

The Simpsons' Shakespeare: Hamlet Today. Possible Meanings and Consequences of a Parodic Appropriation.

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Introduction

The *Simpsons* is the title of the 22-year-old, extremely successful animated sitcom created by the American Matt Groening, and produced by Gracie Films for Twentieth Century Fox. It features funny yellow-skinned characters who represent social stereotypes. The main characters are the members of a typical American family, living in the village of Springfield – site of a nuclear power plant. This family consists of Marge, her husband Homer, their three children – Bart and Lisa, both attending elementary school, and little Maggie –, and their two pets, a cat and a dog. Besides being very popular¹, *The Simpsons* is also culturally strong, as the steep rise in the number and variety of scholarship about the show has clearly demonstrated².

The cartoon has been even used to exemplify the thoughts of the most prominent philosophers in the world, from Aristotle to Nietzsche and Heidegger. Moreover, there are several books which uncover the

¹ Suffice it to mention that a 2006 survey on American people reported that the names of the yellow members of *The Simpsons* family are better known than the five fundamental First Amendment freedoms (McCormick 2006).

² See Alberti 2004, Keslowitz 2006, Delaney 2008 and Turner 2010.

insightful reflections on the many aspects of American and Westernized society that can be found in the sitcom, also commenting on the way the sitcom itself affects the society it is depicting (see White and Holman 2011). Also, there are important works on the literary aspects of the sitcom, primarily about its post-modernity, clear in its use of parody. As Linda Hutcheon states: «The modern world seems fascinated by the ability of our human systems to refer to themselves in an unending mirroring process» (1985: 1)³.

The Simpsons have, however, attracted only scattered attention in the field of Shakespearean studies (see for example Fernández 2005: 314 and Purcell 2009: 112-113). This is surprising, mainly because the tradition of Shakespearean references in the long-running sitcom is rich and thought-provoking. This is suggested by the fact that this topic is widely discussed on the web, both by 'connoisseurs' in academic blogs and web-sites⁴, and by 'amateurs' of Shakespeare⁵, who post, comment and discuss *The Simpsons'* episodes in which the Bard or his plays appear.

Through the analysis of *The Simpsons'* version of *Hamlet*, and through a reflection on the relationship between the «cultural fields»⁶ of Shakespeare and the *The Simpsons*, this paper illustrates how Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been formatted for contemporary audience, and suggests the possible implications of this interaction in both fields: what is implied by this particular trans-medial transaction of the Bard's work? What is implied in the use of the Bard as a cultural icon in the sitcom?

³ See for example Henry 1994, Weinstein 1998 and Kippen 1999.

⁴ <http://transmedialshakespeare.wordpress.com/2011/03/18/the-simpsons-and-shakespeare-love-affair/>, web (last accessed 03/03/2012).

⁵ <http://thatguywiththeglasses.com/blogs/entry/ghostbusters-the-modern-day-hamlet>, web (last accessed 03/03/2012).

⁶ The notion of cultural field is borrowed from Bourdieu for Shakespearean studies by Sonia Massai, this concept implies that «Shakespeare can best be understood as the sum of the critical and creative responses elicited by his work» (Massai 2005: 6).

Shakespeare and The Simpsons, why not?

The masterpieces of the Swan of Avon and the hilarious stories of the yellow characters of Springfield only apparently belong to different and distant dimensions. The triumphant animated sitcom, indeed, shares with the Bard more than one feature, primarily its status as a worldwide icon, thus a global phenomenon. That Shakespeare's *afterlife* turned the Bard into a sort of brand so that one can rightly speak of the existence of a 'Shakespeare logo' comparable to Nike or Coca-Cola is undeniable today, and many scholars have demonstrated it since the 1990s (see, among others, Bristol 1996, Hodgson 1998, Lanier 2002 and 2007). As early as 1964, Christian Deelman, while reconstructing the first Shakespearean Jubilee of 1769, defined the event as the beginning of 'Bardolatry', i.e. the religion of Shakespeare.

Something very similar can be stated about *The Simpsons*. Just a year after their first appearance on television, Herry Waters described the sitcom as «a breakaway ratings hit, industry trendsetter, cultural template, and a viewing experience verging on the *religious* for its most fanatical followers» (Waters 1990: 272, my italics). The fact that the series is a powerhouse and a money-making industry, is self-evident. Suffice it to say that the yellow-skinned family deserved a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2000, that internationally *Simpsons. The Movie* (2007) was a box-office success, that there are innumerable gadgets of the show characters, and that, as stated above, it also provides a field of research for scholars.

Furthermore, *The Simpsons* and Shakespeare as the Globe's playwright have in common the fact of dealing with a similar means of communication. Eminent Shakespeare scholars defined the theatre of Shakespeare a mass communication medium, Paola Pugliatti, for example, wrote: «In Elizabethan England the theatre represented for many, from court to commoners, a crucial opinion-making medium, intimately interwoven with the social, economic and political features of the age and therefore a phenomenon whose impact on the construction, or enforcement, of ideology cannot be overlooked» (2010 :5), exactly as that of television today. That what people watch and hear on

television does affect their attitude towards reality (way of life, politics, opinion on news items, and so on) has been widely discussed⁷.

As a consequence, a further feature shared by Shakespeare's plays and *The Simpsons'* episodes is the wide spectrum of their audience and, thus, the multileveled kind of reception to which they respond. Indeed, Karma Waltonen and Denise du Vernay are right when they observe that «just as Shakespeare wrote under the constraints, attitudes and expectations of his time, so do the writers of *The Simpsons*» (2010: 188). This statement leads us to at least two additional observations: first of all it is interesting to highlight that in a book boldly called *The Simpsons in the classroom*, about how to successfully integrate the sitcom in the lessons of high school and college teachers, which is published after many academic studies about the cartoon, still there seems to be the need to justify the idea of introducing a pop-cultural issue into the education system. Secondly, and more importantly, it is worth underlining that the best way to legitimize a still un-canonized cultural expression is the time-honoured one of co-opting Shakespeare — mainly but not only in the Anglophone world⁸. This happens because of the cultural value of Shakespeare as an icon. As Douglas Lanier states: «Shakespeare symbolizes high art in general» (2007: 15).

This practice is evident in the book. In the preface, the authors specify that to really understand the series, one should have a solid cultural background, which includes Shakespeare (Karma Waltonen, Denise Du Vernay 2010: 4). Moreover, they write: «Some students, when they hear *The Simpsons* is on a syllabus, assume they will be in for an easy class and an easy A [...]. They might need to be reminded that Shakespeare was once 'popular culture', too» (*ibid.*: 6). This mirrors the general assumption that Douglas Lanier acutely describes in his book on Shakespeare and modern culture:

⁷ On this topic see Iyengar - Kinder 1987, Moy - Xenos - Hess 2005, Compton 2008, Ortvad 2009, Baumgartner - Morris 2006.

⁸ The literature on this topic is wide. For a seminal work see Dobson 1992.

Popular culture [...] is aesthetically unsophisticated, disposable, immediately accessible, and therefore shallow. [...] By contrast, Shakespeare is aesthetically refined, timeless, complex and intellectually challenging [...]. The 'and' in Shakespeare and popular culture marks not just a link but a distinction. This drive to keep *Shakespeare and popular culture* apart is shared by both those who lament that popular culture has been displacing our cultural heritage, and by those who champion popular culture as the people's literary canon. (2002: 3)

Indeed, in the book by Karma Waltonen and Denise DuVernay, in the chapter devoted to the development of critical thinking one reads:

Teaching critical thinking and analysis through a familiar medium is not 'dumbing down' the curriculum, as we have heard from instructors from the old school, but rather it serves as an exercise in having analytical skills, preparing students to apply these skills to the humanities, and writing through the lens of these new insights. Suddenly, Shakespeare isn't as intimidating as he used to be. (*ibid.*: 112)

Culturally, this has an important democratic effect, since Shakespeare «is part of an Englishman's constitution», as Jane Austen wrote, and it has been demonstrated that in England at least, the social distinction between those who know Shakespeare and those who do not, thus between those who access high culture and those who do not with the cognate social consequences, begins at school⁹.

⁹ This concept has been stated by Helen Nicholson in her conference paper "'This Island's Mine': Citizenship, Britishness and Theatre Education", given at the Local/Global Shakespeares conference, held in London on 11-13 September 2009.

Shakespeare and The Simpsons: a long ghost story

The Simpsons are, in Harold Bloom's terms, haunted by Shakespeare, just as our culture is. The name of the English playwright is present since the second episode of the series (but the first regular one), entitled "Bard the Genius" (2, 2, 1990). It appears as "Shakespeare I-XV", in the spine of a volume which is on the bookshelf of the rich library of a school for gifted children, which Bart happens to attend after secretly replacing his IQ test with that of his brilliant school-mate Martin Prince. To corroborate the thesis of this paper, it is very interesting to point out that once Bart is asked to choose a book among the many on the bookcase, he takes a cartoon, to the embarrassment of the teacher, who tries to persuade Bart to choose something else (there are *Dante's Inferno*, *Plato*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Life of Leonardo* and many others), while snatching the cartoon out of his hands, wondering how it could happen that a cartoon was there. The situation satirizes the unjust but widespread attitude of teachers and academics towards what belongs to pop-culture, such as cartoons, commonly considered the low aspect of culture that must be subordinated to high culture.

Shakespeare is also present in some episode titles which echo the titles of his plays, such as "Much Apu About Nothing" (23, 7, 1996) where the name of the (stereotypical) Indian market owner of the sitcom replaces the noun "Ado", "Rome-Old and Julie-Eh" (15, 18, 2007) a word game based on the plot of the episode, which revolves around the contrasted love between the old Abe, Homer's father, and the younger but not so graceful Selma, Marge's sister, and "A Midsummer's Nice Dream" (22, 16, 2011), which bears the triple plot of the Shakespearean *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Moreover, Shakespearean quotes are frequent, chiefly made by the character of Sideshow Bob, a (self-proclaimed) cultivated man (contradicted among other things by his habit of checking Shakespearean quotes in Wikipedia), who works in the field of television. Eventually in the series, he becomes a criminal and is imprisoned. In a "Star is Burn" (18, 6, 1995), even the Springfield's trunk Barney quotes a line from *Othello* ("To be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast", II.iii), when he surpris-

ingly participates in a film festival with his own black and white work on the terrible life of an alcoholic. In doing so, he does not use Shakespeare in an art-for-art sake manner, but functionally, to express himself and describe a concrete and contemporary social problem. To use Terence Hawkes's words, he «means by Shakespeare» (1992: 3).

Most interestingly, in some cases Shakespeare is shown as a character in the very form of a ghost, in the special episodes made by the series for Halloween. They are called "Treehouse of Horror" and distinguished by a Roman number. In "Treehouse of Horror XIX" (4, 20, 2008), Shakespeare appears in the "Celebrity Heaven", where he and many other pop-cultural celebrities, such as John Lennon, are revolting against the unpaid exploitation of their image. This funny idea acutely mirrors what Michael Bristol accurately and critically demonstrated in his book on the canonical status of the Bard:

Shakespeare has made the big-time. No less than The Beatles or Liberace, Elvis Presley or Mick Jagger, Shakespeare is big-time in the idiomatic sense of cultural success and widespread notoriety. Not only has he achieved canonical status, Shakespeare is a contemporary celebrity. (1996, blurb)

These spirits are all completely white, with the exception of their heads, still yellow, and mirror their globally known icons. Shakespeare wears a Renaissance suit and John Lennon is on board the famed yellow submarine.

The plot of this episode revolves around a group of managers who do not want to pay VIP image rights and thus convince Homer to kill some celebrities, because, as they say, he seems to be talented for it. In a previous Halloween episode, "Treehouse of Horror III" (5, 4, 1992), Shakespeare is a zombie walking through the corridors of Bart and Lisa's elementary school, in the proximity of the library, together with the zombies of the American President Washington and of Albert Einstein. Homer shoots the playwright saying the typical sentence of horror films: «Shows over Shakespeare». The Bard falls down, and with his head turned to the audience asks himself: «Is this the end of

Zombie Shakespeare?». That was not the end of Zombie Shakespeare, and it never will be, because, as Sideshow Bob reminds us in another episode, the Bard is immortal — and reception theory explains to us that he is immortal also thanks to this cartoon.

The most important evidence of the influence of Shakespeare in the cartoon are the episodes which bear clear allusions to Shakespeare's plays. In "For Great Women and a Manicure" (20, 20, 2009), for example, there is a part called "Lady Macbeth", in which Homer and Marge are no more the father and mother of a contemporary family, but play different roles. They both work in a theatre company, currently producing Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. From this metatheatrical perspective, *The Simpsons* provide a contemporary reading of the Shakespearean play¹⁰. Marge is very ambitious, yet she is the troupe's washer woman and her husband Homer is a humble actor with a ridiculous part in the production: one of the trees in the forest. Thus she pushes Homer to kill other actors, in order for him to gain the title role and to be judged as the best actor. Marge/Lady Macbeth is finally killed by her sense of guilt, since she is haunted by the spirits of all the people she made Homer kill. In the end, Homer is alone on the troupe's stage and his wife proclaims he is now the one and only actor who can play the protagonist role in all the plays written by the Bard, but Homer, overwhelmed by the idea of reading more Shakespeare, commits suicide. This parody is only apparently desecrating. Once again, Shakespeare has been used to speak to a contemporary audience, Homer has actually done what he overtly declares to dislike, i.e. reviving Shakespeare. The same premise informs *The Simpsons'* parody of *Hamlet*.

The Simpsons' Hamlet

If among the English writers of the past William Shakespeare must be considered the most "anxiety-inducing of all" (Corcoran 2010: 2-3), *Hamlet* must be assigned the same leading role among his works. In his fundamental book *Shakespeare our contemporary* Jan Kott wrote:

¹⁰ For a good and clever analysis see Antinora 2010.

The bibliography of dissertations and studies devoted to Hamlet is twice the size of Warsaw's telephone directory. No Dane of flesh and blood has been written about so extensively as Hamlet. Shakespeare's prince is certainly the best known representative of his nation. Innumerable glossaries and commentaries have grown round Hamlet, and he is one of the few literary heroes who live apart from the text, apart from theatre. His name means something even to those who have never seen or read Shakespeare's play. In this respect he is rather like Leonardo's Mona Lisa. We know she's smiling even before we have seen the picture. [...] It is not just Mona Lisa that is smiling at us now, but all those who have tried to analyze, or imitate, that smile. (1991: 47)

Coherently to this idea, *Hamlet's* parody according to *The Simpsons*, under the subtitle "Do the Bard Man", is embedded in the episode "Tales of public domain" (2002), which suggests that the Renaissance play, as Kott sharply states, can be considered as a story of public domain, that is to say both known by and belonging to the people, and thus to the masses too. In this episode, Homer gets a notice from the library that he still has a book of classic tales that is years overdue. He takes the dusty volume from a shelf and reads aloud to Bart and Lisa the stories of Ulysses, Joan of Arc and Hamlet. Through the metatheatrical technique which features the sitcom, each tale is told in the form of a parody, where the main characters of the series take the roles of the famous stories. Since they are featured as contemporary society stereotypes, this fact easily endows the story told with modern-day meaning. Furthermore, coherently again to what Jan Kott wrote about the play of the Prince of Denmark, *The Simpsons' Hamlet* is informed by the most known critical apparatus on the play.

First of all, Homer introduces the play telling its name and author, «*Hamlet* by William Shakespeare», and immediately after the 'sacred' work is exposed to the words of the irreverent Bart, who states: «Dad, these old stories can't compare with our modern super writers. Steven

Bochco¹¹ could kick Shakespeare's ass». Through these comic words, Bart indirectly hints at a parallelism between today's television writing and Renaissance theatre writing, which is rightful and proper for the reasons advanced above. Lisa, his intelligent sister, tries to interest him by saying that the story begins with the murder of the protagonist's father. To this information, Bart replies: «Cool. Does he get to marry his mom?». Homer answers to his son: «I don't know but that would be hot». Obviously, here there is the parody of the endless criticism, at the basis of Laurence Olivier's (1948) and Franco Zeffirell's (1990) films on the play, that reads the character of Hamlet through the pattern of the Oedipus-complex, which has been correctly described as Freud best known concept and the most repulsed one (De Berg 2003: 78-83). This exegetic line is used at the beginning of the cartoon parody.

Indeed, when Homer reads: «Once upon a time there was a young prince of Denmark», we are shown Bart in the role of Hamlet, sleeping in bed, and on the wall of the bedroom there is a sign that reads «Danes Do It Melancholy», a comic sentence that also refers to the sexual and psychological connotations of the story, corroborated by a painting hung on the wall representing the wedding of Gertrude with Claudius and a mortified and moped Bart/Hamlet in the background. As stated by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Ernst Jones, among others, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may be said to live a reawakening of the Oedipus complex after his mother's marriage. Both the fact of considering sex melancholy, that is to say as a way of rejoining the origin, and the representation of the sorrowful reaction to the new couple, not only achieve comic effects of their own but they also become satirical in relation to the critical notes just mentioned. Moreover, in the series the character of Bart, whose name is a telling anagram of brat (Korte 1997), has a conflicting relationship with his father, who frequently gets angry at him and tries to choke him. This is particularly congenial to this oedipal interpretation of *Hamlet*, and bridges the gap between the past

¹¹ Steven Bochco (born 1943) is an American television producer and writer, author of great hits which include *L.A. Law* and *NYPD Blue*.

of Shakespeare's story and the present of the audience's existence, making these family dynamics meaningful for our time.

Homer takes the role of the father's ghost. We watch him entering the room to ask for revenge through the wall and producing the green slime which unequivocally reminds us of the famous green ghost Slimer, featured in the movie and eventually television animated series called *Ghostbusters*. Homer, as a *Simpsons* character, shares with Slimer the inclination to gluttony and this fact is used to make a parody of the Shakespearean lines of the father's ghost, when he tells his son he is «for the day confin'd to *fast* in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purg'd away" (I.v.11-13, italic mine)». Precisely, when Homer says «Yes I have returned from the dead», Bart replies «Looks like you've returned from the Buffet», which has an ironic effect if one thinks of the Shakespearean lines quoted above. Consequently, the ghost tries to choke him, but he cannot because of his 'aerial' substance.

After a one minute re-enactment of the murder, where we see Moe/Claudius put the poison in Homer/old Hamlet's ear, the rest of the parody is quite exclusively centred on the banquet scene. The metatheatrical scene *par excellence* in the Shakespearean canon, becomes, in this parody, a way to criticize contemporary television, mainly TV cabarets, a frequent target of satire in this animated series. The Simpsonian show man, Krusty the Clown, plays the role of the leading actor of the company invited to court by Hamlet. As a typical stand-up comedian, he makes a fool of a member of the audience, a Viking, sitting up front — thus using the improvisation abhorred by Hamlet — with a politically uncorrect joke: «And if your idea of a first date is burning down a village you just might be... a Viking!». This modern pattern of comedy has the effect of linking the courtly situation with the television entertainment today. Since, as it has been widely stated, in *Hamlet* Shakespeare explores the nature and power of drama, through *The Simpsons' Hamlet* we are invited to explore the nature and power of television.

When Marge/Gertrude praises the oblivion brought about by the jesters, when Bart satirizes the suspension of disbelief at the basis of so-

liloquies, and when Krusty the Clown, before performing what Hamlet asks to perform, warns the audience saying: «Now we would like to warn you that our performances tend to make audience members blurt out hidden secrets», *The Simpsons* provide a sharp satire of television, where programs are rarely made to rouse people's consciences, or to reflect upon reality, but are more commonly planned to provide a fruitless escape from reality, a Freudian consolation for the misery of life. Instead, *The Simpsons* promote and are an example of a television whose task is, in the words of Hamlet, «to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature» (II.ii.17-19) for an awakening of society.

Through the show, Claudius — played by Moe, who in the series is Homer's friend secretly in love with Marge — is unmasked. It follows a fast and long chain of deaths, which differ in manner and causes, more or less evidently, from those of the source text. According to Gerard Genette (1982), the modification of the conclusion is the most manifest kind of modification in an adaptation. My idea is that these departures from the Shakespearean text are made to highlight a contemporary interpretation of the play. Lisa/Ophelia dies when she declares that nobody will drive her crazy. Immediately after this statement, she begins to sing, to jump on the table and meets her death jumping out of the window. We can assume she drowns, because at the beginning of the scene we were shown a moat around the castle, but Gertrude does not report it as in Shakespeare, where Ophelia's drowning happens offstage as well. Lisa, the feminist little girl, plays Ophelia underlying what feminist criticism says about this character: «She has been shaped to confirm to external demands, to reflect others' desires» (Dane 1998: 406), she lacks her own identity, but her madness and her final choice to die are seen as self-sure and autonomous acts, «Ophelia's choice might be seen as the only courageous — indeed rational — death in Shakespeare's bloody drama» (*ibid.*: 423). In *The Simpsons'* parody, the girl's death precedes her father's death, thus the interpretation of a deliberate independent action to be free from the impositions of other people is even more believable. And the death of all the other characters are shown as completely irrational.

In Gertrude's bedroom, Hamlet, scolded by his mother for running around with a sword in his hand, kills Polonius while stabbing the curtain to discover who was hiding behind. Before dying, as in the theatre of the absurd, Polonius, played by the coward Chief Wiggum of Springfield, declares that he was hiding for fear of being stabbed. Finally, he asks his son Laertes to revenge his death. This last role is played by Ralph, Wiggum's son in the sitcom, tearful and definitely not clever – may be a way to recall the interpretations of Laertes as a weak sole, usually deduced from his crying words commenting his sister's death (Stone 1995). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are played by Carl and Lenny, Homer's humble colleagues, hence the word game with their names in the parody: «Rosencarl and Guildenlenny». They both die in an absurd way, poisoned because they touch each other immediately after saying that since Claudius brushed their body with poison, they were potentially lethal. Then Ralph/Laertes, asked by Claudius to kill Hamlet, stabs himself without a reason and falls to the floor, thus Claudius exclaims: «Oh Boy, did I bet on the wrong horse». Then, Bart stabs Claudius and is about to go away and celebrate. But he slips on blood, and exclaiming «[b]loody floor!» he dies. Marge/Gertrude has an equally ridiculous death: she commits suicide because, otherwise, she should clean up the bloody and messy room. There is a, once again contemporary, reflection on female roles in society: they are usually still domestic.

From this conclusion we get the clear idea of a series of reasonless deaths, of a feudal world more than of a Renaissance one. Bertolt Brecht, who adapted and discussed the play many times, underlined this fact. Hamlet is not the scholar of Wittenberg, but a feudal prince. Indeed, in this Simpsonian parody we are shown that hung on the wall of Hamlet's bedroom is a pennant reading "Feudalism"¹². *The Simpsons'* Hamlet does not support the New Philosophy. *The Simpsons'*

¹² Consciously or unconsciously, this interpretation of Hamlet, as a man capable of the illogical brutality needed for kingship in a feudal age, mirrors the Brechtian one (see Heinemann 1996).

parody of *Hamlet* is, therefore, what Linda Hutchen calls parody: «[R]epetition with critical distance» (1985: 6).

When the story telling ends, Lisa defines *Hamlet* «the greatest thing ever written!», but Bart rebuts the statement and describes the play as boring. In the end, indirectly pointing out the importance of rewritings and of reception to hand down culture, Homer states: «Son, it's not only a great play, but also became a great movie, called *Ghostbusters*.» At this point, all the family starts dancing on *The Ghostbusters* sound track. The accuracy of this last statement is not so important, and indeed it seems difficult to deny and, all the same, to accept¹³. Anyway it is a way of presenting *Hamlet* as belonging to a contemporary appealing genre, as a ghost story, and a funny strategy for mediating the cultural distance of the Bard.

Conclusions: The Simpsons up to high culture, Shakespeare back to the people

This paper has suggested that Shakespeare according to *The Simpsons* is a topic worth investigating. Recently, insightful studies on the reception of Shakespeare have invited us to leave behind the old question of the existence of an objective and authentic Shakespeare and conceive the Bard as «a series of culturally specific, multiply-mediated» entity (Lanier 1996: 188), as a «fluid» (Bryant 2002) and ever changing “cultural field”, modified by its “instances”, that is to say by its interpretations and adaptations, since “the work is susceptible to change through production” (Kidnie 2009: 68) and through other kinds of appropriation (Lanier 2002). As an instance, and indeed a very visible and global one, of the Shakespearean canon, *The Simpsons' Shakespeare* is going to influence its interpretation.

¹³ A convincing explanation of the possible relationship can be found in a blog-post called “*Ghostbusters, the modern-day Hamlet*”, <http://thatguywiththeglasses.com/blogs/entry/ghostbusters-the-modern-day-hamlet>, web (last accessed 03/03/2012).

The analyses of *The Simpsons' Hamlet* has demonstrated that, through the cartoon, the play circulates in our society bearing the critical apparatus on the work, and suggesting one possible modern meaning of it, giving input to see it from a contemporary perspective, and also presenting it as something easily enjoyable. Shakespeare is used by *The Simpsons* as an engine of cultural appropriation (Dawson 2002), through which one can reflect upon the modern world. All this bridges the chronological distance between Shakespeare and today's audience, and also the unjust sociological distance between Shakespeare and the masses. People on the net discuss the Shakespeare they find in *The Simpsons* and thus — consciously or unconsciously — contribute to keep on the Shakespearean canon in the multimedial era, through its circulation in multimedial channels.

Ultimately, *The Simpsons' use of Shakespeare* has a double and dichotomic effect. It has an elitist effect, which gives *The Simpsons* the deserved status of high (or at least worth studying) culture and, together, it has a democratic effect, which helps to hand down Shakespeare's plays from generation to generation and to make them meaningful not only within the ivory towers of high culture, but also among the people, that is to say among those for whom they were originally written.

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