

SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC
USE OF GHOSTS

By

Leola Inez Bass

Bachelor of Science

Oklahoma A. & M. College

Stillwater, Oklahoma

1933

Submitted to the Department of English
Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

1937

APPROVED:

George H. White

In charge of Thesis

George H. White

Professor of English

W. C. M. Intosh

Dean of Graduate School

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to Professor George H. White for his helpful suggestions and criticisms, and to Miss Margaret Walters of the library staff for her assistance in library research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I	
Elizabethan Ideas Concerning Ghosts. .	1
Chapter II	
The Status of the Ghost in Elizabethan Drama Before Shakespeare	5
Chapter III	
A Survey of the Ghosts in Shakespeare's Plays:	11
A. <u>Richard III</u>	11
B. <u>Julius Caesar</u>	14
C. <u>Macbeth</u>	19
D. <u>Hamlet</u>	23
Chapter IV	
Shakespeare's Effective Use of Ghosts .	34

ELIZABETHAN IDEAS CONCERNING GHOSTS

It is difficult for modern generations to understand the ghost lore in the plays of William Shakespeare, because we no longer believe that ghosts exist. Through scientific investigation, we have found that the ghost phenomenon, like many others once supposed to be of supernatural origin, can be explained by known laws of nature. It is not that the Elizabethans saw ghosts and we do not. The distinction is that they saw them and believed they came from another world, while we see them and are convinced they are the result of an abnormal condition of the body or mind.

In spite of the progress which marked the Renaissance--the revival of interest in classical learning, the expansion of Europe, and the rise of the middle class--the superstitions of an earlier age were still prevalent. People still believed in fetishes, totems, luck bones, love charms, folk remedies, witchcraft, and ghost lore. Shakespearean critics are agreed that the Elizabethans believed in ghosts. Brandes makes this comment: "It must not be forgotten that this whole spirit and witch world meant something quite different to Shakespeare's contemporaries from what it means to us. We cannot even be absolutely certain that Shakespeare himself did not believe in the existence of such beings."¹

¹ Georg Brandes, William Shakespeare, p. 423.

Wilson describes Elizabethan England in these words: "The world moreover was the abode of myriads of evil spirits, classified by learned demonologists and assigned to their respective elements of earth, air, and water."² Stephenson, in a discussion of Hamlet, says: "Doubtless every person in the Globe playhouse shuddered at the appearance of Hamlet's ghost, for it was true, actually true to them, that this might be either Denmark's spirit or the very devil in a pleasing shape."³ Lily B. Campbell, in her discussion of Renaissance revenge theories, makes this statement: "Although scientists differed somewhat among themselves as to the reality of ghosts, the theological and popular treatises of the period leave little room for doubt that ghosts were popularly accepted as existing outside the mind of the one to whom they appeared."⁴ As will be shown in the next chapter, this belief in ghosts is reflected in much of the literature of the period.

According to the ghost lore of the age, Providence was constantly allowing the departed to reappear on earth to disclose some act of violence, to guard hidden treasure, or to seek revenge. These beings were to be feared because they sometimes deprived people of their reason or harmed them physically. A ghost always appeared between midnight

² Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare, p. 17.

³ Henry Stephenson, Shakespeare's London, p. 6.

⁴ Lily B. Campbell, "Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England," Modern Philology, XXVIII, p. 294.

and cockcrow. It encountered no difficulty in gliding through solid barriers such as doors and walls. It could speak only to the person for whom it had a direct message but sometimes could be seen by others. It could only be spoken to with effect by persons of learning who could address it in the Latin language. A ghost was supposed to speak in a squeaky, unpleasant voice and to have a sour, melancholy face.⁵

So much for the common lore of the century. Among the thinkers of the time we find considerable disagreement. Sixteenth century attitudes toward ghosts are classified by Dover Wilson into three schools of thought.⁶ The first group was composed of Catholics. It was easy for the believers in Catholicism to explain ghosts. They believed that the souls of men oftentimes did not go immediately to heaven or to hell but to an intermediate place called purgatory. To the Catholic, ghosts were the souls of the departed who had stayed in purgatory because they had unfinished business on earth.

The Protestants also believed in ghosts. Not only did universal testimony favor their actuality, but a story from the Bible substantiated Protestant beliefs. Saul, on the eve of a great battle with the Philistines, was disturbed by many fears. He realized that the Philistines were a

⁵ W. S. Davis, Life in Elizabethan Days, pp. 213-214.

⁶ Dover Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, pp. 61-64.

powerful enemy and that God had departed from him. He went to the Witch of Endor and she conjured up the spirit of Samuel, who predicted the King's failure in the forthcoming battle.⁷ The Protestants did not question this story because they accepted scriptural authority. Their conception of religion made it impossible for them to accept the Catholic idea of purgatory. They thought it possible for ghosts to be angels, but they thought it more likely that they were devils who returned to earth in the form of departed friends or relatives to work bodily or spiritual harm.

In the third class were the skeptics. Skeptics are those who doubt some generally accepted conclusion unless they are able to perceive the substantiating evidence. The skeptics thought people saw ghosts because of an unhealthy state of mind or because a joke was played upon them by some rogue. As is true in any period, the skeptics were in the minority. There were, however, enough readers to call for three editions of a burlesque rhapsody entitled Beware the Cat, which ridiculed spells, sorcery, and cat legends.⁸ As we shall see later, Horatio, in the play Hamlet, is a typical example of the skeptic.

⁷ I Samuel, XXVIII.

⁸ Cambridge History of English Literature, VII, p. 125.

THE STATUS OF THE GHOST IN ELIZABETHAN DRAMA BEFORE
SHAKESPEARE

The Renaissance period received from previous periods and civilizations an inheritance of superstitions. The modern tendency is to think of the Renaissance as a complete break from the middle ages. Literary periods can never be distinguished definitely, because there is a certain continuity of thought which extends from one period to another. Ghost lore did not originate in England during the Renaissance. There are numerous references to ghosts in the English popular ballads, which were written at a very early date.

Let us now consider the history of the dramatic ghost. It did not make its first appearance as an actor on the Elizabethan stage. The Greek dramatist Aeschylus, who was born in 525 B. C., introduces the dramatic ghost in his play Persae, which glorifies the Battle of Salamis. The ghost of Darius in this play appears as a ghost of prophecy. Aeschylus makes further use of the ghost in his great tragedy Eumenides, in which the spirit of Clytemnestra is a revenge ghost. The Greek tragedian Euripides uses the ghost for still another purpose in Hecuba. The ghost of the murdered Polydorus appears as a prologue ghost revealing the information necessary for the audience to understand the play. Both the revenge and prologue ghost are used by Elizabethan dramatists, but there is no evidence to indicate that

this was a result of the study of Greek drama.¹

The Elizabethans were more influenced by the work of the tragic writer Seneca, whose plays were immensely popular during the Renaissance. Sir Thomas Wyatt names Seneca as one of the two authors he preferred. In the first stanza of "A Renouncing of Love," he wrote:

Farewell, Love, and all thy laws forever!
Thy baited hooks shall tangle me no more:
Senec and Plato call me from thy lore
To perfect wealth my wit for to endeavour.

In 1581 Thomas Newton published his translation of ten Senecan plays, and by 1589, the approximate date of the publication of The Spanish Tragedy by Kyd, the English writers had adopted many of the weird and bloody ideas expressed in Senecan tragedy.² In the Literature of England the first English tragedy, Corboduë, is described as being a stiff, Senecan production.³ Hazelton Spencer, in the introductory note to Bussy D'Ambois, makes this comment regarding Chapman: "He was also influenced, like all the Elizabethan tragic writers, by the plays of Seneca, most notably in the employment of the Messenger and the ghost, and in the handling of Bussy's death."⁴ Let us now consider briefly the reasons for the popularity of Senecan tragedies.

¹ "Ghost Technique in Shakespeare," The Shakespeare Association Bulletin, X, pp. 157-158.

² Samuel Small, "The Influence of Seneca," The Shakespeare Association Bulletin, X, p. 137.

³ Woods, Watt, and Anderson, The Literature of England, I, p. 288.

⁴ Hazelton Spencer, Elizabethan Plays, p. 518.

Their popularity may be partially explained by the revival of interest in classical literature. Scholars, in their zest for learning, were turning to the great literature of the past. Knowledge of the classics was obtained largely through Roman literature because Latin was a more familiar language than Greek. This perhaps accounts for Seneca's plays being more widely read than those of Aeschylus and Euripides.

In the second place, the Elizabethans had become deeply interested in investigating the phenomena of this life and the life to come. Ghosts were considered as evidence of the nature of future life, about which there was considerable reflection. Seneca represented ghosts, so this is another possible reason for the popularity of his plays.

Furthermore, Senecan tragedies satisfied the Elizabethan desire for the dramatic. They enjoyed the spectacular and despised anything humdrum or commonplace. Renaissance literature reflects this interest in the sensational. The dramas are built around the lives of kings, queens, princes, and noblemen, and the scenes are generally laid in some king's court or on the battlefield. There are commonplace characters, but ordinarily they stay in the background. This Elizabethan flair for the unusual is reflected in the adventurous lives of some of the great persons of the Renaissance. Sir Francis Drake, English naval hero, plundered Spanish ships and brought home treasure to Elizabeth. Sir Walter Raleigh lived an adventurous life as

soldier, sailor, courtier, historian, and prisoner, and died spectacularly on the block in 1618. It is no wonder that Seneca's plays were popular. He chose sensational themes for his subject matter based on the legends of the Greeks. In Agamemnon the ghost of Thyestes speaks of the seven torments of hell, describes the unnatural crimes of the house of Pelops, foretells new crimes, and cries out for revenge. In Thyestes the ghost of Tantalus rants about the crimes of his house and refers constantly to the punishment of the underworld. In Oedipus, Creon, who has just returned from the rites of necromancy, invokes all the ugly forms from the universe. These plays so filled with murders cries for revenge, and spectral appearances from another world must surely have appealed to the Elizabethan desire for the spectacular.⁵

Three of Shakespeare's greatest contemporaries--Kyd, Marlowe, and Greene--made dramatic use of ghosts. In The Spanish Tragedy, one of the most sensational dramas of the period, Kyd uses the ghost of Andrea as chorus for the play. This ghost serves the same purpose that the chorus did in classical drama. In the first scene it acquaints the audience with the information necessary for an understanding of the play. In the last scene it summarizes what has taken place and tells the audience that its enemies' punishment will be continued in hell.

Three supernatural beings appear in The Tragical His-

⁵ The Drama, II, pp. 137-153.

tory of Doctor Faustus--the spirits of Alexander the Great, his Paramour, and the beautiful Helen of Troy. Faustus conjures up the first two spirits at the request of the Emperor, and the spirit of Helen of Troy to please some scholars. These ghosts have no connection with the plot, but are used to demonstrate Faustus' power, which he has gained by selling his soul to the devil.

In Greene's Honorable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay there is a contest of wits between the greatest German scholar, Vandermast, and the greatest English scholar, Friar Bacon. The latter is proved greater than his competitor because the spirit of Hercules (conjured up by the German scholar) refuses to obey Vandermast in the presence of Bacon. When Vandermast gives a command to Hercules, this spirit answers:

I dare not. Seest thou not great Bacon here,
Whose frown doth act more than thy magic can?⁶

This incident is used to show the greatness of Friar Bacon, who is the medieval scientist, Roger Bacon, and like the spirits in The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, the spirit of Hercules is not particularly important to the plot.

These spectral beings created by Shakespeare's contemporaries are not artistic. When we read the plays, we do not think of the ghosts as actual characters but purely as dramatic devices. Wilson has given us an excellent description of the pre-Shakespearean ghost--

⁶ Robert Greene, Honorable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, III, ii, 137-138.

The stock apparition of the Elizabethan theater was a classical puppet, borrowed from Seneca, a kind of Jack-in the-box, popping up from Tartarus at appropriate moments--.⁷

As we shall see in the next chapter, it was Shakespeare who transformed the dramatic ghost from a crude device into a creature of dignity.

⁷ Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 55.

A SURVEY OF THE GHOSTS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

The ghost takes its place as a regular member of the cast in four of Shakespeare's great tragedies--Richard III, Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Hamlet. Shakespeare uses the ghost entirely as a tragic figure, allowing no ghostly intervention in the comedies. Shakespearean ghosts can be classified into two groups--the subjective ghost, which is a product of the imagination; and the objective ghost, which, according to Renaissance ideas, is a reality. Critics differ widely as to which ghosts belong in each classification. I shall attempt to prove that the ghost in Hamlet is objective, and the ghosts in the other three plays are subjective.

RICHARD III

Shakespeare's earliest and least artistic use of ghosts was in Richard III. In this play, the King's slain victims appear on the night before the battle of Bosworth Field to haunt the royal murderer and speak words of encouragement to Richmond, his adversary. When the scene opens, Richard, usurper of the English throne, and Richmond, defender of the house of Lancaster, are making final plans for the next day's battle. Richard reveals nervousness and anxiety by refusing food, drinking great bowls of wine, and speaking of the absence of that alacrity of spirit and cheer of mind he was wont to have. Richmond is alert in his preparations for the combat, yet he seems confident that God will give him the victory because his cause is just. Alone in his tent, he

he prays--

O Thou whose captain I account myself,
 Look on my forces with a gracious eye;
 Put in their hands thy bruising irons of wrath,
 That they may crush down with a heavy fall
 The usurping helmets of our adversaries!
 Make us thy ministers of chastisement,
 That we may praise thee in thy victory!
 To thee I do commend my watchful soul
 Ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes:
 Sleeping and waking, O, defend me still.¹

After Richard and Richmond have retired, the ghosts of Richard's slain victims appear in true Senecan fashion between the tents of the two generals. They torment Richard by ranting of the wrong he has done them and predicting his failure in the forthcoming battle, but turning to Richmond they speak words of greatest encouragement and assure him that his course is just. Among these spectral beings appear the ghosts of four people who should have been very dear to Richard--his brother, Clarence; his wife, Anne; his nephews, Edward and Richard--all dead because they stood in the way of his advancement. Especially touching are the words of his nephews:

Dream on thy cousins smother'd in the Tower:
 Let us be lead within thy bosom, Richard,
 And weigh thee down to ruin, shame, and death!
 Thy nephew's souls bid thee despair and die!--
 Sleep Richmond, sleep in peace, and wake in joy;
 Good angels guard thee from the boar's annoy!
 Live and beget a happy race of kings!
 Edward's unhappy souls do bid thee flourish.²

Although these spirits speak fifty-eight lines in the play, they are robbed of their objectivity because they ap-

¹ Richard III, V, iii, 114-123.

² Ibid. V, iii, 157-164.

pear in dreams. Both generals realize that the ghosts are hallucinations. Richard says to his servant:

O Ratcliff, I have dreamed a fearful dream!³

When the lords ask Richmond if he has slept well, he replies--

The sweetest sleep and fairest-boding dreams
That ever enter'd in a drowsy head
Have I since your departure had, my lords.⁴

The repetition of the word "dream" leads us to conclude that the ghosts are not a reality.

Although the ghosts in Richard III are not so artistically created as Shakespeare's other ghosts, they serve a valuable dramatic purpose. Their function is to represent the mental condition of Richard and Richmond on the eve of the last struggle between the houses of York and Lancaster. The ghosts give expression to Richmond's feeling of confidence and Richard's fear of retribution. Richmond knows that he deserves the victory because he is fighting for the restoration of moral order; Richard knows that he deserves to lose because he has tried to cast it aside.

God and good angels fight on Richmond's side
And Richard falls in all his height of pride.⁵

³ Ibid. V, 111, 218.

⁴ Ibid. V, 111, 231-233.

⁵ Ibid. V, 111, 181-182.

This is the universal law of cause and effect--that evil must result in evil, and good must result in good. Richard defeats himself, because the memory of guilt saps his courage and sends him to the battle unnerved.

By the apostle Paul, shadows tonite
Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers
Armed in proof and led by shallow Richmond.⁶

In speaking to the army just before the battle, he says

Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls,
Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe:
Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.⁷

These words were not spoken to encourage the soldiers, but to help Richard regain his lost courage.

We are not surprised that the battle of Bosworth Field ends in a victory for Richmond, because the predictions of the ghosts have caused us to expect Richard's downfall. There on the battlefield, Richmond is crowned King Henry VII. The "wretched, bloody, and usurping boar" is dead, and the War of Roses is ended.

JULIUS CAESAR

The spirit of Caesar, which appears to Brutus on the

⁶ Ibid. V, 111, 220-223.

⁷ Ibid. V, 111, 314-317.

eve of the battle at Philippi, is subjective in nature. Brutus, in his tent at Sardis, is overcome by a sense of failure and a foreboding of the ruin of his cause. His mental agony is increased by distressing news from Rome. He learns that his wife, grieved by his absence and frightened by the increasing strength of Antony's army, has committed suicide; the triumvirs have put to death a large number of senators by proscriptions and bills of outlawry; large armies under the direction of Octavius and Antony have come to Philippi. These matters must have weighed heavily upon the mind of Brutus.

Furthermore, he was a man of noble character and must have suffered for his part in the assassination of Caesar. Even Antony, who opposed the conspirators, pays tribute to the nobility of Brutus. In the last scene of the play, Antony stands over the dead body of Brutus and says--

This was the noblest Roman of them all;
 All the conspirators save only he
 Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
 He only in general honest thought
 And common good to all, made one of them.
 His life was gentle, and the elements
 So mixed in him that nature might stand up
 And say to all the world "This was a man!"⁸

Brutus became a partner in the conspiracy under a delusion of patriotism. He did not desire the assassination of Caesar for any personal reason, but from a mistaken sense of duty. As he expressed it--

⁸ Julius Caesar, V, v, 68-75.

Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.⁹

Cassius had skillfully and shrewdly led Brutus to believe that Caesar was a menace to the public good. The conspirators desired his participation in the assassination to give it the appearance of right. Cassius played upon Brutus' love of liberty and his unselfish concern for the common good in involving him in the conspiracy. When Caesar is stabbed, he shows his high regard for Brutus--

Et tu, Brute? Then fall, Caesar!¹⁰

Brutus helped assassinate his friend and benefactor because he considered it his duty as a patriot, but it accomplished nothing for his cause and resulted in Civil War. With such thoughts uppermost in his mind, it is not surprising that Brutus imagined that he saw a ghost.

It is an indication of the ghost's subjectivity that no spectral being visits Cassius, who is equally as guilty as Brutus. Subjective ghosts do not disturb Cassius, because he has no moral scruples about the assassination of Caesar.

It is true that the ghost speaks three lines in the play, but the words it speaks are of such a nature that they might easily have represented the thoughts uppermost in Brutus' mind. Let us examine the conversation between Brutus and Caesar's ghost.

⁹ Ibid, III, 11, 23.

¹⁰ Ibid, III, 1, 79.

Brutus. Speak to me what thou art.

Ghost. Thy evil spirit, Brutus.

Brutus. Why comest thou?

Ghost. To tell thee thou shalt see me at Philippi.

Brutus. Well; then I shall see thee again?

Ghost. Ay, at Philippi.

Brutus. Why, I will see thee at Philippi, then.¹¹

The ghost reveals nothing of which Brutus was not already aware. He knows that the spirit of Caesar will be at Philippi, because Antony and Octavius are fighting the conspirators to revenge Caesar's death. We conclude from these facts that the ghost is merely a symbol of Brutus' own presentiments and fears.

Although the ghost of Julius Caesar makes only one appearance, it has an extremely important function in the drama. The bodily presence of Caesar leaves the play in the first scene of Act III, but his spiritual presence dominates the entire last half of the play. Mark Antony, over the dead body of Caesar, prophesies this--

And Caesar's spirit, raging for revenge,
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
Cry 'Havoc' and let slip the dogs of war.¹²

Caesar's influence does not die with Caesar. Brutus' plan to free Rome from a possible tyranny failed. Three tyrants became the governing power instead of one; Mark Antony so aroused the mob that there was civil war instead of peace. Mark Antony's funeral speech caused the people to love the dead Caesar more than they had loved the living Caesar.

¹¹ Ibid. IV, 111, 281-287.

¹² Ibid. III, 1, 270-273.

This spirit of Caesar which takes the form of a ghost when it comes to Brutus on the night before the battle at Philippi merely symbolizes the power of the dead dictator. Its words,

"--thou shalt see me at Philippi."¹³

seem to be a prediction of Brutus' failure. This apparition paralyzes his courage because he realizes that the spirit of Caesar is urging Octavius and Antony to revenge.

Antony, in a speech before the battle at Philippi, taunts Brutus by recalling the scene of the assassination. Octavius vows that he will not put up his sword

Never, till Caesar's three and thirty wounds
Be well avenged, or till another Caesar
Have added slaughter to the sword of traitors.¹⁴

Cassius, seeing that the cause is lost, has his servant Pindarus stab him. He dies with these words on his lips:

Caesar, thou art revenged
Even with the sword that killed thee.¹⁵

Brutus, as he stands over the dead body of Cassius, mentions the spiritual presence of Caesar.

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!
Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
In our own proper entrails.¹⁶

At the last Brutus runs on the sword of Strato rather than be taken back to Rome as a captive. His dying words are:

¹³ Ibid. IV, 111, 284.

¹⁴ Ibid. V, 1, 51-53.

¹⁵ Ibid. V, 111, 46-47.

¹⁶ Ibid. V, 111, 95-97.

Caesar, now be still:
I killed not thee with half so good a will.¹⁷

With these words Brutus indicates that now Caesar's perturbed spirit can rest.

MACBETH

The banquet scene in Macbeth is one of the most effective and impressive scenes found in any of the Shakespearean tragedies. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth give a banquet for the highest officers of the state. Two of the invited guests are Banquo and Fleance, whom Macbeth arranges to have murdered before they reach the palace. As the ghosts enter the banquet hall, Macbeth sees one of the murderers, who reveals the death of Banquo and the flight of Fleance. Coming back to his guests, Macbeth tells them how disappointed he is that Banquo is not present. Almost as a challenge to his deception, Macbeth sees the spirit of Banquo take the place which he was to have occupied at the table. Macbeth creates a scene and would have probably revealed his guilt had not Lady Macbeth imperiously dismissed the guests.

The ghost does not speak and it is visible only to Macbeth. The idea of the apparition being seen by only one person at the table offered no problem to the Elizabethan. According to ghost lore, even though a ghost was in the presence of several people, it oftentimes was visible only to the one for whom it had a direct message. Since Lady

¹⁷ Ibid. V, v, 50-51.

Macbeth has no part in this second murder, she does not see the ghost.

The subjectivity of Banquo's ghost seems obvious when we study the scene carefully. Macbeth, the man of action, has killed the innocent, beloved Duncan to further his own great ambition. To cover up the first deed, he has been responsible for the killing of a second man--a kinsman and friend--the good and honest Banquo. It seems logical that a person with so much on his conscience might create a ghost mentally. Furthermore, Macbeth has shown once before that he is subject to such hallucinations. Lady Macbeth reminds him of this by saying:

This is the very painting of your fear:
This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,
Led you to Duncan.¹⁸

Further proof of the ghost's subjectivity is found in Macbeth's description--

Now they rise again
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns.¹⁹

Just a few moments before the murderer had said to him--

--safe in a ditch he bides,
With twenty trenched gashes on his head.²⁰

Macbeth's repeating the murderer's description indicates that the thought of what the murderer said has returned to him with such intensity that it takes visible form.

On further examination, we notice that the ghost disap-

¹⁸ Macbeth, III, iv, 61-63.

¹⁹ Ibid. III, iv, 80-81.

²⁰ Ibid. III, iv, 25-26.

pears when Macbeth asserts its unreality.

Hence horrible shadow!
Unreal mockery hence!²¹

Macbeth himself regards the ghost as an illusion for he says after its disappearance--

My strange and self abuse
Is the initiate fear that wants hard use.²²

These facts lead us to conclude that the ghost is subjective.

The function of the ghost in Macbeth is to reveal his disintegration of character. At the beginning of the play we see Macbeth as a suitable tragic figure--an admirable character respected by those who know him best. The captain who has fought with him in the battle with the Irish kerns and the Norwegians praises him for his bravery, and the King describes him in the ironical words:

O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!²³

In the banquet scene we see a man so harassed by the memory of guilt that he is afraid to be alone with his own thoughts. He suffers such mental agony that in his imagination he sees the spirit of the one he has wronged. Throughout the play, Shakespeare makes us aware of Macbeth's strong imagination. After the first prophetic utterances of the witches, Banquo describes Macbeth as seeming "rapt withal" and says to him:

Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear

²¹ Ibid. III, 1v, 106-107.

²² Ibid. III, 1v, 142-143.

²³ Ibid. I, 1i, 24.

Things that do sound so fair? I' the name of truth,
 Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
 Which outwardly ye show?²⁴

Following the encounter with the witches, his mind begins to play upon the possibility of his becoming king. His words are an indication of his imaginative power.

This supernatural soliciting
 Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,
 Commencing in a truth? I amthane of Cawdor.
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
 Against the use of nature? Present fears
 Are less than horrible imaginings:
 My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
 Shakes so my single state of mind that function
 Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
 But what is not.²⁵

Before he kills Duncan, he imagines the consequences.

If the assassination
 Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
 With his surcease success; that but this blow
 Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
 We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
 We still have judgement here; that we but teach
 Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
 To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
 Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice
 To our own lips.²⁶

Even before the crime is committed, he sees a bloody dagger. When the deed is done, he tells Lady Macbeth that he thought he heard a voice cry:

Sleep no more!
 Macbeth does murder sleep.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid. I, iii, 51-54.

²⁵ Ibid. I, iii, 130-142.

²⁶ Ibid. I, vii, 2-12.

²⁷ Ibid. II, 1, 36-37.

The ghost of Banquo is a creation of Macbeth's overwrought imagination, and its appearance is a revelation of his mental suffering.

The tragedy in Macbeth is his realization of the kind of person he might have been and the kind of person he really is. The ghost is a symbol of the depths of degradation to which he has sunk; therefore, its entrance is extremely effective. It emphasizes the deterioration in his character--until we see him in the last scene with only one admirable trait--physical courage.

Lay on Macduff
And damn'd be him that first cries 'Hold, enough!'²⁸

HAMLET X X

The spirit of the departed king in Hamlet is Shakespeare's spectral masterpiece. While the other Shakespearean ghosts merely reveal the mental suffering of those who see them, the ghost of Hamlet's father is a real actor in the play.

This ghost is objective in nature. In the opening scene of the play the audience learns that the ghost of Denmark's departed king has appeared on two successive nights to Marcellus and Bernardo, the palace guards. Marcellus imparts the story of the ghost's appearance to Horatio, Hamlet's friend, and induces him to watch with them on the following night. Horatio is skeptical about the ghost's ap-

²⁸ Ibid. V, vii, 33-34.

pearance, attributing it to excessive imagination on the part of the guards. Marcellus, in a speech to Bernardo, speaks of Horatio's skepticism.

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
 And will not let belief take hold of him
 Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us
 Therefore I have entreated him along
 With us to watch the minutes of this night,
 That if again this apparition come,
 He may approve our eyes and speak to it.²⁹

To this Horatio says

Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.³⁰

He is soon to change his mind, however, for the ghost makes its third appearance and he finds it as real as the guards had described it. Horatio's seeing the ghost is an important proof of its reality. He did not believe in the ghost when he was told of its appearance, but after he has seen it, he exclaims--

Before my God, I might not this believe
 Without the sensible and true avouch
 Of mine own eyes.³¹

Horatio reports what he has seen to Prince Hamlet, who is present at its fourth appearance. The spirit refuses to speak in the presence of the others, so Hamlet follows it from the platform, where it discloses the unnatural circumstances of its death. Hamlet, who thought his father's death the result of a serpent's sting, learns that Claudius murdered him by pouring a poisonous substance into his ear.

²⁹ Hamlet, I, 1, 23-29.

³⁰ Ibid. I, 1, 31.

³¹ Ibid. I, 1, 56-58.

The ghost commissions Hamlet to revenge his death, thus starting the action of the play.

* This is the only Shakespearean ghost which is seen by more than one person. It is seen by four people, one of whom is a skeptic. This is a significant indication of its objective nature.

Furthermore, this is not an ordinary ghost but one that Shakespeare has endowed with personality. When the ghost gives its commission to Hamlet, it displays lovable human characteristics. It shows the consideration of a father and the deep love of a husband in the words:

But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her.³²

The reality of King Hamlet's ghost is further emphasized by the nature of its dress. It appears in the uniform of a soldier--a departure from the conventional ghost's costume. It walks in a stately manner, armed from head to foot. Horatio says--

Such was the very armour he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated;
So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,
He smote the gledded Polacks on the ice.
'Tis strange.³³

Hamlet is genuinely amazed when Horatio describes the warlike appearance of the ghost. He asks further questions.

Hamlet. Arm'd say you?

³² Ibid. I, v, 85-89.

³³ Ibid. I, i, 60-64.

Marcellus and Bernardo. Arm'd, my lord.

Hamlet. From top to toe?

Marcellus and Bernardo. My lord from head to foot.³⁴

Hamlet is so greatly impressed by this description that he mentions it again when the others have gone.

My father's spirit in arms! All is not well;
I doubt some foul play: would the night were come!³⁵

Shakespeare makes the spectre of King Hamlet realistic by creating it to conform with the Elizabethan ideas concerning ghosts. Several references are made to the prevalent superstitions of the age. When the ghost appears in the opening scene, Marcellus says:

Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.³⁶

This request is made because, according to common lore, a ghost could be safely addressed only by a person familiar with the Latin language. Horatio, in pleading with the ghost to speak, makes another reference to popular superstition--

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,
Speak of it; stay, and speak!³⁷

Several references are made to the disappearance of the ghost with the crowing of the cock.

I have heard,
The cock that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th' extravagant and erring spirit hies

³⁴ Ibid. I, ii, 225-226.

³⁵ Ibid. I, ii, 255.

³⁶ Ibid. I, i, 42.

³⁷ Ibid. I, i, 136-139.

To his confine: and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.³⁸

In Act I, Scene IV, Horatio tries to prevent Hamlet's following the ghost by reminding him of a common belief concerning ghosts--

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness?³⁹

The ghost in Hamlet is the kind of spirit which most Englishmen still believed in at the end of the sixteenth century. Shakespeare made the ghost more realistic by giving it a contemporary spiritual background.

Thus far we have dealt exclusively with the ghost's appearance in Act I. The ghost appears again in Act III, Scene IV, during a highly dramatic scene between Hamlet and Gertrude. It may be contended, even by those who grant the objectivity of the ghost in Act I, that the ghost which appears in the queen's bedroom is a hallucination. It is true that Hamlet is in an excited state of mind throughout this scene and could have created a mental ghost, but there seems sufficient evidence to prove its objectivity.

There is a definite reason for the ghost's appearance at this particular time. Just as the ghost furnishes the motive for revenge in Act I, it comes to remind Hamlet of

³⁸ Ibid. I, 1, 149-156.

³⁹ Ibid. I, iv, 69-74.

his duty in Act III. Hamlet is not carrying out the ghost's orders. He has not accomplished the revenge; he has severely reproved Gertrude, which he was specifically enjoined not to do; by killing Polonius he has jeopardized his chances for successfully accomplishing the revenge; and now, excited as he is, it seems likely that he will reveal the ghost's secret to Gertrude. In the speech previous to the ghost's entry Hamlet has described Claudius as "a murderer and a villain." Hamlet starts another bitter denunciation of the king, but is interrupted by the appearance of the ghost. It was a timely moment for the ghost to appear and rebuke Hamlet.

Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.⁴⁰

The gracious spirit then turns to Gertrude, forgetting everything but her pitiable condition.

But, look, amazement on thy mother sits,
O step between her and her fighting soul,
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works,
Speak to her Hamlet.⁴¹

At the command of the ghost, Hamlet turns his attention to the queen, who has seen nothing. The inability of Gertrude to see the ghost accounts for most of the subjective theories regarding this spirit. Dover Wilson has given a logical explanation of this problem. Gertrude cannot see King Hamlet, because she is separated from him by her sin. He cites for his authority a speech from Der bestrafte Bruder-

⁴⁰Ibid. III, iv, 108-109.

⁴¹Ibid. III, iv, 110-113.

mord, the German Hamlet, in which Hamlet says:

"I can readily believe that you see nothing, for you are no longer worthy to look upon his form."⁴²

This interpretation explains another perplexing problem in the play--the meaning of Hamlet's words

Do not look upon me;
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern affects.⁴³

The king becomes strangely agitated because he cannot communicate with Gertrude, and this accounts for his "piteous action." Again, Wilson cites the corresponding scene in Der bestrafte Brudermord in which Hamlet says: "See, he beckons as if he would speak to you."⁴⁴ Almost immediately the spirit of the king "steals away," realizing perhaps that he is forever separated from the one he loves best.

An important proof of the ghost's reality is Hamlet's own contention that it is real. The other Shakespearean characters that see ghosts speak of them as illusions, but Hamlet contends that the ghost is a reality. In replying to Gertrude's accusation that the ghost is the mere "coinage of (his) brain," he says:

My pulse as yours, doth temperately keep time,
And makes as healthful music.⁴⁵

⁴² Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 254.

⁴³ Hamlet, III, iv, 125-127.

⁴⁴ Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 254.

⁴⁵ Hamlet, III, 4, 139-140.

Again, the costume of the king may be cited as proof of its reality. Hamlet says of it--

My father, in his habit as he lived!⁴⁶

What this habit was is explained in the first quarto edition of Hamlet. The stage directions say that the ghost enters wearing a night gown, which probably corresponds to our word "dressing gown." Ordinary stage ghosts did not wear night gowns, but were clothed in "foul sheet or leathern pilch."⁴⁷

Although there is not so much evidence of the ghost's objectivity in this scene as in the opening scene of the play, there is a sufficient amount to warrant our classifying it as objective.

Let us now summarize the evidences of objectivity in both appearances. Four people see the ghost; one is a skeptic. It speaks eighty-nine lines in the first act of the play and six lines in the third act. In both scenes it displays personality by showing its solicitude for Hamlet and Gertrude. In the first scene it gives information not known and subsequently proved. It is in keeping with Elizabethan ideas concerning ghosts. It is not dressed like the typical stage ghost.

Caesar at Philippi may be a student's dream, Banquo at the feast may be a false creation proceeding from Macbeth's crime oppressed brain, but there can be no doubt--about the objectivity of the spectre of King

46 Ibid. III, iv, 134.

47 Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 250.

Hamlet.⁴⁸

Much time has been spent in establishing the objectivity of this ghost, because a knowledge of its nature is extremely important for a correct interpretation of the play. If the ghost were a product of Hamlet's imagination, there would be no justification for his course of revenge.

King Hamlet's ghost is not only Shakespeare's most interesting spectre, but also his most useful one. It is absolutely indispensable to the play because it serves as both prologue and revenge ghost, and contributes greatly toward establishing the mood of the tragedy.

One of the difficult problems of the dramatist is to acquaint the audience with all the preliminary information necessary for an adequate understanding of his play. In Greek and Roman plays the dramatists oftentimes used the chorus to present the prologue. Shakespeare uses the ghost for this purpose. In Hamlet, it is necessary for the audience to learn of the manner of King Hamlet's death, the usurpation of the throne by Claudius, the unsettled conditions in Denmark, and the attitude of various characters toward the king. All of these things are revealed either in the discussion of other characters about the ghost or in the lines spoken by the ghost itself.

A second function of the ghost is to establish the mood of the play. With the first mention of the ghost we have a premonition of the impending tragedy. The suppressed ex-

⁴⁸Ibid. p. 52.

citement of the guards on watch arouses our interest in what is about to happen. Then with its actual appearance, Horatio prophesies:

This bodes some strange eruption to our state.⁴⁹

A short time later, this same character relates the appearance of the ghost to similar incidents previous to the death of Julius Caesar.

In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets:
As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse:
And even the like precurse of fierce events,
As harbingers preceeding still the fates,
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
Unto our climature and countrymen.⁵⁰

This speech must have been powerfully effective with the Elizabethan audience, because they were probably familiar with Shakespeare's historical tragedy Julius Caesar. The ghost serves a valuable dramatic purpose. Along with Hamlet, the audience becomes interested in knowing why his father's spirit cannot rest.

The chief function of the ghost is as an instigator of revenge. In this respect it resembles the ghosts of Senecan drama. Hamlet hates Claudius, but he is not aware that he has murdered his father. When the ghost reveals the circum-

⁴⁹ Hamlet, I, i, 69.

⁵⁰ Ibid. I, i, 112-125.

stances of his murder, he is instantly aroused to action.

He seems to steel himself for what is to come.

Hold, hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up.⁵¹

All lesser considerations are forgotten. His old interests and aspirations are to be cast aside; now he is concerned only with the commandment of the ghost. Hamlet loves his father dearly and according to Renaissance standards must revenge his death. He commits himself to a course of revenge in the words:

I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter: Yes, yes, by heaven.⁵²

Revenge furnishes the motive for all the action of the play, and the ghost is the instigator of this revenge. For this reason, I think Dover Wilson was not far from the truth when he called the ghost the hero of the first act of Hamlet.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid. I, v, 93-95.

⁵² Ibid. I, v, 99-104.

⁵³ Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 52.

SHAKESPEARE'S EFFECTIVE USE OF GHOSTS

Shakespeare's ability to change the dramatic ghost from a roistering puppet to a dignified character signifies his greatness as a dramatist. Shakespearean ghosts were not used merely to produce weird, uncanny effects nor to please the less appreciative members of his audience. No doubt Shakespeare was responsive to the dramatic tastes of the Elizabethans and knew that the ghosts would be very pleasing to the groundlings, but he gave these spirits definite functions in the plays and created them so artistically that modern Shakespearean scholars can respect them.

The ghosts in Richard III represent Shakespeare's first attempt to make dramatic use of supernatural beings, so they are not so sympathetically created as the later ghosts. We have not the slightest feeling of sympathy for the poor, wronged creatures, who haunt Richard crying "despair and die." Our only reaction to these ghosts is a feeling of satisfaction that Richard has defeated himself and that again right is triumphant.

In Julius Caesar, as has already been pointed out, the action of the last half of the play seems motivated by the memory of Caesar. It is in keeping with the theme of Caesar's abiding spiritual presence that the ghost appears in Brutus' tent at Sardis. It would not be dramatically effective to have Caesar speak harsh words of accusation to Brutus, when all he had said when he recognized Brutus as a member of the conspiracy was:

Et tu, Brute, Then fall, Caesar!

Much of the affectiveness of the banquet scene in Macbeth is due to Shakespeare's method of presenting Banquo's spirit. It seems significant that this is the only Shakespearean ghost which does not speak. This was not an accident, because its silence is in keeping with our conception of the living Banquo, who must surely have guessed Macbeth's treachery. The spirit of Banquo, as it appears to the mind of Macbeth, is like the living Banquo--quiet, dignified, and silently accusing.

It is especially with the ghost of King Hamlet that we realized Shakespeare's artistry in dealing with those creatures which lie without the pale of our understanding. This ghost seems almost to possess a human heart. We sympathize with this spirit when it speaks so tragically of Gertrude's sinfulness, just as we would with any suffering Shakespearean hero. This stately, majestic figure cut off before it had a chance to make peace with God, is not, to the appreciative reader, a mere abstraction. It is a spirit which reveals the very soul of a gracious king, a kind father, and a loving husband. This ghost does not in any respect resemble the ghost in the earlier version of the same play. It is quite a departure from the roistering puppet of Der bestrafte Bruder-mord, which has been described as boxing the sentinel's care and standing in the center of the stage opening and shutting its jaws!¹ King Hamlet's ghost is at all times dignified and kingly.

¹ Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 56.

As this study comes to an end, we are more thoroughly convinced than ever that Shakespeare is a great dramatic artist. It is a tribute to his genius that he could take the crude, theatrical ghost and convert it into a being that we, with all our skepticism, find interesting more than three hundred years later.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

1. Aeschylus: Agamemnon.
Ten Greek Plays, edited by Gilbert Murray.
 New York: Oxford University Press, 1930.
 Pp. 91-142.
2. Aeschylus: Eumenides.
Ten Greek Plays, edited by Gilbert Murray.
 New York: Oxford University Press, 1930.
 Pp. 181-212.
3. Greene, Robert: The Honorable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay. Elizabethan Plays, edited by Hazeton Spencer. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1933. Pp. 176-205.
4. James, I, King: Daemonologie.
 London: The Bodley Head Quartos, 1597.
5. Jonson, Ben: The Alchemist.
Elizabethan Plays, edited by Hazelton Spencer.
 Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1933.
 Pp. 354-409.
6. Kyd, Thomas: The Spanish Tragedy.
Elizabethan Plays, edited by Hazeton Spencer.
 Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1933.
 Pp. 209-251.
7. Merlowe, Christopher: The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus. Elizabethan Plays, edited by Hazelton Spencer. Pp. 39-63.

8. Shakespeare, William: Hamlet. Shakespeare's Principal Plays, edited by Brooke, Cunliffe, and McCracken. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935. Pp. 517-566.
9. Shakespeare, William: Julius Caesar. Shakespeare's Principal Plays, edited by Brooke, Cunliffe, and McCracken. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935. Pp. 481-512.
10. Shakespeare, William: Macbeth. Shakespeare's Principal Plays, edited by Brooke, Cunliffe, and McCracken. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935. Pp. 669-700.
11. Shakespeare, William: Richard III. Shakespeare's Complete Works, edited by P. F. Collier. New York. P. F. Collier and Son Company, 1925. Pp. 673-715.

Secondary Sources

1. Bates, Alfred, ed.: The Drama, II. New York: Stuart and Stanley Publishers, 1903.
2. Bradley, A. C.: Shakespearean Tragedy. London: Macmillan and Co., 1932.
3. Brandes, Georg: William Shakespeare. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927.
4. Campbell, Lily: "Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England," Modern Philology, XXVIII, (1931) pp. 281-296.

5. Davis, W. S.: Life in Elizabethan Days.
New York: Harper Brothers, 1930.
6. Dowden, Edward: Shakspeare.
New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1880.
7. Dunn, Esther: The Literature of Shakespeare's England.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.
8. Goadby, Edwin: The England of Shakespeare.
New York: Cassell and Company Publishers, n. d.
9. Mabie, Hamilton: William Shakespeare.
New York: Grossett & Dunlap, 1900.
10. Matthews, Brander: Shakspeare as a Playwright.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.
11. Moulton, Richard: Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker.
New York: Macmillan Company, 1907.
12. Osgood, Charles: The Voice of England.
New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1935.
13. "Renaissance and Reformation," Cambridge History of English Literature, III, pp. 124-130.
Cambridge, England: University Press, 1911.
14. Small, Samuel, "Shakspeare's Ghosts,"
Shakespeare Association of America, X, (April 1936)
pp. 118-121.
New York: Shakespeare Association of America, Inc.
15. Small, Samuel: "The Influence of Seneca," Shakespeare Association of America Bulletin, X, (July 1935),
pp. 137-150.
New York: Shakespeare Association of America, Inc.

16. Stephenson, Henry: Shakespeare's London.
New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1906.
17. "The Ghost Technique in Shakespeare," The Shakespeare Association Bulletin, X, (July 1935).
New York: Shakespeare Association of America, Inc.
18. Warner, Beverley: English History In Shakespeare's Plays.
London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909.
19. Wendell, Barrett: William Shakespere.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907.
20. Werder, Karl: The Heart of Hamlet's Mystery,
(translated by Elizabeth Wilder).
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907.
21. Wilson, Dover: The Essential Shakespeare.
London: Cambridge University Press, 1935.
22. Wilson, Dover: What Happens in Hamlet.
New York: MacMillan Company, 1935.
23. Woods, Watt, and Anderson: The Literature of England,
I, pp. 272-299.
Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1936.

Typed by

Mrs. S. J. McCaskill