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Maurizio Calbi, *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 252 pp. ISBN 978-0-230-33875-3

Reviewed by Aureliana Natale

Maurizio Calbi's *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century*, engaging with the issue of the contemporary cultural practice of recycling the classics over and over again, introduces the reader to the state-of-the-art of Shakespearean Media Studies through the analysis of some recent multimedia and multicultural experimental re-creations. Drawing not only on adaptation studies and media theory but also, and maybe most prominently, on some of Jacques Derrida's theoretical categories, this book contributes to the redefinition of adaptation as a fragmented, unfinished and never-ending process of transaction and negotiation. A process which nevertheless ends up forging a sort of omni-pervasive Shakespearean presence, however disseminated and fissured, on our contemporary mediascapes. As Calbi points out, transforming the source plays in a myriad of different ways, this interminable practice of reshaping the original to shape the new, turns Shakespeare's textual presence into a spectral one, haunting the new versions of his masterpieces. Taking his cue from the Derridean concept of 'hauntology', Calbi's reflection starts from *Specters of Marx* and makes use of Derridean thinking as a key to open the Shakespearean text in a radical way. Deconstructionist theory proves to be at the base of his approach. Borrowing from the French philosopher himself the definition of the "Thing Shakespeare" as a "Spirit" that is "more than one, no more one" (1), Calbi conceives of Shakespearean presence in terms of a sort of latent immanence floating upon the contemporary cultural scenario: a proliferating signifier deprived of any possible stable meaning.

Calbi searches the contemporary mediascape sifting out a list of multicultural works, including non-English language films and performances. A Shakespearean new canon in the plural goes from Kristian Levring's *The King Is Alive* (2000), where a group of lost tourists tries to fight desperation and gain survival by performing *King Lear*, to the original and provocative Twitter version of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Such Tweet Sorrow* (2010).<sup>1</sup> Here Twitter creates a space to participate in Shakespeare's text: in the social media sphere, the audience intervene not as simple followers, but they also have the possibility of stepping in the twitted event, creating groups as #savemercurio or #mercutiogroupies intent upon a radical retelling of the classic.

Calbi's analysis includes also: Alexander Abela's *Souli* (2004), a postcolonial version of *Othello* regarding the practice of storytelling and the "rhetoric of silence" (63); Roberta Torre's *Sud Side Stori* (2000), an Italian adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* set in Palermo and based on the love story between Toni Giulietto, a rock singer,

<sup>1</sup> See also Linda Jennifer Buono's review of *Such Tweet Sorrow* in *Anglistica AION*, 15.2 (2011), 97-100.

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and a Nigerian prostitute, Romea Wacoumbo; Alexander Fodor's "iconoclastic and referential" (112) *Hamlet*, with Polonio transforming into Polonia, a *noir femme fatale*, who works as a pusher for her drug addicted younger sister Ophelia. Fodor's film is an example of Shakespeare "in the extreme" (99), a game of re-writing from a "Shakespearecentric" to a "Shakespearecentric" perspective (110). In addition Calbi suggests three versions of *Macbeth* by respectively Klaus Knoesel (*Rave Macbeth*, 2001), Billy Morrissette (*Scotland PA*, 2001), and Peter Moffat (*BBC Shakespeare Retold Macbeth*, 2005). In the analysis of the last two *Macbeth* adaptations (*Scotland, PA* and the *BBC Shakespeare Retold Macbeth*) Calbi draws on the idea of ghostly immanence and repetition. Respectively a filmic and TV production, they share with the original the basic plot and some motives (sense of guilt, predictions, apparitions), but one is set in a Café being transformed into a restaurant in rural Pennsylvania and the other in a Three Stars Restaurant in Glasgow. In both versions, verging on grotesque, Macbeth kills Duncan, who is in both versions the owner of the restaurant where Macbeth works. As a consequence the killer becomes not only the head-chief, but also the head-*chef* of the kitchen. But the emphasis seems in both cases to be upon repetition and murder as a condition claiming more bloody deeds. As Calbi writes:

Both ... respond to the 'original' by adopting a compulsive spiral-like logic of reiteration of their own, a logic of "strange things ... which must be acted, here they may be scanned" but inexorably "return/ To plague th'inventor". More specifically, they implement a logic of repeated murderous deeds that fail to be effective as acts of full incorporation, and therefore produce (bodily) remainders that relentlessly come back to haunt. (32)

In his afterlife Shakespeare and his disseminated phantoms have become a, maybe hardly recognizable, but constant presence in global cultural networks. On the web 2.0 he circulates everywhere. Shakespeare, as an infinite source, offers words, themes, stories, and the newness of the present is based on the production of new meaning formations. As a result there is the destruction (and the deconstruction) of the spatio-temporal boundaries between old and new that opens the gate to the spectro-textuality and spectro-mediality of the Bard's haunting. Calbi in his introduction gives examples like the immense *Designing Shakespeare: Audio Visual Archive* that collects the Bard's adaptations between 1960 and 2000, but another example could be the web site *Global Shakespeare* where plays are broadcasted from all around the world, in hundreds of different languages.

Hence, *Spectral Shakespeares* is a testimony of the infinite and multiform process of re-shaping Shakespearean imaginary through media which produces, as a consequence, the killing of his authority and his coming back in new garments, destroying a myth while perpetuating its glorification at the same time. In its focus on the intersections between the multicultural and the multimodal Calbi's book looms large as an original contribution not only to adaptation studies but to Shakespearean studies tout court.