

Enter Ghost

by John Olson

I love that moment in *Hamlet* when the Ghost first appears. It seems so real, thanks in large measure to Horatio's sober outlook & initial skepticism. It's really happening. Their eyes are popping out of their heads. And it makes me wonder, how would I react if I encountered a ghost? It would upturn my entire outlook on existence & death. First: holy shit, there is an afterlife! That's the first think I'd think of. Then, what's like, being dead? I thought it would be non-existence, total & absolute. I can't even imagine non-existence. Though I've experienced it already; I was non-existent for billions of years before I got yanked out of my mother's womb into this dubious realm of fools & tyrants, heartaches & derailments. Gotta say though, the drugs are good. How does anyone get through this existence without a little chemical assistance now & then? Religion, I guess. Zen. Zen seems like a pretty reasonable way to deal with the void that underlies all existence. Zen allows a way to draw from it, draw the sweet lucidity of oblivion into the cloudy regions of the mind. Dispel illusions, one's imaginary chains. Imagine, then, what a ghost could tell you. The ghost in Hamlet — Hamlet's murdered father — is not a happy camper, that's for sure. He'd probably be the wrong guy to ask. He just wants revenge. "Doomed for a certain term to walk the night, / And for the day confined to fast in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away." That would make anyone grouchy. Sounds like every shit job I ever had. It's not a good review of the afterlife. Hopefully, if I ever encounter a ghost, it'll be someone like William Blake, or Michael McClure, or Shakespeare himself. So Bill, my first question to you is this: what did you use to write with? A quill? Because those quills look pretty messy. And they don't allow for much margin in the way of mistakes & rewrites. And when Gertrude describes Ophelia's drowning in such detail, how was she able to do that? She must've been pretty close to take in all that detail. Then why didn't she try to save her? Did she just stand there & watch her drown? That's kind of fucked

up. Can you help explain that? It's been gnawing at me. And why do we always imagine such encounters in darkness? What if a ghost appeared in broad daylight? During a volleyball game at the beach, or sitting in a bar trying to drink whiskey, or beer, while it goes right through them making a puddle on the floor. You can't drink as a ghost, but you don't have to shit or piss, either. You don't need to eat, though I've heard the term "hungry ghost," what does that mean? Ghosts in line at MacDonald's? It means beings whose intense emotional needs drive them, even after death, to seek fulfillment for an insatiable longing. I don't think that means cheeseburgers. I think that means one should find fulfillment before you die. Though isn't death the ultimate fulfillment? I won't know till I get there.

