

Shakespeare's Ghosts Live

“Gradually, but surely, modern neuroscience is transitioning to a perspective that includes consciousness as a fundamental element in our worldview and not an incidental by-product of the brain. Along with this shift is a new appreciation of the complexity of the psyche, and the realization that many of our forebears understood aspects of consciousness that we unfortunately have shunned. Dr Annetrin Puhle and Dr Adrian Parker-Reed have combed Shakespeareana and modern consciousness research for evidence of the richness of the psyche in the form of ghosts, spirits, and psychical phenomena. They show that these happenings remain an essential part of who we are, and are manifestations of healthy human function. This wonderfully illustrated, eloquent book is a reclamation project for the human psyche, an effort to take back what we have forfeited in our modern era. After reading Shakespeare’s Ghosts Live, you will never think of Shakespeare, ghosts, or yourself in the same way.”

—Larry Dossey, MD, author, *One Mind: How Our Individual Mind Is Part of a Greater Consciousness and Why It Matters*

“Talking about psychic phenomena in academia is still not regarded as politically ‘correct’, say the authors of this meticulously researched and engagingly written study of a long neglected area of Shakespeare’s vast survey of the totality of the human condition. This attitude, they add, amounts to ‘wilful disregard of current interest in exploring altered states of consciousness’. It has led to attempts to replace the term ‘parapsychology’ by ‘anomalous psychology’, implying this to be no more than a ‘deviant belief’. It is an attitude with which Shakespeare would not have agreed. To him, dialogues with a deceased parent or a trio of precognitive witches are just two well-known examples of many cited here which he accepts as anything but deviant—especially when they convey accurate information. We are constantly reminded that, in the words of one of Shakespeare’s most often quoted observations, there are indeed more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Horatio’s philosophy, or indeed in much of contemporary academia.”

—Guy Lyon Playfair, author, *If This Be Magic* and *Twin Telepathy*

“Dr Puhle and Dr Parker have joined forces to produce a fascinating and deceptively important book. Woven around Shakespeare’s surprisingly numerous and judgement-free references to apparitions and things supernatural is a thought-provoking and intellectually honest foray into the history of modern day psychic research, with an emphasis on apparitions. It further notes where we are now in the investigation of such matters, and goes on to dip briefly into the deep waters regarding the nature of consciousness. Along the way there are some well-aimed sideswipes at aspects of the ‘zombification’ of today’s culture, especially in the mainstream neuro-scientific reductionist approach to consciousness. This is a well-written work to savour, with Shakespeare’s ghosts all the time haunting its pages.”

—Paul Devereux, Editor, *Time and Mind – The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture*

Shakespeare's Ghosts Live:

*From Shakespeare's Ghosts
to Psychological Research*

By

Annekatriin Puhle
and Adrian Parker-Reed

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Shakespeare's Ghosts Live:
From Shakespeare's Ghosts to Psychical Research

By Annekatriin Puhle and Adrian Parker-Reed

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2017 by Annekatriin Puhle and Adrian Parker-Reed

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4449-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4449-9

Cover image: "The bloody Tree": photo and copyright © Alex Thomson,
Chester-le-Street Heritage Group, Co. Durham, UK.
Shakespeare image by John Taylor, 1610.

Cover designed by Annekatriin Puhle and Adrian Parker-Reed

Book illustration: Annekatriin Puhle

*For Marianne & Volkmar and Winifred & George
With Love*

... I William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon ... do make & ordain this my last will & testament in manner & form following. That is to say first, I commend my Soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping & assuredly believing ... to be made partaker of life everlasting. ...
(Passage of Shakespeare's *Last Will and Testament*, 25th of March 1616)



Sir John Gilbert (1817-1897): William Shakespeare.
Shakespeare edition 1881-1886.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
Foreword by Adrian Parker-Reed	xi
Foreword by David Fontana	xviii

PART ONE: SEEING WHAT NOBODY SHOULD SEE

Chapter One.....	3
Shakespeare – What’s in a Name?	
Chapter Two	21
The Cambridge Scholars of Psychological Research	
Chapter Three	37
Who Sees a Ghost? A Guide to the Literature	

PART TWO: THE CASE REPORTS

Chapter Four.....	60
Introduction to the Historical Case Reports	
Chapter Five	88
Historical Cases	
Chapter Six	170
Some Modern Cases of Psychic Experiences	

PART THREE: WHAT SENSE DOES IT MAKE FOR US TODAY?

Chapter Seven.....	209
Core Experiences	

Chapter Eight.....	227
The Ultimate Question: Endless Consciousness?	

Chapter Nine.....	248
States of Mind	

Afterword by Annkatrin Puhle	269
------------------------------------	-----

APPENDICES

Notes.....	274
------------	-----

References	283
------------------	-----

Extended Bibliography.....	300
----------------------------	-----

List of Cases	323
---------------------	-----

List of Illustrations	326
-----------------------------	-----

Index.....	335
------------	-----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the *Tate Fund* (Society for Psychical Research, London) for supporting the project *A Phenomenological Analysis of Apparitional Experiences Suggestive of Survival Occurring in Great Britain from the Early 1600s to the Late 1800s* from which some of the case material was first published in an earlier book in German (Reichl Verlag, St Goar 2009). Special thanks are owed to Matthias Dräger for enabling the use of this material in the current book and to Guy Lyon Playfair for his expertise, especially concerning the Enfield Case.

We will also express our gratitude to the resources of the Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health, Freiburg and the University of Gothenburg. We appreciate the help given by Eileen Armstrong, Mary Rose Barrington, Eberhard Bauer, Sven Carlsson, Paul Devereux, Larry Dossey, Peter Fenwick, the late David Fontana, Alan Gauld, Trevor Hamilton, David Hicks, the late Montague Keen, Michael Paternostre, the late Michael Perry, and the late Marianne Samarellis, who all inspired us in various ways. Our thanks include members of local history groups: Margaret Brearly of the Cawood Castle Garth Group, and Alex Thompson of the Chester-le-Street Heritage Group.

All the Shakespeare-quotations are taken from the *Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (2001). The presumed dates of the composition of Shakespeare's works follow the internet-page "Oxford Reference", which is based on the 'Canon and Chronology' section in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, by Stanley Wells & Gary Taylor, with John Jowett & William Montgomery (1987), date accessed 11-09-2016:

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191740763.001.0001/acref-9780191740763-miscMatter-0005>



John William Waterhouse: *The Magic Circle*. Oil on canvas, 1886.

FOREWORD

ADRIAN PARKER-REED

Shakespeare's Weapons for Fighting Zombies

Everyone who has heard of Shakespeare will think of the play *Macbeth* and the three witches or the ghost in *Hamlet*, and perhaps recall even *Julius Caesar* and the Ides of March. Shakespeare's world was populated by ghouls, witches, and seers, all of whom had parts in an occult world. In today's rationalized world, it would seem that there will soon only remain a place for zombies. But Shakespeare's world is not so remote from ours. Today's religious fanaticism and scientific dogma seem at times to belong to the Dark Ages and this current preoccupation with zombies is perhaps a redressing of ghouls in modern technology. But the zombie fixation has also entered academia. The term "philosophical zombie" is used in neuroscience to depict how beings devoid of consciousness could simulate everything that humans can do. Consciousness becomes of no real importance. Other experts point out that everyday awareness is usually passive only arising in response to, say, the cling from the next e-mail. One of today's foremost philosophers, David Chalmers, satirically remarked "a zombie could do everything I can do" and the Nobel prize laureate, co-discoverer of DNA, Francis Crick declared that "your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules". Are we all then merely zombies with brain tissue as our hard discs which process the chemical codes as our software programmes?

By contrast, I can recall when I first began to study psychology, being told if you wanted to know anything about consciousness and human relationships, you had come to the wrong department – you should instead go to English Literature and study

Shakespeare. Regrettably, there is still truth in this: Today's psychology is an obedient servant of the natural sciences and lives under the illusion there is no place for the mind in the world of physics. But is there? Avid users of the internet might know there is another picture of the world that is in stark contrast to the above one. This is the world of modern physics with an ever-growing list of discoveries such as dark matter, string theory, multiverses, and non-local effects, and out of these comes a challenge for us to have humility about the limits of our understanding. Neuroscientists as a whole do not want to know about this uncertain world but this is to their detriment. This area is now about 200 years out of touch with modern physics. The multidimensional world of physics gives us mathematical precision but it is also a picture that lies closer to mysticism than zombie-neuroscience. What has all this to do with Shakespeare? It is this distance of physics from everyday reality, which can make us at least a little open to the insights of Shakespeare's occult world. And here comes the irony, which is that some of these insights may represent a relatively more accurate glimpse of reality than today's psychology. The genius of Shakespeare is that he could transcend his time and express insights in ways that touch our lives today.

There is of course a core of valuable psychological knowledge that is in contrast to the above zombie philosophy. When human psychological health matters come calling then it is fashionable and more efficient to use cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) than to seek a psychoanalyst. But here we can really ask, "What's in a name", because CBT is not really as the name sounds, a recipe for teaching self-discipline. Almost by self-contradiction, the modern form of this may be a mouthful to say (mindfulness integrated cognitive behaviour therapy) but it has the vitality of what was previously denied – the mind - that is *mindfulness*. Move on to drug treatment, especially to anti-depressants, and you encounter something even trickier: placebo effects. Placebo effects are not unwanted and delusory, they are the most demonstrative form of self-healing – a curative form of self-hypnosis and as such an everyday evidence of the causal role of the mind. Moreover they demonstrate how the mind or mind-set is a component in nearly all illnesses.

Our mission here with this book is to provide the reader with inspiration from three sources: literature, personal experience, and science. We refer to the works of Shakespeare, the exceptional experiences of individuals, and finally the research on these experiences. By focusing on some of the writings of Shakespeare, we can get to see not only the performance of the theatre of the mind, but we can even get a glimpse of the backdrop of reality and see the web of connectedness including the actor. Part of this glimpse will relate to what we today call “paranormal” events that were then “normal” in the sense of being an integral part of Shakespeare’s world. Not surprisingly these phenomena are seen today as an unwelcome challenge to the authority of science and religion. Yet the depth of meaning in Shakespeare’s famous quotations cannot of course be readily dismissed as a reflection of a superstitious world. Shakespeare’s passages still have a universal appeal and so it would be foolish to censor what Shakespeare has to say about the psychic area. These experiences do persist even today although they may considerably have altered their form and are not so coloured by the religious doctrines that abounded in Shakespeare’s time. Rational people still occasionally see ghosts, talk to the dead at gravestones, and have dreams that seem to come true. Perhaps more common today is that some would claim they know who is ringing on the smartphone or whom the next mail is from. There is little merit in the roles of the diehard sceptic and wannabe sceptic. One of our colleagues, Marcello Truzzi, who belonged to the rare breed of open-minded sceptics, told how he financed his days at college by means of a black book in which he wrote the names of dedicated sceptics who were willing to sell their souls to him for a small price since they said they did not believe in souls. They would then come back to him later and beg to buy their names back although the price was now of course a lot higher.

We divide the book into three parts. Part one concerns the attempts to understand “psychic experiences”. We give time and space to the Cambridge scholars because few people know their work which was an enormous step forward, not only in terms of collecting and documenting testimony of personal experiences, but also by realising the challenges that occur in seeking an understanding of telepathic experiences and apparitions relating to

unexpected deaths. There is however a much forgotten literature that stretches from Shakespeare's time until the late 1800s when these researchers from Cambridge University and the Society for Psychical Research first began their collection. We were curious to learn how the different historical and religious periods might have influenced the form that apparitional experiences took and how they were then interpreted. Part two concerns these case collections. It became apparent through looking at these reports that some cases were fairly well documented because they gave information that had potential legal implications. We decided therefore to focus primarily, although not exclusively, on experiences that gave some information that could later be verified. We took also a small sample of modern well-known cases for comparison. The selection is too small to make any definite conclusions other than highlighting the core experience in many of these cases. This core experience concerns the various ways in which the sources of the apparitions expressed intentional behaviour such as revealing the name of a murderer or the location of a body. The basic format that some of these cases took appeared to be independent of cultural period. Some cases were quite traditional such as pacts or agreements of individuals to contact each other following the death of one of them. In part three, we present these core experiences in relationship to modern more laboratory-based research and speculate what can be learned from the challenges that these joint findings present. However to really begin to understand psychic experiences behoves us to also look at the results of some of the attempts to capture "psi" (as psychic experiences are called) in the laboratory. To our pleasant surprise throughout all these efforts we found that the insights of Shakespeare were a guide towards understanding these phenomena.

If the claims of those credible persons reporting psychic experiences and those of researchers, many of whom are based at our elite universities, are correct then we need now to at least try to understand what they mean. We also had the positive results of our own experiments that were set up to resemble the real life conditions for telepathy but with the precautions to, as far as possible, eliminate other explanations. We asked ourselves: Surely some understanding can be reached without appealing to the usual

escape clause that more research is needed? A few years ago I applied for funding of a project in this area to the Swedish Science Research Council which, after approving the plan and research methods, gave its verdict to come back when I had a plausible theory of the phenomena. At that time this felt like being told to come back after gaining a Nobel Prize but it has encouraged us to be more daring. Whereas scientists are often too afraid to step into this area, artists have a greater freedom. The Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman was quite candid about his own experiences in this area that inspired many of his films: He said, "these phenomena are a fact and that it is how it is". Bergman went on to tell how at times his "demons are innumerable, arrive at the most inappropriate times and create panic and terror", but that he learned to "harness them to his advantage". He was also convinced that he had contact in his dreams with his dead wife and that he would meet her in the next life.

As regards certainly over the phenomena, whilst the true sceptic must always have some doubt (even about scepticism), we sympathise not only with Bergman but also with the positive conclusions of the most critical and open-minded scientists who have dared to look closely at the area. There is every reason to see the mind and consciousness as something primary in nature. Accepting this as a "working hypothesis" can lead us to some surprises concerning the way in which forms of consciousness can operate. Some of the ideas here are unabashedly speculative but they may help understand even the more bizarre phenomena. Neither do we apologise for looking at what can be learned from Shakespeare and literature. Science does not have a monopoly on the truth. To paraphrase the great philosopher Immanuel Kant, scientific laws are not part of nature; they are one way of understanding nature. Possibly for some readers, the notion there are other ways of seeing reality can be something of an epiphany, but whatever the case is, this can become a personal weapon to combat the nihilism of the materialistic zombie world. The philosopher-psychologist, John Beloff remarked how the study of these experiences has become "the ultimate battleground for different theories of the mind-body relationship". As for Shakespeare's role in this, to my surprise he turned out to be a

successful adjudicator on this battleground by resolving most of the issues at stake.

Let's now look at the historical heritage of cases that may only superficially seem to defy conventional explanations and at the research findings, which indicate that we are not zombies and give us clues as to what we really are.

Professor Adrian Parker-Reed



Dr Adrian Parker. Bamburgh, Northumberland. Photo and copyright
© Annekatrin Puhle.



These are a few of the 46 books by Prof. David Fontana, which are translated into 25 languages. Fontana was well respected within British psychology and held important positions. He was President of the Society for Psychological Research (1995-1998).

FOREWORD

DAVID FONTANA

(Written for the first German version *Mit Shakepeare durch die Welt der Geister* by Annkatrin Puhle, St. Goar: Reichl Verlag 2009.)

From time to time – although much more rarely than one might wish – a book appears in the field of psychical research that fulfils such a valuable purpose that one is left wondering why it wasn't written years ago. Just such a book is the present one based on painstaking and dedicated research.

Throughout the centuries apparitions have been regarded as one of the most important of paranormal manifestations. They appeal not only to the collector of weird and wonderful happenings, but to countless thousands of ordinary men and women (and of course children) who enjoy a good ghost story, particularly when it is one that seems to have a foundation of fact. Perhaps above all, they appeal to those who take a serious interest in the possibilities of life after death, and who look for evidence instead of taking such things (or rejecting them) on the basis of faith. For if apparitions are genuine paranormal events – and particularly if they are recognised by those who see them and convey some kind of veridical message – the most likely explanation for them is that they are indeed visitors from the next world.

However before we can decide on whether or not they are from beyond the grave, we need to have an extensive and intensive analysis of as many reported cases as possible so that we can look for similarities and differences between them and if possible tease out some kind of pattern that will help us dismiss not only charges that those reporting them are merely hallucinating (hallucinations tend to be weird and bizarre and to be highly personal to those

experiencing them) or that they represent something akin to photographic images impressed upon the environment by some powerful emotional energy, and then re-run sporadically and aimlessly until whatever energies are involved become exhausted. Annekatrin Puhle has provided us with this analysis. Carefully and methodically she looks at each of the cases uncovered by her research into the literature and old documents across three centuries, and selects representative examples that can then be subjected to close scrutiny. Arising from this scrutiny she finds that cases can be categorised under such headings as justice cases, money cases, warning cases, prophecy cases, and promise cases.

Significantly, she finds it appropriate to identify which she calls a core experience among apparitional sightings, particularly where those reporting these sightings have been able (or better still, were able at the time of the sighting) to accept the experience and integrate it into their frame of reference. Where this happens, then the core experience appears to be defined by two things: Information and intentionality. The apparition desires to convey information of some kind, either about him or herself or about the observer, and intends to appear at that time and place and to the observer concerned. The ghost of Hamlet's father, although fictional, is a good example of both these features, and we can assume that Shakespeare (and doubtless many others) recognised the core experience from accounts available to them at the time. We have every reason to be grateful that Annekatrin Puhle has now confirmed this experience on the basis of not merely of a handful of cases but from a vast trawl through the literature.

She goes further, and turns her attention to the meaning of the apparitional experience for the observer. This breaks important ground. In any research into human experience and behaviour it is vital to take seriously what people tell us about themselves is all too often ignored. For example there has never been any shortage of scientists anxious to tell successful mediums that their gifts are either an example of facility in guessing, or of so-called Super-ESP which allows them to pick the brains of sitters and others by telepathy, and operate far-ranging powers of clairvoyance to ferret out obscure pieces of information (to say nothing of using precognition to pick up hints from the future, or using psychokinesis

(unexplained movements by mental force) if they are physical mediums). The scientists concerned, although they have never had mediumistic experiences themselves, claim nevertheless to know more about the subject than mediums who have had their gifts from childhood. The same is true of scientists who attempt to dismiss apparitions variously as hallucinations, epilepsy, psychosis, as the result of expectation and an over-active imagination or, should they accept the reality of the paranormal, as projections from the minds of the living. And the same is true of those scientists who dismiss Near-Death Experiences as aberrations of the dying brain or as the result of the release of endorphins or other substances into the bloodstream or of medically administered drugs (all of which explanations, incidentally, have been found wanting). In none of these instances do the sceptical scientists take the trouble to consult those who actually have the experiences on which they claim such expertise. Fortunately Dr. Puhle does not belong to this brand of scientists. She considers that what people who see apparitions tell us about their experience can throw important light upon the meaning, purpose and nature on those anomalies. Her conclusion, with which I fully agree, is that as with follow-up findings by Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick, Kenneth Ring and many others from those who have had Near-Death Experiences, experiencing an apparition can be a transforming, life-changing experience. She refers to the comfort gained from seeing an apparition of a deceased loved one, and we might expand upon this and mention also the comfort – and the implications for this life – of knowing from experience that life does not end with the tomb.

The great value of this book will be readily apparent to anyone who spends time with it. It opens up the subject of apparitions to further research endeavours designed either to extend her work or to build upon it. It should stimulate discussion, debate and enquiry, and serve to introduce those new to the study of apparitions to the fact that there is strong evidence that ghosts are far more than characters in folklore and fiction. To add to the appeal of the book, not only is a work of scholarship, it makes highly interesting reading. No one who is fascinated by the idea of apparitions will fail to enjoy the many case studies presented in its pages. Dr. Puhle is clearly an enthusiast for her subjects and enjoys

sharing this enthusiasm with others. Like most good books, it therefore can be enjoyed on many different levels, and Dr Puhle has done us all a very great service by bringing it to us. It constitutes a landmark in the study of apparitions and takes its place as one of the most important contributions to this interesting and highly significant field. For many people who like myself, regard the question of whether or not we survive death as crucial not only to self-understanding but to the way in which we live our present lives, the book will become a trusted companion.

Professor David Fontana



Prof. David Fontana.

PART ONE

SEEING WHAT NOBODY SHOULD SEE



Ravensworth Castle in County Durham dating back to Viking times, and in dire need of restoration, has unfortunately become one of the sites for ghost hunters although Adrian spent much of his childhood there and never saw any ghosts. Photo and copyright © Adrian Parker.

CHAPTER ONE

SHAKESPEARE—WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Juliet: *What’s in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
(Romeo and Juliet. 1595. Act 2, scene 2)*

Names come to mean quite different things. Even the name Shakespeare can mean different things to different people. For me (Adrian) growing up amongst the pit villages in Durham, Northern England, Shakespeare means a lesson about transcending class stereotypes. This came after spending my early years in a hamlet with the ruin of Ravensworth Castle as a playground rather than a coal tip, which meant my expectancies were not high when at the age of eleven I joined the local school for the area and we had to write our first essays. The prize essay from one of those pit boys began with the above quotation and it was so brilliant that the rest of the essay became a lesson in humility. Amongst those children was the future rock musician Bryan Ferry who was once described by the press “as an orchid from a coal tip”. The lesson I took with me in my future as a clinical psychologist was that children *can* transcend negative expectations. Likewise, crass and crude expectations dominate the perception of Shakespeare in that there are still those who argue that coming from such a limited background as he did—his father was after all “only an alderman and not a lord” and “he only went to the local Grammar School”—he could never have produced such works.



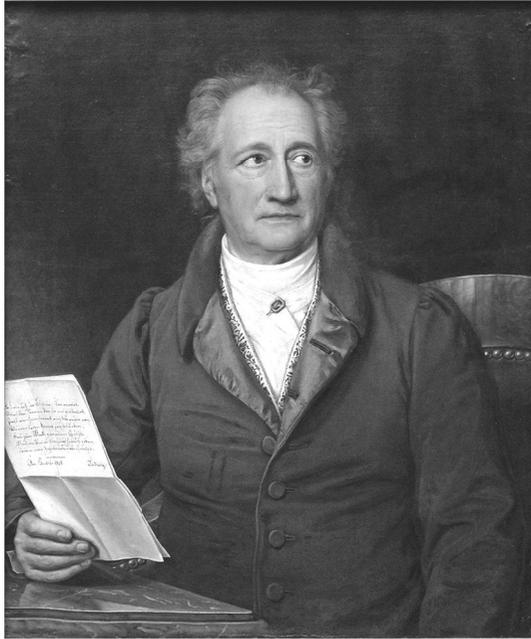
There are some beautiful areas in the North of England: Here we have the romantic Warkworth Castle ruin, where *Henry IV*, act 2, scene 3, plays. April 2008. Photo and copyright © Adrian Parker.

For me (Annekatrin) the names of Shakespeare and Goethe were first associated with my two older sisters, since the oldest was studying and later teaching Shakespeare while the other was an admirer of Goethe. The life dates of my sisters happened to coincide with Goethe's and Shakespeare's dates: the "Goethe-sister" was born almost to the minute 200 years after Goethe while the "Shakespeare-sister" died on Shakespeare's death day and assumed birthday. The deeper meaning of the poet's names unfolded later in life when I started working with research projects about psychical experiences. Here Goethe naturally came first. Although he is quoted to death, the psychic aspect to his writings and personal life is almost ignored. The starting point for my research with historical reports and literature on psychical experiences such as apparitions, hauntings, and poltergeists in the German-speaking area was Goethe's time. During my four-and-a-

half-year project, the collection of relevant literature back to the 1500s amounted to over 2,000 items. As a follow-up, my research journey led me to the United Kingdom since it was reputedly a paradise for ghostly experiences, which proved to be right. So I made a similar collection of numerous but largely unknown accounts, which I found mainly in London and Cambridge. I turned to Shakespeare who was for Goethe one of the spiritual figures whom he admired so much that he described him as “a being of a higher sort”.¹ Goethe thought of Shakespeare as belonging with Raphael and Mozart to a select group of eminent individuals who seemed to be inspired and guided by higher spirits and godlike beings, by demons as he called them (demons in the old Greece were not negatively connoted as today). First a few words about Goethe.



Gerard Soest: *William Shakespeare* (1564-1616). After the Chandos portrait. Oil on canvas, circa 1667.



Joseph Karl Stieler: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). Oil on canvas, 1828.

Goethe (1749-1832), the creator of the masterpiece *Faust*, lived about 200 years after Shakespeare (1564-1616) and inspired his contemporaries so much so that his time is called “Goethezeit” (Goethe’s time). He is obviously closer to our own supposedly rational world, but even Goethe’s works were inundated with spirits just as Shakespeare’s world was populated by spirits and ghosts. This, the magical and psychical world, was perceived at that time as occult (in the sense of being hidden) but it was nevertheless omnipresent and as such exerted a pervading influence on life. This may well sound alien or anachronistic to modern readers but should we possess the curiosity, and perhaps the humility, to take us back into the Shakespearian world then a portal to this world is still provided by his works. We can thus step back in time with this literature and experience scenes from a magic theatre of reality and see how Shakespeare’s words transform the occult into the world of

drama and poetry. But his works are more than just a temporary escape: They succeed in condensing the diffuse and ethereal into such dramatic forms that they create a dynamic and universality of meaning that is not just parochial and bound to his era. Indeed when Goethe in his Age of Reason attempted the same formidable tasks of translating the ineffability of mystic and occult experiences into prose and poetry, he developed his great admiration for Shakespeare.

Frustratingly, as we deepened our knowledge of Shakespeare, we noticed that whereas a continual flow of biographical information exists about Goethe, for Shakespeare it is almost impossible to “meet the artist behind his artistry”. The lack of knowledge about Shakespeare’s life seems to us today unaccountable knowing that he achieved eminence already during his lifetime. The fact is that this was not unusual for those times and we have to accept that there is an absence of original texts, manuscripts, and letters, so that all we are left with are signatures on some official documents. Even if computer-based linguistic analysis has resolved most of the major controversy over the authenticity issue in favour of accrediting Shakespeare, there is still much debate over the possible role of other contributors. The list of potential contributors includes Christopher Marlowe, Sir Francis Bacon, the 17th Earl of Oxford Edward de Vere, and the noblewoman Mary Sidney. What speaks against the influence of Marlowe and even the idea of a collaborative group of authors is the fine and subtle imagery and the clear homogeneity of the style. What does perhaps remain enigmatic is how the intimate knowledge of the courtly and regal lifestyle reached Shakespeare. It should however not be underestimated how much could have been learned through contact with peers, given they had a diversity of social backgrounds. The hallmark of the true artist is surely this openness in seeking the greater commonality in human experience beyond the world of one’s own upbringing. It may indeed be so that in the case of Shakespeare, it was this openness and desire for new experiences that gave rise to the universal messages that transcended his time.

In presenting this literature, our ambition is to share with the reader some of the otherwise forgotten accounts of these remarkable experiences and to relate them to the insights which we

can get from Shakespeare. Many of these insights that have barely been discussed concern precisely this occult world of ghosts. Indeed, if we are looking for a suitable mentor for understanding the well-attested reports of ghosts in a cultural context rather than merely debunking them, then the search naturally leads us to Shakespeare.

In approaching this topic, it is easy to be caught between the extremes of over-ingenuous versus magical thinking. Over-ingenuous critical thinking can lead to an absurd over-belief in contrived explanations. Magical thinking can equally lead to “anything is possible” associations. For example, Shakespeare was baptised on the 26th of April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire and since baptism usually took place three days after the day of birth, this indicates Shakespeare’s birthday to have been the 23rd of April which is coincidental with his death date, the 23rd of April 1616, engraved on a memorial plaque in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. And for those who are interested in remarkable coincidences, it can be mentioned that the number 23 happens to coincide with the dates for major events in Shakespeare’s life. He achieved his initial success as a playwright in the year 1587 when he was 23 years old. This success was due to his first tragedy *Titus Andronicus*, which was received with great acclamation. The first folio edition of his work was published in the year 1623, seven years after his death by his friends Heminge and Condell. If we wish to look for further coincidences then Shakespeare was 46 years old (by doubling 23) in 1611 when the King James Bible was published. On opening this Bible at the page of psalm 46 and then by finding the 46th word from the beginning and the 46th word from the end of the psalm (not counting “Selah”), the intermediate words read “shake-spear.”

This may of course seem to most modern minds to be contrived and trivial, but in Shakespeare’s time there was a belief in a web of connectedness with nature that added meaning to life, so perhaps it is not so strange that there is an interest today in some circles in finding meaning in such webs of connections.

So if Shakespeare is to be regarded as a mentor for understanding the occult, then where did he acquire his knowledge? As far as we know there are no ghostly episodes recorded about the