Calbi, Maurizio. *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

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Maurizio Calbi's *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century* appears on the threshold of adaptation studies. Calbi patterns his work from studies of the many late-twentieth century Shakespearean film adaptations. His book draws theoretical breath from W. B. Worthen's concept of the destabilizing, ephemeral nature of performance and Peter Donaldson's claim that contemporary Shakespearean films reflexively display adapted incarnations of media just as much as they display Shakespeare. Yet Calbi's specific analysis opens the door to radical new guests/ghosts of Shakespearian adaptation from the past decade, including non-English language films, twitter feeds, and multicultural and multimedia encounters. Calbi frames this new generation of adaptations as uniquely "post-cinematic" (Calbi 2013, 3) or disseminated, compared to the "relatively placid" (2) adaptations of the late 1990's.

Calbi first takes readers from the more comfortably Anglophone Shakespeares — *Scotland, PA*, the BBC *Shakespeare Retold Macbeth* — to the more unfamiliar territory of lesser-known or non-Anglophone films: *The King is Alive*, *Souli*, and *Sud Side Stori*. Indeed, Calbi's investigation perhaps reaches its most compelling point when he combines his interest in postcolonial retellings of Shakespeare with his book's Derridean framework. In the context of postcoloniality and cultural confrontation, intellectual discussions of dislocation, translation, and hos(ti)pitality reveal their concrete, political exigency. *Spectral Shakespeares* concludes with three chapters that consider issues of remediation and multimodality through, respectively, cinematic and digital appropriations of Shakespeare in Alexander Fodor's *Hamlet*, Klaus Knoesel's *Rave Macbeth*, and *Such Tweet Sorrow*. It is this unique focus on the intersections between multicultural and multimodal Shakespeares that sets Calbi's book apart as an insightful, original contribution to adaptation studies. Calbi makes readers remain uneasy with his Shakespearean specters. His initial reading of twenty-first century Shakespeares as "fragmentary" and multiple does not simply leave us with friendly ghosts at textual play (2); instead, he posits the current intersections of global/local, homely/foreign, and connected/disconnected in new media Shakespeare as inequitable, disturbing contact zones.

With the groundwork having been laid by deconstructionist theory and previous adaptation studies, Calbi could thankfully dispose of outmoded debates about "pure" or original Shakespeare in his introduction and move quickly into what the concepts of mediality and alterity mean for current adaptations, rather than taking up too much of readers' time arguing for his scholarship's very existence. His insightful analysis of his chosen texts demonstrates their value to future scholarship. Of particular importance to scholars who study Shakespeare outside of media and adaptation studies is Calbi's argument that certain adaptations go beyond merely interpreting or putting their own spin on the adapted Shakespearean text: instead, they recreate it (8). For example, Calbi's second chapter makes the provocative claim that *The King is Alive* reveals and recreates *King Lear* as "essentially an ensemble of fragments" (8l, emphasis in original). In other words, the future — in this case, current and future adaptations of Shakespeare across new mediums — fundamentally (re)create the textual past. This stance may appeal to readers interested in the connections between the Shakespearean text and its historiography, which of course will always already be in flux.

Calbi's focus on media in itself is a rich avenue for an application of Derridean hauntology to Shakespeare: media are both embodied and disembodied, material and ephemeral, and often both meticulously produced and endlessly reproduced. Media is both an amorphous, dislocated body and, as Calbi argues, a dislocater that sets our own bodies out of joint and subverts humanist notions of an autonomous, corporeally unified subject position (13). This focus on re- and dis-located bodies re-emerges in Calbi's first chapter, where he ties *Macbeth*'s carnage to issues of meat-eating and vegetarianism in *Scotland, PA*. This relocation of human bodies to animal blurs the human/nonhuman boundary. In his analysis of *The King is Alive*, Calbi charts how *King Lear* speaks through the characters of the film, possessing their bodies and creating a sense of "dispossession" (44). This inhabitation of the present by the specter of the past occurs through prosopopoeia, a rhetorical practice where one speaks as another, absent person; Paul de Man and Derrida famously situated prosopopoeia as the figure of reading through its appeal to an invisible, absent audience and its use of the past to inhabit, or haunt, the present. In Calbi's reading of *The King is Alive*, Lear's act of speaking through current actors thus figures and disfigures Shakespeare and his spectators. Further, Calbi performs an act of critical dis- and re-location of political bodies in his emphasis on the films *Souli* and *Sud Side Story*. Calbi moves Shakespearean criticism away from its Anglophone center toward what is considered the global periphery: Africa and Italy's immigrant community.

Calbi's reading of *Sud Side Story*, in particular, contemplates the position of the contemporary spectral bodies, those of Nigerian "guests" in Italy's polity. *Sud Side Story* adapts *West Side Story*

to Italy's Berlusconi era, just as *West Side Story* appropriated *Romeo and Juliet*. The reiteration of a cross-cultural star-crossed love unveils political tensions within the Italian community's hos(ti)pitable treatment of the Nigerians. While the film portrays identity as fluid, Calbi claims, pious appeals to polite multiculturalism are shown as ineffectual. Calbi's interpretation of *Sud Side Story*'s adapted balcony scene is particularly illuminating. Toni and Romea (the Romeo and Juliet of the film) wordlessly interact in the scene through body language. Calbi frames this unspoken scene as a conscious citation of silent film conventions, an "archaism" that stands in for a Shakespearean past (93). Not only do these contemporary adaptations cite earlier cinematic Shakespeares, but they also cite the past-ness of early cinema as a spectral figure of the Shakespearean text. Shakespeare therefore operates as a spectral figure for a generalized literary, filmic, or narrative past that new, present media recreate.

A radically different *Romeo and Juliet*, *Such Tweet Sorrow*, occupies Calbi's concluding chapter. Like *Sud Side Story*, though, this Tweet-speare reflexively cites itself and the conventions of social media formats as a medium. For example, in a cultural parallel to endlessly citational lolcats, Juliet is a teenage "Twihard," an obsessive fan of a literary work that has also certainly been dramatically (re/dis)possessed and disseminated by social media participants. Additionally, rival Twitter followers position themselves as #TeamCapulet and #TeamMontague (139). This citationality parodies both social media itself and overwrought criticisms of social media as a signifier of cultural decline. The immediate response by bloggers and critics who have debated whether this was "Shakespeare," or an unfortunate production, less consciously paralleled the "flame wars" of social media culture. Calbi unpacks moments when fragments and older incorporations of the Shakespearean text peek out from the new form, for instance, in Juliet's bold sexual awakening, which is simultaneous with her increased twitter-literacy (147), and in Mercutio's "larger than life" social media persona (149). The audience response to *Such Tweet Sorrow* marks the problem of Shakespeare's presence/absence as both infinitely perennial and infinitely participatory in the social media sphere. Calbi marks the re-inclusion of fragments from the Shakespearean text itself by the production's followers, as well as the call for an even more radical retelling of the text by the online campaign to save Mercutio (154-55). Calbi cleverly positions the role of Twitter in this production as *pharmakon*. Calbi's analysis of the *pharmakon* recalls Derrida's famous essay, "Plato's Pharmacy," in which a *pharmakon* acts as both medicine and poison. Likewise, Calbi argues, social media introduces a participatory connectivity that acts as an addictive, sticky web for its users.

Calbi reacts to *Such Tweet Sorrow* with a slightly more skeptical tone than he shows in his film criticisms. He takes a more critically conservative stance by returning to the question of

authenticity that he subverts in his previous chapters. Yet this platform and others in the social media sphere will surely be the new nexus in which similar critical questions of spectrality, remediation, and authenticity are posed over the next several years, perhaps even to the extent that all cinematic Shakespeares, even at their most spectral or peripheral, will also seem "placid," stable, and central by comparison. I predict that Calbi's concluding chapters will seem prescient as the spectral Shakespeares of new media will soon begin to haunt the thresholds of our scholarship in droves.

References

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