to offer a certain degree of substance or presence, when of course this is the last thing that it can guarantee. The question of film is therefore the question of technical reproducibility; it is the image’s technicity that must be encountered. Not for the first time.<sup>9</sup>

## Ghosts

Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as the question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a spectre, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. This logic of haunting would not be merely larger or more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being (of the “to be,” assuming that it is a matter

of Being in the “to be or not to be,” but nothing is less certain). It would harbor within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. It would *comprehend* them, but incomprehensively. How to *comprehend* in fact the discourse of the end or the discourse about the end? Can the extremity of the extreme ever be comprehended? And the opposition between “to be” and “not to be”? *Hamlet* already began with the expected return of the dead King. After the end of history, the spirit comes by *coming back* [revenant], it figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again.<sup>10</sup>

Ghosts make things happen. As Derek Attridge explains: “The ghost is as much an *event* as an *object* (the word “apparition” holds both of these together). The ghost speaks performatively—it is itself a performative—nothing will be the same again after it has appeared and spoken.”<sup>11</sup> It is thus an interruption of the familiar, it changes things. But, as Attridge goes on to say, it is also a citation, and it is only its familiarity, its status as a repetition, that allows it to be recognised as a ghost at all. The ghost arrives as an injunction, as a call to justice, it demands a response (and not from an answering machine). It reveals the unfamiliar in the familiar, as well as the familiar in the unfamiliar. “What, has this thing appeared again tonight?” asks Marcellus. Hamlet speaks of his prophetic soul, as if this is what he thought would happen all along. Thus, the appearance of the ghost is always an opening to a future occurrence as much as a figure from, or of, the past.

## **Tragedy**

Tragedy is always a matter of repetitions, enfolding the textual into a performative (dis)articulation of form and content. This might be called its destinerrancy. The question of tragedy is the question of response and responsibility. Tragedy’s machinic element is familiar (but isn’t familiarity what is in question here?), and the sense that the one who is destined to inherit the tragic imperative accentuates the excess of meaning over a more common destination towards non-being, that is, common

finitude, is also common (and is the foundation of community, as is tragedy in a certain Girardian reading).<sup>12</sup> It is no surprise that Freud felt his own obsession with *Hamlet* as a compulsion, and it is a text to which he returns, again and again.<sup>13</sup>

### **Beyond Oedipus?**

The problem with the recurrent appearance of a ghost is that it might engender a certain weariness, that it might become too familiar, producing a loss of effect (or affect), and a sense that we have “heard it all before.” Such an *ennui* is satirised by Harry Enfield in his *Norbert Smith: A Life*, a mock documentary about a great English character actor, who bears a passing resemblance to Olivier, Gielgud, Guinness and others of their era. Here, a film *Hamlet* is presented as if rewritten by Noel Coward, who appears as Horatio by moonlight on the battlements, which are very close to those of the Olivier version. The Coward-playing-Horatio figure complains about soliloquies, suggesting that they are “like precocious children, always demanding one’s attention, but they’ve rarely anything to say.” Hamlet (Enfield) begins “To be or not to be, that is the question,” to be countered by a haughty sigh of, “I rather feared it might be.”<sup>14</sup>

One way of responding to Kenneth Branagh’s film version of *Hamlet* is to think of it as an attempt to avoid this sense of having heard or seen it all before, to go beyond preceding adaptations. This might explain the length of the film, the use of stars in cameo roles (including other famous Hamlets such as Derek Jacobi and John Gielgud), and the approach to textual editing (or the lack of it). Branagh’s film attempts to show things which have never been seen before, and which could not be shown on stage. Yet it also works by *not* doing things which other films have done, and this includes Branagh’s decision not only to avoid an Oedipal reading of the

relationship between Hamlet and Gertude, but also to insert “flashbacks” to a sexual relationship with Ophelia.

The motivation for this is not hard to find, and certainly it would have been difficult to take the Oedipal reading further than it already had been by Olivier and Zeffirelli. But Branagh’s film tries to “outdo” other films, particularly that of Olivier, insistently. Olivier’s famous leap in the climactic scene thus becomes the swashbuckling chandelier scene at the end of Branagh’s film. Of course, Branagh *doesn’t* actually swing on the chandelier in full Errol Flynn style, but those who watch the scene tend to think that he has done so. When this kind of thing is added into the equation, it is hard not to read this avoidance of the Oedipal reading as a thoroughly Oedipal attempt to supplant his cinematic “fathers.”

If there were any unconscious desire to produce the *Hamlet* to end all *Hamlets*, then it clearly failed (even discounting the empirical evidence of Almereyda’s version). At the end of his introduction to the published screenplay of his *Hamlet* film, Branagh notes his continued fascination with the play, commenting that “The hold it has over me will not lessen its grip....For I believe I’ve come happily to realize that of course I cannot explain *Hamlet*, or even perhaps my own interpretation of *Hamlet*.”

He continues:

This film is simply the passionate expression of a dream. A dream that has preoccupied me for so many years. I cannot really explain that either. The reasons are in the film. The reasons are the film.

Goethe said, “A genuine work of art, no less than a work of nature, will always remain infinite to our reason: it can be contemplated and felt, it affects us, but it cannot be fully comprehended, even less than it is possible to express its essence and its merits in words.”

After twenty years, I’m happy to say, I think I know what he means.<sup>15</sup>

It is tempting to see the whole key to the film here. The play seems to have taken over Branagh, incorporated him, with the force of an obsession or even, as it were, a possession. Branagh consequently repeats his performances of the text, on stage, on

radio and on film, but these do not offer an ending or even a comprehension. The film, indeed, is the expression of a dream, but of one which he cannot fully interpret, and it is hard not to hear an echo of that most famous interpreter of dreams. But there is also a sense of avoidance here; the dream remains inexplicable, not merely unexplained. The film-text becomes the interpretation of the dream with which the play-text has possessed him. In other words, as text becomes impulse to repetition, the play becomes the ghost, and the reader, actor or audience member becomes Hamlet. The feeling that “I am Hamlet,” indeed that anything is Hamlet, an identification which would appear ludicrous were it not so pervasive, is both recognised and parodied by Branagh in his other *Hamlet* film, *In the Bleak Midwinter* (1995), which was released in North America as *A Midwinter’s Tale*. *Hamlet* produces its own repetitions through this imperative to identification.<sup>16</sup>

The film thus becomes an answering machine, in which it receives its own call and records that call as a response to its own prior inspiration. *Hamlet as film thus becomes the prosthetic body inhabited by the ghost of its own spectralising performance.*<sup>17</sup>

And then Goethe appears in Branagh’s account, the high priest of Romanticism offering authority for Branagh’s incomprehension, and neutralising this spectralisation with a paternal authority that reasserts the clear, clean line of inheritance. Goethe is thus inserted into that line of substitute fathers (prosthetic fathers?) that would link Branagh to Olivier, to Jacobi, to Shakespeare and to Hamlet. Finally, Branagh suggests that he does at least know what Goethe means by this statement about the ineffability of art. But he doesn’t tell us. This is the end of the introduction and we then proceed to the script of the film.

## Monuments

One of the elements which is most clearly Branagh's addition to the text of *Hamlet* is the opening and closing use of a monumental inscription. This inscription is carved into the plinth of a statue of Hamlet *père*, which is of course the wrong Hamlet to attach to the title of the film. Or is it? The difficulty of answering this question might be one of the consequences of Stephen Dedalus's reading of the relationships between fathers and sons in the play, in the famous library scene of Joyce's *Ulysses*.<sup>18</sup> Does the text of *Hamlet* (whatever its subtitle reads) commemorate a father or a son?

The relationship of Shakespeare's own text to monumentality is asserted in an anonymous poem which prefaces the Second Folio (the folio being the main source text for Branagh's film):

What needs my *Shakespear* for his honour'd Bones,  
The labour of an age in piled Stones,  
Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid  
Under a Star-ypointing *Pyramid*?  
Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame,  
What need'st thou such weak witnes of thy name?  
Thou in our wonder and astonishment  
Hast built thyself a live-long Monument.  
For whilst toth'shame of slow-endeavouring art,  
Thy easie numbers flow, and that each heart  
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalu'd Book,  
Those Delphick lines with deep impression took,  
Then thou our fancy of it self bereaving,  
Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving;  
And so Sepulchr'd in such pomp dost lie,  
That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die.<sup>19</sup>

The poem is, of course, by John Milton. Milton's text is an act of monumentalisation that questions the need for monuments. It asserts the solidity not of the figure to be commemorated but of the reader, in a move that echoes Paul de Man's reading of the autobiographical.<sup>20</sup> But isn't there something of Hamlet in all this? We are made marble "with too much conceaving," echoing the familiar prejudice against Hamlet as

the inactive, thought-tormented ditherer. And isn't there something troubling in the description of Shakespeare as "Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame"? Inheritance is not always a source of comfort; it can bring with it an injunction, a destination that is thrust upon an unwilling heir. The "live-long Monument" similarly disturbs a placid relationship of living to non-living, perhaps picking up on the idea present in the *Sonnets* that textual monuments are replacements for a living heir. The text replaces the image which breathes in a body, offering instead to act as a prosthesis, in which the mind of the reader is possessed and hardened into commemoration: like a statue which guards a threshold or gateway.

## Trauma

The Greek word *trauma* means "wound," and originally refers to damage inflicted on a body. Its modern sense, however, especially in its psychoanalytic register, is more usually as a description of an injury which is inflicted on the mind rather than the body. Yet, as Cathy Caruth has argued, the importance of trauma theory is in its emphasis on the relationship between the wound and the voice, between experience and enunciation.<sup>21</sup> There must be a movement of doubling, of citation, in which the repetition comes as if for the first time, with the force of a blow, and it is only through this repetition that it is possible to recognise (and thus to experience in consciousness) what has "happened." Trauma thus reveals knowledge as belated, mediated through language and conceptualisation, through a certain abstraction. Thinking itself becomes the traumatic experience. This might be a way of reading a central comment from Heiner Müller's reworking of the play: "My thoughts are wounds in my head. My brain is a scar. I want to be a machine. Arms to grab legs to walk no pain no thinking."<sup>22</sup>

Clearly what I am not arguing here is that Branagh is traumatised by *Hamlet*. This is not an analysis of Branagh. Equally, I am not suggesting that Branagh's film stages or thematises trauma, even unwittingly. It might indeed be possible to trace the outline of such a reading, but that is not what I'm doing here. What I do wish to propose is that Branagh's relationship to the play and the film that it produces are part of a structure of repetition and (in)comprehensibility which might best be understood in terms of traumatic structure. It is, then, the explicatory power of discourses of trauma which stand against persistent failures and refusals to interpret. Part of my task here is to oppose what seem to me to be examples of, in Simon Critchley's useful phrase, "obscurantism."<sup>23</sup> We might also draw parallels here to de Man's analysis of the resistance to theory as a resistance to reading, since I think that these failures to interpret exhibit all the characteristics of such resistance.<sup>24</sup>

### **Technology**

This desire for a machinic existence should alert us to a feature of the apparition which is not as easily recognised as it perhaps should be, and this is due to the conclusion that must be drawn not just about the ghost but also about the constitution of the human *per se*. Part of what is troubling about the ghost is its phenomenalisation of an embodiedness that does not demand a living human body. The conclusion that might be drawn is that the human body itself may indeed be dispensable, even prey to obsolescence. It can be substituted for by another body, a foreign body:

For there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh, in a space of invisible visibility, like the dis-appearing of an apparition. For there to be [a] ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever... Not by returning to the living body from which ideas and thoughts have been torn loose, but by incarnating the latter in *another artificial body, a prosthetic body*, a ghost of spirit, one might say a ghost of the ghost...<sup>25</sup>

Flesh takes on the substance of celluloid, a substitution for the living body, but this is no more than an inverted repetition of a spectral assumption of the flesh. What this points to in our context is not the technologisation of the human by the filmic apparatus, but rather the technicity of the human itself. The filmic process becomes a doubling of an originary technicity, and this is not a fall away from a more authentic presence, since it is presence which is at stake here.

The stakes indeed are high, since what opens up in this relation of the human to the non-human is the space of justice. As Simon Critchley notes with characteristic clarity:

The thesis of originary technicity, as the claim that the human only comes to itself as such through a movement of technical *différance*, opens the possibility of thinking the relation of the human to the non-human, of the *justice* of a relation to the non-human other, whether animal, vegetable, mineral or machine. This perhaps illuminates Derrida's persistent attempts...to employ the figure of the spectre or ghost to deconstruct the limit between the living and the non-living....I do not think that it would be at all implausible to recast the entire argument for a logic of spectrality in *Spectres of Marx* in terms of a claim for the irreducibility of technicity in the constitution of the human, social and political space of the contemporary world. Technicity is not a perversion but a fatality, a fatality that we should not approach reactively but *amorously*, that is, affirmatively; perhaps even erotically.<sup>26</sup>

The technicity of the constitution of the human is not a "perversion," not a fall away from a pure or correct mode. A fatality is all too common (indeed it is a figure of the common). That Critchley suggests we might be half in love with easeful death should not be thought of as a lapse into nihilism.<sup>27</sup>

### **Ends of History**

Let's accelerate. In his critique of Francis Fukuyama's arguments on the end of history, Derrida presents us with a series of objections which range from the evidential to the abstract.<sup>28</sup> Fukuyama's text is revealed as bad sociology, as

philosophically incoherent, and as naive about temporality. It is in his emphasis on anachrony that Derrida offers the most devastating critique of all such “end-ist” thinking, and the spectre is fundamental to this movement of thought. It is not just teleology, but periodisation and historicisation that are inadequate to the challenge of the dis-jointing of time. Bearing this in mind, we have to ask how it would be possible that a film of *Hamlet* could forget the ghost so completely that it would offer an ending in which we could be assured of finality, silence, or the demise of a political system?<sup>29</sup> Historicism is precisely what is least able to account for the spectralising effects of (the) film.

### **Inheritance**

One never inherits without coming to terms with [*s'expliquer avec*] some specter, and therefore with more than one specter. With the fault but also the injunction of *more than one*. That is the originary wrong, the birth wound from which he [Hamlet] suffers, a bottomless wound, an irreparable tragedy, the indefinite malediction that marks the history of the law or history as law: that time is “out of joint” is what is also attested by birth itself when it dooms someone to be the man of right and law only by becoming an inheritor, redresser of wrongs, that is, only by castigating, punishing, killing. The malediction would be inscribed in the law itself: in its murderous bruising origin.<sup>30</sup>

Part of the problem of any attempt to think death, and particularly to think it in terms of experience, is that it resists incorporation by the critical armature through which experience is usually mediated. This is to some extent a matter of temporality. As Freud suggests, we are always on the scene both too soon and too late: “Our own death is indeed unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it we can perceive that we really survive as spectators.”<sup>31</sup> Even in imagination, it is impossible to coincide with death. In projecting death (and there is a consonance with the terminology of film that cannot be avoided here), we can only see it from the

stalls, *still* before us. The spectre comes as a phenomenalisation of this anachronism, of this failure to live comfortably in linear time, exposing its uncanny potential to defamiliarise the familiar, and vice versa. This experience of the spectral structure of temporality is what we call history. It would be hard to think of this as an ending.

## Notes

All references to the play-text of *Hamlet* are to Harold Jenkins' Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1982 [repr. Thomas Nelson, 1997]).

- <sup>1</sup> Nicholas Royle, "Phantom Review," *Textual Practice* 11.2 (1997), 386-398.
- <sup>2</sup> *Shakespeare in Love*, dir. John Madden (Miramax Films/Universal Pictures, 1998). The screenplay is published as Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love* (London: Faber, 1999). All references are to the published version and will be given parenthetically in the text.
- <sup>3</sup> Parenthetically, I wonder whether somewhere here is perhaps an echo of an exchange between Hamlet and Polonius. Asked what he is reading, Hamlet replies "Words, words, words." In this scene of the play, Polonius is described, with clear sexual overtones, as a "fishmonger," raising the watery spectre of Ophelia. But I fear that this may not be so much a wet herring as a red herring, and this is one ghost that I do not intend to follow here.
- <sup>4</sup> The phrase "upstart crow" is, of course, Robert Greene's, and is often cited as part of the first piece of Shakespeare criticism.
- <sup>5</sup> All quotations from *The Sonnets* are taken from the Arden edition by Katherine Duncan-Jones, ed. (London: Thomas Nelson, 1997).
- <sup>6</sup> Among a great deal of material which might be cited here, the best place to begin is probably Jonathan Bate, ed., *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1992).
- <sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Ghost Dance: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," trans. Jean-Luc Svoboda, *Public* 2 (1989), 61.
- <sup>8</sup> Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1999), 138.
- <sup>9</sup> This phrase echoes Walter Benjamin's "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Technischen Reproduzierbarkeit." The standard translation is "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973 [1992]). "Technical Reproducibility" is, however, to be preferred to "Mechanical Reproduction."
- <sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la Dette, le Travail du Deuil et la Nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993); *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 10.
- <sup>11</sup> Derek Attridge, "Ghost Writing," in Anselm Haverkamp, ed., *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 224. For further essays on the importance of the spectral for critical and theoretical enterprises, see Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, eds., *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).
- <sup>12</sup> Obviously much more needs to be said here, but I hope you will allow me to hold this over, since it is the subject of another paper, "'A little more than kin, and less than kind': Hamlet's communities," delivered at the *Early Modern Kinship* conference at King's College, London, in March 2001.
- <sup>13</sup> The central text is *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but references to *Hamlet* also appear in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, 15 October 1897, "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage" [1905/6, published posthumously] and "The Moses of Michelangelo" [1914]. These readings are discussed by Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), and in Nicholas Royle, "To be announced," in Joanne Morra, Mark Robson and Marquard Smith, eds., *The Limits of Death: Between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 234-52.

- <sup>14</sup> Such a weariness might be equivalent to that of Steve Woodmore, the man who holds the record for fast speaking, and who delivered the entirety of the “To be or not to be” soliloquy in 23.8 seconds. At this speed, it is almost unintelligible, and has to be checked by slowing down the tape to ensure that every word has been spoken. Think of the rehearsals, of the practice, of what the French call the “*répétition*.” Of every time that this speech has been rehearsed. What this performance of the speech makes clear is the always present possibility of a repetition of the soliloquy for purposes which have nothing to do with the meaning of the speech itself. Is it also possible that this insight might be extended to the entire play? This might lead us to think rather differently about our practices of performance.
- <sup>15</sup> Kenneth Branagh, *Hamlet by William Shakespeare: Screenplay, Introduction and Film Diary* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), viii.
- <sup>16</sup> This urge to identification is discussed in R. A. Foakes, “The Reception of Hamlet,” *Shakespeare Survey* 45 (1993), 1-13. Steven Berkoff also published his account of his own production as *I am Hamlet* (London: Faber, 1989).
- <sup>17</sup> For some fascinating discussions of prosthesis, see David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Terry Castle, “Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie,” *Critical Inquiry* 15.1 (1988), 26-61; and Marq Smith, “Prosthetic Nightmares,” *parallax* 6.3 (2000), 93-104.
- <sup>18</sup> See James Joyce, *Ulysses* [1922] (London: Penguin, 1984), chap. 9.
- <sup>19</sup> “On *Shakspear*. 1630,” *Poems of Mr John Milton* (London: 1645).
- <sup>20</sup> Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 67-81.
- <sup>21</sup> See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
- <sup>22</sup> Heiner Müller, *Die Hamletmaschine*, in *Revolutionsstücke*, ed. Uwe Wittstock (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), trans. Marc von Henning as *The Hamletmachine*, in *Theatremachine* (London: Faber, 1995), 93.
- <sup>23</sup> Critchley has used this as one of his key terms in his brief but intriguing *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). “Obscurantism” is defined as “the rejection of the causal explanations offered by natural science by referring them to an alternative causal story, that is somehow of a higher order, but essentially occult.”(118)
- <sup>24</sup> Paul de Man, “The Resistance to Theory,” in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3-20: “It turns out that the resistance to theory is in fact a resistance to reading”(15); “Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory *is* itself this resistance”(19).
- <sup>25</sup> Derrida, *Specters*, 126.
- <sup>26</sup> Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity* (London: Verso, 1999), 175-76.
- <sup>27</sup> For Critchley’s own thoughts on nihilism, see his *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997) and “To die laughing,” in Joanne Morra, Mark Robson and Marquard Smith, eds., *The Limits of Death: Between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3-21.
- <sup>28</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992). It is discussed by Derrida in chapter 3 of *Specters of Marx*.
- <sup>29</sup> This must include monarchy, which is one of the reasons for my distrust of the “end-ist” narrative offered in Julie Sanders, “The End of History and the Last Man: Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet*,” in Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray, eds., *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 147-64.
- <sup>30</sup> Derrida, *Specters*, 21.
- <sup>31</sup> Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” [1915], *Penguin Freud Library 12: Civilization, Society and Religion*, Albert Dickson, ed. (London: Penguin, 1985), 77.