A K B

i i a i ha h i :
a l , i , a s s h a a s i s

"There *are* phantom effects, even if phantoms do not exist."[1]

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 each6.3(u)-21ff.9(of e2.8(.8(u)-1(ti)-b

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

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.

Wri ing

No doubt the most pervasive recent image of Shakespeare as writer is presented in *Shakespeare in Love*.[2] Curiously, however,

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.(10) 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)[5] 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.[6] 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.…

> 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.[10]

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 performativel

finitude, is also common (and is the foundation of community, as is tragedy in a certain Girardian reading).[12] 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.[13]

Be ond Oedip ?

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 soli

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 recogne, ie012(i).58(s)-7.3(n)-3(i)-16.2th

Mon men

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 *p re*, 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 *Ul sses*.[18] 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 *P ramid?*
> 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.[19]

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.[20] 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.

Tra ma

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.[21] There must b6.5(e m)22.8(u(pe)16.77)-18.6(s.77)-18.c2ov-18.24fl h.5(a,9(h.5(aa(w)26.

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."[23] 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.[24]

Technolog

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 bod , a prosthetic bod* , a ghost of spirit, one might say a ghost of the ghost…[25]

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 *diff rance*, 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 Mar* 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 *amorousl* , that is, affirmatively; perhaps even erotically.[26]

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.[27]

End of Hi or

Let's accelerate. In his critique of Francis Fukuyama's arguments on the end of

philos