

## 92. Incommensurable Intertextuality in Appropriative Literature

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### ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this paper is to propose as well as to appraise a critical approach in the study of appropriative literature. To this end, I proceed with a review of Shakespeare appropriation and adaptation; this introductory section is ensued by discussions on a few crucial concepts, including intertextuality and incommensurability. To support my theoretical approach for the analysis of appropriative literature, I draw upon the works of a number of theorists and philosophers, including Julia Kristeva, Hans-George Gadamer, Joseph Raz, and Thomas S. Kuhn, on intertextuality, incommensurability, and the role of reader in the exploration of relations between texts. To elucidate the hermeneutic approach in this paper, I cite examples from the appropriations of *Hamlet*. The study of intertextuality in the appropriations or afterlives of Shakespeare is the investigation of transposition, re-envisioning or revisioning of his plays. This inquiry is often established upon the categorization of intertextual relations into congruities or transformations between a new work and its intertext or source. The present essay problematizes, as a point of departure, this basic methodological assumption and underscores the significance of incommensurable intertextuality in the study of appropriative literature. Incommensurable intertextuality, as investigated in regard to the appropriations of *Hamlet*, can be categorized into two: (1) those resulting from the reader's suspended judgment regarding the signification of an intertextual relation; and (2) those which emerge as the consequence of a relation, theme, or phenomenon in an appropriation or adaptation which ontologically differs from its apparent equivalent in the intertext.

*Key Words:* appropriation, intertextuality, incommensurability, ontology, *Hamlet*

### Introduction

Appropriation and adaptation, as Hodgdon (2005) underscores, are two recent inextricable notions in literary and dramatic studies; had these notions been current during the age of Shakespeare, the bard would have obtained the status of the master of appropriations and adaptations in his era. Appropriation and adaptation signify the urge to reminisce previous works and characters. This reminiscence, in adaptation, is often accompanied by a conspicuous devotion to the original work; appropriation, on the contrary, is distinguished by a variety of endeavors to recast, to re-envision, or even to disembowel a celebrated literary work. Both appropriation and adaptation, nevertheless, entail the inclusion of contemporary social and historical context into the new productions of Shakespeare. As such, even in theatrical performances of the plays by Shakespeare, authenticity, in the sense of impeccable concordance with his dramaturgic practice, is unattainable. Hutcheon (2006) states that there is substantial affinity between adaptation and appropriation, for both represent the process of re-creation or re-interpretation of a previous literary work within a new literary or theatrical production. Nonetheless, adaptation, unlike appropriation, often refers to a broadly enunciated transposition of a work from one medium (e.g. a fiction or an epic) into another (e.g. a film or play). Transposition in appropriative or adaptive literature may involve the recasting of a previous story from a disparate perspective so as to intimate an unconventional construal of events or characters in a previous work. It may also signify the transformation of

ontology in the sense that the real or historical account of an event or a character's life morphs into the world of fiction or drama.

Kidnie (2005) mentions that any new production of Shakespeare reveals some degree of transformation in the form of subversion, cultural hybridization, or contemporization. An appropriation or adaptation of a play may serve as an instrument for 'writing back' to Shakespeare or to raise issues against a presumed political or ideological system. In the domain of filmic adaptations, Jackson (2000) explains, a lucid distinction can be made between two principal approaches to Shakespeare. Characteristically, efforts are made to be as faithful as possible to the original text of a play by Shakespeare; nonetheless, some directors tend to prioritize the cinematic aspects of a production distinguished by its more emphasis on action and perspicuous shifts in register, setting, narrative sequence, and point of view. In general, most filmic adaptations of Shakespeare cannot exploit more than thirty per cent of the original text. Sanders (2006) contends that adaptation and appropriation are the fundamental constituents of literary creation. Although detracted by some critics as the declension of originality, appropriation signifies the urge to rewrite the past, specifically the literature which has attained canonicity. Shakespeare's plays are among the works which have exponentially been subject to the process of adaptation and appropriation. Among *Hamlet's* famous appropriations are James Joyce's 1922 *Ulysses*, Tom Stoppard's 1967 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and John Updike's 2000 *Gertrude and Claudius*. Two recent filmic adaptations of the play are Kenneth Branagh's "Hamlet" in 1996 and Michael Almereyda's in 2000.

In the following section, I explore the significance of intertextuality in the analysis of appropriative literature, for, as Sanders (2006) and Howlett (2000) underscore, any approach to the investigation of appropriative or adaptive reproductions of Shakespeare is invariably intertextual, for it presumes, at least, an interrelation between not only two diverse mediums of aesthetic expression but two modes of discourse.

### **Intertextuality and Appropriative Literature**

Intertextuality, Orr (2003) remarks, signifies a discourse as well as a practice in modern literary theory which has been construed and applied diversely since its coinage by Julia Kristeva in late 1960s, although Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin must be, according to Landwehr (2002), credited with initiating the concept in his *Problems with Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, published in 1929. Allen's (2000) contention is that the application and interpretations of intertextuality have been so varied that the term defies rigorous explanation and is now as nebulous as other terms, for instance, 'history' or 'imagination', in literary theory. The very idea of intertextuality, according to Still and Worton (1990), which signifies a phenomenon or an undertaking in its recent usage, is as ancient as human literature. Scholars of antiquity were aware of intertextual relations among texts; hence, the emergence of the term can, in some measure, be considered as the resuscitation and theorization of the older practices. Hebel (1991) underscores that although the term intertextuality is not conceptually unprecedented, this does not imply that it has been inconsequential in literary criticism; the term has proved a momentum for the theorization of a salient theme that has been traditionally employed in literary studies: allusion. There are also scholars who argue that allusion is a mere facet of intertextuality, and there are those who claim that the neologism is indeed a theory of allusiveness or that allusion has primacy in intertextuality.

Julia Kristeva is heedful of the ramifications, or, in fact, overdetermination, of her theory which do not accord to her conception of the term; as such, in her explications on the transformation from one sign system to another, for instance, the incorporation of carnival,

scholastic discourse and courtly poetry into a novel, she initially utilizes the term intertextuality, but rather instantly she reminds her readers that as the term intertextuality “has often been understood in the banal sense of ‘study of sources’, we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic—of enunciation and denotative positionality” (1986, p. 111). Gasparov (2010) emphasizes that intertextuality must not be confined to the exploration of allusiveness in literary texts or the phenomenon of recollecting the echoes of previous works in new ones. It is still a momentum against Cartesian as well as Chomskian conception of language. As Eisenhauer (2013) underscores, intertextuality, both in theory and practice, builds upon several philosophies and traditions, and, as such, not only do the intellectual background and concomitants of the notion make it apposite for any mode of comparative study, but it demonstrates how the analysis of intertextual relations between a work and a previous often canonical work is a complicated process. Intertextuality, in general, engenders the possibility of probing a variety of relations between genres, texts, authors, disciplines, and concepts within diverse social, political, and historical contexts and discourses.

### **Incommensurability and Intertextuality**

The ostensibly ironic combination of ‘incommensurable intertextuality’ is not unprecedented. Beautell utilizes the notion of “incommensurable intertextuality” (2000, p. 23) to underscore cultural idiosyncrasies or singularities within a postcolonial literature that cannot, among a variety of cultures and ethnicities, e.g. in Canadian literature, be categorized as congruities and differences and do not succumb to such generalizations as periphery versus center or colony against empire. Bourne-Taylor appears to conceive of “incommensurable intertextuality” (2010, p. 336) as the uniqueness or the conspicuous feature, whether aesthetic or philosophical, that distinguishes a renowned poet such as Mallarmé or Michel Deguy from other poets or poet thinkers. The concept of incommensurable intertextuality in appropriative literature, as I intend to explore it in this paper, necessitates a brief account of the concept of incommensurability.

Pearce (1987) observes that the doctrine of incommensurability, since its early days of inception in the philosophy of science, has involved the question of comparing diverse philosophical or conceptual systems. There has always been a degree of suspicion toward ‘incommensurability’ as an approach which is associated, in the minds of its detractors, with epistemological relativism or even irrationalism. Commingled with misconceptions as to its coherence as well as its strength to resolve epistemological issues, the doctrine has been applied to the study of not only scientific systems but to differing cultural norms, ethical issues, and Weltanschauungen. T. S. Kuhn (1982) mentions that the concept of incommensurability, beyond the domain of geometrical values, was first introduced by him and Paul Feyerabend in 1962. Both philosophers utilized the term in a partially congruous sense so as to emphasize the point that the meaning of scientific terms varies as a consequence of change of the theory which is applied to define the same terms. The corollary is that a given term which is employed within the scope of one theory is not commensurate with the same term with regard to a different theory. For instance, the concept of gravity within the Newtonian physics is incommensurable with Einsteinian gravity. From Feyerabend’s (1987) perspective, incommensurability does not imply untranslatability or the absence of any relation or nexus between two concepts within two different languages or two historically distant epochs; it is a rare phenomenon, occurring when the conditions of meaningfulness for a concept or term within a theory, language, or symbolic system do not allow the utilization of the same descriptive term or concept within a different theory or language. Hence, the term applies, for instance, to the notion of

mechanics for Aristotle in relation to the same notion for Galileo or Newton as well as to the relation between Homeric ‘honor’ or ‘common-sense’ with the same themes used by the early Greek philosophers or by the people living in our time.

Whereas Kuhn (1982) as well as Feyerabend’s (1987) conception of incommensurability appear to be more ontological or semantic, Raz (1986) is more concerned with judgmental dilemmas as incommensurability. People are inclined to eschew comparing certain events and regard them incommensurable when, for instance, they have to decide which profession is more lucrative; they often shun judgments concerning the value of such quotidian activities as sitting at home and watching television in comparison with spending time with friends in a bar; and scarcely do they compare love for one’s parents with love for wealth. In each of these cases there are some merits, proclivities, and cultural differences which cannot be juxtaposed. Incommensurability does not signify absolute indeterminacy, for people make choices when they encounter utterly precarious situations. Any person is eventually able to opt for a choice among a number of possible options with equal value and his decision is not inexorably arbitrary. Yet people are generally concerned about those cases in which a judgment, whether commensurable or incommensurable, is significant or consequential. Further, people change their opinions and sometimes such shifts in people’s judgment prove tragic, for they tend to regret preferring one option to the other. Dilemmas are the consequences of incommensurability.

The term incommensurability has acquired a literature in the works of different philosophers. Raz elucidates that incommensurability is an aspect of the indeterminacy of reasoning to prove that a choice is more preferable or worse than the other. He conceives of the terms incommensurate and incommensurability as synonyms of, and, interchangeable with, the words incomparable and incomparability. In other words, “A and B are incommensurate if it is neither true that one is better than the other nor true that they are of equal value” (1986, p. 322). Smith posits an analogous assertion according to which the suspension of judgment signifies incommensurability; it defines a situation “where the worth of identity X is viewed as neither equal to, nor better than, nor worse than nor on a par with, the worth of identity Y” (2011, p. 24). As the exploration of adaptive and appropriative literature, according to Sanders (2006), involves an analysis of the intertextual relations between a modern text and canonical texts, in the next section I approach the text of *Hamlet* to shed more light on the role of reader and the state of incommensurable intertextuality in the investigation of appropriative literature.

### ***Hamlet* and Incommensurable Intertextuality**

#### ***Hamlet*: The Intertext**

Any person who engages with a literary text is a reader whether he is the critic who is consciously equipped with a critical or theoretical method, the audience who strives to elicit the meaning of a work, or even the author of a text who reads his own work with regard to, at least, literary norms and in juxtaposition with other works in the same genre. Literature is a mode of communication and, in fact, dialogue, and as such, the reader is an interlocutor in this dialogue who cannot remain passive. Only through an active participation on the part of the reader can a work enter “the changing horizon of experience . . . from simple reception to critical understanding” (Jauss 1970, p. 8) What is at stake in this section is that understanding of a text like *Hamlet* which functions as the intertext or source in the exploration of appropriative literature poses specific challenges which have to be addressed very briefly. *Hamlet* appears to have been a problem at least since the early twentieth century. Hawkes (1986) claims that *Hamlet* includes its own contradiction or “*Telmah*” (p. 313) in the sense that any reading of the play can be refuted by an antithetical reading.

Kinney contends that “the meanings of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* are infinite; its significance, inexhaustible” (2002, p. 1). Proudfoot et al. (2011) underscores that *Hamlet*, despite losing some of its popularity, is still Shakespeare’s most debated play.

Gadamer succinctly asserts, “All performance is interpretation. All interpretation is highlighting” (1989, p. 400). In other words, behind every performative art or the reproduction of a play or a film, there is interpretation and an emphasis on particular elements within a work. Any director who aspires to produce *Hamlet*, Wickham contends, has to face two challenges: “the rich confusion of poetic and psychological detail” within the text of *Hamlet* and “the ornate superstructure of critical appraisals that have grown up around it” (1969, p. 208). Before proceeding further, I have to propose a comment on Wickham’s shrewd observations; in fact, one must alter the order of Wickham’s propositions, in the sense that the first challenge, as quoted above, is the consequence of the second. That is, it is the existence of numerous critical opinions that make the play appear to possess a plethora of poetic and specifically, psychological layers. An ideal performance of *Hamlet* is one which concords with our interpretation of the play; this can be observed in Bloom’s conception of Hamlet’s character; he avers that there is a substantial degree of conformity between the actors who play Macbeth, Lear or Othello. On the contrary, each actor’s Hamlet differs invariably from those of others. “The most memorable Hamlet that I have attended, John Gielgud’s, caught the prince’s charismatic nobility, but perhaps too much at the sacrifice of Hamlet’s restless intellectuality. There will always be as many Hamlets as there are actors, directors, playgoers, readers, critics” (1998, p. 413).

It is crucial to mention a few more examples to demonstrate how a theoretical framework molds our interpretation of *Hamlet* as a judgmental basis in the study of appropriative literature and how it affects our interpretation of the intertextuality between *Hamlet* and its appropriation, adaptation, revisioning, or afterlife. In their analysis of Shakespeare’s appropriations, Dionne and Kapadia explain their position toward revisioning and appropriative literature: “Postcolonial theories and literatures teach us that it is those icons of an established cultural authority that, in the symbolic politics of seeking a mode of address outside the paradigm of Western doxa, naturally become the locus of a distant culture” (2008, pp. 2-3). In other words, both of these scholars not only determine for their readers the manner of interpreting certain texts but how they are convinced to observe the world from a postcolonial perspective. These scholars, in their analysis of Kalyan Ray’s novel *Eastwards*, claim that the work is a postcolonial revisioning of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and *Midsummer Night’s Dream* as well as a dialectic between the East and the West, “deflating the stultifying moral codes of the British bourgeoisie” (p. 1). The reader or critic’s frame of mind or Gestalt may be Freudian; that is, he may assume that Hamlet is not, contrary to Charnes’s (2006) stance, entrapped in a world of political tensions but affected by unfulfilled incestuous desires. Lee, in his commentaries on director Kukseo Ki’s second theatrical production of *Hamlet* in 1982, argues that Ki’s adaptation transformed the Shakespearean play into a socio-political drama; as such, “*Hamlet* was interpreted as a tragedy of the madness and terror of society, not as a tragedy of inner instinct and human desire” (2009, p. 135). Lee also conceives of *Hamlet* as a revenge tragedy, explaining that director Kukseo Ki’s fourth version of *Hamlet* in 1990 was a sardonic criticism of Korea’s intelligentsia. As such, in Ki’s 1990 production, “Hamlet was not a prince of Denmark looking for revenge against his uncle but a helpless young man living in modern Korean society” (p. 135). In other words, Lee’s (2009) major assumptions are that *Hamlet* pivots around revenge and incestuous complex and based on this reading, which is quite contrary to the readings of other critics (e.g. Girard, 1986; Goddard, 1951; Kerrigan, 1980), he interprets the intertextual relationship between *Hamlet* and its adaptations. Safaei and Hashim (2012) argue that in order to reach a definite non-relativistic position on the

interpretation of an instance in the intertext in its relation to its revisioning or appropriation, the critic may deem it inevitable to “ignore or marginalize, if not refute, antithetical readings of the same instance” (p. 33). Conversely, my primary contention in this paper is that one has to investigate the state of incommensurability, its varied forms, and the possibility of juxtaposition in the study of appropriative literature. In the next section, I explore this issue further.

### ***Hamlet* and Incommensurability**

Before proceeding further with the question of *Hamlet* and its appropriations, more elaboration on the concept of incommensurability is necessary. As Griffin (1997) observes, incommensurability, on a superficial level, connotes the issue of scaling of two values that cannot be compared as to ‘equal’, ‘less’, or ‘greater’. Yet the question of scaling or comparability can, one may contend, be resolved by reformulating our conception of the scale as ordinal or cardinal for a given value; incommensurability signifies a degree of intrinsic conflict or incompatibility within as well as between ostensibly comparable notions such as happiness, mercy, dignity, justice, or human life. Unlike commodities, for instance, which can be compared with the implementation of a unified monetary system as a substantive supervalue, these abstract concepts are irreducible to a presumed quantitative basis. Hence, the question of incommensurability is not merely one of the homogeneity of values or one of ranking or its impossibility. From a rather analogous perspective, Broom (1997) argues that two objects or concepts under discussion may not be comparable with regard to their attributes which are not essentially or quantifiably measureable; to ask which monument, Stonehenge or Salisbury Cathedral, is more ‘magnificent’ is an instance of incommensurability. A part of this indeterminacy in comparing the two monuments results, on the one hand, from the semantic vagueness of the monadic predicate ‘magnificent’; the categorically aesthetic and architectonic facets of the two buildings contribute to the incommensurability of ‘magnificence’ in the two constructions, on the other hand. In other words, the Stonehenge and the cathedral are not located on a continuum which can render these two constructions commensurable. It is worth mentioning that even the existence of a continuum of comparability does not invariably warrant commensurability; for instance, whereas Salisbury Cathedral can definitely be judged as more impressive than a local church, a chapel, or Bath Abbey, the comparison of the same cathedral with another one, possessing considerable immensity and gothic grandeur, renders judgment, apropos of their impressiveness or magnificence, incommensurable.

Haverkamp acknowledges that the proportion of readings on *Hamlet* is to the extent that any new construal of the play runs ineluctably “the risk of its own belatedness” (2006, p. 171). While acknowledging this observation, I would like to extend my discussions on incommensurability by raising a question regarding *Hamlet*: “What causes, or, who is responsible for, the final scene of bloodshed in *Hamlet*?” This question may appear obvious, yet it is, in my opinion, a valid one with numerous answers and crucial implications. It can be, inter alia, (1) the evil ghost, (2) Horatio and the officers who, mistakenly or justifiably, reveal the ghost’s return to Hamlet, (3) Claudius’s intrigues to entrench his monarchy, (4) Hamlet’s urge for vengeance or his so-called delay, (5) the courtiers’ submissiveness to Claudius’s rule, (6) the political misrule which is initiated by late King Hamlet, (7) Polonius’s insistence on his theory of unrequited love as the cause of Hamlet’s lunacy, (8) two unqualified courtiers, i.e. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who fail to deliver Hamlet to the king of England, (9) pirates who return Hamlet to Denmark, (10) Claudius’s postponement of eradicating Hamlet, (11) Laertes’s collaboration with Claudius to poison Hamlet, (12) omnipotent Providence, (13) Gertrude’s lechery, (14) poetic justice in favor of Fortinbras, (15) theatrical conventions of revenge tragedy in Elizabethan era. My list is not

exhaustive; and one may assert that more sophisticated causes not enumerated here or a convergence or a causal sequence between two or more of the above factors culminate in the last scene of annihilation in *Hamlet*. Yet my argument is that each of these possible replies engenders a perspective through which the reader can appraise a given incident or theme in an appropriation or adaptation of *Hamlet* as congruity or contradistinction, imitation or defamiliarization. To consider all the possible, though antithetical, readings of an incident increases the possibility of facing incommensurability in the interpretation of intertextual relations between an intertext and its appropriations. The differentiation or taxonomy of transformations is not a matter of concern or even terminology, and whether one employs compliance and subversion or imitation and revisioning or en-visioning is not consequential, for as Popper contends, “linguistic precision is a phantom, and problems connected with the meaning or definition of words are unimportant,” for “words are significant only as instruments for the formation of theories” (1972, p. 28). *Hamlet’s* Ghost, in specific, gives rise to a salient issue on which I elaborate under the rubric of occasionality in the next section of this essay.

### **Occasionality and Incommensurability**

Occasionality, as elaborated by Gadamer, signifies “a meaningful element within a work’s total claim to meaning and not as the trace of the particular circumstances that are, as it were, hidden behind a work and are to be revealed by interpretation” (1989, p. 497). Gadamer asserts that a work of art, as some theorists believe, does not possess a transcendental significance; in other words, there are spatial and temporal limitations on the significance of a work of art which can be designated in terms of a work’s occasionality. This feature of a work of art makes it possible for a historian to obtain, via an artistic work, insight into the history of the work. Occasionality is a feature of art which reflects its contemporaneity; it is the ability “of literature which makes it possible for it to belong (*angehört*) to its own time and through which its time listens (*gehört*) to it” (p. 498). From Gadamer’s (1989) perspective, a literary work, such as *Hamlet*, should be viewed, in the light of occasionality, not as a verbatim account of historical events during Shakespeare’s era, but as a work which is imbued with political relevance. A critic may erroneously conceive of a work as a historical document and conclude that Shakespeare, apprehensive of alluding to the controversial issue of Queen Elizabeth’s virginity, leaves unanswered the question of Queen Gertrude’s adultery in *Hamlet*. However, it is a function of literature to engender a space for the readers to be immersed in reflections on various aspects of the work. A work which reveals every socio-political detail is not literature but a history book.

The concept of occasionality is seminal in scrutinizing the ghost as an instance of incommensurable intertextuality in the appropriations of *Hamlet*. Spinrad (2005) explores the beliefs in demons in Shakespeare’s era and remarks that in the treatises on demonology, one can observe a variety of classifications of the spirits, apparitions, and their intents. Hoy provides his readers with excerpts from Lewes Lavater’s treatise on demonology, translated into English in 1572: “evil angles are hurtful and enemies unto men; they follow them everywhere, to the end they may withdraw them from true worshipping of God, and from faith in his only son, Jesus Christ, unto sundry other things” (as cited in Hoy 1963, p. 115). Yates (1979) mentions that James I, king of Scotland, who succeeded Queen Elizabeth in 1603, published his *Daemonologie* in 1587. In his book, King James disserts on specters, demons, and apparitions and expresses his beliefs regarding occult science and the practice of conjuration; it is his conviction that witches are able to see fairies and that conjuration, as a result of invoking the words of God, has the power to raise spirits. Shakespeare’s works, too, reflect the playwright’s obsession with ghosts, witches, and spirits. This obsession is not exclusive to Shakespeare but an aspect of the age of the playwright; for the same reason, one

can observe in his works the reflections of the contemporary Weltanschauung as to ghosts and spirits. Macbeth encounters the witches; Hamlet converses with a ghost; Prospero commands Ariel, his attending fairy, to wreak havoc at sea.

However, to claim that the emergence of a ghost, resembling that of the ghost in *Hamlet*, echoes Shakespeare's play may not do justice to the existence of two incompatible occasionalities. In other words, the ghost in *Hamlet* may be considered, among others, as a revenant returning from the world of the dead with a lucid message for the living (Levy, 2002), as a demon or a specter that appears, with regard to Elizabethan conceptions, before a social or political catastrophe (Spinrad, 2005), or as a metaphysical agent to restore political order (Matheson, 1995). That a lamenting ghost instigates his son to take vengeance in *The Dead Fathers Club* (Haig 2006) and *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* (Wroblewski 2009) can be considered, drawing upon Sanders (2005), as textual haunting, or, the parasitical presence, of the past. Nonetheless, one has to heed that the ghosts in the twenty-first century, because of their distinct occasionality, are, according to Bennett and Royle (2004), ontologically different from the ghosts of the previous centuries. A ghost may appear in every performance of *Hamlet*, yet, as Greenblatt (2003) opines, belief in ghosts has substantially diminished in many nations across the world. The corollary of this assertion is that the specters which appear in the appropriations—as well as in the performances—of *Hamlet* may bear a significance which is not commensurate with that of their Shakespearean prototype. Not only do today's attitudes toward apparitions differ from those in Shakespeare's era, but today's ghosts, according to Bennett and Royle (2004), may represent new phenomena and trends which did not exist in Shakespeare's age; they may imply, among others, the invisible surveillance of citizens, propaganda apparatuses, spectral syndicates for organized crime, religious terrorism and its apparitional leaders, or modern technologies like the Internet or telecommunication systems.

In his analysis of *Elsinore*, a one-man performance of *Hamlet* by Robert Lepage, a Québécois actor and director, Kidnie explains that a “disembodied voice” accompanied with “a white spot” (2005, p. 135) announce the existence of the ghost who enjoins his son to retaliate his murder. My argument is concerned with the ontology of the “disembodied voice” and the “white spot” in *Elsinore*, as an instance. If the phantom in *Hamlet* is a revenant or the concretization of a set of beliefs, whether pagan, demonic or Christian (West, 1955) or if it is a mere representation of Catholic dogmas regarding purgatory (Bevington 2008), then, my primary question is concerned with the signification of the “white spot” (however artistic or innovative it may appear) in a recent adaptation of *Hamlet* and whether these two manifestations of the specters in 1601 *Hamlet* and 1997 *Elsinore* are commensurable; or whether it is possible to compare, in terms of allusion or conformity, the theme of revenge in *Hamlet* with that in 1997 *Elsinore* or in early twenty-first century appropriations of the play (e.g. *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* and *The Dead Fathers Club*) in the age of civil society. I do suggest that along with the investigation of intertextuality between a work and its appropriations, one has to appraise the possibility of juxtaposition between two ostensibly congruous concepts, characters, or events.

## Conclusion

Incommensurable intertextuality appears to be an aspect of appropriative literature; as the intertext is commonly an older work, it has to be noticed that not all concepts or events or characters within the two works can be commensurable. With regard to a text with the complexity of *Hamlet*, incommensurability may appear more crucial. Incommensurable intertextuality, within the scope of this paper, emerged as the consequence of the reader's suspended judgment regarding the signification of an intertextual relation and as the result

of a relation, theme, or phenomenon in an appropriation or adaptation which ontologically differs from its apparent equivalent in *Hamlet*. The scope and facets of incommensurable intertextuality is an issue that requires broader investigation.

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