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Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare

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Desmet, Christy, Natalie Loper, and Jim Casey, eds.

Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare.

New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. Pp. xxi, 312 + 8 ill. ISBN 978-3-319-63300-8 (hardcover) €114.39.

There is a history to be written of the reception of Shakespeare adaptations over the last fifty years or so. It would likely begin with a traditionalist dismissive disapproval, then move through grudging acknowledgment, categorization, nomenclature, and gatekeeping, an engagement with post-structuralist theory—especially Deleuze and Guattari—an expansive understanding of cultural evolution aligned with neo-Darwinism, and a move beyond narrowly dramatic or literary adaptation into myriad forms of popular culture. There would be an expansion of the definition of “Shakespeare,” as in Graham Holderness’s touchstone in *The Shakespeare Myth*: “For every particular present, Shakespeare is, here, now, always, what is currently being made of him” (Manchester University Press, 1988, xvi). Certain metaphors would twist through this history: is Shakespeare the roots and trunk while adaptations are the branches and offshoots, or is Shakespeare a rhizome, like a field of potatoes, with no hierarchy or centre? Some of these steps in scholarly understanding are more or less settled; others not so much.

Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare is a recent collection in this history, part of a book series called Reproducing Shakespeare with a dozen titles also part of this history. *Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare* itself has several overlapping foci. As its title suggests, the collection is interested in questions of identity, fidelity, and inclusion and exclusion. Following on Daniel Fischlin’s collection *Outspeares*, as several of the contributors acknowledge, many of the chapters focus on Shakespeare in new media: television, popular film, graphic novels, and so forth. Jennifer Hall discusses various twitter accounts that go under the name of Shakespeare (@shakespeare, @shakepearesong, @shakespeareays). Finally, the book arose from a conference session on “Accidental Shakespeare,” which the editors define as “Shakespeare as an excrescence, something extra rather than the essence of an artwork, but also Shakespeare as something that happens outside or in addition to authorial intention” (19).

The collection also divides into case studies and theoretical explorations. For those interested in forms of new media and especially the particular works examined, the case studies will prove interesting. In these chapters, as the editors

note, there is an emphasis on new versions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. Among the instances, Brandon Christopher touches on *Kill Shakespeare*, a series of graphic novels in which Juliet and Hamlet are a romantic couple; Jim Casey discusses the Japanese anime cartoon *Romeo x Juliet*; and Kristen N. Denslow traces the “meme” (small but distinct references) of *Hamlet* in American television shows such as *Six Feet Under*, *Sons of Anarchy*, *Lost*, and *Gossip Girl*. There are also discussions of James Cagney, Anthony Burgess, and Baz Luhrmann, as well as a presently *de rigueur* piece on Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More*.

Of more general interest are the theoretically oriented chapters. Central to the theoretical discussion are the Introduction, Christy Desmet’s individual contribution, and Douglas Lanier’s Afterword, in which he applies ideas he has expressed previously to the chapters that precede. The first theoretical question is one that is more or less begged by the Introduction: do new media change anything essential to the picture of adaptation or do they merely rearrange pre-existing furniture? Shakespeare in new media is obviously a current and relevant topic, eye opening for those narrowly invested in literature and drama, but it is not clear that the basic frameworks developed in the recent past for understanding adaptation are altered by this topic in any essential way. The second question, explicitly broached by the collection’s title, is how to reconcile “is” and “is not”: Are they an alterity, so that something is either one or the other? Can something be a mosaic of the two? Can something be inextricably both at once, so that “is” and “is not” form a new kind of category, something in two opposing states at once, as in quantum physics? This question rests in part on a definition of Shakespeare: is Shakespeare a text, an author in either the traditional or Foucauldian sense (invoked here by Lanier), or as Holderness has formulated it, whatever is done in that name? Lanier calls his version of this latter expansive definition the Shakespearean rhizome, of which Shakespeare’s texts are just a part. Moreover, the idea of “accidental Shakespeare” expands this rhizome beyond what is done in the name of Shakespeare to the unintentional, that which is done without invoking the name of Shakespeare. This is a striking idea. In a biological understanding of adaptation there is a widespread dismissal of intention, or intelligent design. This dismissal might need relaxing in the age of the Anthropocene, and certainly cultural adaptation is not strictly the same as natural selection. Nonetheless, approaches in general have most likely heretofore overplayed the role of intention in cultural borrowing and reworking.

There is a fear sometimes expressed that too expansive a notion of Shakespeare will fatally undermine the cohesion of the field of study. Lanier expresses such misgivings. He tries to put some order to the field by invoking the somewhat discredited notion of fidelity. Every adaptor, he argues, feels they are being faithful to what is essential in Shakespeare, though they feel free to be unfaithful to the inessential. This fidelity, he argues, is to Shakespeare as rhizome rather than to Shakespeare narrowly as text. Nevertheless, Lanier's proposition is dubious: Could someone not see what is nonessential in Shakespeare as interesting and worthy of being developed? Would such a work not be an adaptation of Shakespeare? Moreover, do not the notions of fidelity and infidelity leave us within the realm of intention? Perhaps what is needed is an intrepid openness to expansiveness, if that's where thinking and analysis take us. Such an openness would still allow for analytical distinctions. It just wouldn't foreclose on exploration.

It is an interesting collection that spurs such questions and debate.

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Donlan, Thomas A.

The Reform of Zeal: François de Sales and Militant French Catholicism.

St. Andrews Studies in French History and Culture 9. St. Andrews: Centre for French History and Culture of the University of St. Andrews, 2018. Pp. iv, 144. ISBN 978-1-907548-16-1 (paperback) n.p.

The Reform of Zeal is Thomas A. Donlan's first published book. A teacher at Brophy College Preparatory in Phoenix, Arizona, Donlan holds a PhD in History from the University of Arizona and is the author of the article "Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary: Witness to a Catholicism of Douceur" (De Sales University, 2017). *The Reform of Zeal* is part of a much larger series of monographs and studies by English-speaking scholars on the French-speaking world: St. Andrews' Studies in French History and Culture. It is intended for scholars of François de Sales.

In his introduction, Donlan notes that the link between religious conduct and nonviolence during the French Wars of Religion has not received sufficient