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Almost Shakespeare: Reinventing His Works for Cinema and Television. Ed. James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner. Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland, 2004. Pp. vi + 197. \$32.

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Readers of a certain age will remember when collections of critical essays were essential teaching tools. In the days before JSTOR, electronic reserve, and even photocopiers, the only way to get undergraduates to study criticism was to make them buy paperback collections like the Prentice-Hall series called *Twentieth Century Interpretations*. The essays in those volumes had already appeared in print, either as part of a single-author book or as an article in one of the “big journals”—*PMLA*, *JGEP*, and so on. I expect they represented, more or less, the seminar reading lists of the editors; using them was like getting an insight into the style of a scholar-teacher like David Bevington, Alfred Harbage, or David Young. It was nice to know that someone—hopefully someone you’d like to study with—had found these articles helpful in teaching Shakespeare.

Technologies have changed, and we don’t need such compilations any more. Some publishers do still give us essays appended to editions of the plays: I have had students buy Suzanne Wofford’s useful edition of *Hamlet* (Bedford-St. Martin’s, 1994), with its representative samples and explanations of feminist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and so on. Increasingly, though, we find the kind of collection that this review focuses on: a collection of original essays. James Keller and Leslie Stratyner have added to the growing series of such volumes containing a wealth of new articles on Shakespeare, film, television, and popular culture (for example, Boose and Burt’s *Shakespeare: The Movie* and *Shakespeare: The Movie II*, and Burnett and Wray’s *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*). This new collection has several essays that should find a place in syllabi for courses on Shakespeare and film, and the volume as a whole makes an excellent quick read for any Shakespearean with an eye to the questions of adaptation (or, as the editors wisely call it, “reinvention”). I suspect, however, that at \$32 the volume is too expensive and (like most such collections of original essays) too diverse in content and method to be picked up as a required text in many courses.

The focus of Keller and Stratyner’s collection is “Shake/spawn”—films and TV shows “that are derivative of Shakespeare, but are not actually Shakespearean productions” (3). The editors offer the collection in part to assuage anxieties that “Shakespeare seems to be suffering from a multiple personality disorder” (1), losing his identity through his texts’ multiple and often idiosyncratic appearances in teen films and TV dramas. These “apparitions,” write Keller and Stratyner, “vex those who wonder that he would appear in such degraded settings” (1). Readers likely to delve into this volume are probably not too vexed: I’d guess that we already believe that these “apparitions” speak to us. At any rate, the editors counter the anxiety over Shakespeare’s disintegration by citing Shakespeare’s own practice of reinventing culture: as he was “responsive to the popular demand

for sequels and recurrent characters” (2), we should not be alarmed to see his works reinvented in contemporary forms. Moreover, they rightly assert, the wit involved in some of these reinventions—*Macbeth* in a fast food restaurant, for example—more than resembles the well-explicated and time-honored *discordia concors* of 17th-century poetic conceit, “two incongruous ideas hammered into a poetic harmony” (3). Part of the pleasure of this volume is its surveying the wit and invention of creative responses to Shakespeare.

Of the twelve contributions to this volume, one very likely to contribute directly to further study is a bibliography of film and television derivatives compiled by José Ramón Díaz Fernández. One might think that in an age of online resources like the *World Shakespeare Bibliography*, a printed bibliography would be an anachronism. But a listing like this is very useful. One can easily notice, for example, the difference between there being only one derivative listed for *As You Like It* (Raja Gosnell’s 1999 film *Never Been Kissed*—which does not have a record of its own in *WSB*) and 22 derivatives listed for *Hamlet* (the bibliography lists only derivatives about which critical work has appeared). By glancing across the listings, too, one can see the wide range of *Hamlet* derivatives and notice that while films by Lubitsch, Kurosawa, and Branagh (*In the Bleak Midwinter*, not *Hamlet*) are amassing considerable critical attention, *Highlander II: The Quickening* remains virtually virgin ground, for better or worse.

The most successful critical essays in this volume demonstrate three qualities, in my opinion: knowledge of the play(s); sensitivity to the cultures in which the derivatives are created and disseminated; and good close reading—the skill to describe and interpret passages from these spin-offs. In a volume as diverse in subject matter as this, close reading has a special degree of importance. In a collection on *Hamlet* a critic can assume readers know the play well enough that description can be dispensed with. Here, though, we can hardly imagine more than a handful of readers who know the plot or premise of a majority of such diverse texts as *Prospero’s Books*, *Withnail and I*, *CSI: Miami*, and *10 Things I Hate About You*. The best of these essays do some necessarily robust close reading to put a text before us, describe what happens, and at the same time help us understand how it feels and how it takes on meaning.

Melissa Jones’s essay on *10 Things I Hate About You* (“‘An Aweful Rule’: Safe Schools, Hard Canons, and Shakespeare’s Loose Heirs”) shows us key moments in the film with clarity and puts them into a context of apt ideological analysis. The surprise in this essay is that while it begins with the Columbine shootings, it does *not* deal with *O*: instead, its concern is to analyze the frothy romantic comedy in the Columbine context, reading its silencing of gendered violence “for the very audience most at risk of subjugation—teens, and girls in particular” (151). Andrew Barnaby’s “Imitation as Originality in Gus Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho*” also uses effective close reading as he traces the resonant phrase “chimes at midnight” from its Shakespearean text to its revisions in films by Welles, Branagh, and Van Sant. The essay gives us a good sense of how each film *feels* as it replays “Falstaff’s strange combination of worldliness and world-weariness

(a life at once rich and depleted)” (33). Barnaby’s essay clarifies why it matters to pay close attention to derivatives like this: we see repetition not as homage and privilege, but as creative re-working—specifically, in the case of Van Sant’s film, as an act of misreading that highlights the moral predations of Falstaff, the betrayals of Hal, and the desperate situation of those on the margins, “the lost children of our inner cities” (25). Ayanna Thompson’s “*Suture*, Shakespeare, and Race: Or, What is Our Cultural Debt to the Bard?” is an inventive and subtle exploration of the relationship of both *Othello* and *Hamlet* to *Suture*, a 1993 independent film by Scott McGehee and David Siegel. Setting her analysis in a theoretical matrix of Lacan, suture theory, and race theory (DuBois and August Wilson), Thompson makes us see this little-known neo-noir film as a serious critical intervention in the debates about universality in Shakespeare and universality in US race relations, debates that she shows to be eerily interconnected.

Maybe Keller and Stratyner are right: Shakespeare’s “apparitions” in teen dramas and television, in arguments about privilege and race, in punk and post-colonial debates, *do* vex some people. Their volume helps us pay attention to that. “Shakespeare,” as we have to keep saying, is not the same for every reader. The overall impact of reading this volume is to be struck again with the necessity of attending to the marginalized, the vexatious, and the unexpected in the performance, study and teaching of Shakespeare.