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Hauntology  
and Intertextuality  
in Contemporary  
British Drama  
by Women Playwrights



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## INTRODUCTION

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**H***auntology and Intertextuality in Contemporary British Drama by Women Playwrights* is dedicated to the study of intertextual aspects of contemporary British drama authored by women, the aspects defined by the cultural significance attached to the figure of the ghost. My primary objective in this book is to argue for the cultural validity of the spectral representations and structures in contemporary drama. The main level on which the spectral figure is investigated is its deconstructive potential for rupture and openness, offering the space in which conceptual and textual Others can emerge. The ghost comes to signify the processes of being haunted by the past, by other texts, and by those who have been marginalised or silenced. The spectral figure operates as a site of intertextual transposition and transference of memory, trauma, melancholia or loss, binding contemporary drama by women to another time and other texts. Hauntology is a theoretical approach postulated by Jacques Derrida in his *Spectres de Marx* (1993) which paradoxically undermines what comes to be considered as scientific or systematic. The term derives its meaning from the combination of the verb “to haunt” and the word “ontology” to signify the extent to which the sense of being is always haunted by something other that makes it impossible to describe, comprehend or enclose existence in definite categories. My major concern in this book is to examine the various aspects of hauntology as intertextual connectives, breaching the self-sufficiency of contemporary drama and destabilising the notions of independent and coherent selves.

The concept of intertextuality holds a significant place in drama by women for its concern with the processes of re-writing and revision. These processes can be situated in the context of feminist critical theory or considered as a more general tendency sometimes attributed to contemporary art – of recycling and repeating existing styles and ideas. They can be per-

ceived as a mark of exhaustion or death or as an evidence of the cultural renewal and the potential of myths and canonical texts for generating new possibilities and meanings. The present study embraces transgeneric intertextualities as well as individual rewritings of texts and myths. Some of them are dedicated to questioning the implications of the discourses presented in the source texts, while others try to explore the transformation of the texts in the context of the new epoch, such as the end of the millennium. By referring to familiar conventions and genres, some playwrights seek to find the language to express alternative subjects and themes while problematising the very possibility of achieving such an expression. All of the texts studied in this book present a valid metacritical position, exploring the possibilities of reaching beyond the source text, formulating a different perspective, creating alternative forms, where so far the subject has been silenced or omitted. They problematise the notion of rewriting and their own relationship to the source text, often conceptualising it as imprisonment or haunting.

Hauntology and spectrality thus provide the conceptual framework in which intertextuality will be considered as an expression of the openness through which the Other can manifest itself. The idea of Otherness can be seen as rendering the self-sufficiency and completeness impossible, tying it back to the past or opening it up for the future. The Other is at once perceived as the return of the one who has departed and the projection of the possibility of its integration or promise of acceptance. The intertextual concept of the ghost will be understood here primarily after Jacques Derrida (2006) as a deconstructive figure, signifying the openness of the text to other texts or to the Other as the repressed or silenced element. Some of the analysed texts are haunted also in a more literal sense by having a figure of a ghost as one of the characters appearing on the stage. Others will be referred to as haunted in the sense of presenting the spectral perspective of the Other – the spectral space or the visor effect. The combination of spectrality and intertextuality will thus embrace the texts in which the relation to other texts is mediated by the figure of the ghost or the spectral perspective and in which such a relation is presented as problematic and troublesome. What can temporarily be subsumed under the provisional term of “haunted intertextuality” will sometimes refer to the texts that seem to harbour a secret from the past text and in which it is possible (or not) to arrive at meaning by deciphering the secret of the source text.

The conceptual framework employed for the exploration of the specific kind of intertextuality defined by haunting is derived from the two crit-

ical texts primarily concerned with the fields only indirectly pertinent to the analysis of literature, i.e. Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's collection of essays *The Shell and the Kernel*. Both texts started off a number of different applications in literary criticism and theory without originally being purely concerned with literary studies. However, both texts were preoccupied from the very beginning with the interpretative consequences of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the figure of the ghost therein. This book will thus refer to the literary potential of the figure of the ghost, spectre or phantom without taking into consideration the original application of the concept in reference to Karl Marx<sup>1</sup> in Derrida's case and psychoanalytic therapy in Abraham and Torok's essays. What is selected from Derrida's work is the deconstructive approach to the figure of the ghost and various consequences of hauntology, including the ethical responsibility for the voice of the Other, acceptance of what is above human understanding and the perception of a text as always haunted, open, undisclosed, which, in particular, refers to intertextual relationships. In the case of Abraham and Torok, I will focus on the interpretative possibilities of the figure of the phantom, particularly in the relationships between texts, sometimes literally parental texts, placing emphasis on the troubled relation to the source texts, conceptualised in the idea of haunting. Abraham and Torok's theory will be also considered in a larger cultural context – that of transgenerational cultural transference of trauma and a need to recover the past accident and secret. This aspect differs from the Derridean concept of acceptance of the ghost's ambiguity and secrecy, since the act of discovering a secret is a form of violence performed on the silent figure of the ghost. Nevertheless, an urgency to listen to the ghost, which seems to be shared by both approaches, in divergent ways represents the ethical concern with the otherness that the ghost comes to signify. While Derrida's reference to Marx will be completely omitted, the psychoanalytic implications of phantoms will be applicable in several texts as they explore the psychological problems experienced by the characters as a result of family secrets or traumas. Therefore, although mostly employed in literary critical contexts, some therapeutic aspects might find their representation in the analysis of the characters' construction especially in the concepts of trauma and the literary implications of the processes of working

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<sup>1</sup> In his discussion of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, Nicholas Royle claims that the text can be interpreted to be as much about Marxism as it is about Christianity, where the ultimate spectrality is represented by the figure of Christ (Royle 2003, 286). Neither of these, however, will constitute a central point of the present discussion.

through and acting out. The present book is thus concerned with the structural consequences of the spectral in drama and theatre. The figure of the ghost functions as a disturbance, disruption, opening or a gap. The theoretical and practical concerns of this book can be broadly located within the field of contemporary literary and cultural theory of deconstruction, post-structuralist aspects of both radical and applied intertextuality, selected concepts of psychoanalytic literary theories, including trauma and melancholia, as well as feminist literary criticism.

In the academic context, hauntology poses a certain problem exposed by Derrida – the one of scientificity. The paradox that Derrida discusses in reference to *Hamlet* is that, although the scholar might possess the knowledge how to address the ghost, he or she will be rather unwilling to admit such a figure within the scholarly field. Attending to the ghost demands a reformulation of presuppositions and accepted methods. In literary criticism, the questions related to scientificity concern the methods of analysing the significance of the ghost figure, acceptance of the openness of texts, as well as establishing the new methods of reading the spectral. In this respect, the methodological difficulty of dealing with a spectral text is akin to the problems of dealing with intertexts; if intertextuality implies the endless and ceaseless exchange of elements and meanings between all existing texts, the task of dealing with any single text is bound to prove futile. To analyse the spectral in texts is always to narrow down its meaning, to play down its significance; likewise, the act of analysing ghostly relationships between texts demands limiting possible connections and effects to a number of aspects, which always involves violence performed on the spectral and its enforced materialisations.

Although the figure of the ghost has been traditionally placed in the past and ascribed to the concept of the Gothic, the present book investigates the aspects of spectrality which are removed from its Gothic and spiritualistic contexts. Rather than assigning the spectral to a specific genre or mode of writing, I approach it as a deconstructive category and a potential aspect of any text or drama. While in current criticism, such as Julian Wolfreys' discussion of the Gothic, the term can refer to a largely dispersed concept of gothicised elements, described by the critic as the spectrality of the Gothic, the present book is concerned with a broader category of haunted texts, seeing the spectrality of the Gothic as only one of possible manifestations of the spectral.<sup>2</sup> The dramatic texts analysed in this

<sup>2</sup> Wolfreys' enumeration of a myriad of possible aspects in which the Gothic's haunt-  
edness is manifested seems to suggest a range of readings that can embrace almost all



book do not form any separate and definable category and each is haunted in a different aspect and manner. Spectrality is thus seen as part of the postmodern and contemporary experience of mediated realities and self-conscious intertextualities.

Moreover, with its various aspects and contexts, hauntology is preoccupied with the manner of coming to terms with death and loss, trauma and melancholia, disrupted or pathological mourning. Hauntology often investigates the very process of dealing with death and loss, showing the instability or sometimes failure of the process. In some cases, the disrupted processes or permanent states of pathological mourning are presented as a general metaphor of today's culture or identity. As Jameson suggests, the spectral enters the present culture through the gaps left by incomplete, pathological or disrupted mourning processes and melancholia (Jameson 2008, 43). In a sense, hauntology also explains the transposition from the anthropological field of mourning and death into the field of literature. The phantom or the discourses of mourning and loss might be employed to show analogies to other conditions and states, such as exile, otherness, gender or sexual difference.

Alongside intertextuality and hauntology, mourning constitutes the third aspect connecting the plays examined in this book. Spectrality is a way of dealing with or the consequence of loss and death, disturbed mourning and melancholia, haunting memories and voices of the past. Therefore, the spectral emerges in these texts when death cannot be accommodated within the cultural framework of burial rituals or when the psychological means of dealing with it fail. Yet death and mourning are almost always placed within the metacultural framework, through the processes of intertextuality or cultural reproduction, both analeptic and proleptic. Characters tend to conceptually inherit their problematic relations to death from their intertextual ancestors. These complex references disperse single literary deaths into networks of relationships in which the original loss is dissolved into disconnected spectral manifestations. Because of this dispersal, the mourning processes can never be completed or healed within the text without the alteration of the pre-text, which is as such impossible. The spectral rupture of the text represents its opening to the voice of the Other, whether the dead, the ghost or the marginalised and

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aspects of spectrality, including the alterity within the subject or reproducibility of images or the return of the past and the repressed (Wolfeys 2002, 12–13). However, as Wolfeys seems to argue, these elements derive not only from the nature of the Gothic as such but the haunted aspect of the Gothic, and thus are shared with other haunted cultural forms.

repressed. From its marginalised and spectral position, the Other manages to present alternative and metacritical perspectives, which force other characters and readers/viewers into self-reflective awareness. Melancholia, which leads to disintegration of self and near-death, is also conceptualised as a possibility of renewal and transformation into something other, struggling against the limits imposed by the original texts.

Notwithstanding the fact that hauntology and its critical literary applications are a relatively recent phenomenon, this book enters the field already occupied by a variety of studies and discussions of spectrality and hauntology, including the deconstructive concepts of the spectral in today's culture. The theory of hauntology has been applied by critics in the analysis of a number of different phenomena and texts, such as music, film, photography, fiction, as well as theatre. Electronic media, i.e. television, computers or mobile phones, which by definition are classified by Derrida as phantom structures, have increased the possibilities of experiencing and representing the spectral phenomena. The new technical solutions employed in visual arts to generate the paradoxical representations of the uncanny have been subject to analysis in the context of Derridean theories<sup>3</sup>. The spectral aspects of contemporary culture and current interpretations of the past phenomena found their way to extensive cultural analysis, for example, in such works as *The Uncanny* by Nicholas Royle, *Phantasmagoria* by Marina Warner, *The Culture of the Copy* by Hillel Schwartz or *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* by Colin Davis. The use of hauntology has been also extended to the acoustic dimension, referring to the notion of being haunted by the sounds/ music of the past<sup>4</sup>. The term itself has been since applied to refer to particular genres of popular music<sup>5</sup>, suggesting a nostalgic return to the past musical trends.

In the field of drama and theatre, the aspects of hauntology and spectrality have been employed to explain a variety of concepts, ranging between more conceptual attempts at defining the nature of theatre, performance and acting, on the one hand, and more specific meanings and themes introduced by the figures of ghosts in drama, on the other. Possession by spirits has been applied in cultural and theatre anthropology to account for the status of a performer and actor and the nature of acting. Tadeusz Kantor's Dybbuk figure represents an attempt at defining the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Wendy Haslem's article on Gothic spectrality in installations and digital projections, "Traces of Gothic Spectrality in New Media Art."

<sup>4</sup> For example, Mark Fisher. "Home is where the Haunt is: The Shining's Hauntology."

<sup>5</sup> Bartek Chaciński. "Co słycać w muzyce? 10 muzycznych słów, które musisz znać."

specific relation into which a performer enters with the character enacted by him or her<sup>6</sup>. The concept of the ghost and its relation to the host have appeared in the theory of site-specific performance by Clifford McLucas and Mike Pearson, who write about the components of performance using the metaphor of haunting, where the performance is represented as a ghost haunting a particular site (host) (cf. Kaye 1996; Lorek-Jezińska 2005ab). Some critics, for example Marvin Carlson in *The Haunted Stage*, argue that theatre as such is more “haunted” than other media and genres, because of the significance of recycling and repetition in the processes of cultural reproduction. Each performance is a return of the past performance, while acting and other components of theatre are always set within the context of earlier performances and theatre conventions. In a slightly different perspective, hauntology has been applied to account for performativity in performance studies, emphasising the openness and internal otherness of each performance, which in turn calls for the redefinition of the performance studies methodology<sup>7</sup>. Some of these preoccupations are also apparent in the drama analysed in this book, particularly in its metatheatrical concerns. However, the main focus is placed elsewhere – on the conceptual significance of spectrality in addressing the questions of identity and representation of marginalised groups and individuals. Although not all dramatic texts examined in this book can be classified as feminist or women’s drama<sup>8</sup>, they search for the means to express the impossibility or difficulty of finding an adequate conceptual space for the representation of the aspects of the Other mostly related to women’s experience. Spectrality paradoxically both offers such a space and signals its inconceivable nature.

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<sup>6</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “The Theatre of Death: A Manifesto.”

<sup>7</sup> This tendency can be illustrated by Benjamin D. Powell’s and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer’s article “On the Haunting of Performance Studies.”

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the book for the sake of brevity and convenience I sometimes refer to the plays I examine as feminist drama or women’s drama although not all dramatic texts offering the spectral perspective in this book are concerned primarily with women’s experience or present any direct involvement in feminist issues. While some playwrights identify themselves privately as feminists, their plays are not necessarily engaged in the feminist debate. Likewise, some of the issues undertaken by feminist dramatists referred to in this book could be classified by some critics as post-feminist. For the discussion of the distinction between feminist and women’s drama see Goodman (1993, 30–37), (1996) and Bassnett (1984), for a more general examination of feminist, female or women’s writing see Moi (1991), and for the debate on postfeminism or postfeminist theatre see Reinelt (2006) and Moi (1990).