

To the Editor:

**Observations and rejoinder to remarks made by Melvyn Willin in his book review of *Shakespeare's Ghosts Live: From Shakespeare's Ghosts to Psychical Research***

Corrections and Comments on Melvyn Willin's book review of "*Shakespeare's Ghosts Live: From Shakespeare's Ghosts to Psychical Research*" by Annekatrin Puhle and Adrian Parker, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.

As authors we were naturally pleased to receive such a positive review from Melvyn Willin so we hope it will not sound unappreciative to react to what we see as a major shortcoming and a few factual errors in the book review.

Since the book was an enormous undertaking covering the history of psychical research from Shakespeare's time onwards with the aim of illustrating how Shakespeare's insights relate to modern research on consciousness, it might be expected that the review would do justice to this theme. This central theme was however not part of the review. The book was, as Melvyn Willin notes, not intended as an in-depth study of Shakespeare's plays, but it was aimed as the title expresses at highlighting the playwright's ideas about ghosts. It did this by using numerous Shakespearian quotations and discussing their contextual meanings. This was an enterprise culminating in, amongst other things, the concept of pooka (puck or púca) or thought-forms, which is surely highly relevant to any understanding of medium spirits and poltergeist phenomena. It is here we felt that the reader might well have benefited from the expertise of the reviewer but somehow these aspects do not get a mention in the review. Instead space is given to discussing distracting views such as whether or not zombie can be used to mean "mindless people" rather than, as the reviewer prefers, "the living dead".

Melvyn Willin did give considerable time to reading the book for which we are thankful but regrettably he does seem to have become stuck in making questionable assertions about inconsequential details. He says for instance that William Drury's drum is incorrectly given in the plural form. However it is our understanding that the first "spirit possessed" drum was burned and Drury later in life regained the possession of a second one that behaved in the same way. Melvyn also complains of a typo he found in the spelling of his name in the index. We can only say that one of us has her name almost always spelt wrongly in English texts but has learned to be gracious about such things.

Being a little ungracious now, we will point to some major factual errors: Philippus Melancthon is a well-known and highly regarded German scholar, a philosopher, theologian, recognised on a similar level as Martin Luther. He played an essential role in the European reformation. It is therefore incorrect to call him a "more obscure writer" (p.205). Furthermore the book is not as, stated by Melvyn Willin, an English version of the 2009 German book "*Mit Shakespeare durch die Welt der Geister*". Both books have only in common the 30 historical English cases but the case descriptions and, because of later research, the interpretations given to them differ to some extent. More than half of the content of the English book is new, and a large part of the added

new text is a contribution by Adrian Parker. Accordingly the index of the book is new and adapted to the English text. This means that the English book has a much-extended and revised bibliography covering both the historical and modern works. Included here is a unique catalogue of the European libraries where these rare and not easily accessible books can be found.

We do agree entirely with Melvyn on one point: the annoyingly ill-fitting dust jacket. He is welcome to receive the paperback version.

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ANNEKATRIN PUHLE AND ADRIAN PARKER-REED

To the Editor:

### **Response from Melvyn Willin**

Unlike some reviewers (and authors) I would not presume to state that I always “get it right”. However, I believe a touch of humble self-defence may be in order to exonerate myself from some of the complaints voiced. The book’s title *Shakespeare’s Ghosts Live* would not indicate that the “central theme” was “the history of psychological research from Shakespeare’s time onwards with the aim of illustrating how Shakespeare’s insights relate to modern research on consciousness”. Furthermore, I have to differ from the authors’ assertions that “the concept of pooka...is highly relevant to any understanding of medium spirits and poltergeist phenomena”.

My alleged “inconsequential details” are again open to different interpretations...one person’s inconsequential may be different to another’s.

Now down to the “ungracious” comments. The authors state that “Philippus Melanchthon is a well-known and highly regarded German scholar”. I agree with the latter, but not the former description. I do not believe that the average reader (whoever that is, in fairness!) would have heard of this erudite gentleman. The reason for my description of the book as an English version of the 2009 German book *Mit Shakespeare durch die Welt der Geister* was strongly implied by the inclusion of David Fontana’s foreword and if this is not correct, then I take it back with the query why use his foreword in the first place?

I note that in the authors’ remarks about the review my comments concerning a few missing references and faulty construction are not addressed and I still don’t like the expression “a bit more stupid than we are today”!

My overall opinion is still to recommend the book, as my review stated. I shall be interested to read any book by any author that is perfect in every way, whether they are written by Annekatrin Puhle, Adrian Parker-Reed...or Melvyn Willin!

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