

## Shakespeare's genius: *Hamlet*, adaptation and the work of following

### Adaptation: the following work and the work of following

The issue of Shakespeare's uniqueness keeps coming up . . . as cause both for acclaim and for dismay, together with a repeatedly documented cause for alarm concerning the indiscriminate appropriation of Shakespeare to underwrite, or to neutralize, cultural and political oppression. I suppose I am to be counted among those who take Shakespeare's 'position' here as indeed a matter of his appropriability, as when Brecht shows us how to consider the opening scene of *Coriolanus* from the side of the rebellious populace. Such inspirations to appropriation, or counter-appropriation, point a way to articulate our persistent, or recurrent, intuition of Shakespeare's all-too-superhuman 'humanity'. I imagine this emphasis is prompted by, and finds ratification in, the perception of our age, in the theatre of the West, as one less of innovation in the composing of plays (and operas) than originality in their productions or readings, our unpredicted reconsiderations of works from any period.<sup>1</sup>

The survival of Shakespeare's plays continues to demonstrate that literature means different things to different people in different contexts. To say that this facility for reinvention and restaging seems to be valued is not to reduce the evaluative to a prescriptive form of interpretation – indeed, the range of ways in which those texts we now term canonical continue to be valued and reinterpreted, often from diametrically opposed points of view, suggests rather the contrary.

In considering the question of Shakespeare's 'uniqueness', Stanley Cavell points us to the simple truth that the continued proliferation of Shakespearean adaptations and productions, in an ever-burgeoning variety of media, itself confirms that a particular play's afterlife is nothing more or less than a constant process of origination. In doing so, he remains willing to allow that our relation to literature is open-ended and creative rather than predetermined or rule following, commenting elsewhere that 'a work such as a play of Shakespeare's cannot contribute the help I want from it for the philosophical issues I mention unless the play is granted the autonomy it is in one's power to grant, which means, seen in its own terms'.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, Cavell is not seeking a return to an autotelic or self-contained notion of 'the-text-in-itself', much less some spurious sense of original authenticity or immutable literary value. Rather,

his interest is linked directly to the originary governance of the work of art and the hermeneutic yield of what he terms 'our unpredicted reconsiderations of works from any period'. This surplus potential, manifested by the plays' 'appropriability', is perhaps especially evident in the case of theatrical appropriation where, as Mark Fortier reminds us:

Interpretation in the form of theatrical conceptualising or performance . . . can and sometimes must take license in ways that literary criticism narrowly defined does not. . . . Theatrical adaptation, especially radical rewriting and restaging of an existing work, goes one step further: although adaptations of Shakespeare's work may be driven by a belief in fidelity to something about Shakespeare, and although in large measure they are forms of critical and interpretative practice, questions about the accuracy of adaptation have little practical meaning.<sup>3</sup>

Theatrical adaptation is arguably 'less constrained' than other modes of interpretation. As such it offers us a way of rethinking the fuller implications of our hermeneutical encounter with those works which are in some sense 'exemplary' – not only insofar as these texts enable continued rewriting and restaging, but also in the sense that they then often remain paradigmatic, as radical or 'ground-breaking' adaptations. By speaking of these works as exemplary, then, I mean to suggest not only those texts which survive over a long period of time, but those works which in doing so maintain their originary power and thereby serve to extend the ways in which we make sense of them.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, as Fortier's distinction suggests, it makes little sense to speak of the 'accuracy' of adaptation. Yet this of course raises a series of related issues: why is it that, even in the case of contemporary evaluations of the playwright's work, some Shakespearean adaptations remain more memorable or significant than others? More problematically still, even if we acknowledge the originary power or qualitative distinction of some adaptations over others, how can we then do so without merely reinstalling traditionalist clichés concerning Shakespeare's eternal value?<sup>5</sup>

It is evident that the apparent opposition between originality and adaptation actually needs to be construed more rigorously, and in this chapter I will argue that we need to theorise adaptation not only in relation to the singularity of our encounter with exemplary or originary works, but also in terms of our capacity to receive the 'new sense' of those works which must by definition remain unprecedented and non-thematisable. In the first half of my argument this opens the way to a reconceptualisation of Kant's notion of original works in his discussion of genius via the intermediary concept of the exemplary, and in specific relation to the elaboration of this term as a central concern of modern aesthetic discourse.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than regarding Shakespeare as a poor unwitting adjunct of reason or as a means of underwriting 'cultural and political oppression', I want to argue that the *resistance* of the playwright's work to definitive interpretation or conceptual control might finally turn out to be a far more crucial resource for critical thought, as, only in understanding the resistance or refusal of the text are we are 'exposed' to its otherness. In this respect, as Gerald Bruns remarks of Cavell's account of the hermeneutical encounter, 'The idea is not to accommodate the text to our way of thinking but

to recognize its alienness, its otherness, as a question put to us, such that understanding the text will mean understanding the question, what it asks of us'.<sup>7</sup> In reminding us that the succession of any literary text customarily manifests itself in the form of exposure to the other which cannot be readily construed or subsumed within the framework which attempts to confine it, and in emphasising the limits of the hermeneutical situation, Cavell's sense of the ethical significance of aesthetic response could be directly aligned with the work of Levinas and Derrida. In the case of all three thinkers this means remaining responsive to the irreducible otherness of the other in an encounter with alterity which is 'refractory to categories' and which foregoes philosophical 'knowing', if that 'knowing' is construed in the narrower sense of mere objectification.<sup>8</sup> In Cavell's account, the desire for certainty within the modern philosophical tradition is itself exposed as a form of scepticism which barely conceals a rage at the non-identity of the other. So that, within the hermeneutical encounter, it is precisely because scepticism is forced to concede the limits of an experience beyond its grasp that it exposes us to the possibility that we might 'acknowledge' the 'otherness of the human'.<sup>9</sup>

For Cavell, then, if Shakespeare's texts are philosophical dramas, it is because they retain an ethical dimension within the limits of those social, historical and linguistic conventions which simultaneously remain in need of redress and actually conjure an ethical situation into being. Evidently, these distinctions concerning the locatedness of our hermeneutic experience and its ethical implications go to the heart of literary tradition itself insofar as it constitutes a hegemonic process that is dynamic and contingent and which allows for the possibility of intervention as well as future change and transformation. By Cavell's 'measure of resistance', however, the question of how we relate to literary texts and the profession of literary criticism (insofar as it purports to 'profess' anything) occurs at a type of limit, and as such it is a matter of unsettling consequence and self-estrangement. The critical act is curiously non-appropriative – a form of possession that all too often dispossesses – in a process that challenges 'our prepossessions, our preoccupations with what we think we know about what our intellectual or cultural fathers or mothers have instilled in us'.<sup>10</sup> Yet insofar as those texts we recognise as literary continue to offer us 'new resources for hope' in creative forms that promise to transcend 'existing ways of thinking and feeling', literary criticism also necessarily embraces the possibility of transformation.<sup>11</sup> In either case the key question remains how can one succeed, or adapt to that which continues to remind us of the limitedness of our present condition and thereby in some sense refuses to be followed? This is a fate exemplified to some extent by Shakespeare's Hamlet, the proto-intellectual and critic-adaptor to whom I'll want to turn in the second half of this chapter.

In summary, then, one might say that each critical act is a form of adjustment, yet paradoxically adaptation – the work of following as well as the following work – encapsulates a hermeneutic process that stages the impossibility of following in the very process of attempting to follow or locate the measure of the work. Yet importantly *how* we negotiate, adapt or ad-just to the alterity of adaptation also necessarily constitutes its own measure of creativity; furthermore the work of adaptation reminds

us that aesthetic experience is itself dynamic and historically variable. It follows that in its dependence on an endless adaptation to the other and the non-identical, the work of following is conjoint with a certain responsibility, or more accurately perhaps, demands a certain responsibility of us, and in this respect the question of a text's successivity, of how we attempt to measure up to it, or vice versa, might also disclose more than radical criticism has previously allowed for.

### From genius to exemplary work?

To speak of 'Shakespeare's genius' is of course already an act of provocation, evoking as it does a notion of the 'transcendent bard' that the recent historicist turn in literary and cultural studies has helped to dislodge and demythologise. Yet the refusal to think of Shakespeare's work in terms of this most traditional category is curiously unhistorical, and not only constitutes a failure to engage with the critical history of what is a key concept in aesthetics, but also arguably comprises a missed opportunity for the critique and renewal of the category itself. As it appears in Kant's third critique, genius is a fairly new concept, yet its critical prehistory includes some clear association with the playwright's work, most notably perhaps in Edward Young's influential *Conjectures on Original Composition* (London, 1759) where, notwithstanding his 'faults', Shakespeare is adjudged 'an Original' in contrast to Ben Jonson the classically correct imitator:

*Shakespeare mingled no water with his wine, lower'd his Genius by no vapid Imitation. Shakespeare gave us a Shakespeare, nor could the first in antient fame have given us more. Shakespeare is not their Son, but Brother; their Equal, and that, in spite of all his faults. . . . Jonson, in the serious drama, is as much an Imitator, as Shakespeare is an Original.*<sup>12</sup>

In fact, as Jonathan Bate reminds us, this contest between 'originality' and imitation is as old as the First Folio itself, as, in attempting to account for the source of Shakespeare's distinctiveness, the various early dedications to the plays oscillate restlessly between intimations of Shakespeare as a 'natural genius' on the one hand, and Shakespeare as the consummate craftsman on the other – precisely, that is to say, between the accusation and counter-accusation of originality and adaptation, creating and making.<sup>13</sup>

In Young's treatise, as elsewhere, the focus is as much on ancient exemplars of 'original genius' as it is on the 'modern' and the accent is not exclusively Shakespearean,<sup>14</sup> yet by the eighteenth century, as Bate reminds us, a sense of the exemplary status of Shakespeare's genius already clearly plays an important literary-critical function within a more public domain. To follow debates in the pages of *The Spectator* or the *Tatler* during this period, or within the growing archive of commentary and editorial glosses that quickly surround the recuperation of the playwright's work, is to witness something of the potential hermeneutic yield that accrues from the singularity of the Shakespearean text. Even in its Renaissance context this transformative potential of literature, as well as its generative power, is clearly bound up with the sense in which

the 'principal books' of a particular age survive as a form of exemplary presiding spirit or '*genius literarius*'.<sup>15</sup> Yet as these discussions become increasingly codified within an emergent public sphere, Shakespeare's 'genius' rapidly emerges as a category which reveals compliance with and deviation from the formal aesthetics of which it is part. Here, the playwright's refusal to submit to existing rules or to correspond to any antecedent begins to insinuate an important legislative function, and disputes concerning the nature of Shakespeare's artistic creativity are crucially implicated in producing new forms of social interaction and in helping modify the criteria for taste and judgement. In the process of helping to situate and contest existing contemporary cultural norms concerning truth, value and meaning it follows that, just as Shakespeare becomes aesthetical, he becomes political and contentious too. So that as Margreta de Grazia observes, the playwright's work is central to:

the neo-classical critical tradition of determining Beauties and Faults, an exercise that required and refined the generally interchangeable faculties of Taste, Judgement and Reason. Analysis of an author's Beauties and Faults (Excellencies and Blemishes) involved major critical issues, the rivalry between art and nature, for example, or between rules and genius. Dryden was apparently the first to apply the categories to Shakespeare, but the major eighteenth-century editors from Rowe (1709) to Samuel Johnson in 1765 regarded the judging of Beauties and Faults as one of the editor's major duties.<sup>16</sup>

Here again of course Shakespeare's heuristic function is a direct product of his resistance to interpretation. Indeed as de Grazia reminds us:

Shakespeare is quoted in all these publications – anthologies, editions, periodicals, and critical essays – because, in all of his irregularity, he offers 'the fairest and fullest subject for Criticism', providing the critic with both positive and negative examples of moral probity and literary decorum. . . . It was precisely because Shakespeare afforded, in Pope's words, 'the most numerous as well as the most conspicuous instances, both of Beauties and Faults of all sorts' that he provided the best material for developing and refining Taste.<sup>17</sup>

Viewed in an eighteenth-century context, then, notions of the playwright's genius clearly retain a subversive quality that remains beyond regularisation and in so doing provides the very exception that proved the rule. In the process of making Shakespeare 'fit' for consumption Restoration editors, adaptors and critics alike are forced to concede that in its untheorisable excess the playwright's work sustains its relative exclusivity by 'authenticating' a claim to validity which is somehow unique, yet simultaneously also exceeds the restrictive demands of empirical truth which governs the neo-classical criticism of the period. In its 'British' context, the pressure of situating these variant truth claims in relation to Shakespeare's work in some part serves to locate the inherently contradictory formation of an emergent 'national literary criticism' itself. As Christopher Norris reminds us, such is the 'paradoxical consequence' of Dr Johnson's editorial project that:

On the one hand Shakespeare has to be accommodated to the eighteenth-century idea of a proper, self-regulating discourse which would finally create a rational correspondence between words and things, language and reality. . . . On the other hand,

allowances have to be made for the luxuriant wildness of Shakespeare's genius, its refusal to brook the 'rules' laid down by more decorous traditions like that of French neo-classicism.<sup>18</sup>

As Norris's comments suggest, these divergences concerning the indeterminacy and opacity of Shakespeare's work go to the heart of key questions concerning the heterogeneous affiliation of a native culture and its values, and in time they become the proving ground for emergent senses of national and cultural identity in other contexts too. Indeed, discussions concerning the nature of Shakespeare's genius arguably site one of the earliest conjunctures through which to view an emergent relationship between literary criticism and aesthetic theory in something approximating to a modern European context.<sup>19</sup> Yet it is, as Bate reminds us, in Germany that early English literary criticism marks perhaps its most complex antecedent relationship in providing a crucial developmental spur to 'the growth of what we now think of as Romantic aesthetics'.<sup>20</sup> Such is the impact of the playwright's work that by 1812 Friedrich Schlegel observes: 'German Shakespeare translations [have] transformed the native tongue and the range of national consciousness.'<sup>21</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century Friedrich Gundolf goes still further, claiming that the German tongue had literally 'embodied Shakespeare's *Seelenstoff*, his *anima* or "soul substance"'. . . . Shakespeare has not been translated into the German language it *has become that language*'.<sup>22</sup> As George Steiner observes, 'The notion is, at one level, absurd, at another of the greatest philosophic-linguistic interest'.<sup>23</sup> Crucially, of course, in its hermeneutic context the pivot of this 'philosophic-linguistic interest' concerns a shift in understanding about the nature of language itself. For German Romanticism, the semantic indeterminacy of Shakespeare is directly linked to the emergence of a new native 'literary language' which cannot be subsumed under existing rules, as, beyond the systematic endeavours of modern philology to establish a science of language, 'literature becomes the realm of language which arises for its own sake and is not bound to representation' or to descriptive analysis.<sup>24</sup>

In the same tradition, a more explicitly philosophical justification for reading genius as an acategorical category is provided by Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which also of course in some part itself sets the agenda of modern aesthetics. Kant locates some helpful distinctions which serve to clarify several of the points we have touched on so far. Firstly, in the course of his conceptualisation of genius, Kant confirms that the 'product of genius' could be said to evade definitional procedure insofar as it is without antecedent.

[G]enius (1) is a *talent* for producing that for which no definite rule can be given: and not an aptitude in the way of cleverness for what can be learned according to some rule . . . consequently *originality* must be its primary property. (2) Since there may also be original nonsense, its products must at the same time be models, i.e. be *exemplary*; and, consequently, though not themselves derived from imitation, they must serve the purpose for others, i.e. as a standard or rule of estimating.<sup>25</sup>

Genius then cannot be subsumed within book learning or 'academic instruction' insofar as it exhibits a talent 'for producing that for which no definite rule can be given

and not an aptitude in the way of cleverness for what can be learned according to some rule'.<sup>26</sup> Again this non-subsumability of genius ensures its legislative (canonical) function. Moreover, as Kant goes on to remind us, the products of genius are distinguished by being exemplary. Paradoxically, this means that whilst genius is beyond comprehension by standard definitions it simultaneously provides its own measure in serving as a standard or model for others. In short, as we have already inferred, genius is rule breaking but also rule making.

As Jay Bernstein suggests, in the course of Kant's analysis originality 'becomes manifest in two modes: destructively and constructively'.<sup>27</sup> In respect of the former the provocation of exemplary items is transgressively to overturn a conventional understanding of what has previously passed as art. Yet, as Bernstein points out, for Kant 'originality must involve more than breaking rules; its deformations must allow for the possibility of reformation'.<sup>28</sup> In this sense the open-endedness of exemplarity is secured in terms of its successivity and can be construed as 'serving the purpose for others' in providing 'new ways of making sense'.<sup>29</sup> So that as Kant puts it:

Following [succession] which has reference to a precedent, and not imitation is the proper expression for all influence which the products of an exemplary *author* may exert upon others – and this means no more than going to the same sources for a creative work as those to which he went for his creations, and learning from one's predecessor no more than the mode of availing oneself of such sources.<sup>30</sup>

Again, importantly, Kant distinguishes between imitating and following works of genius: the former is 'slavish' and 'would mean the loss of the element of genius, and just the very soul of the work'; while the following work of genius runs the risk 'of putting talent to the test', in 'one whom it arouses to a sense of his own originality in putting freedom from the constraint of rules so into force in his art, that for art itself a new rule is won'.<sup>31</sup> This is a crucial distinction and evidently comes close to the idea of adaptation I have already outlined above, i.e. the work of following as a form of creative con-sequence.

In one respect Kant's sense of the succession of an exemplary work could be said to 'provide possibilities in the plural, that were not previously available; and . . . may alter what we conceive those possibilities to be' only by reference to a precedent.<sup>32</sup> Yet by extension we might say that modern adaptations often themselves only disclose the provocation of an original work precisely by 'virtue of succeeding it'.<sup>33</sup> Thus such an affinity through distance might only materialise unevenly over a period of time. Moreover an adaptor might 'acknowledge' the relation between exemplarity and succession by 'producing the successive works themselves'.<sup>34</sup> This helps us view say Baz Luhrman's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* as disclosing something newly 'Shakespearean' in the course of simultaneously constituting its own form of unprecedented innovation. Bernstein offers a clarification of the connection between exemplarity and succession and the production of succeeding works by referring us to the example of modernist art:

Here . . . exemplarity means the opening up of new possibilities without the item or items that do the opening up being able to be accounted for in terms of its or their

antecedents. Exemplary items provide the measure, with only their provocation, on the one hand, and succession on the other, 'measuring' (without measuring) them.<sup>35</sup>

In some sense I would want to argue that the production of successive works and their exemplification of a measureless measure could be construed as analogous to the indeterminate process of (Shakespearean) adaptation itself. However, as Bernstein rightly points out, in conceiving of succession in terms of one genius 'followed by another genius', Kant 'does not quite see this possibility' for exemplary works.<sup>36</sup> As such, Kant's analysis still arguably runs the risk of imposing a uniformity on the potentially measureless possibilities of the exemplary. Yet as Bernstein argues, this would be to reduce 'the indeterminacy of the exemplary instance to unity' and 'to reduce the new rule won through exemplarity to a single case'.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, insofar as Kant understands the *act* of genius as constituting 'free action [and] as creative and legislative rather than rule following',<sup>38</sup> this also serves to suggest that artistic practice might itself be open to reconceptualisation in terms of its proto-political and ethical potential within the public domain. These are possibilities I shall want to return to below.

### A thrust enters history . . .

The origin of the artwork is art. But what is art? Art is actual in the artwork. Hence we first seek the actuality of the work. In what does it consist? Artworks universally display a thingly character, albeit in a wholly distinct way. The attempt to interpret this thing-character of the work with the aid of the usual thing-concepts failed – not only because these concepts do not lay hold of the thingly feature, but because, in raising the question of its thingly substructure, we force the work into a preconceived framework by which we obstruct our own access to the work being of the work. Nothing can be discovered about the thingly aspect of the work so long as the pure self-subsistence of the work has not distinctly displayed itself.<sup>39</sup>

We need to push the concept of exemplarity still further. How does one apprehend the measureless possibilities of the exemplary? And in what sense can we argue that there is a qualitative distinction in the succession or survival of great works, and their open disclosure of transformative possibilities over a period of time? Bound up with how we interpret, remember or testify to the enduring semantic power and signifying possibilities of literary works, Heidegger's remarks on 'The origin of the work of art' offer us a more 'generalised thinking of the Kantian notion of genius', and in doing so help tease out the historical implications of exemplary artworks.<sup>40</sup>

In some sense, as Heidegger's comments suggest, we need to confront the actuality of the artwork. But then if the artwork or the play is the thing, what type of thing is it? Heidegger's key point here of course is that an artwork's distinct thingly character remains beyond the grasp of the usual thing-concepts, which fail because they force the work into a preconceived framework and thereby obstruct our own access to what he terms 'the work being of the work'. As Heidegger implies, conventional approaches to the question of the authenticity of artworks operate according to a correspondent model of truth in which art's relationship to the world is conceived in terms of a naive mimeticism which posits the truth of an anterior or pre-existent reality, of which art



is then a 'true' re-presentation. So far so good of course, insofar as in 'displacing the dominance of the representational understanding of truth and thing',<sup>41</sup> Heidegger is in agreement with post-structuralism in its critique of those 'natural forms of reading' which traditionally presuppose a rather fixed understanding of the value of artworks and their claim to authenticity.

Yet Heidegger's essay on the origin of the work of art is careful to preserve a place for truth or authenticity in the sense that, as the philosopher puts it, art is truth setting itself to work:

In a work, by contrast, this fact, that it *is* as a work, is just what is unusual. The event of its being created does not simply reverberate through the work; rather, the work casts before itself the eventful fact that the work is as this work, and it has constantly this fact about itself. The more essentially the work opens itself, the more luminous becomes the uniqueness of the fact that it is rather than is not. The more essentially this thrust comes into the open region, the more strange and solitary the work becomes. In the bringing forth of the work there lies this offering 'that it be.'<sup>42</sup>

For Heidegger, this 'disclosive' thrust-like dimension to art is one of the ways in which truth happens. Moreover, 'art is one of the ways in which history takes place' insofar as, as Bernstein puts it, for Heidegger 'whenever art happens – that is whenever there is a beginning – a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again'.<sup>43</sup> If we extend this sense of the originary power of artworks via the notion of exemplarity to the notion of great works and their continued epoch-making capacity to set truth to work, the questions that Heidegger raises clearly go to the heart of the formation of a literary tradition as an indeterminacy of disruptive settings.

To summarise, then, before moving on: the most effective adaptations are without anterior motive and as such they cannot claim to copy or 'lay hold of' an original. To conceive of adaptation as 'agreement with', imitation of, or depiction of something actual<sup>44</sup> is to treat adaptation as pre-scriptive in the sense of merely re-presenting a copy of what *is*, or to rehearse a restriction which, rather like textual revisionism of the worst kind, imposes a misplaced notion of fidelity on a unified original and thereby duplicates a 'logic of the same'. Most literary and cultural theorists would concur with this qualification and would agree that in this sense adaptation is fated never to measure up. Yet there is clearly a qualitative measure which distinguishes some adaptations from others and this relates directly to a conceptualisation of exemplary works as dynamically historical and notably successive. In this respect the event of adaptation can be locational (epoch-making even) in the difference that it makes. Indeed its sense of occasion could be said to disrupt and constitute a cultural history itself. In practice of course theatrical adaptation visits this disclosive, non-uniform, 'happening truth' potential of adaptation setting itself to work on an almost nightly basis, so that as Artaud puts it staging or setting becomes the 'starting point for theatrical creation':

A performance that repeats itself every evening according to rites that are always the same, always identical to what they were the night before, can no longer win our support. The spectacle we are watching must be unique, it must give the impression that

it is unprecedented, as incapable of repeating itself as any action in life, any event brought on by circumstances.<sup>45</sup>

Crucially, as Artaud's comments suggest, insofar as the work of adaptation 'works' it is because the work of adaptation ungrounds itself on its own terms. What Heidegger might term the originary thrust of a work, its actualisation, is without antecedent even as it then ensures its own historical success as a measure without measure.

### The play's the thing . . .

Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio. (I. i. 45)<sup>46</sup>

In conceiving of a literary tradition as a form of discontinuous history, we are clearly far removed from traditional attempts to install a fixed or a priori distinction between 'one kind of writing and another'. In the very act of challenging our critical expectations exemplary works resist generalisation, and as such literary criticism is forced to confront the possibility that inheritance (literary or otherwise) is always already incomplete – a history only of located dislocation and partial assimilation – an experience which cannot be fully accounted for. Frustratingly, in the course of provoking thought and in making us think, this also ensures that literary texts are phantoms which finally resist critical appropriation. And no doubt this is partly because, in their own way, the questions of how we remember, of being and not being, knowing and not knowing, are themselves linked in intricate ways to the literary critical 'event'. For how can we 'know' that which simultaneously remains beyond our full comprehension? Or even (as Marcellus requires of the scholar Horatio) 'speak to it'?<sup>47</sup>

*Hamlet* of course stages this dilemma of critical finitude in some detail and in doing so opens with the most evidential of questions, 'Who's there?' (I. i. 1), while Francisco's response to Barnardo's enquiry 'Stand and *unfold* yourself' (2) almost immediately directs us to the question of 'exposition' and interpretation.<sup>48</sup> In dramatic terms the staging of the Ghost during the opening scenes of the play effectively restages what Cavell might term a 'philosophical drama' insofar as we are confronted with an entity that does not fall within conventional bounds of 'naming', so that an audience is forced to reconsider 'that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge'.<sup>49</sup> Again of course it is precisely those more traditional or propositional modes of enquiry which attempt to establish an anterior or predetermined relation to the 'truth' that are immediately called into question here. The Ghost's arrival cannot be anticipated or prepared for. Indeed, in keeping with the best literary events 'it' appears quite literally without preamble *in medias res* (into the midst of things), and ironically, in doing so it interrupts Barnardo's own 'Ghost story', so that, once again, any ordered sense of narrative sequence is further complicated and the boundary between the 'literary' and the 'fictional' is further blurred. As a result the apparition itself is more real than fiction, for as Barnardo asks: 'Is not this something more than fantasy?' (I. i. 57). Again, the apparition is 'thing-like' insofar as it is referred to as an 'it', although 'it' is used interchangeably now with the antique form of he ('a') in Barnardo's: 'Looks *a* not like the King?' (46). Here and in his preceding observation that the entity appears 'In the same

figure like the King that's dead' (44), Barnado relies on a form of recognition that is also a form of *re*-cognition, i.e. a form of cognition that is based on comparison. Marcellus picks up the same comparison moments later, asking Horatio 'Is it not like the King?' (61). Yet Horatio's response to Marcellus, 'As thou art to thyself' (62), teasingly suggests that, insofar as an insistence on similitude or likeness depends upon a sense of difference, then it also constitutes a form of identification that is already split and divided against itself, insofar as it depends on a self comparing 'self' with self. It follows that the apparition throws any conventional sense of critical 'self-possession' or transcendent detachment into crisis, a situation Horatio (the most 'scholarly' and 'sceptical' of the observers) is unable to deal with. As a consequence, and as a mark of his confusion, Horatio the 'scientist' is now forced to swear a religious oath that he is witnessing something that cannot be, but somehow *is*: 'Before my God, I might not this believe / Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine own eyes' (59–61). Insofar as Horatio's brand of scepticism relies on objective distance and proof the Ghost is clearly not susceptible to interpretation on these terms. In some sense, then, he and the others are unable to learn what Cavell characterises as 'the lesson of scepticism', namely that 'the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing'.<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly enough of course *Hamlet* – arguably the most performed of all Shakespeare's plays – itself pivots around the question of adaptation, in terms of Hamlet's staging of the play within the play. And here again of course, in more senses than one, succession and 'knowing' arise as the very nub of the problem, insofar as the act-event of Hamlet's own adaptation 'The Mousetrap' (III. ii) (with 'some dozen or sixteen lines . . . insert[ed] in't', II. ii. 535–6) is already an attempt to 'test' the 'accuracy' of the Ghost's testimony. In some respects of course Hamlet's problem here is analogous to the problem we have already faced, i.e. how does one stage what is apparently not there? Moreover the play-within-the-play once again highlights issues relating to interpretation and performance, insofar as it stages an audience on stage and a director (Hamlet) hoping to influence the outcome.<sup>51</sup> In some ways the failure of Hamlet's adaptation (his own attempt to stage the Ghost) is seminally instructive for those who attempt to direct theatre in anything other than an open-ended fashion – though, unsurprisingly perhaps, his own response during the play-within-the-play discloses 'a desire for certainty' and empirical evidence as he manifests the rage of the epistemophile who would pedantically 'piece out' and over-interpret every aspect of the story. As Ophelia observes, later on during the scene itself, 'You are as good as a chorus, my Lord' (III. ii. 240); while, for his part, Horatio assures Hamlet that nothing will escape his 'detecting' (III. ii. 89). Many literary critics have repeated the same mistake. And in some ways Hamlet's adaptation has become the editorial and interpretative crux of the play, as in trying to pin down the 'meaning' of Claudius's 'response' to the play-within-the-play generations of 'scholars' have effectively committed the same category error of attempting to preserve the 'veracity' of the Ghost 'at all costs'.<sup>52</sup> Yet in this sense, of course, in 'The Mousetrap' the 'burden of proof' is miscast and is the crux on which interpretation must founder, insofar as there can be no 'test' for testimony.

During the course of *Hamlet*, then, the attempted adaptation might be cast as an act of narration in which Hamlet the proto-intellectual will clarify the act of sovereign succession and rewrite the official history. Yet Hamlet's 'excessively goal-orientated consciousness' (in terms of theatre direction at least), ensures that both prior to and during 'The Mousetrap' itself, in casting himself as a 'minor' dramatist he unwittingly emerges as what Deleuze might term a 'despot of the invariant'.<sup>53</sup> Because Hamlet approaches adaptation from a homogenised perspective there is no allowance for the recursive 'catch' of 'The Mousetrap' or the surprise of the 'power of improvisation'. In brief, Hamlet anticipates a form of revelation or incarnation 'under the sign of presence' and fails to construe the non-originary origin of the event of disclosure. During his advice to the players, Hamlet condones an instrumentalist approach to the vagaries of performance that negates adaptation. In his desire for certainty he fails to allow for the fact that literary transformation is a form of what Heidegger calls 'preserving' – that is to say 'letting a work be' rather than attempting to restore it to what it once was.<sup>54</sup> One might say that the unfathomability of Claudius's response belongs to an abyss of the play's own making, as, however he tries to adapt or modify the conditions for its reception, it can never be Hamlet's play.<sup>55</sup> Rather like the ol' mole that burrows in at the beginning of the play, adaptation works its wiles in displacement. Following the play within the play, *Hamlet* necessarily reverts to the onto-theology of a deterministic universe. Or, as Francis Barker memorably puts it, the play effectively imposes military rule upon itself.<sup>56</sup>

As the creation of the other, adaptation is without motive, a relinquishment of self that is also a response to a provocation of the work's own making. It follows that there is no way of reincarnating the 'truth' or making such a world 'present to oneself'.<sup>57</sup> Ironically of course, in one further twist, Hamlet's failure to relate to his world in anything other than narrowly conceived terms of epistemic certainty is already exposed in advance of his attempted adaptation, during his initial response to the player's speech (a speech which itself of course also in some sense serves as a further prompt to stage 'The Mousetrap', cf. II. ii. 584–601):

What's Hecuba to him, or he to her,  
That he should weep for her? What would he do  
Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
That I have? (II. ii. 553–6)

In some ways Hamlet's 'own' mistaken sense here of not 'measuring up' finally returns us to the importance of the Kantian distinction between imitating and following, though we might say that he effectively refuses to put 'talent to the test' insofar as his response to the player is one of identification and 'self-possession' rather than an openness to alterity. As Gerald Bruns comments, generally speaking, 'Hamlet's desire for certainty . . . is continuous with his desire not to expose himself to the world around him'.<sup>58</sup> It follows then that despite his protestation of an aesthetic sensibility his own response to the player's speech betrays his inability to forego knowing for receptiveness, and in opting instead for 'authenticity' he chooses 'self-preservation' ahead of adaptation.<sup>59</sup>

## Hamletism and humanism

Thou art a monument without a tomb,  
And art alive still while thy book doth live  
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.<sup>60</sup>

With its talk of tombs and monuments, being and non-being, the question of literary succession is evidently entwined with what Derrida would term a 'logic of haunting', insofar as its surplus potential is not a matter of 'the meaning of an original' but is always already deferred and infinitely translatable, whether as a form of memorial or as a trace of a future-to-come. Again, for Derrida, it is important to stress the heterogeneity of this process. Moreover he does so in direct relation to Shakespeare: 'This is the stroke of genius, the insignia trait of spirit, the signature of the Thing "Shakespeare": to authorize each one of the translations, to make them possible and intelligible without ever being reducible to them.'<sup>61</sup> As Derrida suggests, there is evidently a claim here that is in a certain sense 'cognitive' but non-reducible – as such it is bound to prove unsettling for any humanist in search of authentic originality. Genius calls us to follow: not in any slavish sense of imitation but rather in the hope that we gather around the disjuncture that makes following a possibility.

In the case of *Hamlet*, as we have seen, the official history relentlessly imposes its own narrative on events and as such it construes the question of memory and related questions of intellectual inheritance in terms of a more reductive form of identification with the past. In doing so it underpins a regime which is based on vengeance and injustice – we might say that it belongs to the 'hegemony of the homogenous'. In this respect, of course, Hamlet's hyperbolic misidentification with the past is itself uncannily reminiscent of humanism's own nostalgic yearning for complete restitution. And in some part the progressive idealisation of Hamlet during modernity as a non-recuperable figure itself also caters to this nostalgia. In the process, 'Shakespeare's Hamlet' eventually emerges as a simplifying synecdoche for 'Shakespeare's genius', and by a further act of association quickly becomes the most readily identifiable representation of the liberal intellectual 'paralysed in will and incapable of action', yet still somehow possessing Hamlet's 'generalising habit' and thereby occupying the ethical and cultural high ground.<sup>62</sup> In short, we are presented with a version of intellectual life at a quasi-transcendent remove, though of course it is a living and an intellect that remains secure only in its inability to come to terms with what is in effect a productive melancholic entrapment with the past.

Yet the prompt provided by the example of Hamlet can be construed otherwise, for as Derrida observes: 'If right or law stems from vengeance, as Hamlet seems to complain . . . 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.'<sup>63</sup> The play's provocation, as Derrida rightly reminds us, is to pose the question without offering a solution that we can live with – unless, that is, we learn to live with ghosts.<sup>64</sup> In this sense the spirit of Hamlet exemplifies a non-foundationalist petition to justice that remains unfulfilled, yet it is difficult to see how a criticism which

claims to be 'political' could refuse this call to justice. Again the ad-justment, the move towards justice, to 'put yourself in my place' remains a question of displacement rather than comparison: an act of adaptation that allows for the creation of the other. Yet in these terms alone exemplarity itself arguably always insinuates a reconceptualisation of the political.

Crucially, of course, in burdening himself with restitution at any cost, Hamlet fails to realise that memory itself is an ethical instant and an opening instance: 'O cursed . . . / That ever I was born to set it right' (I. v. 196–7). In this respect his misapprehension of his own legacy proves onerous. After all, one cannot expect a finite subject to think of all ethical obligations; such a legacy would be 'inhuman', though Hamlet's legacy to Horatio is precisely a form of inhumanity, as if to bequeath the full-bore canon of divine law – a type of madness. These questions go to the route of the problem of Hamletism: Hamlet the intellectual, the literary critic, the philosopher. The act of inheritance or witness, the aesthetic contract by which Hamlet and humanism seem bound, actually remarks nothing more or less than the inaugural aporia of intellectual life. As Derrida reminds us, 'the truth of the acolyte who follows without being fully present is [finally an analytic figure] who accompanies and does not accompany'<sup>65</sup> – a witness who must follow without following. This in turn also comes close to the freedom implied by Kant's theorisation of genius, without subscribing to its subjectivism.

## Conclusion

In reconceptualising great works as 'successful' we might say that rather than adapt to circumstance, or adjust to new conditions, they (great works) continue to precipitate crisis on their own terms as well. It follows that some of the sharpest appreciation of the dislocationary potentiality of adaptation of great works comes from those who remain open to what we might term after Derrida the continued 'emergency' of adaptation, and who adopt a stance towards adaptation which is both interruptive and 'presentist' in terms of its critical orientation. In Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', for example, adaptation ('blasting a specific work out of the lifework', etc.) surfaces as a recurrent preoccupation. Yet again, for Benjamin, we might say that, configured in these terms, the work of adaptation draws us together in a 'fitting' way only by being uniquely 'out of joint'. Opposed to the empty quantitative homogeneity of historicism his 'materialist historiography' is nonetheless based on an adaptive 'constructive principle' and as such it elicits a qualitative response, engendering what he terms elsewhere 'a unique experience with the past'.<sup>66</sup> In short, Benjamin's 'constructive principle' makes for an uncontainable 'presentist' type of moment which is no less fully historical for letting 'history happen' even as it marks a messianic cessation of happening.

For a range of theatrical adaptors of Shakespeare including Brecht, Artaud, Heiner Müller and many others, the ungrounding of adaptation aligns itself with the new aesthetic of a revolutionary theatre, which in its estrangement reactivates a 'political consciousness of the present' both in provoking an audience and in potentially transforming

established modes of cognition. Yet it would be wrong to speak in terms of the motive or agenda or 'aim of adaptation', not least insofar as 'the political effects of such a theatre cannot be foreseen'.<sup>67</sup> Rather, in adaptation, as in Benjamin's sense of *Janzeit* or time of the now, we witness a teleology that undermines *telos* and where 'origin is the goal'. Maybe this is simply to say that, like history, adaptation works itself out behind the backs of the actors. This means that while successful revivals are name-making and epoch-making within the actualising thrust of adaptation itself, as Heidegger puts it, 'the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge'.<sup>68</sup>

Paradoxically, even while the most successful Shakespearean adaptations could be said to 'belong' to others – Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Césaire's *Une tempête*, Müller's *Hamletmaschine*, etc. – no one can 'own' the event of adaptation itself. Or at least one could say that adaptation stakes its claim for ownership in non-proprietary terms, or that if adaptations 'catch on' or are successful it is because they possess an 'originary governance', or again, that they are unmeasurable works which then measure future productions. Finally, as Hamlet teaches us, there is no setting it right. Adaptation implicitly conjures forth an ethical relation with an other in that it acknowledges an irreducible excess of things being out of joint. Yet how we negotiate, adapt or ad-just to the alterity of adaptation itself inevitably constitutes its own measure of creativity rather than following the rule. In this sense to adapt is also to *ad-just* – to move *towards* justice or rather to open up what Derrida might term the indeterminate future-to-come of justice itself. And in this latter sense, of course, there is no adapting to adaptation. As the 'creation of the other', adaptation is without motive, a relinquishment of self that is also a response to a provocation of the work's own making. In this respect just as the exemplary work measures its work as succession, then maybe adaptation could also be construed as the interval between adapted works. In fact we might say that the interval between works 'presents' itself as the non-determinable condition of adaptation itself, a summoning forth to further adaptation yet beyond the director's will.

## Notes

- 1 See S. Cavell, 'Foreword', in J. J. Joughin (ed.), *Philosophical Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. xii–xvi (pp. xii–xiii).
- 2 See S. Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 144.
- 3 See M. Fortier, 'Shakespeare as "minor theater": Deleuze and Guattari and the aims of adaptation', *Mosaic*, 29:1 (1996), 1–18. Fortier offers a provocative account of theatrical adaptation in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor literature', as inducing 'a series of variations' which are not reducible to a unity. For more on the growth of 'adaptation studies' generally, compare D. Cartmell and I. Whelehan (eds), *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), cf. esp. Whelehan, 'Adaptations: the contemporary dilemmas', pp. 3–19.
- 4 Cf. Timothy Gould, who makes an analogous distinction concerning the relation of 'original works' and their interpretative constituency in 'The audience of originality:

Kant and Wordsworth on the reception of genius' in T. Cohen and P. Guyer (eds), *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 179–93 (esp. pp. 179–80).

- 5 A quick additional word concerning my own use throughout the chapter of the word 'adaptation' is probably in order at this juncture. Many purists would insist that, strictly speaking, the term 'adaptation' should be restricted solely to productions which have substantially and distinctively new material inserted or added in advance. Yet this seems an overly formalistic and prescriptive way of understanding how adaptation actually works in practice and forecloses on understanding adaptation as a process which is itself open-ended. As Fortier and Fischlin remind us in their recent introduction to *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), the term adaptation is a helpfully flexible and wide-ranging one: 'Adaptation implies a process rather than a beginning or an end, and as ongoing objects of adaptation all Shakespeare's plays remain in process. . . . Adaptation as a concept can expand or contract. Writ large, adaptation includes any act of alteration performed upon specific cultural works of the past and dovetails with a general process of cultural recreation. More narrowly, its focus . . . is on works which, through verbal and theatrical devices, radically alter the shape and significance of another work so as to invoke that work and yet be different from it – so that any adaptation is, and is not, Shakespeare.' (pp. 3–4). I want to argue that, when it is construed as an 'expansive' concept, the theorisation of Shakespearean adaptation offers us a way of rethinking our encounter with exemplary works – as a dynamic, qualitatively variable and creative process which both is and is not 'Shakespearean', a process which Cavell labels a matter of Shakespeare's 'appropriability'. In other words the 'originary power' of adaptation/appropriability is not reducible to the more restrictively 'oppressive sense' in which (political) 'appropriation' has often operated in recent cultural criticism – usually to imply what Fortier and Fischlin themselves term 'a hostile takeover, a seizure of authority over the original in a way that appeals to contemporary sensibilities steeped in a politicised understanding of culture' (again see Fortier and Fischlin, p. 3).
- 6 I follow the lead here that is provided by J. M. Bernstein in his discussion of exemplarity in Heidegger as a 'generalized thinking' of the Kantian notion of genius, cf. J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), esp. pp. 66–135. The extent of my indebtedness to Bernstein will be evident below; meanwhile, insofar as the paper draws on the work of thinkers like Bernstein and Bowie who have challenged the anti-aestheticism of recent cultural and literary theory and offered a reconceptualisation of aesthetic theory as fundamental to our understanding and experience of modernity, it could be classed as new aestheticist in terms of its critical orientation. It forms part of work in progress on a book-length study of Shakespeare and the aesthetic.
- 7 G. Bruns, 'Stanley Cavell's Shakespeare', *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 612–32, (pp. 630–1).
- 8 See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), and also again cf. Bruns, 'Cavell's Shakespeare', esp. pp. 619–20. This register of an openness to alterity is also widespread in the ethical turn of Derrida's work and is evident most recently in his development of the conceptual motif of 'hospitality', which begins with the 'unquestioning welcome' of that which 'is given to the other before they are identified'; see esp. *Of Hospitality*, trans. R. Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- 9 See Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, passim; and again also cf. Bruns, 'Cavell's Shakespeare', esp. pp. 614–17.



- 10 See Cavell, 'Foreword', p. xvi.
- 11 See A. Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), passim.
- 12 See E. Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition* (London, 1759), pp. 78–80.
- 13 I am particularly indebted here and below to J. Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 1997), esp. pp. 26–30, and J. Bate, 'Shakespeare and original genius' in P. Murray (ed.), *Genius: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 76–97. Shakespeare was, of course, first and foremost an adaptor, a notorious Jack-of-all trades, an 'Upstart crow' who fleeced his competitors and lifted and reworked his best plots from the templates provided by English chronicles and Italian romance. For his part, in his own preface to Shakespeare's plays, Ben Jonson opts for a compromise formation conceding the fact that, despite Shakespeare's undoubted success in outshining competitors ancient and modern, when all's done and dusted 'a good poet's made as well as born / And such wert thou' (Ben Jonson, To the Memory of my beloved, the author Master William Shakespeare and what he hath left us, 1623, in 'Commendatory Poems and Prefaces 1599–1640' in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed S. Wells et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. xliii). In short, the distinction between creating and making is eminently deconstructible and, from the very outset, a barely concealed rift begins to open up within any more narrowly conceived sense of a nature/art opposition which all too often imposes its own form of stable metaphysical binary in more traditional discussions of the playwright's work.
- 14 As Bate suggests, during this formative period other regular exemplars include Homer, Pindar and 'the sublime of the Old Testament prophets', cf. Bate, 'Shakespeare and original genius', p. 77.
- 15 See S. J. Greenblatt, 'What is the history of literature?', *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (1997), 460–81 (cf. esp. pp. 476–7).
- 16 See M. de Grazia, 'Shakespeare in quotation marks' in J. I. Marsden (ed.), *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 57–71 (p. 62).
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- 18 See C. Norris, 'Post-structuralist Shakespeare: text and ideology' in J. Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 47–66 (p. 49).
- 19 Even in France, despite an initial 'rationalised' resistance to Shakespeare, the exemplary status of the playwright's work begins to open up a productive faultline concerning native literary inheritance and the question of its legacy. By the second half of the eighteenth century Voltaire, originally one of the strongest polemicists for Shakespeare's 'strong and fertile genius' (though this was never a wholly unreserved endorsement), is nonetheless eventually dismayed at the consequence of his advocacy: 'it was I [Voltaire complains] who was the first to point out to Frenchmen the few pearls which were to be found in this enormous dunghill. It never entered my mind that by doing so I would one day help the effort to trample on the crowns of Racine and Corneille in order to wreath the brow of this barbaric mountebank.' Cited in G. Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 384.
- 20 See Bate, 'Shakespeare and original genius', passim. As Bate notes, along with an assortment of other British critics during this period Young was to prove extremely influential and key distinctions within his treatise on *Original Composition* help shape the aesthetics of Herder and others working in the same tradition, cf. esp. pp. 88–9.
- 21 See Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 401.

- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 401–2.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 402.
- 24 For more on the philosophical context of the shift in the understanding of the function of language during this period and its connection to the ‘wider issue of aesthetics’ see A. Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1–27 and cf. esp. p. 21.
- 25 See I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 168–9.
- 26 Again Young would concur: ‘Genius is a Masterworkman, Learning is but an Instrument; and an Instrument tho’ most valuable, yet not always indispensable. . . . For unprescribed Beauties, and unexampled Excellence, which are Characteristics of *Genius*, lie without the Pale of *Learning’s* Authorities, and Laws’, see *Conjectures*, pp. 25–6.
- 27 See Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 93.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 See Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, pp. 138–9.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 181, also cf. H. Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 213.
- 32 Cf. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 94.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.* and cf. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, p. 181.
- 37 See Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 94.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 39 See M. Heidegger, ‘The origin of the work of art’ in D. F. Krell (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 139–212, p. 165.
- 40 Again cf. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 14, and pp. 66–135, *passim*.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 42 See Heidegger, ‘The origin of the work of art’, pp. 190–1.
- 43 Cf. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 84.
- 44 Cf. Heidegger, ‘The origin of the work of art’, p. 162.
- 45 See A. Artaud, *Selected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 157, also cited in Fortier, ‘Shakespeare as “minor theater”’, p. 3.
- 46 All quotations are from the Arden edition of *Hamlet*, ed. H. Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1990).
- 47 In this respect, as Stephen Greenblatt reminds us, our negotiation with old Hamlet’s death is itself exemplary. Indeed in some sense it constitutes the *Ur*-scene of literary history itself, the singular act of witness and memorial whose ontological ambiguity continues to assure and maintain our literary critical life, for as Greenblatt puts it, ‘It is the role of the scholar to speak to the dead and to make the dead speak: “Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee speak”’. See Greenblatt, ‘What is the history of literature?’, p. 479.
- 48 In this sense we also need to remember that Barnardo’s ‘Who’s there’ already comes from a position offstage and outside of the frame of the play, so that even before we get to examine the question of apparition or who might be able to see what, we are invited to confront the dislocation of a hermeneutic encounter. In short, we are aware only of a question which comes from a place ‘elsewhere’ as one person speaks out of the void, enquiring about the identity of another. For further reflections on the ghost scene see my ‘Pedagogy as event: *Hamlet* and hauntology’ in P. Skrebels and S. Van der Hoeven (eds), *For All Time? Critical*

*Issues in Teaching Shakespeare* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002); the next two paragraphs owe a good deal to the argument developed there.

- 49 Cf. J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. P. Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 6. As Derrida reminds us, in theorising about a ghost or a 'specter': 'one does not "know" what it *is*. . . . *It is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence.'
- 50 See S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*, p. 241, also cited by Bruns, 'Cavell's Shakespeare', p. 616.
- 51 As a theatre director, of course, Hamlet insists upon a rather naive sense of the relation between 'theatre' and 'reality'. In advocating a form of mimeticism that would hold the 'mirror up to nature' (III. ii. 22) and a performance that would 'suit the action to the word' (17), he relies on an over-prescriptive sense of the distinction between the real and the unreal. Indeed, Hamlet evidently believes that events in a play can be conceived of in terms of their direct correlation to an anterior or predetermined reality, though at the same time it is precisely the improvisational unexpected 'event-like' nature of theatrical performance that he is forced to concede, complaining that 'clowns' are liable to speak 'more than is set down for them' (39).
- 52 See S. Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, p. 181 and cf. among others John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967). As Gerald Bruns observes, 'It is no trouble to think of Hamlet's play-within-a-play, or indeed his whole effort of revenge, as a burlesque of Baconian method, since Hamlet experiences, without quite realizing it, the inevitable shortfall of strategic thinking with respect to the world' (Bruns, 'Cavell's Shakespeare', p. 616).
- 53 See Fortier, 'Shakespeare as "minor theatre"', p. 5.
- 54 As Bernstein notes, in Heidegger's sense of the term 'preserving' is to be contrasted with 'connoisseurship' or that which 'parries a work's thrust into the extraordinary'. See Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 88.
- 55 In an essay (which appears just as my own chapter goes to press) in *Shakespeare in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2002) Terence Hawkes makes an analogous point, along with the following acute summation: 'It's an interesting reflection of modern presuppositions concerning art, and especially drama, that this matter [the "Mousetrap" controversy] should be thought to constitute a "critical problem" or even a playwright's error. For it now seems reasonable to argue, to the contrary, that Claudius's null response represents another of those moments when the play, rather than one of its characters speaks. . . . Claudius's failure to respond to the dumb-show is not an "error" or a "mistake" made by Shakespeare. It's not something that goes "wrong". Or, rather, like Polonius's forgetting of his lines, it's the sort of "wrongness" that, once confronted, begins to reveal what our inherited notions of "rightness" conceal from us' (p. 73).
- 56 Francis Barker, 'Which dead? *Hamlet* and the ends of history' in F. Barker *et al.* (eds), *Uses of History: Marxism, Postmodernism and the Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 47–75 (p. 52).
- 57 Again cf. Bruns, 'Cavell's Shakespeare', p. 616.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 In teasing out the ethical implications of Hamlet's situation we might say that his failure to acknowledge the player's predicament in anything other than his own terms is clearly linked to what Cavell might term a fear of exposure of the self to the alterity of the other. And again there is an evident correlation here between Cavell and Levinas, especially insofar as

Levinas's own ethical turn substitutes 'What's Hecuba *to me*' for Hamlet's 'What's Hecuba *to him*', thus allowing for precisely the sense of hostage of self to other that Hamlet's response debars.

60 See Ben Jonson, 'To the Memory of my beloved', p. xliii, lines 22–4.

61 See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 22.

62 Or, as Coleridge puts it, 'I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so'; also cf. R. A. Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 6.

63 See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 21.

64 Again cf. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. xviii and also cf. his *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

65 Jacques Derrida during a question and answer session following 'Perjuries', a paper presented at the 'life.after.theory' conference held at the University of Loughborough, 10 November 2001. I am also indebted to Derrida for inadvertently suggesting the notion of the potential 'inhumanity' of a 'full remembering' rehearsed above a few lines earlier.

66 See W. Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history', *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1973), pp. 245–55, and cf. esp. p. 254.

67 Cf. Fortier, 'Shakespeare as "minor theater"', *passim*.

68 See Heidegger, 'The origin of the work of art', p. 166.