

BOOK REVIEW

Mikaela Warner, University of Georgia

Shakespeare and Girls' Studies. Ariane M. Balizet, Routledge Studies in Shakespeare. New York: Routledge, 2020. xii + 178 pp. \$160 (cloth); \$48.95 (paper); \$44.05 (e-Book). ISBN 978-1-138-55429-0; eISBN 978-1-315-14892-2.

In an opportune installment of the *Routledge Studies in Shakespeare*, Ariane M. Balizet triangulates appropriations of Shakespeare through pop culture, specifically American girl culture. Balizet calls our attention to the most popular Shakespeare adaptations of the past thirty years, many of which feature girls as the protagonists, the target audience, and the creators themselves. *Shakespeare and Girls' Studies* showcases how Shakespeare appears in girl-centered media, often further entrenching ideas of traditional girlhood. Balizet also attends to the ways media aimed at young people exposes them to the cultural capital of Shakespeare. Balizet posits that Shakespeare in girl media encompasses many facets, including required reading, an exploration of desire, a site of humiliation, and an opportunity for transgressive adaptation.

Balizet theoretically expands on Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Doug Lanier's ideas of adaptational rhizome and purports that the concept of a "girl" can be one such intersecting rhizome within Shakespeare Studies. By examining the narrowness of expected girlhood, and the many young people excluded based on race, gender, sexuality, and disability, Balizet examines how some appropriations of Shakespeare hegemonize girlhood while others carve subversive space to rewrite what girlhood can look like. She thoughtfully limits her exploration of girl media to recent decades, from 1994 to 2018. Each of the four chapters following her introduction focuses on a particular medium: film, television, young adult fiction, and web series. A final chapter considers the future of Shakespeare and Girls' Studies.

Balizet's introduction effectively situates Girls' Studies in the last thirty years against the political backdrop of abstinence-only sex education and Common Core standards in U.S. school systems and the dismantling of the welfare state. This context builds a useful foundation for Shakespeareans and adaptation scholars who are new to Girls' Studies, an interdisciplinary field rooted in Women's Studies, Media Studies, and Education. For readers who haven't enjoyed *Gilmore Girls* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Balizet includes helpful summaries and analysis. Addressing filmic adaptations on screens big and small, Balizet's analysis tends to focus on plot and dialogue utilizing a Girls' Studies approach rather than a Film Studies one.

Balizet continuously teases out the nuances of critical differences between adaptation and original text, without bogging down her analysis in a search for Shakespearean “authenticity.” Rather, Balizet perceptively reveals how the threads of traditional girlhood are woven through Shakespeare media, largely focusing on how Shakespeare interacts with young adult romance and sexuality. While this is not the only topic she covers, virginity, dating, and heartbreak are central generic concerns of hegemonic girlhood and where Balizet’s most salient insights are found. Balizet establishes a sensitive and thorough discussion how violent misogyny controls girls’ bodies in topics such as sexual healthcare, sexual assault, and rape.

Balizet shows a particular attentiveness to the young people often excluded from Shakespearean adaptations of girlhood, asserting that most of girl media in the last thirty years has produced an archetype of a Shakespearean heroine who is largely straight, wealthy, and white. In her second chapter, Balizet succinctly analyzes *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) for the formation of the fragile, virginal, white girlhood of Bianca contrasted with Gabrielle Union’s character Chastity. Later in the fourth chapter on YA fiction, Balizet highlights one exception to this trend in Cat Winter’s 2016 novel *The Steep and Thorny Way*, an adaptation of Hamlet that centers on a biracial teen girl in 1920s Oregon. While traditional media tend to reify limited scopes of girlhood, Balizet contends that alternative media like web series offer more diverse representations. The fifth chapter showcases several expansively queer web series adaptations that handle topics such as coming out and changing pronouns.

Balizet’s book works best as a catalogue of underexamined adaptations from a Girls’ Studies perspective. Balizet notes that her expertise and target audience is Shakespeareans who are interested in adaptation. High-school educators will find the collection of adaptations and the sample discussion questions on *10 Things I Hate About You* in Balizet’s conclusion helpful. In closing, Balizet posits that Girls’ Studies is the future of Shakespeare Studies, and that an attentiveness to the experience of girls and Shakespeare can broaden and improve Shakespearean scholarship and pedagogies.

Taking on a challenging task, Balizet successfully outlines Girls’ Studies and presents a wide array of Shakespearean media through this lens. Future studies might zero in on one of the many threads Balizet brings to the table in her text, whether that be a topical focus in race or disability or a genre-focused approach. The closing line of Balizet’s introduction highlights the harmonious collision of Shakespeare Studies and Girls’ Studies in this engaging monograph: “Girlhood is always a memory, already left behind, and always current, relevant. The same, I argue, could be said of Shakespeare” (21).