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Spectres in Hamlet: An Examination of 'Spectral Anachrony' Based Upon Jacques Derrida's Writings on the Play

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SPECTRES IN *HAMLET*: AN EXAMINATION OF 'SPECTRAL  
ANACHRONY' BASED UPON JACQUES DERRIDA'S WRITINGS  
ON THE PLAY

APRIL LODGE

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of MA by Research

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[...] one must stop believing that the dead are just the departed and that the departed do nothing. One must stop pretending to know what is meant by “to die” and especially by “dying.” One has, then, to talk about spectrality.

– Derrida

## Introduction

Derrida is haunted by Hamlet's declaration: 'The time is out of joint' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.186). In his essay of the same title Derrida tells us:

Hamlet in fact haunts the book I have just written, *Specters of Marx*. The phrase "The time is out of joint" is cited, recited, analyzed, and also loved there like an obsession. And yet, after the fact, I read it today differently

(1995: 18)

Derrida's writings on *Hamlet* developed his understanding of spectrality, of an interior subjectivity and, in turn, of performativity. The influence of the play on him, and his love for it, he even admits here as an 'obsession'. Derrida also recognises that despite his repeated use of the phrase 'the time is out of joint', it is spectral and thus open to change. A spectre does not have to adhere to a linear construction of time, and is therefore anachronistic. Derrida notes the spectrality of Hamlet's famous phrase, as even after his repeated use of it in *Specters of Marx* (1994), when he returns to use it again (giving it titular importance in his essay) already within the space of a year his reading of the term has changed. We often use words before having a full understanding of their meaning and it is not until later, when a new understanding is reached, that we can retrospectively recognise that the spectre was always already at work in those words before, without our awareness of it. This is the anachronic experience of the spectral, which I will term *spectral anachrony*. This is precisely what Derrida experiences with his use of Hamlet's phrase: 'The time is out of joint' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.186). Derrida uses this phrase, by his own admission, obsessively in *Specters of Marx* in 1994, and yet it still takes on a different meaning when he comes to use it again in his essay the following year. In this essay Derrida suggests that:

"the time is out of joint" [...] could also resonate secretly with that essential pathology of mourning. I have become aware of it too late; it is too late, for *Specters of Marx*, where the dis- or anachrony of mourning is in some way the very subject. This tragedy of dating has become apparent to me today, too late.

(1995: 18)

Derrida repeatedly tells us it is 'too late' for *Specters of Marx* to contain this realisation, but the anachronic spectre of mourning has always already been present in this book, despite Derrida's lack of acknowledgment of its being at work. As *spectral anachrony* allows us to realise, when we review *Specters of Marx* retrospectively this spectre can be seen to already have been at work. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida writes: 'First of all, mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else.' (1994: 9). This seems an odd statement to make. Derrida gives very little focus to the topic of mourning and after his brief mention of it here, on page 9, the word mourning is not used again until page 64. Yet Derrida states that he will be speaking of nothing but mourning. Herein is the spectre. The reason Derrida makes the grand statement that, 'we will be speaking of nothing else' but mourning, is because mourning itself is temporally out of joint and does not adhere to a linear flow of time. One is always in mourning and so it is impossible to speak outside of mourning. Thus, Derrida's tone of regret in 'The Time is Out of Joint' (1995) as he insists it is 'too late' for *Specters of Marx* to contain this understanding (that temporal disjuncture is connected to mourning) is totally unnecessary, as by taking *spectral anachrony* into account and retrospectively analysing *Specters of Marx* with this in mind, it is possible to consider the ways in which Derrida's realisation was already present within the book, even without Derrida's knowledge of its presence.

Derrida is indebted to *Hamlet* for developing his philosophical ideas and, in turn, analysing Derrida's writings on *Hamlet* reveals the fundamental connection between spectrality and anachrony. This connection has been largely overlooked by other commentators, and will be expanded upon in this thesis. As *Hamlet* proved to be such an inspiration to Derrida it will also form the basis of my analysis here. There are three different versions of *Hamlet*: the first quarto (Q1) was printed in 1603 and the following year a second quarto was published (Q2); the folio (F) was published in 1623 after Shakespeare's death. This thesis will quote from the second quarto as the first is incomplete and is suspected to be 'reconstructed by actors from performances' (Irace, 1998: 1). The folio is also incomplete as it is 'a little shorter than Q2 and lacks some substantial passages of Q2's dialogue' (Thompson & Taylor, 2006: 9). Alternatively, the second quarto, also known as 'the

good quarto of 1604-5 [...] was printed from Shakespeare's autograph copy' (Greg, 1954: 64). As a result it will be the second quarto edition of *Hamlet* that is the foundational text which will be quoted from throughout this thesis.

In order to examine Derrida's writings on *Hamlet* it will also be necessary to have an understanding of his project that is to say, of deconstruction. Deconstruction is a term coined by Derrida that refers to his theoretical approach. It will be necessary to understand deconstruction in order to examine Derrida's writings on *Hamlet*: Derrida recognises that binary opposites are hierarchical and that one side is given a privileged status over the other. For example, in the binary of life and death, life is ascribed a superior status to death. Deconstruction allows us to consider the ways in which these binaries are not completely oppositional but in fact overlap, thus destabilising the binary and removing the bias that characterises it. It is important to understand that deconstruction is not a theoretical approach that can be applied to a text, but is an approach that considers the ways in which the binaries within the text are always already deconstructing themselves. A prime example of deconstruction in *Hamlet* would be the ghost of King Hamlet. The ghost is simultaneously alive and dead: the binary of life and death is deconstructed by the existence of the ghost as it holds properties of both; as a result neither side of this binary possesses a more significant status than the other.

In 1996 Jeffrey Williams wrote an article entitled 'The Death of Deconstruction, the End of Theory and Other Ominous Rumours', in this he states that:

By the late 80s and through the early 1990s [...] there was a rash of pronouncements proclaiming the death of deconstruction and announcing its passing from the critical scene.

(1996: 17)

My choice, therefore, to utilise ideas that lost popularity in the field of literary criticism at least two decades ago may seem an unusual one. Derrida, himself aware of the criticism levelled against his project, spoke of the death of deconstruction in the quote I have used as an epigraph to



this thesis. After writing about *Hamlet* as his overture to arguing for the continuation of Marxism in his book *Specters of Marx*, Derrida acknowledged the importance of spectrality and, indebted to *Hamlet* for reaching a better understanding of it, wrote another essay (which the epigraph is taken from) entitled 'The Time is Out of Joint' (1995). Even if the repeated assertions that deconstruction had died were true, Derrida stressed the importance of spectrality in arguing for the survival of that which is declared dead.

Deconstruction will continue to exist as a spectre and even now, after the death of Jacques Derrida, the creator of deconstruction, and after the long-since declared death of his project of deconstruction, his philosophy remains influential upon the way in which we think. Not only does Derrida teach us of the importance of spectrality, as it allows us to comprehend the end, but he also begins to combine the spectre with anachrony and the disjointure of time. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida offers the following important statement:

The disjointure in the very presence of the present, this sort of non-contemporaneity of present time with itself (this radical untimeliness or this anachrony [is] the basis [on] which we are trying here to *think the ghost*)

(1994: 29)

The spectre is always anachronic; it deconstructs a linear understanding of time and its presence can be deemed, retrospectively, to have already been at work. Within his parenthetical comment Derrida alludes to the necessity of understanding anachrony for it even to be possible to conceive a ghost or spectre. The spectral and the anachronic are inextricably linked. To be able to understand a spectre one must also understand that it does not adhere to a chronological flow of time. Although Derrida begins to recognise this necessary connection between the two, he never fully propounds the idea. In order to refer to this distinct connection, then, I propose to use the term *spectral anachrony*. It is impossible to recognise the work of a spectre in the present moment, but through a retrospective analysis, in view that the spectre is anachronic and that it has always already been at work, it is possible to recognise the functioning of a spectre.

This thesis will take on four main topics of discussion, each of which will form a chapter; an analysis of *spectral anachrony* will be informative to each of these chapters. The first chapter will focus on the ‘work of mourning’ (Derrida, 1996: 172), as Derrida also recognises ‘the dis- or anachrony of mourning’ (1995: 18). Not only is spectrality anachronic, but mourning is anachronic too, as Derrida began to acknowledge in his essay ‘The Time is Out of Joint’ (1995). Part of the work of mourning requires the process of interiorisation and an examination of the *spectral anachrony* here will show that the spectre of an interior subjectivity is already at work in Shakespeare. By arguing this we will be able to answer the particularly baffling question as to why the ghost is visible to Hamlet but invisible to Gertrude later in the play, when it had previously been witnessed by Horatio, Barnardo and Marcellus. After chapter one has set the foundational understanding that Hamlet is continually working at the task of mourning, the second chapter will continue by analysing another task that Hamlet is asked to fulfil, which is to avenge his father’s murder. By referring to Derrida’s interpretation of what the ghost asks of Hamlet it will be possible to see how Derrida confuses revenge with justice. However, the proposition that – although he is only asked to attain revenge – Hamlet takes it upon himself to achieve a totalising form of justice that will be delivered to those who have committed murder by the close of the play, will reconcile Derrida’s misconception with my reading of *Hamlet*. In the third chapter I will return more specifically to the idea of spectrality and discuss it in relation to performativity. Derrida criticised Austin’s formulation of performativity in the 1970s, however, following his writings on *Hamlet* in the 1990s it becomes apparent that Derrida’s understanding of performativity has developed as a result of his understanding of spectrality. Consequently, his initial criticism of Austin for alluding to the necessity of an interior spirituality, in order to understand the performative, can be considered to be similar to his own later attempts to combine performativity with an understanding of spectrality. Austin and Derrida’s use of spirituality and spectrality share distinct similarities, yet they are subtly different and the third chapter will endeavour to make this distinction. In the final chapter, after discussing the *spectral anachrony* of an interior subjectivity, of justice and of the performative utterance, we

will consider how the protagonist, Hamlet himself, is spectral. The ghost of King Hamlet is readily accepted to be a ghost, but Prince Hamlet, following the task of vengeance the ghost has set him, no longer exists in the same way. Through *spectral anachrony* it is possible to retrospectively regard Prince Hamlet as a spectre, haunting the play until he has achieved that which has been asked of him. However, as we noted previously, Hamlet has taken it upon himself to do more than that which is asked of him. By the end of the play Hamlet achieves total justice against those who have committed murder, which also necessitates his own death, and with this his spectral presence in the play is no longer required and he can rest in peace.

Although the spectres in *Hamlet* may be laid to rest at the close of the play, through our retrospective analysis that takes into account the view of *spectral anachrony*, it is possible to bear witness to the multifarious ghosts that are in this play and to analyse the ways in which they are at work. Because the dead are not the departed, the ghost of Hamlet's father is recognisably a spectral presence throughout the play, but more than this the spectre of deconstruction itself is at work within this thesis and, indebted to its presence, we can see how Derrida's philosophy will continue to survive in literary theory as long as people continue to think paradoxically.

## Chapter 1: Hamlet's Complicated Work of Mourning

The death of King Hamlet, before the start of the play, is a pivotal event that marks the arrival of a spectre which continually haunts the Prince of Denmark, radically altering his purpose in life and his experience of existence. The death of his father leads Hamlet, not only into mourning, but into a melancholic disposition. In his essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (Freud: 1917) the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud defines these terms and begins to discuss 'the work of mourning' (1917: 245). This is a phrase that Derrida later takes up and discusses in an essay entitled 'By Force of Mourning' (1996). An essential idea one must take from Derrida's philosophy, which would oppose a Freudian conception, is that 'all work is also the work of mourning' (Derrida, 1996: 172). Mourning is laborious and Hamlet is absorbed in this occupation.

Moreover, not only is mourning influential for Hamlet, but so is death itself. Death is a spectral presence in the play and it is one which deconstructs time; considering this interrelationship between death and time will allow for the application of my term *spectral anachrony*, which will be applied to *Hamlet* in this chapter. Inextricably linked to the work of mourning is the process of interiorisation. Following a death, the bereaved have to accept that the dead now only continue to exist from within them. The term interiorisation characterises this understanding of the transition of the dead from an external, corporeal existence, to an internal and cerebral one. Interestingly, this discussion of interiorising the dead, and of an interior subjectivity in *Hamlet* more broadly, reveals the instability in philosophical thought at the time as ideas were shifting from objectivity to subjectivity in the sense outlined, after *Hamlet* was first performed, by Descartes. For Hamlet, this process of interiorisation is interrupted by the ghost of his father. The arrival of the spectre confuses Hamlet, as he is unable to ontologically discern the remains of his father and this also instils him with doubt, thus complicating his work of mourning. The ghost is both the catalyst that incites Hamlet to act, as well as the perplexing absent presence that encumbers Hamlet, as he spends a lot his time trying to comprehend the spectral continuation of his father and the nature of existence itself.

In addition to considering death with relation to spectrality, another enlightening way to comprehend death is with reference to silence. An examination of Hamlet's final words in the play will inform the final discussion in this chapter. By exploring Derrida's writings on *Hamlet* and conceiving the play from the position of spectrality it will be possible to observe the anachrony of Shakespeare experimenting with ideas of interiority, not as simply paradoxical, but as an innovative development that contributes to the philosophical comprehension of subjectivity. Hamlet's complicated work of mourning provides Shakespeare with an unstable and thus mutable basis from which to trial out these developing issues of interiority.

Hamlet is both in mourning for his father and melancholic as a result of his death. Although these terms are closely related they are distinct from one another; Freud notes the connection and distinguishes the terms in his text 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917). Before offering Freud's definition of melancholy it is first necessary to outline a brief etymology of 'melancholy', as the understanding of the term in the Renaissance era was different to our current conception that has been developed as a result of Freud. In the renaissance era melancholia would have been associated with humoral theory as melancholy was the symptom of black bile.<sup>1</sup> Hamlet's 'inky cloak' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.77) and the ritual of wearing black when in mourning is connected to melancholy through humoral theory and its affiliation with black bile, hence Hamlet's extended period of dressing in black would have symbolically presented his melancholy to a contemporary audience, who would have been aware of humoral theory. Both mourning and melancholy are a reaction to loss, but, unlike mourning, melancholy results in the loss of ego. Freud offers the following definition of melancholy:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches

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<sup>1</sup> For an outline of the Renaissance humoral theory see 'History of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology: With an Epilogue on Psychiatry and the Mind-Body Relation' by Stanley W. Jackson page 444.

(1917: 244)

This definition bears a strong comparison to Hamlet's speech in Act 2 scene 2:

I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises  
and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to  
me a sterile promontory

(*Hamlet*, 2.2.261-265)

Although this quotation from *Hamlet* reveals the features of dejection and inactivity that Freud outlines as symptomatic of melancholy, these features are also perceptible in people who are in mourning. It is the 'self-reproaches' that Freud refers to that distinguish melancholy from mourning, and this is precisely what we see in Hamlet, who reprimands himself with: 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.485) and 'Why, what an ass am I' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.517). Presenting Freud's definitions comparatively with Hamlet's speech in Act 2 scene 2 exposes Hamlet as an archetypal example of the Freudian melancholic man. In his speech, Hamlet diagnoses himself with melancholia; he is self-aware of his disposition, but even with this knowledge he is unable to alter his feelings, as Hamlet is in a perpetual melancholic state of mourning.

Derrida's essay 'By Force of Mourning' (1978) outlines some of his key philosophies on mourning and also offers a critique of the ideas Freud proposes in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917). One of the major points on which Freud and Derrida disagree is on the period of time in which to grieve. The term of mourning is of concern, not only on a critical level, but also on a diegetic level as Claudius and Hamlet disagree over the correct length of time in which it is necessary to mourn. Claudius lectures Hamlet with the following:

your father lost a father,  
That father lost lost his, and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term  
To do obsequious sorrow; but to persever  
In obstinate condolement is a course  
Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief,

(*Hamlet*, 1.2.89-94)

Claudius suggests here that there is a fixed term which mourning must be constrained to and encourages Hamlet to bring the time for mourning his father to an end. Like Claudius, Freud sees mourning as something that has a fixed term: 'when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again' (Freud, 1917: 245). Claudius wishes Hamlet to complete his work of mourning as soon as possible and in order to speed along the process he points out the commonality of death and faces him with the fleeting nature of mortality.

Derrida analyses Claudius' address in his essay 'The Time is Out of Joint' (1995), informing us that Claudius exhorts Hamlet to 'put a *term* to his grief, to *comprehend* his mourning, to comprehend it between two dates, the beginning and the end,' (1995: 2). Nonetheless, Hamlet can neither comprehend his mourning nor set a fixed term to it. In his critique of 'Mourning and Melancholia' (Freud, 1917) Derrida offers the following statement which deeply opposes Freud:

[...] all work is also the work of mourning [...] whoever thus works at the work of mourning learns the impossible – and that mourning is interminable.

(Derrida, 1996: 172)

For Derrida as for Hamlet himself, mourning is a process in continual occurrence. The term of mourning has no beginning and has no end; instead they exist simultaneously as Derrida suggests in 'Force and Signification' (Derrida, 1978) when he refers to the 'implication of the end in the beginning' (1978: 25). It is impossible for Hamlet to comprehend his term of mourning between two dates. Claudius says that the survivor is bound 'To do obsequious sorrow'. However, sorrow and in particular mourning is not an act that can be performed and completed, it is not something *to do*, but in a Derridean sense, is something *to be*. Mourning is a state of Being. Derrida's interpretation that mourning has no beginning and has no end is a point which he and Freud disagree on, as can be noted when contrasting their views on when mourning commences. In 'Mourning and Melancholy' Freud says that mourning is 'regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person' (Freud, 1917: 243), but contrastingly for Derrida mourning is 'prepared' and is that which 'we expect from the beginning

to follow upon the death of those we love' (Derrida, 1996: 176). Not only is mourning interminable in the sense that it has no finality but more so because it has no set commencement either.

Derrida's philosophy that mourning is perpetual contradicts the Freudian notion that mourning can be completed. Derrida also deconstructs time: as the term to mourning has no fixed end or beginning, the past co-exists with the present and future certainties, such as death, also impinge upon the present, resulting in an anachronic understanding of time as a result of mourning.

Before reaching the understanding that mourning is 'interminable', Derrida discussed, what he termed, the 'anachrony of mourning' (Derrida, 1995: 18). This conception, that mourning negates a linear understanding of time, is something that Hamlet himself recognises within the play.

Following his encounter with the ghost Hamlet declares to his friends: 'The time is out of joint; O cursed spite/ That ever I was born to set it right!' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.186-187). With this declaration Hamlet captures the notion that mourning and the spectre of death are atemporal, time has become disjointed and unhinged. Embedded within every instant of existence is the inevitability of death and Hamlet in his melancholia is all too aware of this.

Through the death of his father Hamlet has begun to philosophise over death and this morbid fixation has left him, according to Nietzsche, longing 'for a world beyond death' (Nietzsche, 1999: 40). Nietzsche argues that Hamlet has 'gazed into the true essence of things' (Nietzsche, 1999: 40) through the process of his work of mourning and has thus discovered the wisdom of Silenus, that it is better to 'not have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*' (Nietzsche, 1999: 23). In Nietzsche's view Hamlet longs for death and this is an acquisition of true knowledge. However, for Derrida there is no fixed truth to be attained and Hamlet's fascination with death is not a death wish, but a natural consideration as a result of contemplating the anachrony that life is haunted by the inescapability of death.

Shakespeare adds further significance to this exploration of atemporality by placing the pivotal event – the death of King Hamlet – which the subsequent actions of the play depend upon,



before the start of the play. In the way that mourning is interminable, as it is something that is done before, during and after death; death itself is a spectre that is similarly anachronic. Death is an imminent part of existence. The conditions for the possibility of life necessitate death, it is impossible to have one without the other; or in Gertrude's words: 'Thou knowst 'tis common all that lives must die,' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.72). Through carrying out the work of mourning for his father Hamlet is faced with his own mortality and begins to question the nature of existence. Death is a haunting figure throughout the play that does more than simply occur in the final scene in order to bring about a resolution. As I earlier noted in the epigraph to this thesis, Derrida advises us that:

[...] one must stop believing that the dead are just the departed and that the departed do nothing. One must stop pretending to know what is meant by "to die" and especially by "dying". One has, then, to talk about spectrality.

(1995: 30)

Death is a spectral presence in life and the living are continually haunted by the dead and by the concept of death itself. When in mourning the bereaved are not only faced with the absolute alterity of the dead and the task of accepting that they are no longer a part of the living world, but must also accept that the dead continue to haunt the living. The dead endure within memory after death and the memory of the dead spectrally remains. The all-important work of mourning has to comprehend this paradox: the dead are the absolute other that has ceased to exist and the spectre that continues to exist.

However, the spectre of death haunts Hamlet not only in memory throughout the play, but is apparent physically and externally as the ghost of King Hamlet returns to converse with Hamlet in Act 1 scene 5. In *Hamlet* the dead are far more than the departed, the dead king is a spectre, which begins by coming back and works to bring about changes in the state through inciting Hamlet to action. In *Hamlet* the death moves as a spectre which recurrently leaves and returns: the ghost can come and go as it pleases and upon its visitations it acts as a *memento mori*, reminding Hamlet of his own imminent death. Although the physical embodiment of the spectre as a ghost can come and go,

moreover, there is the spectre of death itself which has a constant presence. As we have already noted the spectre is anachronic and does not have to adhere to a chronological flow of time. Hamlet presents his mother with a portrait of his father and describes his father as 'the front of Jove himself with an 'eye like Mars to threaten and command,' (*Hamlet*, 3.4.54-55). This portrait, produced while his father was alive, is used here after his death to recollect his greatness, but note the *spectral anachrony* of this; in retrospect that portrait captured an image of a man that has survived him following his death. The spectre of death is already at work, even before the subject of the picture has died. The death of King Hamlet may be the pivotal event that marks the arrival of the spectre, but upon reflection the spectre was always already at work even before his death. The term *spectral anachrony* captures this essence of the atemporality of the spectre.

In *Hamlet* the spectre of death is not only an external presence, as in the case of the ghost, but is also an internal presence. An integral part of the work of mourning is the process of interiorisation. In the introductory essay 'To Reckon with the Dead: Jacques Derrida's Politics of Mourning' Brault & Naas explain that:

In mourning, we must recognize that the friend is now both only "in us" and already beyond us, in us but totally other, so that nothing we say of or to them can touch them in their infinite alterity.

(2001: 11)

To be able to come to terms with death those in mourning must accept that the dead continue to exist only within them, the living. After death the dead remain as 'the other in us' (Derrida, 1995: 20) and they continue to exist from within those who live on.

Those in mourning must work at this interiorisation by coming to terms with the new found interiority of a loved one. Following the death of his father Hamlet must try to comprehend that his father exists within him and accept the constant presence of his dead father. Hamlet is alive and dead in various senses. Both King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet remarkably share the same name and Hamlet the father has died, whilst Hamlet the son remains alive. However, the dead father returns

as a ghost to the realm of the living, deconstructing the opposition between life and death. Also, Hamlet the son has to interiorise his dead father and as a living Being must accept the dead, and death, within him. Hamlet, the father and the son, in being confronted with death (physically for the king and mentally for the prince) are in a position that situates them in an uneasy place somewhere between life and death.

When explaining why he is still dressed in black to Gertrude and Claudius, Hamlet offers the following heroic rhyming couplet: 'But I have that within which passes show,/ These but the trappings and the suits of woe' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.85-86). Hamlet argues that his outward apparel of grief cannot express his inner thoughts and feelings. This has led critic Francis Barker to note that 'an interior subjectivity begins to speak here' (1995: 32). Hamlet refers to his possession of an inward consciousness which cannot be presented externally. However, Barker argues that this 'interiority remains, in *Hamlet*, gestural' (1995: 32) because the discussion of subjectivity in *Hamlet* is 'anachronistic and [belongs] to a historical order whose outline has so far only been sketched out' (Barker, 1995: 33). The conceptualisation of an interior subjectivity, which Descartes outlines not long after the first performance of *Hamlet*, is already being explored by Shakespeare and as a result of this anachrony Barker dismisses Hamlet's reference as merely gestural. To add to this discussion Nick Davis states that: 'Hamlet's claim to have 'that within which passes show' could not conceivably signal a temporally defined moment of concerted cultural change, because there was no such moment' (2013: 5). Although there is no singular moment that can be credited as the foundation of the concept of an interior subjectivity, we should not dismiss Hamlet's allusion to it here as simply a gesture on the grounds that it is anachronistic. Instead the *spectral anachrony* of an interior subjectivity in *Hamlet* should be welcomed. Shakespeare anticipates the arrival of subjectivity in *Hamlet* as the inconsistency of the ghost's presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, plays out this unstable binary between objectivity and subjectivity, at a time when the conception of an interior subjectivity is yet to be fully developed. It is only by assessing *Hamlet* retrospectively, with

an understanding of Cartesian subjectivity, that the *spectral anachrony* can be recognised and the spectral presence of interiority can be brought to light.

Another way in which Shakespeare acts out this issue of interiorisation in *Hamlet* is through the interplay of the external and the internal. When Hamlet visits his mother to chastise her for marrying his uncle, the ghost of the dead king returns to remind Hamlet of the task of revenge he has set him. Although Hamlet can see the ghost, Gertrude cannot. The ghost is simultaneously visible and invisible, as it is a spectre that deconstructs binary oppositions such as: life/death, presence/absence, as well as deconstructing a linear, chronological understanding of time. However, more importantly the shift from an externally present ghost that is seen by multiple witnesses (including Horatio, Barnardo and Marcellus), to an invisible and internal ghost, that exists only in Hamlet's mind and is thus invisible to Gertrude, marks the workings of the spectre of subjectivity and tracks the move in our cultural understanding of interiority as the idea is being developed here by Shakespeare. In other words, Shakespeare's inconsistency in presenting the ghost externally earlier in the play and internally later in the play, is not a flaw on the part of the playwright, but is a reflection on the way the philosophical understanding of subjectivity was unstable but beginning to be developed at that time.

Although we have discussed the necessity to understand the interiority of the dead within the living during the work of mourning, it is apparent that the ghost of King Hamlet raises complications in this process of interiorisation, which has consequences for Hamlet's work of mourning as a whole. In relation to a discussion of the ghost in *Hamlet*, Derrida states that mourning 'always consists in attempting to ontologize remains [...] nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt' (Derrida, 1994: 9). Which Derrida directly notes in *Hamlet*:

[...] one must indeed know *at what moment* death took place, and this is always the moment of a murder. But Hamlet, and everyone in *Hamlet*, seems to be wandering around in confusion on this subject.

(1995: 20-21)

It is this worst-case scenario of confusion and doubt that Hamlet encounters as a result of the ghostly return of his father. The death and ghostly reappearance of his father leads Hamlet into a position of ontological uncertainty as he cannot locate his father's remains. Before Hamlet is even aware of the ghostly appearances from his father he says to Horatio 'My father, methinks I see my father' and when Horatio asks where, Hamlet replies 'In my mind's eye,' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.183, 184). Hamlet is already haunted by the spectre of mourning, but seeing the ghost itself further confuses Hamlet by making him question his understanding of reality, as well as leading him to question the entirety of his knowledge.

As a result of his encounter with the ghost Hamlet is left, not only with ontological confusion, but with epistemological doubt. The presence of the ghost removes Hamlet's certainty in the nature of Being. But, in denying his usual understanding of existence, the ghost also makes Hamlet question knowledge itself. If Hamlet cannot even understand where the remains of his father lie, then he is no longer able to trust in that which he presumes he already knows. The entirety of Hamlet's knowledge is brought into question and during the encounter with the ghost Hamlet alludes to wiping clean his memory to start again, now with this new found discovery of the other-worldly: 'Yea, from the table of my memory/ I'll wipe away all trivial fond records [...] And thy commandment all alone shall live/ Within the book and volume of my brain' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.98-99,102-103). Although this passage is often cited with regards to revenge, as Hamlet is here promising to exact the task of vengeance he has been set, it is evident from Hamlet's actual deferment from action following this scene that he does not really intend to hastily carry out this duty. Instead, the scholarly metaphor reveals Hamlet's concern with knowledge, as the visitation of the ghost has forced Hamlet to question what he knows and believes to be true. Hamlet's work of mourning is already an impossible task, as it is – as Derrida noted – interminable. Notwithstanding this, the arrival of the ghost adds further complexity to Hamlet's work of mourning as it also casts Hamlet into confusion and doubt.

Death in Hamlet is conceptualised in terms of silence. The work of mourning requires the bereaved to comprehend the unerring silence of death. After the loss of a loved one those left behind are unable to communicate with the dead as they now exist only from within the living. Derrida concludes his eulogistic essay dedicated to Foucault in *The Work of Mourning* with an inclusive reference to his mourners by recognising 'the absolute silence where we remain' (Derrida, 2001: 90). One of the major difficulties we face in mourning is the oppressive silence of death and accepting that thoughts and feelings can no longer be shared with the departed. Derrida also laments in 'By Force of Mourning' something he terms 'the survival effect, the effect of living on' (1996: 186). While the dead are infinitely othered by their, silence the living are expected to use their voice to articulate the silence in which they remain in the face of death. The living must continue to live and to speak in the face of the silent dead. However, in *Hamlet* the dead do speak. As a result of this, Hamlet, instead of speaking for the dead, falls silent: 'Hamlet *glimpsed* [entrevu] such a terrifying thing, the Thing itself, that he decides to make no further move: he will remain but a discouraged witness, paralyzed, silent' (Derrida, 1995: 35).

Hamlet feels the weight of the survival effect after the death of his father as he must continue to live in very different circumstances, where his uncle has usurped his father and himself. Although death is perceived as silence and the living the speaking survivors, once again the ghost complicates this understanding as the ghost has a voice and breaks the silence of death. We can specify, therefore, that the silence that is associated with death in *Hamlet* does not refer to death alone, but peaceful death. The silent dead are those that are at rest, the 'perturbed spirit' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.180) of Hamlet's father can speak because, despite being dead, he is not able to rest. It is Hamlet's duty to exact vengeance upon his father's murderer and once this has been carried out the ghost of his father will be at peace and able to attain the customary silent death-state. Hamlet's final words in the play are: 'The rest is silence' (*Hamlet*, 5.2.342). This pertains to the peaceful resolution of the play after the bloody and violent dramatic closure, as well as to his own amity in his final moments. The word 'rest' is also significant, in that it can be understood as 'the rest', as in the

remainder, but to rest as in to pause and relax. 'The rest is silence' therefore can be understood to mean either that, following his death, all that will remain is silence, or, that his restful death will be peaceful and he will have no need to return, as his father did, as a ghost.

Hamlet's work of mourning is a complicated process and his deliberation over life and death as a result of this leads Hamlet to begin to, anachronically, contemplate subjectivity. One of the reasons Hamlet's mourning is more complex is due to his melancholia. Hamlet has lost his own ego and reproaches himself for not acting upon the command his father has set him to take revenge. Hamlet is a classic model of Freud's definition of melancholy. However, Freud's conception of mourning fundamentally conflicts with the view of Jacques Derrida. Freud perceives the work of mourning as something that can be completed, whereas Derrida argues that it is a continual process that is always at work and can never be completed. In this sense, mourning is atemporal as it is not something that has a beginning and an end, but something that has always already begun and that will never end. Hamlet's phrase: 'The time is out of joint' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.186) is a phrase which captures this atemporality, or anachrony, and is something Derrida returns to discuss in his informative essay with the same title, in which he describes mourning as anachronic. In his writing, Derrida (unlike Freud) fails to make the distinction between mourning and melancholy, instead choosing only to discuss mourning.

The time of mourning is not the only thing that acts anachronically, the spectrality of the ghost also deconstructs the linear flow of time. My term *spectral anachrony* combines Derrida's conception of spectrality with anachrony in order to show how the two are interrelated, as the spectre is anachronic it is possible to retrospectively shed light on a spectre by showing how it has already been at work. This can be applied to the portrait of Hamlet's father, where the spectre of death was already at work in the image, even before the death of the king. However, the presence of the spectre can only be understood in retrospect. Death spectrally haunts the living. Yet, not only is the anachrony of the spectre of death at work in Hamlet, but so is the anachronic spectre of

subjectivity. *Hamlet* is influenced by the idea of an interior subjectivity that is developing at the time but is not yet fully formed. Despite the fact that subjectivity has not yet been fully understood, Hamlet anticipates its arrival when he declares 'I have that within which passes show' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.85). As Shakespeare plays with the developing issue of interiority he chooses to make the ghost visible to all initially, but later the ghost exists only in Hamlet's mind. This inconsistency comes about as a result of Shakespeare's experimentation with the idea of an interior subjectivity that is yet to be fully formed.

In summary, Hamlet is continually in mourning throughout the play. Even when it is not always apparent, the spectre of mourning is always at work as a foundational factor in constructing Hamlet's disposition. Derrida reminds us:

[...] this is the law, the law of mourning, and the law of the law, always in mourning, that it would have to fail in order to succeed.

(Derrida, 1996: 173)

Firstly, with regards to mourning we have already noted that 'all work is the work of mourning' (Derrida, 1996: 172) and unlike Freud, who suggested that the work of mourning can be completed, we realised from Derrida's perspective that mourning is 'interminable' (1996: 172), thus to be successful at the work of mourning one must fail to achieve this final point of completion where mourning is no more. It is only through a failure to complete the work of mourning that one has found what it means to mourn. Similarly, this logic of failure as a determining factor for success can be applied to justice and will be a central philosophy to the following chapter that focuses on Hamlet's quest to attain justice for his father. Hamlet's repeated failure to take revenge is a necessary part of his mission to attain justice and his failure to succeed is a condition of his eventual success in attaining justice at the end of the play.



## Chapter 2: The Quest for Justice

In 'Force of Law' Derrida claimed that: 'Deconstruction is justice' (Derrida, 1992: 15). Derrida continues his exploration of justice, as something which is both distinct from the law and dependent upon deconstruction for its actualisation, in his writings on *Hamlet*. In the exordium to *Specters of Marx* Derrida writes:

No justice [...] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead,

(1994: xviii)

In writing this book Derrida was taking up a political responsibility and attempting to do justice to Marxism in arguing for its spectral continuation. It is interesting therefore that from the commencement of this work Derrida returns to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a play where not only the issue of spectrality is apparent and open to investigation, but a play where the protagonist takes upon himself the responsibility of delivering justice for the other. *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy that moves beyond the constraints of an ideology of vengeance to consider instead the possibility of justice. By the close of the play Hamlet does achieve total justice against those who have committed murder, as well as dispensing a form of justice wherein all those who are guilty are fittingly punished as a means to set the state right. In order for Hamlet to rectify the corrupt state, the way in which the dramatis personae die is essential to Hamlet's unremitting mission to attain justice.

While *Hamlet* proves to be a useful text for Derrida to begin to discuss spectrality, it becomes more than this as, quite appropriately, *Hamlet* haunts Derrida and he continued to write on the play his essay entitled 'The Time Out of Joint' (1995). In the play the ghost demands Hamlet to: 'Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.25) as from another-worldly realm, the ghost is in a position to point out the corruption of earthly law. In his essay Derrida describes this task that Hamlet is set by the ghost as a mission to '[make] justice of a crime, through the vengeance and punishment to which he has committed himself with an oath' (1995: 18). In using

deconstruction Derrida necessarily begins to talk about justice, as '[d]econstruction is justice' (1992: 15), despite the fact that justice is quite different from the revenge he confuses it with here. Though Derrida mistakes the distinction between justice and revenge, it is only by way of deconstruction that it is possible to conceive the achievement of justice which, as I will show, Hamlet succeeds in dispensing at the end of the play.

At this point it is necessary to make a distinction between justice and the law, as Derrida takes the time to outline in his essay 'Force of Law' (1992). In this essay he writes: 'deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of *droit* (authority, legitimacy, and so on)' (1992: 15). The law is a set of rules that can be applied to reach a decision; the law is therefore calculable, whereas justice is incalculable. Justice is a figurative device that validates the law and its implementation, whilst functioning only theoretically and never in practice. Which leads us to the conclusion that Jennings writes: 'Thus law and justice, however sharply we may need to draw a distinction between them, nevertheless require one another – indeed, are embedded in one another' (2006: 30). Justice only exists as an ideal upheld to justify the law, and the law can only be enforced through the authority it is supplied with by justice. This symbiotic relationship shows the dependence of one upon the other in order for either to function. The following quote from 'Force of Law' discusses the interrelationship between deconstruction, justice and the law:

This deconstructible structure of law (*droit*), or if you prefer of justice as *droit*, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice.

(Derrida, 1992: 15)

Although Derrida is speaking somewhat paradoxically here, his final declaration that:

'Deconstruction is justice' is one that will be informative to our discussion of *Hamlet*. As we have already observed justice is an idealistic and transcendental ideal, beyond the reach of the law.

Derrida aligns deconstruction with justice. In the same way that justice is unattainable to the point that we question 'if such a thing exists' (1992: 15), so deconstruction has this similar quality of being beyond reach. But as we stated earlier, Derrida situates deconstruction between justice and the law. The law is calculable, justice is not, but deconstruction has qualities of both. Deconstruction is that which is seemingly unachievable but can be accessed by way of the things that are achievable, such as the law in this case. We are required to think paradoxically, as deconstruction allows simultaneous access and prohibition to the law, as well as to justice. When Derrida declares that: 'Deconstruction is justice' (1992: 15) therefore, he is announcing that the only way to access the impossible ideal of justice is by way of a deconstructive logic, where two opposing concepts (such as justice and the law) can be understood concurrently. In order to consider how Hamlet can attain, not only revenge, but justice for his father, it is necessary to take a deconstructive approach.

Derrida situates deconstruction at this intersection between the law and justice. Hamlet is aware that the law is deficient as it is susceptible to corruption. Marcellus announces after witnessing the ghost, that '[s]omething is rotten in the state of Denmark' (*Hamlet*, 1.4.90), which suggests that the supernatural visitation has come as a result of some corruption to the state. *Hamlet*, as Andrew Hadfield points out, is 'set at the court of an elected monarchy' (2004: 28), the authoritative figurehead is King Claudius, and Hamlet's role is to avenge his father's murder by himself murdering the usurper. Due to the corruption of the law by the monarch himself, it falls to Hamlet to enforce the law, which is why the task given to him is such a burden. Hamlet declares: 'The time is out of joint; O cursed spite/ That ever I was born to set it right' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.186-187). Derrida comments upon his outcry in *Specters of Marx*:

Hamlet curses the destiny that would have destined him to be the man of right, precisely [*justement*], as if he were cursing the right or the law itself that made him a righter of wrongs,

(1994: 24)

Hamlet is ordered by the ghost to attain revenge in an attempt to set right the wrongdoings of his uncle. However, Hamlet takes upon himself more than the task of revenge that has been asked of him. Derrida's reading of Hamlet's famous rhyming couplet proposes that Hamlet is attempting to attain, not simply vengeance, but righteousness. He must be the 'righter of wrongs'. Hamlet's *raison d'être* according to Derrida, is 'to do right, to render justice, and to redress history' (1994: 24).

Derrida confuses justice with revenge, and the distinction between revenge and justice is a crucial one to make. On the one hand is revenge, which is achievable and culminates in a violent act upon the wrongdoer that is carried out in order to achieve retribution. On the other hand is justice, which is a model concept, an ideal that can never be achieved. Hamlet has only been asked to take revenge, but Derrida talks of Hamlet's need to attain justice. One way to reconcile Derrida's interpretation (that Hamlet's purpose is to attain justice), with the role of revenge that he is set in the play, is to argue that although Hamlet is only solicited to take revenge he takes it upon himself to seek justice as opposed to vengeance, and this is the view we will take here.

Hamlet has a propensity for uncertainty, which the audience realise initially in Hamlet's indecisiveness on whether or not to believe in the ghost's story, in addition Hamlet later displays doubt about how and when to take revenge. In his aim to dispense justice Hamlet must first learn whether or not the ghost is telling the truth, which will relieve his uncertainty so that his actions may be justified. To begin his quest for justice, as opposed to vengeance, Hamlet must first determine whether or not the story the ghost has told him is true. His initial scepticism of the veracity of the ghost relieves Hamlet temporarily from the moral obligation to exact both: the revenge that is demanded of him and to respond to the call for justice, which he has taken upon himself to deliver. Although Hamlet is, initially, sceptical of the ghost and questions its intentions: 'Be thou a spirit of health of goblin damned' (*Hamlet*, 1.4.40), following their conversation he determines that it 'is an honest ghost' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.137). However, Hamlet later reverts back to his initial scepticism, reiterating: 'The spirit that I have seen/ May be a de'il' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.533-534).

Even though Hamlet must wait to discover the truth before he can take action, one of the notable aporias of justice that Drucilla Cornell outlines in *The Philosophy of the Limit* (1992), is that: 'Justice does not wait' (1992: 134). *Hamlet*, however, shows us that justice can and does wait, even if this prolongs injustice. Justice is that which requires an immediate response, but in order to ensure the right actions are taken one must wait and take the time to learn the truth. Hamlet's scepticism of the ghost provides him with an excuse to delay in response to the ghost's demand for revenge and in his own task of justice. Hamlet is aware of his uncertainty and aims to dispel it:

I'll have grounds  
More relative than this. The play's the thing  
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

(*Hamlet*, 2.2.538-540)

Our protagonist here, as most protagonists in revenge tragedies do, produces a secret plot against the villain. However, in most other revenge tragedies this plot would be to take revenge, as in *The Revenger's Tragedy* by Middleton, where Vindice plots to take revenge against the murderer of his beloved.<sup>2</sup> However, in *Hamlet* the plot to put on the play is not one aimed at attaining revenge, but is a plot to discover the truth in the search for justice. Hamlet appropriately terms the play: '*The Mousetrap*' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.231) as it is set to catch out Claudius' guilty conscience. Hamlet is not simply seeking to attain vengeance, as he wants to learn the truth in order that the state can be rightfully restored.

*The Mousetrap* is successful in revealing Claudius' guilt; following this revelation Hamlet's scepticism is no longer a viable excuse to delay in responding to the call for justice which, as Cornell noted, is required immediately and he has already been delaying. An opportunity for Hamlet arises to deliver justice following the performance of the play as the king retires to pray and gives voice to

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<sup>2</sup> From the opening speech of the play Vindice refers to his desire for revenge: 'Murder unpaid? Faith, give Revenge her due/ Sh'as kept touch hitherto – be merry, merry/ Advance thee,' (1.1.43-45) and later in the scene it is revealed Vindice's brother, Hippolito, is already acting as a spy in the court in order to plot to exact revenge against the murderer. Middleton, T. (1988). 'The Revenger's Tragedy', *Thomas Middleton: Five Plays*. London: Penguin Classics.

his crimes. Nevertheless, justice is once again deferred. Notably in *Hamlet* the term 'justice' is used only once, and ironically it is spoken by the murderous usurper in this 'prayer scene'. To follow on from the earlier discussion of the distinction between the law and justice, which was considered from a Derridean perspective, we will now examine how Shakespeare observes the difference through the villain of the play. In this scene Claudius says:

In the corrupted currents of this world  
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,  
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself  
Buys out the law; but 'tis not so above:  
There is no shuffling, there the action lies  
In his true nature,

(*Hamlet*, 3.3.57-62)

Claudius recognises the corruptibility of earthly laws, as he himself has managed to evade justice for committing the atrocity of murdering his own brother. However, unlike the law which can be bought, Claudius identifies justice as something divine and transcendental that cannot be cheated. Claudius' view of justice as transcendental is the same as Derrida's conception of justice, which Jennings characterises as follows: 'it will be necessary to think of justice outside, beyond, and even against law' (2006: 19). Justice is incorruptible as it is beyond the law, which provides it with an idealistic and elevated status. However, by the same token that gives justice this supreme significance; it is also unrealistic and unattainable. Thus, Hamlet's attempt, not simply to obtain revenge but to 'set it right' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.187) and to deliver justice, is an impossible task. As Hamlet has now proved the honesty of the ghost and learned of his uncle's guilt, he can no longer use his scepticism as an excuse to delay in taking the revenge that has been asked of him. Still, as Hamlet has set himself the task of delivering justice and not only taking revenge, and as justice is an unattainable ideal, it is not surprising therefore that in his mission to achieve the impossible Hamlet is led into philosophical contemplation and ultimately paralysis. Although Hamlet is paralysed from action, as a result of the weight of his difficult task, in the prayer scene we see him get very close to taking action:

Now might I do it. But now 'a is a-praying.  
And now I'll do it [*Draws sword.*] – and so 'a goes to heaven,  
[...] And am I then revenged  
To take him in the purging of his soul  
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?  
No. [*Sheathes sword.*]

(*Hamlet*, 3.3.73-74, 84-87)

Hamlet has the perfect opportunity to take revenge in this scene but he wants more than vengeance. Hamlet seeks justice by killing Claudius while the weight of his crimes is upon him, as they were upon his father when Claudius murdered him. Critic Eleanor Prosser notes that for 'over two centuries critics have been personally appalled by Hamlet's expressed reason for refusing to kill Claudius at prayer' (1971: 189). However, to lay his father's ghost to rest it is necessary for Hamlet to offer retributive justice. Despite the fact that Hamlet's motivations seem appalling and violent, he defers this violence and instead waits for the right moment to deliver justice. A moment which arrives at the close of the play as Hamlet has the opportunity to kill Claudius with a poison that has been produced by the villain himself. Hamlet's excuse for delay in the prayer scene is no longer his scepticism of the truthfulness of the ghost, but that he wishes to deliver a totalising form of justice, not only to Claudius, but to all those who have committed murder, and to do this requires Hamlet not to bestow revenge upon Claudius whilst he is at prayer. As we will see in the next chapter, Claudius's prayer is hollow in performative terms. For now, however, let us note that although Hamlet is motivated not to take revenge at this point, as he believes Claudius' prayer will save his soul, the audience are made aware that the prayer does not save his soul. In his efforts to make a just decision Hamlet perpetuates the injustice that Claudius should continue to live as King of Denmark and husband to Gertrude. Notwithstanding this, as Derrida remarks in *Specters of Marx*, the perpetuation of injustice is a necessary risk to take in order to have the possibility of attaining justice:

Beyond right, and still more beyond juridicism, beyond morality, and still more beyond moralism, does not justice as relation to the other suppose on the contrary the irreducible excess of a disjuncture or an anachrony, [...] some "out of joint" dislocation in Being and in

time itself, a disjointure that, in always risking the evil, expropriation, and injustice (*adikia*) against which there is no calculable insurance, would alone be able to *do justice* or to *render justice* to the other as other?

(1994: 32)

Hamlet is trying to achieve justice for the 'other', that is to say his father's ghost. In the process of this quest for justice Hamlet experiences anachrony and disjointure of time and of his own Being, in addition to ironically allowing the injustice to continue. As outlined from the start of this chapter, it will be necessary to apply a paradoxical deconstructive logic in order to consider a way in which it is possible for Hamlet to obtain justice. Thus, injustice is a requirement for the possibility of justice, and it is only by way of continuing injustice that it is possible for Hamlet to '*render justice* to the other', to his father and to everyone else at the end of the play.

Justice, like mourning, is both spectral and anachronic. However, whereas mourning requires the challenging process of interiorisation, which is itself anachronic, justice is an internalised ideal that Hamlet must externalise and enact. The spectre is an entity that deconstructs the opposition between presence and absence, the ghost of Hamlet's father is there and not there. It is there, visible to multiple witnesses, yet it does not share the same corporeality as those who bear witness to it and is thus not there. It is an absent presence. Justice shares this spectral quality with the ghost of being an absent presence. Justice is absent as it has not yet been attained, however, Hamlet is persistently motivated to accomplish justice and in this way it is present. It haunts Hamlet's thoughts, decisions and actions throughout the play and, although justice may be being continually deferred, the influence of justice is visible even in, and in fact motivates, Hamlet's inaction. In addition to being spectral, justice is also anachronic. Let us now consider this *spectral anachrony*. When Hamlet declares that '[t]he time is out of joint' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.186), he is not only cursing his destiny as Derrida proposes in *Specters of Marx* (1994), or even only referring to the experience of anachrony in mourning that Derrida later understands in 'The Time is Out of Joint' (1995), but Hamlet is also referring to an anachronic experience of justice.



As Hamlet is in mourning he is undergoing the process of interiorisation that requires him to think of his father retrospectively, as he now only continues to exist from within him. Nevertheless, the role Hamlet has taken upon himself to deliver justice also requires him to look to a future where the moment of attaining justice is possible, because as Derrida says, justice is always '*avenir*' or 'to-come' (1992: 27). Hamlet is simultaneously in the process of retrospectively remembering his father as he was and trying to internalise the dead as part of his work of mourning, whilst also requiring a proleptic view in terms of justice to consider a future where justice can be attained and his father's ghost can be laid to rest as the state will be 'set [...] right' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.187). The mission of justice is anachronic as it requires Hamlet to think futuristically and this disjoins him from living in the present moment. As the interminability of mourning deconstructs a linear understanding of time, and necessitates Hamlet to think retrospectively, so the anachronistic experience of justice deconstructs a linear understanding of time, as it requires him to think proleptically. In terms of mourning as well as of justice, the time really is out of joint as can be recognised by taking *spectral anachrony*, the combination of spectrality with atemporality, into account. This disjointure is also experienced in Hamlet's conflicting efforts to internalise the dead as part of his work of mourning whilst simultaneously attempting to externalise his internal aspiration to deliver justice. Spectrality and anachrony are inseparable, it is impossible to have one without the other.

At the end of chapter 1 on 'Hamlet's Complicated Work of Mourning', I reached the conclusion that a necessary condition for Hamlet's success to complete the work of mourning was the failure to complete it. As mourning can never be completed, it is necessary to fail in order to succeed. Similarly, in the case of justice, it is only through Hamlet's continual failure to avenge the ghost, and his ironic perpetuation of injustice, that Hamlet can have the possibility of attaining justice for his father, as opposed to simply revenge. Hamlet enacts justice through his continual deferral of revenge. Essential to arguing for Hamlet's success in achieving justice, through the deferral of it, is Derrida's concept of undecidability. Let us here briefly outline Derrida's views on

decision-making in order to argue that Hamlet's indecision, which ironically perpetuates injustice, is in fact the only way Hamlet can possibly attain justice. In his article 'Between Justice and Legality: Derrida on decision' Sokoloff tells us that: 'decision is an act of invention that cannot be grounded on anything that precedes it' (2005: 345). This links to another aporia of justice, which is outlined by Cornell as follows: 'If a decision is merely calculation, it is not a decision' (1992: 134). In order to make a difficult decision it is necessary to break with that which comes before it, for a decision to truly have been reached it must be made anew. However, making an unprecedented judgement requires undecidability: 'In the act of decision, we must not know who we are or how we are going to decide' (Sokoloff, 2005: 345). We can see how the binaries deconstruct themselves; certainty requires uncertainty and for a decision to be made it must have developed through a process of the undecidable. Let us return then to *Hamlet*. For Hamlet's indecision is actually a vital part of the decision-making process, for him to reach a just conclusion he cannot know what to decide, or even himself.

This is precisely Hamlet's predicament: in deciding how to act with regards to attaining justice for his father he loses his entire sense of self. The question therefore shifts beyond being about whether or not 'to take arms against a sea of troubles' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.58), but it becomes a question of his own Being. For Hamlet this decision is no longer a matter of taking vengeance for his father but: 'To be, or not to be' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.55). Hamlet, in his indecision of how to act upon his father's command for vengeance has been led into philosophical inquisition of the nature of existence and his reasoning leads him to question, not only the veracity of the ghost, but also the nature of vengeance, as he instead chooses to try and attain justice for his father. Hamlet is not procrastinating from taking revenge but trying to move away from a judicial system that sees violent revenge as the key to attaining justice. In his indecision Hamlet encourages the audience to rethink the ways in which justice actually functions and seeks a fairer way to attain it, whilst at the same time pondering the deepest human concern of what it means to exist. Hence, it is Hamlet's deferral

from action that results in the necessary examination of the expectations of vengeance that move the debate on to a view of possibly achieving justice. As justice is anachronic, and therefore cannot be achieved in a single moment, the whole process of indecision that Hamlet goes through is essential to attaining justice. Thus, Hamlet is, without taking action, enacting justice.

By the denouement of the play Hamlet is deemed to have succeeded in his mission to obtain justice by his own dramatic foil, Laertes. Just as Hamlet is set the task of seeking revenge for the murder of his father, so Laertes seeks revenge for the murder of his father. Shakespeare places the two in opposition: Hamlet has the opportunity to murder Claudius whilst he is in prayer and yet he chooses not to do it in favour of the quest for justice; however, when faced with the same task to take revenge for his murdered father, Laertes ominously announces that to obtain revenge against the murderer he would: 'cut his throat i'th' church' (*Hamlet*, 4.7.124). Unlike Hamlet who, given this same opportunity, reasoned himself out of it in favour of waiting in the quest for justice; Laertes is only seeking to accomplish vengeance and is instead only on the bloodthirsty path of revenge. Janet Clare recognises that, unlike Hamlet, Laertes 'enjoys the prospect of the revenger's part' (2007: 42). In *Specters of Marx* Derrida asks:

If right or law stems from vengeance, as Hamlet seems to complain that it does [...] can one not yearn for a justice that one day, a day belonging no longer to history, a quasi-messianic day, would finally be removed from the fatality of vengeance?  
(1994: 25)

Hamlet, in seeking to dispense justice to all involved, as opposed to exacting revenge, is radically criticising the judicial system and the emphasis it places on retribution. Instead when taking the law into his own hands, Hamlet decides to break with the traditional expectations of simply applying the law, which would be unjust as: 'If a decision is merely calculation, it is not a decision' (Cornell, 1992: 134). Instead of calculating the law and applying it, Hamlet instead seeks to break with the law and try to attain justice. When discussing Derrida and justice Weber says '[o]ne must try to think it starting from the possibility of singularity' (2005: 39). In order to deliver justice Hamlet must think

on an individual case basis and take into consideration various perspectives and wait, even at the risk of propagating injustice, to discover the truth and restore the state to right.

In the final act Claudius produces a poison, which he intends to use to murder Hamlet; however, Claudius receives his just deserts as Hamlet forces him to drink his own poison, consequently ending his life. Following the king's death Hamlet's dramatic foil, Laertes, announces '[h]e is justly served. / It is a poison tempered by himself' (*Hamlet*, 5.2.312-313). Hamlet has delayed this moment of rendering justice through his scepticism and through his propagation of injustice by not killing Claudius in the prayer scene. Unlike other tragic revengers, including Laertes himself, Hamlet has refused to take revenge in preference of the quest for truth and justice. Although he has risked injustice along the way, Hamlet's motivations have been to attain justice for his father and by the end of the play he manages to achieve this by forcing Claudius to drink his own poison. Derrida might well have called this situation 'Shakespeare's Pharmacy'.

Prendergast informs us: 'In the final, murderous scene of the play, vengeance and justice are finally enacted' (2005: 47). By the end of the play all the guilty dramatis personae meet a fitting end. Gertrude, for example, accidentally commits suicide by drinking from a cup poisoned by her lover. As she married her husband's brother it is fitting that her death is brought about as a result of his treachery. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern betray their friend Hamlet in favour of doing Claudius' bidding, as they follow the villain's orders to accompany Hamlet to England where he is to be executed: It is appropriate then that Hamlet, upon discovering his death warrant, similarly betrays his friends and replaces his own death warrant with one demanding the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In addition to this apt form of justice delivered to the guilty, Hamlet achieves a totalising justice for the murderers in this play, which in addition to the death of Claudius, also necessitates the deaths of Laertes and Hamlet himself. Laertes, having conspired with Claudius to murder Hamlet is also justly slain at the end of the play. In the same way that Claudius is, quite

appropriately, slain by drinking his own poison, Laertes endures a similar fitting form of justice. Laertes himself admits: 'I am justly killed with mine own treachery' (*Hamlet*, 5.2.92). Hamlet and Laertes inadvertently swap swords during the fencing duel and Laertes is murdered with the sword he himself poisoned, which he also successfully inflicts Hamlet with. Thus, Laertes also suitably achieves justice for the death of his father Polonius, whom Hamlet murdered earlier in the play. Both sons have avenged their fathers' deaths by taking the life of their murderers with their own hand. More than vengeance though, Hamlet has successfully achieved total justice against the murderers by the end of the play, as all those who have committed the crime of murder are killed by the hand of the son of the father that they have murdered, or in the case of Laertes, by the person they have murdered themselves. As we noted earlier however, injustice is an unfortunate, yet necessary part of the quest to attain justice. Ophelia is completely innocent, and yet just like the liars and murderers in this play she too meets her death. However, as highlighted earlier, the way in which death occurs (and at whose hand) is essential with regards to determining whether or not justice has been achieved. Ophelia commits suicide and her death is not an intended part of Hamlet's quest for justice; in fact her death is one of the few things that motivates Hamlet to take action, as he leaps into her grave to declare his love for her in the final act of the play. This leaves us then with Polonius. Though he is not entirely guiltless, (as he has people spy on his son, prevents his daughter from seeing the man she loves, as well as manipulating her to his own ends in order to act as the right man to a, whether he knows it or not, fratricidal usurper) Polonius' death does seem unjust. Perhaps Polonius is the collateral damage in this quest for justice, of which Ophelia's suicide is also an unfortunate by-product. Ultimately though, Hamlet's mission to attain total justice against those who have committed murder is achieved at the end of the play, despite the high price of injustice towards others that accompanies it.

After discussing Hamlet's self-assigned mission to attain justice as opposed to vengeance, Mercer's determination that: 'Not only is *Hamlet* not a revenge tragedy; it is hardly a tragedy at all'

(1987: 246) becomes less challenging to understand. *Hamlet* is not a revenge tragedy as the prince seeks to attain justice, not vengeance. Hamlet succeeds in achieving the impossible and dispenses a form of justice to the guilty and total justice to the murderers at the end of the play, liberating the state of Denmark from the rule of the murderous villain Claudius. Despite the bloodshed, the play's resolution is not tragic, but optimistic as it points towards the possibility of achieving justice. Justice is possible in *Hamlet* through the use of a deconstructive logic. Deferral, even though it seemingly countenances injustice, is a part of the process of attaining justice. *Hamlet* demonstrates that justice is possible by way of deconstruction; it is through Hamlet's continual failure to achieve vengeance that Hamlet finally succeeds, in the case of those who have committed murder, in attaining a totalising form of justice at the closure of the play.

### Chapter 3: Performativity

The spectre of justice can also be recognised to be at work in *Hamlet* through an analysis of performativity, which this chapter will endeavour to explore. To begin with this chapter will offer an explanation of performativity; including Derrida's criticism and development of this term across the course of his writing, as his initial understanding of the term is altered by his concept of spectrality in his later works. Derrida discusses performativity within *Hamlet* in his analysis of the 'oath scene' and the influence of spectrality upon this reading is evident here. Chapter 1 concluded that, despite the *spectral anachrony*, Shakespeare was experimenting with the developing idea that people possess an interior subjectivity in *Hamlet*. This concept of an internally governed, inaccessible space within the mind is necessitous to an understanding of performativity. The distinction between the spirit and the spectre can be made with reference to the difference between interiority and exteriority, as the spirit is that which is interior whereas the spectre is the externalisation of the interior. This important division marks the difference between an Austinian and Derridean conception of performativity.

In Austin's 1955 William James Lectures, later published as *How to do Things with Words* in 1962, he proposes the case for performative utterances or sentences. Unlike recognised constative utterances, which present something as true or false, Austin suggests that performatives do not 'describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it' (1976: 6). Words *do* things. In a subtitle that echoes Hamlet's philosophical outburst: 'there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so' (Shakespeare, 1891: 2.2.255-6), Austin asks 'Can saying make it so?' (1976: 7).<sup>3</sup> Performative speech acts not only say the words, but in being uttered produce the action. As Hamlet is often criticised for his inaction, this chapter will examine the use of performatives within the play to show how Hamlet acts linguistically. Derrida's

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<sup>3</sup> Note that although I refer to the Second Quarto edition of *Hamlet* throughout the thesis, Hamlet's philosophical musing quoted here only appears in the Folio.

familiarity with Austin's work dates back to his well-known 1971 essay 'Signature Event Context'. This paper later provoked a very public exchange with John Searle.<sup>4</sup> Despite his criticism of performativity, Derrida has continued to engage with the idea throughout his career; his understanding of performativity also later informed his analysis of the oath scene in *Hamlet*, which we will analyse here. This is how Derrida redefines the term:

[...] performativity for me is [...] that which produces events, all institutions and acts in which responsibility is to be assumed; but it is also that which neutralizes the event, that is to say, what happens.

(2000: 467)

A performative creates an event; for example a couple getting married and uttering the words 'I do' are producing a new marriage. However, Derrida says that performativity also neutralises the event. In order for this marriage to be acknowledged it must repeat the recognised, accepted conditions for a marriage: in this sense it is not a new event, but re-iterates that which has occurred many times before. Saying 'I do' re-affirms the power of the marriage institution, thus neutralising the uniqueness of the event by legitimising the institution which produced it.

Austin identifies a difficulty with the concept of performativity that Derrida later criticises. After classifying performatives as words that do things, Austin states a condition for the performative: 'the words must be spoken 'seriously' [...] their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign [...] of an inward and spiritual act' (1976: 9). In order for performatives to be happy or felicitous, as Austin terms them, they must be spoken with the speaker's intention to fulfil them. Therefore, if a performative is uttered but the speaker does not inwardly commit to acting upon those words, the performative is not false but, what Austin terms, 'infelicitous' (1976: 16). Derrida criticises this in 'Signature Event Context' arguing that, to be able to determine whether a performative is felicitous or not 'conscious intention would at the very least

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<sup>4</sup> Following the publication of Derrida's essay 'Signature Event Context', John Searle responded with an essay entitled: 'Reply to Derrida: Reiterating the Differences' in which he criticises Derrida's interpretation of Austin. Derrida replied to Searle's critique with another essay titled 'Limited Inc. a b c...' The title of this essay was later used as the title of a book published in 1988, which contains a summary of Searle's response and both of Derrida's essays.



have to be totally present and immediately transparent to itself and others,' (1988: 18). It is impossible to know the interior subjectivity of an individual, and according to Derrida the inward intention may not even be entirely present to the individual themselves. Thus, Derrida questions whether or not there is such a thing as a 'felicitous' (Austin, 1976: 42) performative.

This dimension of Derrida's critique of Austin is already well known. What Derrida overlooks in Austin, however, is the phrase 'an inward and spiritual act' (Austin, 1976: 9), as performativity is curiously dependent upon the *spiritual*. Austin emphasises the importance of spirituality when he goes on to say: 'Thus 'I promise to . . .' obliges me – puts on record my spiritual assumption of a spiritual shackle' (1976: 10). Derrida misses the extent to which, already in Austin's text, there is a relationship between performativity and the spiritual – a term which Derrida also links with the spectral. Austin's formulation of the performative already contains a spectral dimension, which Austin refers to as the spiritual. Thus, it is not surprising that, in his essay 'Ghost Writing', Derek Attridge assigns a performative significance to the ghost of the king, arguing: 'The ghost speaks performatively – it is itself a performative – nothing will be the same again after it has appeared and spoken' (2001: 176). Here Attridge rightly begins to affiliate performativity with the spectral; although, arguably, this affiliation was always already present in Austin.

Swearing an oath is a performative act. In *Hamlet* both Horatio and Marcellus are asked by the prince to: 'Never make known what you have seen tonight' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.143). Hamlet is unconvinced by their unified reply: 'My lord, we will not' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.144), and asks them to swear that they will not, both vocally and by his sword. The oath requires both the performative utterance: 'In faith, my lord, not I' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.145) and a performance of placing their hand upon the sword, which the ghost also commands them to do: 'swear' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.149). Derrida discusses the significance of this oath scene in his book *Specters of Marx*:

the pledge or the promise (the oath, if one prefers: "swear!"), the **originary performativity** that does not conform to pre-existing conventions, unlike all the performatives analyzed by the theoreticians of speech acts, but whose force of *rupture* produces institution or the constitution, the law itself, [...] *Violence* of the law before the law and before meaning,

violence that interrupts time, disarticulates it, dislodges it, displaces it out of its natural lodging: “out of joint.” [...] The pledge is given here and now, even before, perhaps, a decision confirms it. It thus responds without delay to the demand of justice.

(1994: 36-7, my emphasis in bold)

Derrida says that the swear scene in *Hamlet* immediately responds to the call for justice as it produces the event of swearing; however, it does not neutralise the event. It produces the event in uttering and performing the oath. Yet, at the same time it cannot neutralise the event, it cannot legitimise the institution of the law, as it invents an oath that is before the law. The oath called for is self-negating as it demands the speakers to utter a vow of silence, to speak in order to promise not to speak. The aim of the event is to ensure the event remains a secret. This is why the swear scene is unlike any analysed by ‘theoreticians of speech acts’, it is not merely legitimising the performative of swearing, but creates a rupture with the institution. ‘The juridical is at work in the performative’ (Derrida, 2000: 467): this oath defies a judicial system that cannot yet account for this type of oath and by swearing in this scene Horatio and Marcellus produce something that breaks from the existing law and invents the law. They are entreated to remain silent upon seeing the ghost as they have witnessed the impossible. Horatio and Marcellus do not possess a full comprehension of the event, or of the significance of the assignment of silence that they are asked to swear to. Despite this they both vow to remain silent. Thus, as Derrida points out, the performative of swearing an oath here responds immediately to the demand for justice. That is not to say that in so swearing they have attained justice, but that in swearing, without understanding or questioning the demand to ‘swear’, they respond to a call for justice. Hence Derrida labels this oath the ‘originary performativity’ (1994: 36).

Despite the divided opinion between Austin and Derrida, as a result of Derrida’s criticism of Austin, it is interesting to note how both philosophers share a similar concept. Derrida criticises Austin for assuming that there is an internal spirituality. However, although he criticises him for assuming there is something ‘inward and spiritual’ which is unknowable, in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida gives the following definition of a spectre:

[...] the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some “thing” that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter. There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed. The spirit and the specter are not the same thing, and we will have to sharpen this difference; but as for what they have in common, one does not know what it *is*, what it is presently. It *is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge.

(1994: 5)

The word ‘spirit’ is used three times in his attempt to define the spectre. Derrida makes the same presumption which he criticises Austin for; that there is something inward and spiritual that can act as the foundation for something physical. When Derrida defines the spectre he says that it is the becoming-body of the spirit. The spectre is a corporealisation of the spirit, the difficulty in distinguishing between the spirit and the spectre derives from the unknowability of spirituality. The spiritual intentions of a person do not ‘[belong] to knowledge’, but, despite being unknowable, Derrida argues that the spectre is an embodiment of this spirit. Importantly, Derrida rightly points out, the ‘spirit and the specter are not the same thing’. Performativity is spectral; the spectre is dependent upon a spirit for it to have any form of existence. For Derrida, it is through the spectral that we can gain access to the spiritual. Thus, performativity is spectral: as Austin has it, it is the actual embodiment of something spiritual, which, as Derrida has it, is spectrality.

In giving the ‘inward and spiritual’ (Austin, 1976: 9) intention to remain silent a verbal existence, Horatio and Marcellus create a ghost which will haunt them. Uttering the oath produces a spectre, a ‘spiritual shackle’ (Austin, 1976: 10) is forged and the inward and spiritual is made outward and visible. The performative produces a spectre which will haunt the actions of the men throughout the rest of the play. The spectral performative of the oath causes a ‘*rupture*’ (Derrida, 1994: 37) in time. The oath spoken here and now in response to the call for justice will alter the course of action in the future and upon reflection has already been at work. Even though Horatio

and Marcellus have only just performed the oath in this scene, they have spiritually committed loyalty to Hamlet before this scene, as they have already been keeping the presence of the ghost a secret from the rest of the court in favour of loyalty to Hamlet. This ‘originary performative’ produces a rift, dislodging everything that has come before it and all that will follow it. The oath therefore shares properties with the ghost of Hamlet’s father, who emerges from the past to demand commitment to a future course of action in order to set the present to rights, and who thus, for Derrida, puts the time out of joint. The performative of the oath is spectral as the ghost too is spectral. My term *spectral anachrony*, that I again propose to use here, characterises this effect that the production of a spectre (in this case by way of a performative) has on time. A spectre does not adhere to a linear chronology and its functioning can only be recognised retrospectively; as was also the case with the spectre of interiorisation and the spectre of justice, which is once again at work here in the oath scene.

Derrida only looks at the oath that Horatio and Marcellus swear to. But, Hamlet swears an oath as well. This oath forms the basis of all of Hamlet’s actions following the event. After his conversation with the ghost Hamlet says: ‘Now to my word./ It is ‘Adieu, adieu, remember me.’/ I have sworn’t’ (*Hamlet*, 1.5.110-112). What is it exactly that Hamlet has sworn to? What is his ‘word’? Here is a quotation from Hamlet’s conversation with the ghost:

HAMLET:	Speak, I am bound to hear.
GHOST:	So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.
[...]	
	If thou didst ever thy dear father love –
HAMLET:	O God!
GHOST:	Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!
HAMLET:	Murder!
GHOST:	Murder most foul – as in the best it is – But this most foul, strange and unnatural.
HAMLET:	Haste me to know’t that I with wings as swift As meditation or the thoughts of love May sweep to my revenge.
GHOST:	I find thee apt. ( <i>Hamlet</i> , 1.5.6-7, 23-31)

Before Hamlet has agreed to be the administrator of revenge the ghost tells him he is bound to avenge him. Vengeance is not optional, whether he swears to avenge his father or not Hamlet must murder his Uncle.<sup>5</sup> When the ghost begins to speak of his murder Hamlet interrupts him. This linguistic break with conversational turn-taking shows that Hamlet anticipates what the ghost is about to say. As Attridge tells us, what the ghost tells Hamlet 'is and is not news to him' (2001: 176). Before Hamlet has been told that Claudius murdered his father he already suspected it to be true, as demonstrated by Hamlet's exclamatory later in the scene: 'O my prophetic soul! My uncle!' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.40). After the ghost demands revenge for his murder, Hamlet repeats back 'Murder!' as this is an exclamation uttered in shock. However, it is not a shock at hearing something which he had not previously conceived, but one that is uttered in the shock of having confirmed that which he already knew. Note the *spectral anachrony* here; the spectre of justice, that requires the state to be set to right, is already at work in Hamlet's mind as he suspects his uncle of 'foul play' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.254).<sup>6</sup> It is only here and now, once the ghost has confirmed his suspicions, that the spectre of justice can be recognised as having already been at work.

Hamlet next asks the ghost to tell him what happened so he may 'sweep' to his revenge. This is the point at which Hamlet swears to avenge his father's death: 'Haste me to know't that I with wings as swift/ As meditation or the thoughts of love/ May sweep to my revenge' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.28-30). Even in saying he will exact vengeance 'swiftly' Hamlet already delays the promise with flowery rhetoric. Hamlet does not convincingly verbally commit himself to the task of vengeance, which regardless of his own volition is a task he must fulfil. Yet, he later adamantly states: 'I have sworn't', despite the fact that it is not apparent what it is that he has sworn to. In *How to do Things with Words* (1976) Austin characterises the problem of identifying the interior commitment to a performative that is necessary for its felicitousness by quoting from *Hippolytus*. He quotes it in

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<sup>5</sup> With reference to chapter 2 let us remind ourselves at this point that, although vengeance is asked of him, Hamlet rejects this task in favour of seeking justice.

<sup>6</sup> Upon learning from Horatio that the ghost of his father has been sighted, Hamlet declares: 'My father's spirit – in Arms! All is not well; / I doubt some foul play' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.253-254).

translation as: 'my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not' (Austin, 1976: 9-10). The problem in understanding Hamlet's oath is a reversal of this phrase. For whatever it is that Hamlet has sworn to, he has sworn it inwardly and without giving a clear utterance to it. In comparison to Horatio and Marcellus who are asked to repeatedly swear to their oath of silence, and place their hand on a sword to do so, Hamlet neither makes a performative, nor a performance, of that which he swears to and does not directly outline what the oath is that he has made. His heart has sworn to, but his tongue has not. Hamlet possesses the inward and spiritual commitment that Austin refers to, but lacks the utterance of a committed performative to produce a spectre or 'spiritual shackle' (Austin, 1976: 10). The spectre of his oath to vengeance is, as his spectre of mourning, one that continues to exist only from within. In doing this Hamlet relocates the performative from the public to the private realm. In uttering words publically when swearing, as Horatio and Marcellus do: 'In faith, my lord, not I' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.145), they are placed under the judgement of an external audience as to whether or not they will prove to be felicitous in acting on the performative (i.e. later fulfilling that which they have sworn to do).

Yet, as Hamlet does not observably announce to a public audience an oath that he has sworn, it is only himself that can determine the felicity of his performative. The 'conscious intention' which Hamlet has sworn to is not even 'totally present and immediately transparent to itself' (Derrida, 1988: 18), let alone to others. Hamlet's task of performativity is not only to comply with what he has sworn to do, but to discover the meaning of that which he has sworn to himself. In comparison to Horatio and Marcellus who unquestioningly respond to Hamlet's command, not to speak of what they have seen, Hamlet unconvincingly swears to avenge his father: 'Haste me to know't that I [...] May sweep to my revenge' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.28-30) and later questions what is asked of him. Horatio and Marcellus swear 'in faith' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.145), they do not understand and swear anyway; whereas Hamlet swears, but needs to question and make sense of what he has sworn to before he can act upon it. Derrida recognises the oath that Horatio and Marcellus make as an

‘originary performativity’ that ‘responds without delay to the demand of justice’ (1994: 36-37).

However, as Hamlet’s oath is not verbalised it does not immediately respond to the demand for justice; instead Hamlet’s response to the ghost’s demand for *vengeance* is an internal commitment to seek the attainment of *justice*.

In lecture XII Austin comes up with five general classes of performatives with illocutionary force. Amongst these are ‘commissives’, and he provides a list of examples of these which include: ‘promise’, ‘vow’, ‘pledge myself’ and ‘swear’ (1976: 157-158). In our analysis of the ‘swear’ scene in Act 1 scene 5 then we were already concerned with the commissive performative. Although Austin does not list this as an example, we will now look at ‘I shall obey’ as a commissive performative, as promising to obey in *Hamlet* is a recurring act that is performed by multiple dramatis personae. Austin says: ‘The whole point of a commissive is to commit the speaker to a certain course of action’ (1976: 157). In Act 1 scene 2 Gertrude solicits Hamlet not to go to Wittenberg, to which Hamlet replies: ‘I shall in all my best obey you, madam’ (*Hamlet*, 1.2.120). In uttering this commissive performative Hamlet submits his will to the desires of his mother and commits to acting in her interests, as opposed to his own. He says he will stay in Denmark and he does – Hamlet fulfils the performative so we can retrospectively deem this felicitous. Hamlet remains true to his word here. What Hamlet does in giving up his autonomy is to place himself in a position of performative powerlessness. He submits to the persuasive power of his mother: ‘Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet. / I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg’ (*Hamlet*, 1.2.118-119). He acts upon her interests and not his own. Hamlet’s inaction in not going to Wittenberg is actually a course of action itself. Thus through inaction here, Hamlet is actually taking an action approved by his mother. Later, the ghost comes along and commands Hamlet to avenge him as Hamlet is once again called upon to produce a commissive performative, to swear to avenge his father. In ‘The Time is Out of Joint’ Derrida proposes that, after this encounter with the ghost, Hamlet ‘no longer knows what to do and becomes [...] merely a powerless witness’ (1995: 34). Although Hamlet is asked once

more to submit his own volition, this time he is required to act upon the command; whereas, his mother made a passive request of him to stay in Denmark. Hamlet could easily fulfil the request of his mother as it did not require him to take action – in his passive state of not doing something (i.e. to not go to Wittenberg) he was doing what was asked of him. However, in submitting to his father's demand and once again placing himself in a position of performative powerlessness, Hamlet is now required to take action in order to comply. In swearing vengeance he has committed himself to a course of action that requires action. Hamlet does not possess the power or authority to act of his own volition. This may seem pessimistic, but Derrida offers us the following optimism: 'There is ethics precisely where I am in performative powerlessness' (2000: 467). By being in a powerless state Hamlet is able to question the authority of the other. To be in the position of performative power requires absolute certainty and commitment, doubt is seen as a weakness. However, from his position of powerlessness Hamlet is able to interrogate the authority of the ghost and to critique the judicial system that functions on vengeance. In criticising this Hamlet opens a discussion that contains the possibility of justice.

Austin's prerequisite, that there ought to be an inward, spiritual commitment to a performative in order for it to be felicitous, is exemplified in Hamlet's retort to his mother. When Gertrude asks Hamlet why his father's death 'seems' so particular with him, Hamlet says his displays of grief may: 'indeed 'seem',/ For they are actions that a man might play,/ But I have that within which passes show,/ These but the trappings and the suits of woe' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.83-86). Here Hamlet attests to his interior, spiritual commitment to his performance of grief.<sup>7</sup> However, following Derrida's line of argument, that the interior subjectivity of an individual cannot be known, leads performativity to the following possible conclusion:

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<sup>7</sup> As we began to discuss with regards to the spectral anachrony of an interior subjectivity in chapter 1 (see pages 18-19).



“Performativity,” it now appears means, among other things, the assumption that human beings have no innate selfhood or subjectivity but become what they are through more or less forced repetition of a certain role.

(Miller, 2009: 146)

Miller proposes that it is our actions that define us, and as these are outward and visible (and therefore knowable) we must judge a person based on their actions alone. This reading suggests removing the problematic concept of an ‘innate selfhood’ from performativity altogether. However, this contradicts what Hamlet attests to when he claims to have ‘that within which passes show’ (*Hamlet*, 1.2.85). Despite Derrida’s initial disapproval of the idea that the performative requires an inward commitment, and therefore an interior subjectivity, in his essay ‘Signature Event Context’ in 1971, by the time he is using performativity to discuss *Hamlet* in the 1990s, Derrida has begun to deploy the term ‘spectrality’ in order to combine the performative with interiority, without having to fully endorse subjectivity. Let us here expand upon the earlier distinction Derrida made, that the ‘spirit and the specter are not the same thing’ (1994: 5): the spectre is the ‘becoming-body’ and it is through this spectral corporealisation, that the inward and spiritual can be given an outward presence. Therefore, the spectral is linked to the outside world as the ego is connected to the id – it is outwardly perceptible whilst still in connection with an internal spirit. Whereas spirituality, in the way Austin uses the term, is solely internal and has no way of being accessed by the external world.

In *Hamlet* the play-within-the-play provides another example of how the performative is spectral, as it also is in the oath scene. Surprisingly Derrida does not write about the play-within-the-play, which is interesting with regards to performativity. In this scene the player queen promises to remain loyal to her husband and not to remarry after his death: ‘*If once I be a widow ever I be a wife*’ (*Hamlet*, 3.2.217), this performative is, as the player king notes: ‘*deeply sworn*’ (*Hamlet*, 3.2.219). The player queen produces an Austinian spiritual shackle as she puts on record her determination to remain loyal to her husband. Whilst Derrida neglected this scene, current Derridean scholars have taken up the task of discussing it. Nicholas Royle refers to it as: ‘a strangely private-public theatre, a

sort of interior magic show that passes show, the exposure or exscription of a character's otherwise secret and unknown thoughts and feelings' (2012: 144). Echoing Hamlet's reference to an interior subjectivity (as he has that within which 'passes show'), Royle's interpretation here is far from Miller's allusion to an understanding of performativity that is detached from an 'innate selfhood' (2009: 146), and far from Austin's denouncement of the performative being: '*in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage*' (1976: 22). What Royle suggests is that the performatives produced in the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet* actually enable access to the inward spirituality of those outside the fictional confines of the play. Or to put it another way, the spectral production of fictional performatives enables an exploration of spirituality. Miller's earlier quote then can be aligned with Derrida's perspective in the 1970s. However, as Derrida further explored the idea of spectrality his understanding of performativity has also altered accordingly, and it is from a post-1990s Derridean perspective that Royle discusses *Hamlet*. In addition to Royle, Cixous also adds that:

*To make truth while resorting to dramatic metaphor, to produce effects of unveiling without tearing the veil, is the very art of the theatre-within-the-theatre which Shakespeare will have brought to incandescence: through evocation, through condensation and displacement, through spectral figuration, to make the trace of the secret spring to light.*  
(Cixous, 2012: 4)

The play-within-the-play produces a 'spectral figuration'. Through the performatives in *The Mousetrap* the spirits of Claudius, Hamlet and Gertrude are revealed. The initial dumb-show re-creates the scenario of the murder of a king by pouring poison into his ear. In re-creating the scene of his father's murder Hamlet wishes to expose Claudius' guilt and thus: 'By indirections [to] find directions out' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.63), to quote Polonius. Nevertheless, this is dangerous as until this point Hamlet's knowledge of Claudius' guilt has remained a secret: by putting on this performance Hamlet is making his secret knowledge apparent to the murderer. Though this is a dangerous pursuit, it is necessary for Hamlet to stage the play-within-the-play, in order to: 'simultaneously [test] the Ghost's honesty and Claudius's conscience' (Cavell, 2003: 179).

Austin tells us that a performative will be *'in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage'* (1976: 22), but despite the fact that the player queen's performative is fictional it reveals Hamlet's spirit as he displays to his mother his dismay at having seen his mother remarry, which in turn allows Hamlet to ask his mother her thoughts on the matter, to which she responds: *'The lady doth protest too much, methinks'* (*Hamlet*, 3.2.224). Gertrude's spirit is revealed by way of the fictional performative. Not only does *The Mousetrap* reveal Hamlet's and Gertrude's inward spirit, but it also divulges the spirit of Claudius. Witnessing the spectre of the play-within-the-play causes Claudius to utter the exercitive performative: *'Give me some light, away'* (*Hamlet*, 3.2.261). Through this command Claudius reveals his guilt, confirms Hamlet's suspicions, and verifies the veracity of the ghost's story. The performative is bound up with the spectral and is an outward display of the inward spirit; even fictional performatives have the capacity to touch upon the spirit, as the player queen's performative reveals the spirit of Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius. Performatives are spectral as they are connected to, and reveal, that which is inward and spiritual. Austin outlines that the performative requires an interior subjectivity to be felicitous; however, it is only by way of a Derridean conception of spectrality that it is possible to bear witness to the inward spirit which the performative is connected to.

The play-within-the-play does more than to offer a direct reflection of actions that have occurred, and it is for this reason that it cannot strictly be deemed an example of *mis-en-abyme*, as the person that murders the king in *The Mousetrap* is not the king's brother but *'one Lucianus, nephew to the king'* (*Hamlet*, 3.2.237). The play-within-the-play is a production of Hamlet's spirit, revealing not only his knowledge of Claudius' guilt, but also his *'fantasy'* (Cavell, 2003: 183) and required task to murder his uncle.<sup>8</sup> Although Derrida does not discuss the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet* directly, he does indirectly refer to it in such a way that implies our understanding of *spectral*

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<sup>8</sup> I use *'fantasy'* here in the sense used by Cavell when he says *'we look at the dumb-show as Hamlet's invention, let me say his fantasy,'* (Cavell, 2003: 182-183).

*anachrony*. The play-within-the-play is in a part a necessary reconstruction of Claudius' initial crime of murder in order to test the veracity of the ghost. Derrida tells us:

There is tragedy [...] on the condition of this [...] **spectral anteriority** of the crime – the crime of the other, a misdeed whose event and reality, whose truth can never *present themselves* in flesh and blood, but can only allow themselves to be presumed, reconstructed, fantasized' (1994: 24, my emphasis in bold)

The play-within-the-play is both a reconstruction of the initial crime and a representation of Hamlet's fantasy to avenge his father. The performance of the play is a re-enactment of that which came before, in this way it is anachronic, as well as spectral as this reproduction endeavours to haunt Claudius and remind him of his crime.

In this spectral demonstration of Hamlet's interior subjectivity the player king speaks the words: '*I do believe you think what now you speak./But what we do determine oft we break./ Purpose is but the slave to memory*' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.180-182). Not only does this refer to the player queen's determination not to marry again once her husband has died, but very pointedly refers to Hamlet's own inaction. The play produces a spectre that exposes Hamlet's spirit, which he earlier elucidated in the Act 3 scene 1 soliloquy: 'the native hue of resolution/ Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,/ And enterprises of great pitch and moment/ [...] lose the name of action' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.83-87). The play-within-the-play is spectral and reveals Hamlet's hamartia which is to think too much. When the player king says '[p]urpose is but the slave to memory' it recalls the ghost's parting words to Hamlet 'adieu, adieu, remember me' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.91). By penning lines for the play Hamlet is remembering his father and offering himself a spectral display of his fantasy, a nephew murdering a king, in order to motivate him to take action in his revenge.

As swearing an oath is a performative, prayer is also a performative.<sup>9</sup> After prematurely ceasing the performance of *The Mousetrap* Claudius retires to pray. In his final lecture in *How to do*

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<sup>9</sup> The prayer scene was also discussed at length with regards to justice in chapter 2; see pages 29 and 30 for a recapitulation.

*Things with Words* Austin labels 'pray' as an exercitive: 'An exercitive is the giving of a decision in favour of or against a certain course of action, or advocacy of it' (1976: 155). It is interesting to compare Claudius' prayer to the oath Horatio and Marcellus make earlier in the play. The oath they make is self-negating, as they speak the words of the oath in order to take a vow to silence. On the surface Claudius' prayer is similarly self-negating, as he prays in the knowledge that his prayer is hollow.<sup>10</sup> Claudius begins by saying: 'Pray can I not,' (*Hamlet*, 3.3.38). This prayer-less prayer becomes even more ironic as Hamlet steps in at the moment where Claudius has knelt down, and the protagonist contemplates murdering him. However, he decides not to because he does not wish to 'take him in the purging of his soul/ When he is fit and seasoned for his passage' (*Hamlet*, 3.3.84-85). Hamlet has walked in and seen the outward performance of Claudius kneeling down and based upon witnessing this chooses not to take revenge, as he does not wish to send his uncle's soul to heaven. The audience, who are in the privileged position to have heard Claudius' soliloquy prior to Hamlet's arrival, are aware that although Claudius does the action of kneeling down he does not inwardly commit to the prayer. Which is revealed in Claudius' rhyming couplet that ends the scene after Hamlet has left the stage: 'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go' (*Hamlet*, 3.3. 97-98). Claudius himself highlights Austin's issue with performativity. For a performative to be felicitous it requires a spiritual commitment to fulfilling the course of action that the performative is supposed to commit to: 'Words without thoughts never to heaven go'. Without this spiritual commitment Claudius believes that the prayer is unsuccessful.

However, in one important respect, the prayer is successful. Claudius still carries out the outward performance by kneeling down to pray and through this action Hamlet sees Claudius at prayer and because of this decides not to kill him. Although the prayer seems self-negating, as Claudius does not commit to a course of action that will save his soul, because he performs the action of kneeling the prayer still saves him from death. The performance of prayer, and

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<sup>10</sup> I apply this term in the sense that Austin uses it when he states that: 'a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way*, hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage' (1976: 22).

performativity itself, operates independently of the intentions of the individual. In a chapter entitled 'Derrida's Special Theory of Performativity' Miller tells us both that: 'a speech act may have unintended consequences' and that it 'may, however, act on its own to do something quite different from what the speaker means to do' (2009: 165). This is precisely what we see in the prayer scene; Claudius is aware that although it looks as though he is praying, because he is kneeling, he knows that he cannot pray for forgiveness when he still possesses the effects his crime gained him. Yet, by kneeling to pray Claudius produces the unintended consequence of saving his own life, as it prevents his nephew from murdering him. The prayer scene functions in opposition to the aforementioned oath scene. In the scene where Horatio and Marcellus swear a vow of silence to both King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet, the performative utterance of the oath produced a spectre that haunts their commitment to this. However, as Claudius' prayer lacks a spiritual commitment it is hollow and no spectre is produced. Whereas the ghost is a spectre – a spirit without a body, Claudius is the opposite, a body without a spirit. Conversely, that being said, Claudius' corporeal shell is not utterly devoid of a spiritual intention, he commits himself wholeheartedly to the task of killing Hamlet and it is this which proves to be his downfall.

## Chapter 4: Walking Dead

This chapter will argue that ghosts can be corporeal, proposing that Prince Hamlet himself can be considered as a ghost and that in this deconstructive state of existence he can bring about revolutionary changes in the state of Denmark. Beginning with the definitions of a spectre from, Rodolphe Gasché as well as from the writings of Derrida, we will consider the ghostliness of various scenes in the play. A quote from Derek Attridge based on the exteriority of the ghost of the King in the first Act will demonstrate how, in *Hamlet*, the ghost occupies a physical space in the world at the start of the play. This initial ghost acts as a catalyst to the subsequent actions that drive the plot forward and gives rise to other types of ghosts; including the corporeal ghost of Hamlet, the spirit of revolution and the ghost of the undecidable. I will then go on to demonstrate the deconstructive nature of a ghost's existence, as it is simultaneously visible and invisible in the scene between Hamlet and his mother.<sup>11</sup>

Following an examination of the recognised ghost of the play, the evaluation will continue by arguing that Hamlet himself is a corporeal ghost. Through an analysis of Ophelia's ghostly encounter with Hamlet, paralleled with the meeting he and Horatio have with the ghost of the King, it is possible to deem how after his meeting with the ghost Hamlet himself has become a spectre. By thinking of Hamlet as a corporeal ghost our certainty and understanding of life and death and presence and absence is deconstructed in such a way that we can question our experience of human existence. A re-examination of the '[t]o be, or not to be' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.55) soliloquy based on the idea that Hamlet is a ghost, who has been sent away to England with his death warrant signed, will show that Hamlet miraculously manages to reappear on stage in a graveyard in Act 5. Another imperceptible ghost in the play that can be detected through an understanding of *spectral anachrony* is the ghost of the undecidable; we can retrospectively bear witness to the presence of

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<sup>11</sup>In chapter 1 this scene was discussed with relation to interiority (see pages 18-19). However, the examination of this scene here will more closely consider deconstruction.

this invisible ghost in the prayer scene. Finally, in the tragic conclusion of *Hamlet* the ghosts that have been so pivotal to the action and course of the play are laid to rest. Hamlet exists as a corporeal ghost and the conventional ways in which we understand or explain life and death are not as opposed as we might think. Consequently, this brings about a new way of considering our own existence that is not bound up in the notion that life is superior to death. This will lead us to consider that *Hamlet*, as a text, is itself a ghost through the timeless way in which it continues to haunt the English language.

The first step towards arguing for Hamlet's existence as a corporeal ghost is to define an understanding of what a ghost is. To recap from the last chapter, Derrida's definition of a ghost is that: 'the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit' (1994: 5).<sup>12</sup> Derrida illustrates here the complexity of understanding a ghost, as a ghost is both alive and dead, present and absent. It occupies a physical place in the world and is therefore 'carnal', but it does not have a bodily existence in the same sense that a human does, and he therefore positions it as a 'becoming-body'. The deconstructive nature of the ghost questions the superior position of life by being simultaneously alive and dead. A deconstructive analysis of ghostliness raises questions about our understanding of life and death and encourages us to articulate it in new ways.

Another important concept Derrida formulates that will be useful when discussing *Hamlet* and ghosts is that of '*hauntology*' (Derrida, 1994: 10). With his usual playfulness, Derrida creates this term, which, if pronounced as Derrida would with a French accent, is a homophone for 'ontology'. Ontology, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is 'that department of metaphysics which relates to the being or the essence of things' (2004: 824). The term hauntology combines ontology with the idea of ghosts: as the ghost is associated with death, hauntology not only is concerned with

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<sup>12</sup> To see this quotation again in full return to page 42, where spectrality is discussed in relation to spirituality.



the nature of existence but also begins to 'comprehend [...] the discourse of the end' (Derrida, 1994: 10). Hauntology considers how Being and existence in the present are also haunted by the spectres of the past. As these ghosts have died and returned to the realm of Being they bring with them teleological and eschatological ends, thus combining life with death and placing the past alongside the present. The chronological disruption and ontological paradox brought about by ghosts are characterised by Derrida's term hauntology.

Rodolphe Gasché also gives a detailed definition of a 'specter'; he argues that the ghost is associated with light due to its etymological derivation from the Latin word *spectrum*, saying that the spectre results from the 'decomposition and refraction of sunlight' (2012: 155). However, Gasché also recognises that the ghost is a deconstructive figure, despite being a thing of the light it is also associated with darkness: 'the *specter* is a being tied to the night' (2012: 155). Gasché's definition is also useful when we place *Hamlet* in its historical context; the play would have been performed in the open-roofed theatre of The Globe in broad daylight, yet the opening scene takes place at night. The contradiction between light and darkness would have had literal significance to the audience, adding to the philosophical exploration in the play of the contrast between light and dark, presence and absence, life and death. As well as suggesting this contradictory understanding of a spectre, Gasché states in his definition that a ghost 'possesses a disappearing, ephemeral existence, more dead than alive' (2012: 155). However, the ghost is not always necessarily more dead than alive but can also be more alive than dead. This is the case in *Hamlet* where Hamlet is a corporeal ghost and is doomed, as his father's ghost is: 'for a certain term to walk the night' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.10), until he can achieve justice for his father which will result, ultimately, in his own death.

One way to argue that ghosts are corporeal in *Hamlet* is to turn to the first appearance of the ghost in the play. The stage direction reads 'Enter Ghost' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.38), as Attridge notes: 'Shakespeare exteriorizes the ghost in the first scene' (2001: 176). An actor playing the part of the

ghost walks on stage; therefore the ghost initially has a physical presence. Attridge also describes the ghost as a 'borderline creature' (2001: 176)) suggesting that a ghost does not just appear as an image, as Gasché indicates in his definition, but that it has a corporeal existence. The ghost is more than a spectral image that is produced by one imagination – it is a physical Being seen by multiple witnesses in the first scene of the play. However, once the ghost has left the stage Marcellus says: 'It faded on the crowing of the cock' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.156), which contrastingly implies that the ghost is affiliated with the light as Gasché's definition stated. Deconstruction can be used as a means to understand these competing ideas: the ghost is both a corporeal presence and an image-like spectre that can walk onto the stage and fade away from it.

To complicate matters further, the paradoxical entity of the ghost (that is simultaneously Being and non-Being) is not only presented as a visible entity but, later in the play, is also invisible – as discussed in chapter 1. The first scene presents us with a physical ghost, the ghost of Hamlet's father, which walks onto the stage and is witnessed by Marcellus, Barnardo and Horatio. Yet later in the play when Hamlet visits his mother in her chambers, the ghost appears physically on stage yet is seen and heard only by Hamlet. In this scene the ghost is concurrently visible and invisible, and deconstruction allows us to comprehend this paradoxical coexistence. When the ghost enters Gertrude's chamber Hamlet speaks to it and Gertrude asks: 'Alas, how is't with you, / That you do bend your eye on vacancy / And with th'incorporeal air do hold discourse?' (*Hamlet*, 3.4.112-13). Shakespeare uses this scene, in which Hamlet interacts with the ghost but Gertrude is unaware of its presence, to demonstrate the deconstructive duality of the ghost. The ghost is at once visible (to Hamlet) and invisible (to Gertrude); it is both present and absent as well as corporeal and incorporeal, as the spectre is not constrained to adhere to one fixed side of these binaries. It is the ghost's deconstructive capacity that allows Hamlet to see the ghost while Gertrude cannot.

After examining both the visible and invisible encounters with the recognised ghost of the play, that of Hamlet's father, we have developed a basis from which to argue for the various ways in which the protagonist is himself a ghost. An analysis of Ophelia's encounter with Hamlet will begin to reveal Hamlet's ghostliness. In Act 2 Scene 1 Ophelia recounts to her father a distressing visit she has received from Hamlet; she exclaims, '[M]y lord, I have been so affrighted' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.73). She then goes on to explain how a '[p]ale' Hamlet came into her chamber looking as though he had been 'loosed out of hell' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.78-80) and without speaking grabbed her by the wrist and stared at her face whilst making sounds 'so piteous and profound / As it did seem to shatter all his bulk / And end his being' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.92-93). Pale as a ghost, and groaning to boot Hamlet is the walking dead, and this silent encounter with Ophelia depicts his ghostly return to haunt the woman he loves. Following Hamlet's conversation with the ghost, where he is given the task of avenging his father's death, Hamlet is a dead man walking. He cannot carry out his task without it resulting in his own demise. The scene that Ophelia recounts to her father shows Hamlet as a corporeal ghost, he is alive but destined to die. His visit to Ophelia is a ghostly one, but one with the difference of corporeality.

On learning Horatio has seen the ghost of his father, Hamlet asks Horatio if the ghost is '[p]ale, or red?' Horatio replies, 'Nay, very pale' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.231-232). When Ophelia later remarks on Hamlet's pale countenance when she and he met, the audience can associate this with the earlier paleness of the ghost seen by Horatio; Shakespeare thus offers the audience a means of identifying the spectre in the later scene through the parallel between these ghostly encounters. Another instance of this spectral identification in the later scene can be found in Ophelia's observation that, as well as having an appearance that is ghostly pale, Hamlet looks as though he has been 'loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.80-81). This again harks back to the earlier ghost scene on two counts: the ghost is released from hell in the hours of darkness to tell Hamlet of the horror that is his murder, the ghost confesses: 'I am [...] / for the day confined to fast in fires / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.9, 11-13); also, whilst Hamlet,

in Ophelia's eyes, looks as though he could 'speak of horrors', the ghost of Hamlet's father does return to speak of one particular horror, that of his murder by his brother.

By making these associations between the return of the ghost of Hamlet's father and Hamlet's visit to Ophelia we can recognise Hamlet's own spectrality in this scene. However, Hamlet is a ghost in a sense different from that in which his father is a ghost: although Hamlet is a spectre, he is a corporeal one; Ophelia pronounces, 'He took me by the wrist' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.84). Despite being a silent, pale-faced spectre Hamlet is corporeal; he can touch people and interact with the world. Ophelia's comment of how Hamlet's sighs *seemed* to 'end his being' remind us of Hamlet's earlier retort to his mother: 'Nay it is, I know not "seems"' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.76). At the start of the play Hamlet can be certain of the distinction between what is present and what is absent. Yet, following his encounter with the ghost he is no longer convinced by the metaphysics of presence (that is privileging presence over absence), as he can no longer be certain of what is and is not. Hamlet's Being as he knew it has ended. He is no longer certain of reality, which leaves him as a ghost himself, haunted by the task that his father has set him and destined to die at the end of the play. The spectacular ghostly return of the recently dead King Hamlet and the protagonist's ghost-like encounter with Ophelia are not the only spectral visitations that Shakespeare offers us: there is yet another from Prince Hamlet in Act 5.

After discovering that Hamlet has (albeit unintentionally) murdered Polonius, King Claudius decides to send Hamlet away to England (*Hamlet*, 4.3.40-46); unlike us, Hamlet is unaware that the King's 'sovereign process' is the 'present death of Hamlet' (*Hamlet*, 4.3.61-63). After Hamlet has been sent away, to what should be his death, we next see him appear, as if by a miracle, on stage in a graveyard – a miracle elucidated when he recounts his journey to England to Horatio and explains how he surreptitiously discovered a letter bearing the command that his 'head should be struck off' (*Hamlet*, 4.2.25). Yet, in a sense, Hamlet is already dead; Horatio's companion in the graveyard is a

revenant. Having witnessed the ghost of his father and read his own death warrant, Hamlet, says Derrida in his essay 'The Time is Out of Joint' (1995), has 'seen the impossible and he cannot survive what he has survived' (1995: 36); Hamlet cannot survive but his existence continues as a corporeal ghost. Just as the ghost of Hamlet's father identified himself earlier, not in response to Horatio's question: 'What art thou [...]?' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.45) but to Hamlet himself: 'I am your father's spirit' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.9), so Hamlet, as a spectral entity, now feels it necessary to identify himself in the graveyard: 'This is I, / Hamlet the Dane' (*Hamlet*, 5.1.246). This announcement is foreshadowed earlier when Hamlet addresses the ghost of his father, he declares: 'I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet, / king, father, royal Dane' (*Hamlet*, 1.4.44-45). By applying *spectral anachrony* here it is possible to recognise that, through a retrospective analysis, there is a spectral identification between these declaratives; the spectre is anachronic and despite the temporal distance between these utterances they are connected by the spectre of death. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida notes the necessity for people to 'ontologize remains' (1994: 9) in order to commence the work of mourning. Denial that Hamlet is in fact a ghost stems from his corporeality, we know what space he occupies, and there is no need for the audience to ontologise his remains, as his self-proclamation gives us a satisfactory understanding of his existence and bypasses the work of mourning.<sup>13</sup> However, this prevents us from looking further into a hauntological understanding of Hamlet, who has just been sent to death and resurfaced in a graveyard.

By returning to Act 3 Scene 1 at this point and examining the 'To be, or not to be' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.55) soliloquy, where Hamlet muses extensively on death, we can gain a new understanding of both the famous soliloquy and the nature of Hamlet's existence in the play. In the speech Hamlet draws parallels between death and sleep 'to die: to sleep — / No more,' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.59-60). If death is 'to sleep no more' then it is pertinent that, as he tells Horatio, when Hamlet is travelling to

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<sup>13</sup> As Prince Hamlet is a corporeal ghost his self-proclamation bypasses the work of mourning. This is not the case when King Hamlet declares 'I am your father's spirit' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.9) because the ghost is, unlike the prince, not entirely corporeal (the ghost is described to fade away 'on the crowing of the cock' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.156)).

England, there is in his heart 'a kind of fighting / That would not let [him] sleep' (*Hamlet*, 5.2.4-5). Hamlet cannot sleep as he is destined to live in a death-like state of corporeal ghostliness. The most telling suggestion that Hamlet is a ghost that we learn in this speech is that death is '[t]he undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.78-79). However, Hamlet's father *does* return; he returns as a ghost in search of vengeance. Similarly, Hamlet travels to an undiscovered country, he is sent away with his signed death warrant to England. Hamlet also returns from the undiscovered country, as his ghostly existence continues in his quest for revenge. Hamlet comes back from England and is next seen again in the graveyard talking to the Sexton; as the gravedigger sings to the dead skulls he unearths, he also converses with Hamlet, the living dead. Hamlet continues to exist as a spectre, he is both doomed to die and cursed to live until he has attained his unfinished business in killing Claudius, at which point he will be able to die and his ghostly presence is no longer necessary.

Elsewhere in the soliloquy Hamlet asks 'who would bear the whips and scorns of time' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.69), which brings to mind Hamlet's earlier phrase and one with which Derrida himself is preoccupied: 'the time is out of joint' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.186). The arrival of the ghost at the beginning of the play prompts Hamlet to make this statement; the ghost disrupts the chronology of the play as, in terms of hauntology, it brings the past alongside the present, thus deconstructing any logical understanding of time. In his essay 'The Time is Out of Joint' Derrida notes that 'is' is 'the third person singular present indicative of the verb *to be*' (Derrida, 1995: 24). Time and Being are inextricably linked. Our understanding of what it means to exist is bound up with our understanding of a linear chronology of time. The ghost disturbs our understanding of time as well as of Being. When Hamlet questions 'who would bear the whips and scorns of time' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.69), we can therefore consider the ways in which Hamlet, as a ghost, defies the constraints that time places upon him. As he is a spectre, Hamlet haunts the play without giving a term to his mourning and does not respond to the demand for immediate vengeance, instead deferring revenge in favour of seeking

to attain justice. After questioning why people suffer '[t]o grunt and sweat under a weary life' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.76), Hamlet suggests that man might himself 'his quietus make / With a bare bodkin' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.74-75). Why does Hamlet not simply commit suicide? He suggests it here and already in Act 1 scene 2 he has wished that the 'Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.131-32). At the start of the play it is because God has forbidden it, however after his encounter with his father Hamlet is a corporeal ghost so he cannot commit suicide; he must continue to exist until the quest he has set himself to attain justice has been completed.

After looking at the ghost of the dead walking (Hamlet's father) and the walking dead (Hamlet himself), it is now time to make visible the invisible ghost of the play. Hamlet has an opportunity to murder the king whilst he is praying, and he refuses to do it. The following analysis of this 'prayer scene' in the context of Derrida's writing on the ghost of the undecidable will help to illuminate this invisible ghost. First of all it is important to define what we mean by the ghost of the undecidable. In his essay on 'Force of Law' Derrida states that '[t]he undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost — but an essential ghost — in every decision' (1992: 24). In order to make a difficult decision one must go through the ordeal of the undecidable, and Derrida describes this necessary uncertainty as a ghost. The ghost of the undecidable deconstructs the opposition between yes and no. The prayer scene in *Hamlet* allows the audience to bear witness to the coexistence of certainty with uncertainty in the ghost of an impossible decision.

Left alone at the end of Act 3 scene 3, the King guiltily begins to pray, giving voice to his crimes as he does so. While Claudius is thus engaged, Hamlet enters behind him, declares: 'And now I'll do it' (*Hamlet*, 3.3.74) and, as he prepares himself to kill his step-father, draws his sword. At this moment in the play as Hamlet hovers behind Claudius with the sword raised above his head, ready to bring it down on him and kill him, the ghost of the undecidable presents itself, and Hamlet reconsiders murdering Claudius whilst he is praying, as he does not want '[t]o take him in the

purging of his soul / When he is fit and seasoned for his passage' (*Hamlet*, 3.3.85-86). Hamlet goes from decided action (drawing the sword to kill Claudius) to uncertainty and inaction (talking himself out of killing Claudius and sheathing the sword). Through a deconstructive analysis we can see how this moment in the prayer scene combines the presence of the action of raising the sword with the absence of inaction. Although intangible, the act of faltering brings together presence and absence in a process of deconstruction that the ghostly provides. The ghost of the undecidable is present and visible in the raised sword but at the same time is invisible, as this ghost is incorporeal. Nevertheless, it is only through *spectral anachrony* that it is possible to bear witness to this ghost. The spectre of the undecidable that is at work here can only be recognised through a retrospective analysis with the understanding of a deconstructive line of thought in mind.

This discussion of spectrality within the play leads to an analysis of the spectrality of the text itself. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida notes: 'A masterpiece always moves, by definition, in the manner of a ghost' (2006: 20-21). Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has itself become a ghost through its enduring reputation; for example the phrase '[t]o be, or not to be' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.55) is recognised worldwide. Just as a ghost is timeless, the play itself is timeless and continues to haunt the English language in the twenty-first century. 'The ghost is as much *event* as *object*' (Attridge, 1995: 224), which is certainly the case here. The timeless text of *Hamlet*, in its unstable form consisting of three different versions (the first quarto, the second quarto and the folio), is a presence that haunts the whole of the English language and continues so to do. *Hamlet* acts like a ghost in the way it haunts the very language we use and, in this sense, is a ghostly event as Attridge suggests the ghost can be.

*Hamlet* is a play filled with ghosts. Although they are often side-lined and cast aside as a strange supernatural phenomena, ghosts are actually integral to the plot and actions in the play, as an analysis of the various types of ghostliness that Shakespeare uses throughout the play helps us to understand. Had the ghost of Hamlet's father not returned from beyond the grave to set Hamlet the



challenging task of murdering his own uncle, then Hamlet would have stuck with the decision he made before learning the true nature of his father's death; that being: 'But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.159). Instead the ghost acts as a catalyst to the plot, giving Hamlet motive to break his silence and take action against his uncle. Without the ghost of the undecidable interrupting Hamlet as he is about to take his revenge the play would be over before Act 4 even begins.

Our protagonist is himself a revolutionary ghost; he is a walking dead man, haunting the play to bring about the necessary changes for the state. Hamlet is simultaneously living and dead, and this brings the very nature of Being into question: in his paradoxical state of existence Hamlet is an agent of revolution. Revolution is itself a spirit untouchable yet present, and in *Hamlet* the state of Denmark is on the cusp of revolutionary change. With young Fortinbras and his army, and Laertes and his mob of protestors, the monarchy is about to change hands.<sup>14</sup> Derrida's interest in this spectre of the revolution is influenced by his discussion of Marxism, in *Specters of Marx* Derrida tells us: 'Marx thought [...] that the dividing line between the ghost and actuality ought to be crossed, like utopia itself, by a realization, that is, by a revolution;' (1994: 47). Hamlet is as an agent to the spirit of revolution; himself crossing the line between ghostliness and actuality and as a ghost himself Hamlet is not bound to life but as a Being neither living nor dead can propel the spirit of revolution to the logical endpoint of the play. The death of Claudius during the play's final scene brings about advantageous changes to Denmark.

This leads us to consider the denouement of *Hamlet*. The command of his father's ghost, that Hamlet '[I]et not the royal bed of Denmark be. / A couch for luxury and damned incest' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.82) acts on him like a curse, since the mission to attain justice – to which Hamlet commits

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<sup>14</sup>The spirit of the revolution is apparent from the uneasy commencement of the play. Horatio explains to Marcellus and Barnardo the reason they are on watch is due to anxieties over young Fortinbras gathering an army against Denmark to reclaim the land his father has lost (see *Hamlet*, 1.1.94-105).

himself – will ultimately result not only in his killing the King, his uncle, but also his own death. In his chapter on ‘Hamlet and the Living Dead’, Christofides examines the final scene of the play and insightfully proposes that:

[...] revenge takes us to a liminal point between life and death [...] close to death, still alive but fatally poisoned, [Hamlet] delivers justice from a place neither living nor dead

(2012: 63)

In order to be the agent of the spirit of revolution and the minister of death Hamlet must himself be a ghost. However, Hamlet not only is a ghost in the final scene of the play in order to take his revenge but also has been a ghost throughout the majority of the play, since his own encounter with the ghost of his father. Derrida in his essay ‘The Time is Out of Joint’ says:

[...] one must stop believing that the dead are just the departed and that the departed do nothing. One must stop pretending to know what is meant by “to die” and especially by “dying.” One has, then, to talk about spectrality.

(1995: 30)

Not only is this quote relatable to deconstruction, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, but is relatable to spectrality as a whole. Both King Hamlet the father and Hamlet the son have been haunting the play. Death is not a barrier to the spectres in *Hamlet*, as, regardless of their state of existence, be that spirit or corporeal ghost; they walk the stage and interact with the living in order to bring about revolutionary changes in the world. Once those revolutionary changes are achieved the ghosts are no longer required. By the end of the play, the corporeal ghost of Hamlet has, in killing Claudius, carried out the task for which he has been kept in his ghostly state; this allows Hamlet finally to achieve the peace of death, and his ghost is thus laid to rest. As Hamlet delivers total justice to the murderers of this play, namely Claudius, the spirit of revolution is free to bring about changes to the state of Denmark and thus Hamlet can succeed in what he set out to do, that is to ‘set it right’ (*Hamlet*, 2.1.187).

In arguing that ghosts can be corporeal, as we see the protagonist is in the play, the certainty of our knowledge of reality and unreality, of life and death, of presence and absence, is deconstructed. The ghost is more than a liminal entity that strangely appears then disappears; it is an integral part of the play and necessary for our understanding of it. *Hamlet* needs the ghost of the King to appear in order that it acts as a catalyst to the action that follows; it requires Hamlet himself to act as a ghost and an agent of revolutionary change. As the ghost of the undecidable surfaces, a ghost is also an absent presence in every difficult decision, as we saw in the prayer scene. In his analysis of the ghost scene in *Hamlet* Derrida recognises Barnardo's 'irrepressible desire for identification' (1994: 11) of the ghost. In arguing for corporeal ghosts we are in part falling into the trap of the metaphysics of presence, that is, privileging presence over absence, in what Derrida terms our 'irrepressible desire' to identify the unknown. However, in its examination of the ways in which ghosts are simultaneously both alive and dead and present and absent, this deconstructive analysis considers not only the opposing sides of these binaries in order to contemplate the ways in which they coexist, but also that neither is superior to the other, thus dispelling any privilege of presence in favour of deconstruction. This thesis has shed light on our understanding of the terms we use to discuss life and death and has engaged with applying those terms to *Hamlet* in order to gain a new way to understand spectrality.

We have also considered the ghostliness of *Hamlet*, as the text itself is a ghost. Certain phrases from the play have been adopted into our contemporary idiom, such as 'method in the madness' and 'every dog has his day'; through these Shakespeare is present in the twenty-first century. However, the idiomatic expressions we use today have been contracted down, and the original phrases: 'Though this be madness yet there is method in't' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.202-203) and '[t]he cat will mew and dog will have his day' (*Hamlet*, 5.1.281) are not used as they were originally written. *Hamlet* is both present in our modern language, through the adoption of phrases from the play, but is also absent as these phrases have been transformed from their original wording. In this

way *Hamlet* is both present and absent and is a spectre that haunts the English language. Discussing ghosts in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has led us to consider the nature of human existence and the notion of ghostliness. We are all the walking dead, alive for a time but destined to die one day. Perhaps ghosts are corporeal, as all people are ghosts and maybe our work of marginalising ghosts of the spirit is simply a work of easing our own conscience. Thus, the spectre acts as a reminder of our own ghostliness; in attempting to keep ghosts distinct from ourselves we simply try to distance ourselves from the dead, privileging ourselves as living Beings over ghosts when in fact we are one and the same. Our only understanding lies in the hauntological difference between the dead walking and the walking dead.

## Conclusion

By analysing Derrida's writings on *Hamlet*, in this thesis, a new way of thinking has come to light; the inextricable combination of spectrality with anachrony, which was already present within Derrida's writing, has been fully propounded here. This thesis has endeavoured to show the importance of this connection by producing the term *spectral anachrony*, as well as applying this term theoretically as an approach to our understanding of *Hamlet*, that considers the possibility of the atemporality of a spectre. Through our retrospective analysis of the play, that accepts this possibility, we have been able to recognise the anachronic functioning of various spectres that have always already been at work.

We began, in the first chapter, to outline a distinction between a Freudian conception of mourning and Derrida's definition of mourning. Derrida argues that the 'work of mourning' (Freud, 1917: 245) is in fact 'interminable' (Derrida, 1996: 172) and, unlike Freud, suggests that mourning can never be completed. With this foundational understanding in mind we continued by discussing death as a spectre, as before and after death both the idea of death, and the dead themselves, continue to haunt the living. In addition to the spectre of death, that haunts the living as they are continually employed in the work of mourning, we also considered the anachronic spectre of an interior subjectivity. The philosophical understanding of the world was, at the time *Hamlet* was being penned, shifting from an objective to a subjective worldview. As the boundaries between objectivity and subjectivity were unstable, Shakespeare began to experiment with this idea in the play, hence his initial representation of the ghost as an externalised and visible entity, to the ghost as later possessing an internal existence in Hamlet's mind and being invisible to Gertrude. Shakespeare's choice to play with this developing idea of an interior subjectivity in *Hamlet* is also spectrally anachronic, as the spectre of subjectivity haunts the play before Descartes has given a full comprehension of what the term means. Instead of dismissing Hamlet's phrase 'I have that within which passes show' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.85) as merely 'gestural' (Barker, 1995: 32) as Barker does, this

thesis instead proposed that the *spectral anachrony* of Shakespeare beginning to discuss an interior subjectivity should be welcomed. The spectral apparition of King Hamlet throws the prince into confusion and doubt. As Hamlet is already in mourning, as well as being melancholic, this visitation complicates Hamlet's work of mourning, as this makes it impossible for him to interiorise his father and to accept that dead only continue to exist from within; as in Hamlet's case his dead father also possesses a ghostly existence. Finally, this chapter outlined the important difference between death and peaceful death, as when Prince Hamlet dies at the end of the play the ghost of his father is laid to rest and Hamlet himself can rest in peace.

Just as the first chapter set out to make the distinction between mourning and melancholy, so the second chapter also began by making a few important distinctions. The first being the difference between justice and the law, although the two are related, justice is a perfect ideal whereas the law is calculable and applicable. The second was the difference between revenge and justice. Revenge is violent, retributive and obtainable, whereas justice is thought of as being beyond earthly reach. Claudius himself conceives justice as divine in comparison to the corruptibility of earthly laws: 'In the corrupted currents of this world/ Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,/ [...] but 'tis not so above' (*Hamlet*, 3.3.57-58, 60). Derrida, in his elaborate discussion of Hamlet's mission 'to do right, to render justice, and to redress history' (1994: 24) overlooks this important distinction, as Hamlet is only asked to take revenge. Nonetheless, we reconciled this by arguing that Hamlet takes the mission to dispense justice upon himself. In addition to arguing for *spectral anachrony* of an interior subjectivity in chapter 1, chapter 2 continued this discussion by considering justice with regards to *spectral anachrony*. Justice is a spectre that haunts Hamlet throughout the play and it is also anachronic, as it requires Hamlet to retrospectively consider the murder of his father as well as to think of the possibility of attaining justice in the future. The mission that Hamlet has taken upon himself disjoins him from the present time, as the spectre of justice is – like the spectre of mourning – anachronic. Justice functions in *Hamlet* in two forms: the first form of justice in *Hamlet* is served to the guilty: to Gertrude, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who, having done

wrong, receive a fitting form of justice. Gertrude drinks from a cup poisoned by her new lover, her husband's brother, and thus accidentally commits suicide and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, having betrayed their friend are betrayed by their friend and led to their executions. In his mission to achieve justice, however, Hamlet kills Polonius, who (although himself not utterly guiltless) becomes the collateral damage in his quest. The by-product, as a result of this collateral damage, is the suicide of Ophelia; although she kills herself, so she is responsible for her own death, the murder of her father drove her to the insanity that caused this act. However, by way of a deconstructive logic this chapter set out to explore the paradox that injustice is necessary in the mission to obtain justice, and despite coming at a high price, Hamlet does deliver total justice at the end of the play to those who have committed murder. This second, totalising form of justice, is dispensed to Claudius for murdering King Hamlet, Laertes for murdering Prince Hamlet and to the protagonist Hamlet himself, for murdering Polonius. In the same way that Gertrude, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet a fitting end, so the murderers in this play also appropriately meet their deaths at the hand of the son of those they have murdered, or from those they have murdered themselves.

In the third chapter we saw that the spectre of an interior subjectivity, already discussed in the first chapter, is also bound up with the idea of the performative. When Austin defined the performative he was aware of the need for an inward and spiritual commitment to the performative. Derrida disliked this concept of spirituality as it is inaccessible on an external platform. However, Derrida's use of spectrality, although – like spirituality – is connected to the idea of an interior subjectivity, offers a slightly different view here with relation to performativity. For Derrida, spectrality allows for the embodiment of the internal in order to project it externally. In the case of the performative, therefore, the performative utterance is spectral. It creates a 'spiritual shackle' (Austin, 1976: 10), but in being spoken the performative brings the internal intention into contact with the external world, thus producing a spectre. Alternatively, when a performative lacks the inward and spiritual commitment when it is uttered, then such a spectre is not produced. The example chosen to demonstrate this was Claudius' prayer; as the prayer is hollow it does not

produce a spectre from the performative and the utterance does not bind him to a future commitment. When a felicitous performative is uttered, such as the oath that Horatio and Marcellus swear to, that Derrida calls the 'originary performativity' (1994: 36), then it is possible to analyse the *spectral anachrony* of the performative, as the commitment which they make when they utter the performative 'In faith, my lord, not I' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.145), that swears their silence, they already prove to have been adhering to. In the retrospective recognition of this, we can deem the spectre, which the performative has produced, to be anachronic. The important distinction made in this chapter, then, was the difference between Austin's conception of spirituality and Derrida's conception of spectrality. Although the two are connected: spirituality is entirely internal, whereas with spectrality Derrida combines this idea of the internal, interior subjectivity with the external, verbal commitment; thus altering our understanding of performativity.

In the final chapter, after looking at the spectrality of mourning, of justice and of performativity, I proposed that Prince Hamlet himself is a spectre that is kept alive to bring about justice at the end of the play; which also coincides with the spirit of revolution, as advantageous changes are made to set the state to right. Unlike his father, who is the dead walking, Hamlet is the walking dead, who is similarly a ghost but with the difference of corporeality. To offer an example of Hamlet's ghostliness a comparison between, Hamlet's encounter with the ghost, and, Ophelia's silent encounter with Hamlet, revealed a spectral identification between these two ghastly events. In addition to this we re-assessed the: 'To be, or not to be' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.55) soliloquy, with this reconsideration that Hamlet is a corporeal ghost who has been sent to his death, viewed his own death warrant and then is next seen on stage in a graveyard. Following which we considered the *spectral anachrony* of the ghost of the undecidable. Although this spectre could not be witnessed at first, through *spectral anachrony* – an approach combining the idea of spectrality with anachrony retrospectively – it was possible to consider that, upon reflection, Hamlet's moment of hesitation and his act of faltering when attempting to kill Claudius unites presence with absence in a



deconstructive sense. Yet, as is the case where *spectral anachrony* is concerned, this spectre can only be recognised retrospectively.

The application of the term *spectral anachrony* is itself indebted to the spectre of deconstruction, as the idea that spectrality and anachrony are combined was always already present within Derrida's writings on *Hamlet*; however it is only through returning to the text that it is possible to recognise that this was already present within his writing. This logic is also the logic of deconstruction; *spectral anachrony* is not a new idea, just as a deconstructive interpretation does not say something that was not already in the text itself, rather in the same way that a deconstructive reading exposes that which is already in the text, my formulation of *spectral anachrony* just brings forth that which was already present within Derrida's writing. Although the idea was already present it could only be fully recognised through the temporal distance of retrospection and in going over Derrida's work, in view of *Hamlet*, which was also so influential to him, it has been possible to give the idea of *spectral anachrony* an existence that makes it applicable and useful – thus giving this spectre a corporeality in our work and a presence in our thought.

In this thesis the understanding and application of *spectral anachrony* has been influential to analysing *Hamlet*, by applying the concept it has been possible to answer the question as to why the ghost is initially visible in the play to multiple witnesses and later invisible to Gertrude. It has also been possible to recognise the *spectral anachrony* of justice, as justice is a spectre that is anachronic and does not adhere to a chronological flow of time, it is in part as a result of this, as well as due to the work of mourning, that Hamlet declares the time to be 'out of joint' (*Hamlet*, 2.1.186). With regards to performativity we noted the *spectral anachrony* of every performative utterance, as in uttering a performative a spectre is produced, that continues to haunt the speaker but which can also be noticed to have already been at work. As is the case for the oath to silence that Horatio and Marcellus swear to. Interestingly, this concept of spectrality that Derrida builds upon is already present in Austin's text under the guise of spirituality. In the final chapter we witnessed the ghost of

the undecidable in the prayer scene as a result of *spectral anachrony*. The undecidable is a spectre that combines presence with absence and decision with indecision. In view that this spectre is anachronic and should have already been at work in the play it was possible to witness this ghost of the undecidable in Hamlet's raised sword as he chooses to murder Claudius, before swiftly talking himself out of it.

My concept of *spectral anachrony* has been useful and applicable. Whilst in this thesis I have only discussed it in relation to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, there is scope to apply this term to other texts; in particular, in conjunction with other deconstructive readings, in order to show that spectrality and anachrony are inextricably linked and that, when viewed retrospectively, the anachronic functioning of various types of spectres can be exposed.

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