Marjorie Garber begins her book *Shakespeare’s Ghostwriters* with a provocation that puts her (and by association my) whole project into question: “Another book [or in this case, another article] on Shakespeare?” (xiii). Indeed, observes Michael Bristol in *Shakespeare’s America, America’s Shakespeare*, “the hypostatizing of Shakespeare’s authority has been and continues to be a quasi-religious practice” (10). Bristol attributes this fervor for “Shakespeare” to its inseparability from the institutional networks that regulate and disseminate it, over and over again, in multiple, heterogeneous forms. For Bristol, “what we experience as [Shakespeare’s]
work is shaped by the organization of these means of cultural production” (2). Such a proposition, at the very least, contradicts Shakespeare’s more traditional celebration as simply an idealized artistic genius who is somehow artistically “above” the plays of politics, ethical problematics, and historical contingencies dealt with in his plays and deluging the contexts in which they are performed. Taken to its opposite extreme, such a view can be made to imply that “Shakespeare” is nothing more than a mere effect, specific only to the particular contextual contingencies of any one of “its” given enunciations. Both these opposing poles, if they construe Shakespeare as representing too much and too little respectively, nonetheless point to the seemingly infinite range of signification to which Shakespeare is opened as a result of his hypostatized cultural distinction.

This article attempts to articulate a methodological framework for understanding how Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare uniquely take up/take apart nationalistic uses of “Shakespeare” as a ready symbol of national authenticity, “high” cultural distinction, and even as an alibi for promoting particular ethico-political discourses of “humanity” and “human rights.” That said, most of my observations and examples are applicable beyond the “Canadian” focus of the paper and indeed much of my discussion is framed within a post-9/11 U.S. context. However, delineating the differences between that which is specifically “Canadian” about Canadian institutionalized symbols of cultural authenticity such as Shakespeare and that which is seen as more “universal,” “humanistic,” or “globalized” about those same symbols necessitates a closer look at what is in fact singularly local and/or “nationalist” about any given “universalist” invocation of Shakespeare. The local characteristics of U.S. nationalism—and, importantly, only particular idealized forms of U.S. nationalism and its institutional apparati—arguably are the hegemonic driving force behind current globalization/Empire. Certain American invocations of
Shakespeare, therefore, as I will demonstrate, tend to be synonymous with what is understood to be the effects or phenomenon of the “global.” The specificities of certain globally resonant American adaptations of Shakespeare are thus introduced here in order to contrast them with that which is more characteristically Canadian about Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare; a tactic that further disrupts a universalizing discourse of cultural “authenticity” that is today often deployed as an alibi for global Empire.

The first section interrogates the cultural, ethical and political implications of Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare as they relate to hospitable and/or hostile imaginings of “otherness” within the context of “Canadian nationhood.” The second section investigates some of the major conceptual and theoretical issues at stake in Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare, and unpacks the concepts of the Shakespeare effect, adaptation, and hauntology. Hauntology is a concept coined by Jacques Derrida that I find useful for thinking through the infrastructural limits and (hau/o)ntological contingencies of history and memory inflecting how Shakespeare haunts—or rather lives on—in and through his Canadian adaptations and “Canadian culture” as such.

PART I

*Why Shakespeare Now?*

The ethico-political stakes of contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare are brought clearly into focus in a recent U.S. example which has arguably set the Canadian and indeed global tones for debates about contemporary sovereignty and international human rights. On or just after September 11, 2001, a number of references to *Hamlet* circulated in the international media which inferred that in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, “America” would not act like
“the Hamlet of nations,” meaning “weakly” or inactively by “dithering over details.” While such references are not directly attributable to the Bush administration, in the context of its post-9/11 policies these statements intertextually invoke George Schultz’s infamous 1984 comments on which Bush’s doctrine of preventative war (“the Bush Doctrine”) is clearly based. Schultz, in fact, rehashed his “Hamlet of nations” reference in 2002 for the purpose of urging the U.S. to invade Iraq. What this reference to Hamlet ultimately portends, however, is a blatant disregard for basic human rights and Geneva conventions for the purported “higher” moral purpose of winning a dubiously abstract “war on terror.” This Shakespearean quip, put in the service of American (indeed global) empire, thus calls for a redefinition—meaning a restriction and rolling back—of international human rights and even what constitutes a livable human life from a narrowly right-wing American neoconservative perspective. How can “Shakespeare” stand in for such wrong-headed retributive violence and state terrorism? What are the hauntological/historical remainders contradicting and/or corroborating such universalizing “ethical” evocations of Shakespeare? What promise do Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare hold as critiques of, or corollaries to, such propagandistic purposes to which the playwright and his works are put? As expressions of nationalistic values and the institutions, laws, and citizenship attached to such imagined “ethical communities,” what is particularly “Canadian” about Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare? Could “Canada” be the Hamlet of nations? Wait a minute...wasn’t Hamlet Danish?!

In stark contrast to invocations of Shakespeare’s hypostatized authority as George Schultz’s “Hamlet of nations” quote and its post-9/11 corollaries represent, a number of Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare instead disrupt and subvert such violent and reductive readings of the bard. In fact, the performative nature of such adaptations of Shakespeare belie the
universalizing moral presuppositions of Schultz’s Hamlet reference by demonstrating that Shakespeare can be as *uniquely* applied to the specificities of, for example, Acadian Canadian cultural re-invigoration or First Nations struggles against Canadian neo-colonialist policies, as put into the service of American empire-building as terror war propaganda.

For example, plays such as Antonine Maillet’s *William S* and Daniel David Moses’ *Brébeuf’s Ghost* take on different colonialist specters of Shakespeare which respectively helped to frame different sovereign exceptionalist limitations on early Canadian nationalism which still haunt it today. These plays’ common intervention is to *adapt* one of the most ingrained cultural symbols of Canada’s founding discourse—Shakespeare, and by extension the very institutionalized apparatuses and infrastructures he has both helped to create and been made to represent—in order to re-tool it to the tasks of cultural renewal and reinvention. Thus, while the relative “success” of these plays is perhaps attributable in part to their self-reflexive borrowing of the thematics and organizational structures of Shakespeare, they also redeploy his symbolic effect against one of its most deeply embedded traditional forms—as a symbol of Canadian cultural “authenticity.”

*Authentically Canadian Shakespeare, Authentically Human Shakespeare*

Documents such as the *Massey Report*, the prominence of the Stratford Festival of Canada, and even the ubiquitous circulation of the figurehead of the British monarchy—still stamped on our currency like a paternalistic seal of approval—attest to an enduring Canadian colonialist impulse to define itself as “British North America” in direct relation to “the motherland” and its cultural symbols. This enduring Canadian tradition has long included holding up Shakespeare—often a’top a mountain of tax money—as one of the key sublimated
symbols of western cultural superiority. The dominance of Shakespeare in Canadian culture, however, is arguably a symptom of a wider tacit devaluation of “multicultural” (in common usage, a Canadian code word for non-Anglophone/British) influences as implicitly “culturally inferior” or “in-authentically Canadian.”

Such a hierarchization of what counts more, less or not at all as authentic Canadian culture is problematized, among other ways, by the historically shifting and arguably bankrupt concept of “culture.” A quick scan of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) reveals that culture has been defined in such varying ways as the “high development of personal tastes and refinement,” the social affectations and affiliations of the “élite/upper class,” and more recently simply the specific, if always shifting characteristics of a community or group.4 The older, outdated first and second meanings are clearly invoked with the Stratford Festival which, given the vicissitudes of being a Canadian theatre organization, arguably gets a lot of mileage out of holding up Shakespeare as “élite” culture in order to distinguish itself amongst the competition in relation to a British ideal. Indeed, with “Shakespeare” as their standard-bearer, the Stratford Festival has attracted funding from government sources at a level rivaling all other Canadian cultural institutions. One effect of this practice, however, is that it has helped to hypostatize an institutionally authorized portrait of ideal Canadian citizenship as overwhelmingly white, Anglophone, and of British origin—via “Shakespeare” as one of the most-funded, institutionally favored, and thus unsurprisingly most flourishing Canadian cultural symbols. In short, “Canadian Shakespeare” and all it represents is eternalized by various means as the most privileged and profitable entertainment for Canadians wanting to “hold a mirror up to [their own] nature.”

Another implication here is that such idealizations of Shakespeare as a kind of symbol of good citizenship goes hand in hand with normativizing who is ideally represented by national
discourses of human rights and freedoms. In short, the politics of human rights and freedoms are inextricably tied up with the ways in which “humanity,” far from reflecting transcendental or “universal” human qualities, is instead most decisively imagined and performatively negotiated within and through the discourses and symbols of national “citizenship.” Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* rigorously historicizes the ways in which humanity is articulated and made intelligible through national and international laws, citizenship and institutions. Human rights, she argues, are effectively inseparable from (inter-)national citizenship and/or non-citizenship, outside of which the concept of humanity often becomes unintelligible and inaccessible. On close reading, Arendt’s analysis demonstrates a kind of coextension between citizenship and humanity which refuses authentic origins and transcendental content for either term. She seeks ultimately to reclaim a kind of common humanity that exceeds the limits and exclusions of national citizenship. This includes humanity for those not necessarily interested in becoming “patriated.” In certain ways, however, cultural symbols such as “Shakespeare”—deployed as ideal models of good citizenship, or as nationally-authorized models of artistic “excellence” that Canadians are encouraged to emulate—I argue, in fact become the very “inventor[s] of the human.”

The implications for human rights of this effective coextension between “humanity” and the legal apparatuses and rights attached to citizenship become clearer when one considers the Canadian history of often violent struggles for cultural recognition. These include tragic showdowns such as the Oka and Ipperwash crises, or the ongoing struggle over Francophone-Quebecois sovereignty whose history of violent conflicts and class divisions include the FLQ crisis in the 1970s and the Dispersion of the Acadians in 1755. In short, Canadian citizens are expected to conform to a still largely British-North American cultural norm—one of the most
prominent symbols of which is Shakespeare—or are in danger of having their human rights banned and/or be killed as a result of a neo-colonialist sovereign exception over what counts and doesn’t count as authorized, livable human life and cultural identity in Canada. This means that certain non-ideal/identical Canadian citizens also have less access to human rights as a result of the shortcomings of Canadian nationalism and its most-favoured cultural symbols to be adaptable to the vastly different groups, interests and individuals collectively called “Canadians.”

Shakespeare can thus be understood to be a key site in which the struggle for basic human rights and national cultural recognition takes place. Many Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare, I argue, can be read in this spirit—as an examination of how Shakespeare can be utilized concomitantly to take advantage of as well as to be turned against its more traditional Canadian usage as a western symbol of cultural authenticity and superiority. Moses’ play, for example, demonstrates—via its adaptation and integration of Macbeth’s structure and thematics—how, like a religion or ideology that is held up as having “a functional equivalence to truth” (9), Shakespeare haunts First Nations Canadians, largely as—but not exclusively or reducibly to—the specters of European and British-Canadian imperialism which have traditionally institutionalized Shakespeare—imagined in their own images—as the symbolic equivalence of “high” culture. Eurocentrism’s others, such as First Nations peoples and cultures, are thus interpellated as “lower” culture, in part to prop up the dominant hegemony’s self-imaging by becoming its orienting, “in-authentic” opposite. Shakespeare’s cultural authority, according to Bristol, is “related to the pattern of cultural interests that such authority helps to conserve” (5). By whom, for whom, and in whose interests, then, is Shakespeare still so popular and predominant in the “multicultural” context of Canada? If a certain answer to these questions
seems obvious, the field of Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare has changed and subverted these power dynamics in some intriguing ways, making who properly owns and is authorized to operate the cultural machinery of Canadian Shakespeare(s) much less apparent.

*Leveraging Shakespeare*

Michel Foucault argues that it is perhaps impossible to exist as a subject without participating in the institutionalized biopolitical play of power relations that extend to all aspects of a subject’s day-to-day life. The theatre, movies, books, billboards, internet sites, in fact all forms of “cultural production” which must occupy public space (virtual, physical, or otherwise), find means of being produced, pass censorship laws, gain an audience through (inter-)nationally or publicly funded distribution networks, are all, in one sense, cogs in this wider institutionalized apparatus for producing ethically and politically disciplined subjects. For western subjects—indeed, anyone exposed to the westernizing effects of “globalization”—it is likewise perhaps impossible to avoid some degree of what Bristol calls “erotic submission to [Shakespeare’s cultural] authority” (11). This authority, he proposes, both determines and is determined by the institutional framework of the “nation” by and through which it is made intelligible.

Bristol’s analysis, which is indebted to Foucault’s understanding of power, thus assign a certain degree of agency to the ways in which the power dynamics surrounding Shakespeare’s institutionalization are always *mutual*—i.e., the ways in which power is not possessed but only exercised (if unequally) from infinitely multiple and heterogeneous locations *amongst* its subjects, institutions and technologies. This small opening for subjective agency made possible by the coextension of power with its subjects is arguably the space occupied by many Canadian
adaptations of Shakespeare. Antonine Maillet’s *William S*, for example, achieves its renewal and reinvention of Acadian culture by performatively appropriating and refiguring Shakespeare as a kind of institutionally mediated/mediating metonym—Shakespeare *as* the nation—in irreducibly singular ways.

However, in the so-called “post-national” period of late-globalization—or what many call the post-postmodern era of “utopia”—Shakespeare’s authority can also be understood as operating in a context beyond Foucault’s understanding of power which is focused on modern institutionality. Currently, debates once centred on the disassembling of identity and the disunity of political imaginaries have now given way to current preoccupations with the promise of utopia and more strategic recastings of humanisms and universal politics. That said, and in spite of what has been called the totalizing *post*-national contemporary context of late-globalization/Empire, the “Canadian content” of Moses’ and Maillet’s adaptations of Shakespeare remains an important element in their re-imaginings of more localized cultural identity in and through hegemonic national and international symbols of cultural authenticity. This is because being “ethically” open to singular instances of humanity involves re-member-ing some of the specifically local, as well as uniquely national ways in which “human” rights and freedoms are envisioned, ensured and biopolitically normativized on a day-to-day basis. These include laws and signifiers of citizenship such as health cards, drivers licenses, social, political and economic communities, as well as personal habits, daily activities, cultural practices and identities, the environment, among a myriad other sites and expressions of personal, local, national and global human rights and freedoms. To forget about local and national specificities in lieu of more “universalizing” globalized concepts of humanity and human rights is 1) to effectively erase much of what is singularly *human* about the very people who are most in need of recourse to
rights and institutional protections, such as non-citizens without the right to have rights; and 2) to erase the individual human memories and nationally-sanctioned histories by which our contemporary understanding of “humanity,” if such a totality exists, has long been collectively formed. In these ways, global human rights discourses are irreducibly “haunted” by their singularly national, local, and individual historical enunciations, their limited and exclusionary institutional productions, and their nationally and internationally sanctioned symbols to which they are obliquely or directly attached, such as “Shakespeare.” In short, while globalization has changed the way we think about the local and the national, those latter concepts are still important vectors with long histories that bare closer scrutiny as we daily negotiate our seemingly “globalized” collective humanity.

PART II

The Shakespeare Effect

Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare can be understood to invoke what has been called the “Shakespeare effect.” Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier in Adaptations of Shakespeare define the Shakespeare effect as “[a function of Shakespeare’s cultural pervasiveness as] one of the privileged sites around which western culture has struggled to authenticate and sustain itself” (8).
My intervention here is to rethink their concept in *hauntological* terms to mean the ways in which Shakespeare’s name and/or his “spirit” have become so widely and influentially disseminated in multiple and heterogeneous forms. The spectral effects of Shakespeare, I argue, are in fact what collectively constitute such a “spirit.” Thus, if the Shakespeare effect largely functions in the west and indeed globally as a ready archive of supposedly “high” artistic and cultural references, the field of Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare demonstrates that this is not always the case. The effects of Shakespeare operate by performatively and continuously (re)producing “his” spirit anew in multiple, heterogeneous and unforeseeable ways, allowing him to *live on* in infinitely “adapting” forms. One such form is the myth that the proper name is attached to stable “origins” and a single “author.”

My understanding of “Shakespeare” as cultural effect—a definition clearly indebted to Derrida’s concept of hauntology which I take up later on—I deploy here as a way of debunking a certain conceptualization of Shakespeare as idealized expression of western “high” culture, or as an a-historical enunciation of racial, national, and/or cultural authenticity. Like the concept of “Shakespeare” to which such notions of “high” culture have been attached, the identity politics of cultural distinction, as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues, are themselves merely effects whose quasi-religious force—due in part to a highly developed cultural “taste” for Shakespeare in certain social *habitus*es—have produced hegemonic material *affects.* These include the ongoing affective colonization of First Nations peoples in their own country and even the cultural tensions between French and English Canada. These tensions are complexified by the fact that all of these groups have at various times and in various ways identified with Shakespeare as a symbol of their unique cultural identities—to name only a few of the multiple,
heterogeneous spectral invocations of Shakespeare in the name of a vast array of national, cultural, and global identity politics.

The Shakespeare effect is thus a useful concept for understanding how Shakespeare is so often and easily instrumentalized as a discourse of nationalism and/or any number of forms of identity. One nationalistic example is Britain’s use of *Henry V* as a propaganda film during World War II. That particular film, which stars Laurence Olivier—another idealized specter of contemporary British theatrical “genius”—depicts a conflict between England and France who were, ironically, political allies against Germany during the time of filming. Another level of irony at work here is that Germany is a country in which Shakespeare is embraced as a powerful expression of German nationalism. Yet another tangle in this intertextual web are the resonances and dissonances between Olivier’s film’s propagandistic account of the reign of Henry V and the one in *Holinshed’s Chronicles* without which Shakespeare’s “original” *Henry V* may never have been written. A close, comparative reading of these (at least) two separate military campaigns evoked by these various retellings of Henry V’s exploits is beyond the scope of this relatively short article. However, these few examples of the myriad and often contradictory intertextual plays of meaning at work in any particular enunciation of “Shakespeare” demonstrates the unimaginable and irreducible complexity of such a concept. Thus, holding up Shakespeare to *authentically* symbolize “nationhood” or anything else is an impossible gesture. On the other hand, the richness and flexibility of what is possibly meant by “Shakespeare,” perhaps due precisely to its overuse, in a way helps to open it up to such promiscuous interpretations and instrumentalizations—a promiscuous usage that doesn’t seem to have lessened Shakespeare’s symbolic potency in the least.
Hauntology and the Specters of Shakespeare

In my rethinking of the Shakespeare effect as a “hauntology,” I excavate the latter term from Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*. Hauntology is a classic Derridian “double” gesture that circumscribes, in French, the homonyms *hantologie* and *ontology*, and stages a rethinking of historical inheritance, mourning work and memory. It does this by differentiating between the “spirits” and “specters” of events, persons or concepts. As Derrida explains, “a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back” (11). In other words, a specter is a kind of supplemental concept—or concept of supplementarity—without presence or origins. As such, the “spirit” of a concept was never anything but a collection of multiple, heterogeneous competing spectral ideas and contextual contingencies by and through which it is represented and reproduced. One such contingency is the particular “language” in and through which we understand concepts as concepts.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida cites Karl Marx’s famous quip to Engels that it is “sure he was never a Marxist.” One *hauntological* implication of this statement is that Marx himself isn’t reducible to a simple idea or spiritual ethos ontologizable as either “Marx” or “Marxist.” Marx, in other words, was *only ever* a multiple, heterogeneous collection of spectral parts of his life whose “singularity,” or irreducible individuality, belies the supposed unity of the “man himself.” Hauntology, like Marx’s own work, is thus in direct opposition to a concept like Hegelian universal “Spirit” to which all subjects are supposedly subject and thus their unique individualities transcendentally oriented around the “truth” uniting all universal “I”s in such a global grid-work of being or idealist “philosophy of reflection.” For Derrida, however, Marx’s life and legacy can never be reduced to dates of birth and death, or deduced within a kind of spiritual calculus of universal “being.” Hauntologically speaking, Marx’s “life” isn’t only the
bodily-centred “force” of his being, but also lived in and through his friends and acquaintances, in the virtual spheres of medias like the internet, in the billions of conversations and critiques that he sparked, in the books he authored by himself and with Engels, in the copious texts and materials all written about and through his ideas, in the political activisms he influenced, as well as an infinite array of other spectral forms, none of which can be reduced in- and for-itself as the totality of his “life,” nor quantified in connection to a whole by which one might calculate his “death.” Karl Marx, in short, was always much more and much less than simply the father of “Marxism.” Derrida’s point is that such singular, irreducible lives such as “Marx’s” or “Shakespeare’s” can’t be reductively “ontologized,” dated and localized as identifiable, archivable “truths,” or as such easily “killed off” and buried in the service of a specific agenda. Indeed, do the “spirits” of Marx and Shakespeare not live on—even through their spectral resonances with one another and with their inheritors? And likewise, do they not continuously work on and through us to transform and complexify our relationships with their so-called “original” contributions?

In hauntological terms, the “spirit(s)” of Shakespeare (or the supposed “transcendental signifieds” to which his specters supposedly refer), represent the very possibility of Shakespeare’s living on as a persistent, if irreducibly “open,” concept or memory—but only in and through those multiple, heterogeneous specters which are the conditions of possibility for the lives of spirits. Spirits and specters are thus in certain ways two inseparable sides of the same coin. Derrida asserts throughout Specters of Marx that “there is [always] more than one [spirit of a concept or trace, as there is always more than one specter]…and they are heterogeneous” (Specters of Marx 75). In the context of Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare, this insight immediately brings to mind, among other things, the ongoing debate over Shakespearean
authorship regarding whether or not his plays can be attributed to more than one author, and/or if Shakespeare was the pen name of another writer, such as Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, or Francis Bacon. While such debates often mire themselves in “empirical” claims akin to hypostatizations of what is “authentic” vs. “inauthentic” Shakespeare, hauntology is instead concerned with the “beingness” of such a being as “Shakespeare.” Among other issues, such an approach evokes the ethico-political questions of “for whom, by whom, and in whose interests is Shakespeare being invoked in any given context?” What, in other words, are the many possible ways and spectral forms in which “Shakespeare” comes to be understood and/or “lives on” as such? Likewise, what are the particular limits and exclusions imposed upon his “life” and memory via any given evocation of “Shakespeare?”

Derrida, unpacking the relationship between the signified spirit of a concept like “Shakespeare” and its multiple, heterogeneous specters, explains that what distinguishes the specter or the revenant from the spirit, including the spirit in the sense of the ghost in general, is doubtless a supernatural and paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible […]; it is also, no doubt, the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone other. And of someone other that we will not hasten to determine as self, subject, person, consciousness, spirit, and so forth (Specters of Marx 7).

Neither ontological nor phenomenological, specters (non-material materializations) and spirits (non-phenomenological phenomenalities) collapse the one into the other and thus operate on and at the limits of each other. Specters and spirits thus approach each other’s concepts to the point of being two interchangeable sides of the same coin reproduced in infinitely multiple, heterogeneous ways. This spectro-spiritual aporia has important consequences for thinking
through the ethical responsibilities we have towards others—at least those responsibilities
axiomatic to the ethics of Derridian deconstruction. Being “just” and “hospitable” to the
singularity, or unique individuality of an irreducible “other” such as Shakespeare, for Derrida,
means that we can’t foreclose or “ontologize” his memory once and for all within ourselves. For,
whose spectral memory is exclusively authorized to own within itself the “truth” of such a
widely disseminated spirit as Shakespeare? Yet, for Derrida, our relationship with others always
involves a kind of “memorialization” of, and even “mourning work” for the other in our
memories. This mourning work begins even in anticipation of our meeting the other for the first
time, as a kind of “summing up” or archiving of their life in our memory. While we must guard
against such a reduction of the other to being merely the other for ourselves, our only access to
their singularity, says Derrida, is through a kind of mourning work that in certain ways always
inevitably involves such a reductively ontologizing gesture.

A key intervention offered by a hauntological ethics of mourning and memory, however,
is to leave the other open to and always in question. Thus, an axiom of hauntology is that our
responsibilities to a graspable or unforeseeable “other” are always unknowable outside of our
own singular conceptualization of them. As an approach to “ethics”—the conditions of
possibility for grasping our responsibility to others—hauntology is thus a useful concept for
imagining a relationship to an other who can only ever be opened to as a contingent, irreducible
specter; one among an infinite multitude of such specters. To arrest such a spirit in a museum of
knowledge (say, a “Shakespeare museum” like the Folger library), or within a crypt whose
gravestone demarcates the final date after which our moral obligation to live with and be worked
on by the specter is definitively severed is, in short, doing an injustice to the ungraspability and
irreducibility of the life of that “spirit.” And yet, in spite of the irreducibly complex nature of
those multiple, heterogeneous specters—for example, the ethics and politics of remembering “Shakespeare” for specific purposes and interests—Derrida suggests that they hold out our best hope, indeed our only conditions of possibility for doing “justice” to his “spirit.”

George Schultz’s universalizing ethico-political invocation of Hamlet in 2002 for the purpose of advocating the invasion of Iraq is a key example in need of such an “ethical” intervention. By the end of Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet is doomed to repeat, almost to the last detail, the fate of his father. In fact, a careful reading of those last pages suggests that all of the deaths in the final scenes of *Hamlet* follow an almost prescribed pattern repeating previous “historical events” in the play itself. The type of slow, careful reading of the last scenes of *Hamlet* which I undertake in my endnote is meant to model the type of “justice” (or “great argument”) required of such a complex ethico-political narrative as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. However, such a rigorous critical engagement is precisely avoided by Schultz’s invocation, after 9/11, of Hamlet as universalized symbol of a ditherer in the face of destiny—a calculated, instrumentalized thoughtlessness with global implications which is tragically symptomatic of the current Bush administration’s approach to foreign policy. The “globalizing” force-of-law backing such a reductive adaptation of Shakespeare as Schultz’s, however, has important spectral resonances with even homogeneously “Canadian” adaptations of Shakespeare grappling with what is, on the contrary, Hamlet’s quite complex ethics of “great argument.” However, intellectual “ownership” over Shakespeare, which is implied by Shultz’s moralistic invocation of Hamlet, is directly contradicted by Canadian adaptations of the bard which demonstrate that there are, indeed, multiple and heterogeneous ethical and cultural interpretations and “great arguments” both for and against Schultz’s position evoked in such a Shakespearean quip.

Shakespeare in fact offers a model of ethico-political inheritance in *Hamlet* which strongly resonates with Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* in its feeling of inevitability, yet which
unfolds as a kind of hopeful ethics of intervention after “great argument.” Though the son is not able to escape his father’s historical inheritance, Hamlet’s rigorous, relentless “argument” with his father’s voice behind the mask leads the son to “ethically” intervene in the “just” playing out of the possible future(s) to come of his father’s legacy in the final moments of the play. This ethics of great argument, while fully embracing the “political face” of inheritance and responsibility, if not a preconceived notion of the other’s “Spirit,” is in direct contradiction with an idea of ethics as direct inheritance of absolute morality received, like President George W. Bush says of his “gut instincts,” without thought or question from an omniscient Spirit.

Similar to Hamlet’s is Derrida’s ethics which aims beyond itself in order to keep the very concept of “ethics” open to its unforeseeable possible future(s) to come. His is an ethics of alterity which seeks to remain open to the possibility of being unforeseeably interrupted by the radical singularity of the other from outside our limited perceptiveness and presuppositions, instead of simply imposing our own dogmatic morals and laws of hospitality onto a ready-made concept of the “other.” This directional switch—from an ethical gaze emanating outward from within to an opening to the possibility of being interrupted by otherness unforeseeable in advance from without—is a fundamental feature of Derridian ethics. In this way, Derrida doesn’t foreclose the possibility of ontology—for example, that Shakespeare was born, wrote some world-changing plays, and died—but instead seeks to remain open to what such an irreducible, impossible “ontology” might also be, have been, or become in its possible future(s) to come. Thus, as Simon Critchley explains, hauntology circumscribes a Derridian homonym, namely the difference between ontologie and hantologie, a difference that can only be marked grammatologically in writing, that by-passes phoneticization […] [Derrida claims early on in Specters of Marx that] this hantologie is not only more powerful and ample than any ontology or thinking of Being, i.e. Heidegger’s, but contains within it, as a secondary effect, any eschatology or teleology linked to such ontology […] [Thus,]
ontologie is an apocalyptic discourse on or of the end, whereas hantologie is a discourse on the end of the end. (Ethics Politics Subjectivity 146)

In short, the very possibility of ontology—the beingness of things—for Derrida, is its impossible condition of possibility as a hauntology—the spectrality, conceptual diffuseness, and irreducibility of such a beingness. Ontology thus represents a kind of conceptual closure, whereas hauntology is an opening up of ontology to the multiple, heterogeneous spectral contingencies of which it is comprised and to its possible future(s) to come.

To put this in terms of an “ethics,” the urgency and responsibility we owe to others can never be reduced to moral obligations or “truths,” but must remain “open” and vigilant to what we can’t foresee in advance. We must make ethical decisions—their urgency demands of us a response. However, we must not lull ourselves into complacent or reactionary moralism, or into a prescribed response that foregoes doing sound, rigorous justice to the singularity of such undecidable decisions. Derrida suggests that ultimately we can only ever take “mad” leaps into ethical judgments—indeed, there are no “ethical” decisions which are not also maddeningly complex, and ultimately undecidable ones—but only after doing our “best” to do justice to the rigorous work, unforeseeable in advance, of uncovering the irreducible contingencies of such judgments. We also have to remain open, Derrida says, to the fact that these judgments might be wrong, or might change in the future.

My rethinking of the Shakespeare effect is indebted to such a deconstructive “ethics of alterity” in the ways in which it opens up and adapts Shakespeare’s more traditionally Eurocentric associations to radically other possible specters of what Shakespeare represents or could represent in its possible future(s) to come. If a more traditionally “ontologized” form of Canadian Shakespeare is one “shaped by the organization of [the] means of [his] cultural
production [within the institutional apparatus of the nation]” (Bristol America’s Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s America 2), many Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare—for example Moses’ and Maillet’s—“spectralize” his memory, refocusing on the ethico-political implications of evoking Shakespeare in multiple and heterogeneously strategic ways. The effect is to de-ontologize the “truth” about Shakespeare, and thus open up the possibility of radically “other” adaptations of the playwright’s legacy and works which, by association, represent radically other adaptations of those dominant discourses Shakespeare has come to symbolize, such as Canadian nationalism, citizenship, and human rights.

Adapting Shakespeare, Adapting Ethics

The aspect of Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare that I deal with in this essay are the ways in which they “hauntologically” invoke Shakespeare’s hypostatized cultural authority—an authority that often lends his plays an aura of “ethical” truth which Harold Bloom expresses in heroic, idealized terms as the very “invention of the human.” One might re-read this sentence to also imply “the invention of the humane.” The spectral effect of moral authority at work in any given enunciation of Shakespeare is particularly apparent in the ways in which he is often held up to represent particular ideological assertions about what constitutes proper nationalistic values and the nation’s moral authority over and/or obligations to its citizens, for example, in the work of many “Straussian” Shakespearean scholars.12

Many Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare subvert Shakespeare’s canonical status as almost synonymous with the nation and its cultural values by adapting Shakespeare—often to the point of unrecognizability. Moses’ adaptation of Macbeth, for example, is difficult if not impossible to recognize as such without the author’s own confirmation. This begs the question:
“what exactly constitutes an ‘adaptation’ of Shakespeare—beyond an author’s simple assertion
that he did indeed adapt Shakespeare?” Daniel Fischlin, in his essay “Nation and/as Adaptation:
Shakespeare, Canada, and Authenticity,” defines adaptation as implying the “revision of an
‘authentic’ source” (2). He further distinguishes between what he sees as
two forms of Shakespearean adaptation: the first based on the “Shakespeare effect” that is
a function of Shakespeare’s cultural pervasiveness, in which echoes, resonances, and
direct integration of that effect are in evidence in a given play; the second based on
thematic and formal adaptations of specific playtexts in which the adapted play retropes
the Shakespearean original(s). (2; Note 2)

Such a bifurcated conceptualization of Shakespearean adaptation as Fischlin’s points to an
internal tension within the very concept of adaptation itself—the aporetic non-present presence
of an “adapted” concept (like Shakespeare) which supplementally stands in for, yet ultimately
refuses access to originary meaning. In short, as concepts are always already “supplemental”
signifiers without access to origins in sign-systems of meaning, adaptation is thus from one
perspective already a redundant concept. Or, at the opposite extreme, every concept can be
thought of in a certain way as a kind of imperfect, performative adaptation of its own idealized
conceptual “unity.” As Fischlin and Mark Fortier grapple further towards an adequate definition
of adaptation in their book Adaptations of Shakespeare, they concede that “there is no right name
[for adaptation]. There are only labels with more or less currency, connection to history, and
connotations both helpful and misleading” (2-3), thus choosing to defer (or perhaps to tactically
incite) the current debate over the “meaning” of adaptation and in particular of adaptations of
Shakespeare.
This seeming deferral by Fischlin and Fortier of an “adequate” definition of adaptation, however, is perhaps also a particularly adroit demonstration of how adaptation works—especially given the theoretical problems with discourses of “authenticity” that both critics deal with at length in their book and elsewhere. Adaptation, as a signifier that poses as the merely “supplemental” referent of an “originary” source, thus always already falls prey to the impossibility of its own “presence,” or its always already deferred and contextually contingent signification in a relational sign system of “meaning.” In other words, the concept of adaptation, which hypostatizes the existence of a supposedly “authentic” source such as a Shakespearean play, falls prey to a number of problematics/paradoxes that put into question the very possibility of “origins” or “authenticity.”

For example, Fischlin and Fortier point out that the logic underlying the process of adaptation is problematized by the concept of intertextuality […] developed in France by Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva [which] suggests that all writing, like all cultural production, is an interweaving of already-existing cultural material. In myriad ways, we draw upon what has come before us and exists around us in anything we create. Barthes writes: ‘any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it…the texts of the previous and surrounding culture…Intertextuality [is] the condition of any text whatsoever.’ Other cultural texts are present not only as acknowledged sources or influences but also as ‘a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations’ (1981: 39). Intertextuality implies that all creation is social creation, all production always reproduction. (Adaptations of Shakespeare 4)
This understanding of the semelfactive\textsuperscript{14} nature of intertextuality suggests the impossibility of pinpointing stable, originary meaning in cultural productions that signify the “adaptation” (and thus the “absent-presence”) of an “originary” source.

In simpler terms, Shakespeare’s plays are always already products of an (ongoing) “adaptive process” such that even in their supposed “originary” forms (i.e. the various quarto editions and folio versions of Shakespeare’s plays), they borrow freely and conspicuously from other sources (Fischlin and Fortier 8-11) and further, are always continuously subject to reinterpretation given their particular historical spaces and times of enunciation. Thus, to state that a play such as *Henry V* is “properly” Shakespeare’s is impossible. For example, a number of Henry’s speeches are lifted word for word from *Holinshed’s Chronicles*. Attaching a single authorial name to *Henry V*, therefore, more accurately signifies a highly complex and problematic “consignation,”\textsuperscript{15} or spectrally-contingent archivization of various culturally and historically contingent texts and signifiers, all hypothetically reformed through the effect of one unified “text.”

It is perhaps due to Shakespeare’s highly (re)inscribable status as an “empty signifier” which is nonetheless so massively intertextually riven with heterogeneous cultural meanings and discourses of power that has made “Shakespeare” such an adaptable cultural symbol which Canada—among many other national imaginaries—defines itself in relation to. As Karl Marx famously proposes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*,

the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle
slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-
honoured disguise and this borrowed language. (595)

For Marx, the ghosts of past heroes and conquests are often employed in the service of
“national” agendas that stand in for “barbaric,” fascist and/or capitalist ambitions. The
perpetuation of that “borrowed language” thereby ensures that its own barbarous historical
genealogy will live on in multiple, heterogeneous spectral forms. But what is also fascinating
about Marx’s remarks in the context of adaptations of Shakespeare is the way that Marx
demonstrates his own argument by *adapting* his critique of history from Shakespeare. Thus,
Marx, via his adaptation of Shakespeare—something he has in common with a long tradition of
philosophers, theorists, and thinkers\(^6\)—articulates his theory of the often violent, imperialistic,
hauntological movement of history by borrowing the very Shakespearean robes of those
“barbarous” histories in which to cloak his critique. Such stylish and widely recognizable robes
thus allows him a degree of access to the very inner sanctums of power, there to stage his revolt
from within by adapting the cultural weapons of the “enemy” for use against them.
References


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In 1984, then U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz pushed a policy of “defense through appropriate ‘preventive or preemptive actions’ against terrorists before they strike” which stated that “we cannot allow ourselves to become the Hamlet of nations, worrying endlessly over whether and how to respond. A great nation with global responsibilities cannot afford to be hamstrung by confusion and indecisiveness. Fighting terrorism will not be a clean or pleasant contest, but we have no choice. . . . We must reach a consensus in this country that our responses should go beyond passive defense to consider means of active prevention, preemption, and retaliation. Our goal must be to prevent and deter future terrorist’s acts. . . . The public must understand *before the fact* that occasions will come when their government
must act before each and every fact is known and the decisions cannot be tied to the polls” (George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* [New York: Scribner’s, 1993], 647).


3 The Stratford Festival fashions itself to a large extent as a mimetic twin of its history-steeped English counterpart, and commands a huge annual operating budget, of which more than 4% of its roughly $55,000,000.00 annual budget is provided for by Canadian government grants, making it one of the most highly funded cultural organizations in Canada. The figure came from a Stratford festival spokesman, speaking to a reporter during an anti-poverty protest at the Festival’s gala opening in 2006. The rally was against government funding of the Stratford Festival which the protesters saw displacing funds which would be better spent on the poor and homeless (see CBC news, May 25, 2006 http://www.cbc.ca/arts/story/2006/05/23/protest-stratford-poverty.html). For a detailed account of its budget, see the 2005 Stratford Festival Annual Report, available online at: http://www.stratfordfestival.ca/about/pdf/2005_annual_report.pdf#search=%22Stratford%20Festival%20Annual%20Report%22.

4 Indeed, the field of “cultural studies” has arguably become prominent in humanities departments precisely because of this historical shift in the meaning of “culture.” For example,
in most English Departments in Canadian Universities—once safe bastions in which Arnoldian values regarding “high art” and “good citizenship” were protected and proliferated—this shift has resulted in a decentering of the national literary canon, a throwing into question of the very concept and “artistic value” associated with “literature,” a shift (or rather a pre-enlightenment reversion) to “interdisciplinarity,” and for these and many other reasons, sparked a rethinking of what constitutes an “English (literature) Department” and the activities and productivities that “properly” go on in association with it.


7 The revival of “utopia” and universality in contemporary political and critical theory which has seemingly displaced postmodernism since roughly 1994 (see Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory “Postmodernism”) is perhaps most clearly articulated in books such as Paul Gilroy’s Postcolonial Melancholia and its concept of “planetary humanism,” Judith Butler, Earnesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek’s Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, and perhaps most impactfully Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s Empire and Multitude. My basic argument in this paper is that Daniel David Moses’s Brébeuf’s Ghost can be read as a particularly nuanced early contribution to these debates over the limits and productivities of conceptualizing a universal humanism, but with an acute self-reflexivity in regards to “différence”—or the fundamental ungraspability of the other’s singularity—as opposed to simply respecting “difference”—more akin to a reductive identity politics.

9 See David Hart’s article “Responses to War: An Intellectual and Cultural History” (Available online at http://www.arts.adelaide.edu.au/personal/DHart/Films/HenryVOlivier.html) for an insightful look at how Olivier’s film of *Henry V* was produced under the direct influence of the British government specifically for the purpose of propaganda. The dedication at the start of the film, for example, is dedicated to “the commandoes and airborne troops of Great Britain, the spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture in some ensuing scenes” (Olivier, *Henry V*).


11 In the last violent moments of Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet is suddenly forced, after “great argument,” urgently into action as history insists itself upon him. The hauntological “doubleness” that characterizes almost every scene in the play is especially prominent in this one, as each death seems also to represent a kind of simulacral repetition of—or retaliation for—a previous historical death. Claudius, for example, is killed with poison by young Hamlet who, at the instant of Claudius’s demise, becomes King Hamlet in full war gear. Hamlet, now the simulacral “substitute” for his father, thereby transforms himself into the vengeful vessel of King Hamlet’s Ghost, who exacts “eye-for-eye” revenge against his murderous brother. Laertes, like his father, dies an unwitting pawn of the king, but by Hamlet’s sword (which should have been King Claudius’s, it having been switched at the last moment before the
poisoned sword could be given to Laertes). Gertrude is also killed by poison at the hand of Claudius, a coincidence that likewise resonates as an historical repetition of the murder of his brother. This strange hauntological logic of Gertrude’s death is illuminated by young Hamlet who, bidding her farewell at the end of act 4.3, addresses his mother as King Hamlet. His reasoning is that

Father and mother is man and wife, man

and wife is one flesh, and so my mother. (4.3.53-4)

Thus, the vicious cycle of violence circles back to Claudius, who uncannily re-kills Hamlet Sr. by killing the son (a simulacral “substitute” for his father King Hamlet), and thus also kills Gertrude, his own wife, by mistake, but also as a consequence of her being a part of both Hamlets—the mother of one, and the wife, and thus by renaissance standards, literally the corporal being of the husband. The tenuous separation, or “subtension,” between an “individual’s” corporeality vs. their “subjective” hauntological inheritance, or their “ontological” vs. “hauntological” being, thus momentarilly blurs here for Shakespeare, very much along the lines of Derridian “hauntology.” But at this point in the action, the singularity of young Hamlet’s performative simulation of his father’s ghost asserts itself as an interruption, or “flaw” into the forceful hegemonic ethico-political legacy that has insisted itself upon him as a seeming “substitution.” Fortinbras appearance at the end of this scene entwines these deaths even more deeply with the “barbary” of the national historical record. King Hamlet’s expansion of Denmark’s borders through the killing of King Fortinbras of Norway, however, is suddenly set “right again” when Hamlet intervenes in the playing out of his father’s insistent historical legacy by lending young Fortinbras his “dying voice” (5.2.298) in support of his succession to the elective monarchy of Denmark, thereby ending the border dispute between the two countries.
See, for example, David Lowenthal’s *Shakespeare and the Good Life: Ethics and Politics in Dramatic Form* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997). Lowenthal is a Straussian scholar who, like other prominent Straussian critics of Shakespeare such as Allan Bloom, Harry Jaffa, and Howard White, reads Shakespeare’s works as serious ethical and political philosophy containing wisdom for educating the reader about what is “true” in regards to morally “good” individual and national life. Leo Strauss famously defended the Platonic idea of the “noble lie” and has been linked as an intellectual influence to far right-wing political thinkers such as Paul Wolfowitz.


See Barthes’ “From Work to Text” where he discusses his neologism “semelfactive,” which is taken from “sema (Greek) = sign; semi (Latin) = half; factio (Latin) = making – suggesting that the reading of ‘text’ is largely sign production” (1473).

See Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* for an in-depth discussion of consignation.
Peter Stallybrass, in his essay “Well Grubbed, Old Mole: Marx, *Hamlet*, and the (Un)fixing of Representation” further examines the ways in which Marx’s text seems to borrow directly from *Hamlet* in its critique of history (as represented by Hamlet’s father, the “old mole”) and particularly Napoleon Bonaparte. Marjory Garber, in *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers*, also links Marx’s “Eighteenth Brumaire” (and indirectly, Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” and more directly Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*) with Shakespeare’s English history plays, particularly *Julius Caesar*. She also points out the “insistent presence of the theatrical metaphor” in Marx’s essay, and his construction of the historical record as a farcical tragedy.

This is similar to the way in which Shakespeare’s Hamlet refers to Fortinbras’s soldiers as “fight[ing] for a plot” (*Hamlet* 4.4.9.5), a play on monarchic ambition seen as a kind of farcical tragedy in which the “plot” *materializes* itself into the eventual grave plots of the soldiers who are insisted upon by the hegemonic historical discourse to obey and fight.