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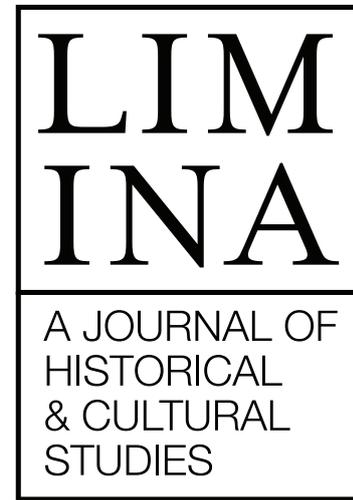
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Cover Image

In Dreames. Digital image by Brook Guidry

Gerzic, Marina and Norrie, Aidan, eds, *Playfulness in Shakespearean Adaptations*, Studies in Shakespeare, New York, Routledge, 2020; hardback, pp. 270, 15 b/w illustrations; RRP \$252.00, ISBN: 9780367256463.

Playfulness in Shakespearean Adaptations posits that play and playfulness are integral to the process of Shakespearean adaptation. The collection is divided into four sections focusing on how Shakespearean texts are adapted in new—sometimes unconventional—mediums. These are stage adaptations, screen adaptations, adaptations of Shakespeare the man, and contemporary film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Within their valuable introduction, Marina Gerzic and Aidan Norrie claim that a playful and irreverent approach to Shakespearean adaptation places a focus on 'the ways in which they are used as pedagogical aids to help explain complex language, themes, and emotions found in Shakespeare's works, and more generally make Shakespeare "relatable" and entertaining for twenty-first-century audiences' (9). Overall, the book successfully provides a wide-ranging overview of the role of play and playfulness in adaptations of Shakespeare, giving examples that vary in scope, period, and medium.

The first section, 'Page to Stage/Stage to Page', is the longest, containing five chapters. This section includes detailed readings of the creative approaches taken by a variety of Shakespearean retellings, ranging from the nineteenth century to present day; namely, Victorian burlesques of *King Lear* (Roberta Gradi), Margaret Atwood's retelling of *The Tempest* in *Hag-seed* (Miranda Fay Thomas), adaptations of *Richard III* in children's literature over time (Marina Gerzic), an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* comics (Chelsea L Horne), and the relationship between Shakespeare and truth in Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters* (Sophie Shorland). This section provides a wide-ranging approach to relatively unconventional ways that Shakespeare's plays have been adapted for different mediums. The detailed analysis in each chapter is backed up by strong historical and genre-specific research that lends the articles credibility and weight, depicting mediums that have not always been considered in the field alongside Shakespeare, such as comics, in a strong academic light.

Both of the contributions to the second section, 'Practicing Shakespeare on Stage and Screen', are written by practitioners outside of academia, something intended to give insight into specifically performance-based adaptations of Shakespeare and highlight engagement with Shakespeare outside of the current state of scholarship. In the first chapter, Sally McLean, writer, director, producer, and actor of the online series *Shakespeare Republic*, discusses the irreverent play of the adaptation and suggests that an online medium introduces Shakespeare to new audiences. In the second particularly engaging and insightful chapter, Katie O'Reilly and Phillip Zarrilli discuss the creative process behind their play *richard III redux OR Sara Beer IS/NOT Richard III*, a piece which attempted to challenge the relationship between theatre and disability through a series of scenes in which disabled comedian and actress Sara Beer performed both as Richard and as various versions of herself. This chapter was one of the highlights of the volume, and a piece which I felt captured the essence of its engagement with play and playfulness in Shakespearean adaptation. O'Reilly and Zarrilli wove together stories of their historical and textual research, physical preparations, and the important narrative of disability activism in their casting choices, how they chose to adapt the piece, and the existence of Shakespeare's *Richard III* within a stigmatized state of cultural superiority.

The third section, 'Adapting the Man', focuses on depictions of Shakespeare as a person and an early modern celebrity who is largely inseparable from his works. Ronan Hatfull's chapter uses a discussion of the film *Bill* to show ways that recent

adaptations of Shakespeare's life have filled in his "lost years" and depict Shakespeare as a relatable author who struggled to find his voice and achieved his renown through hard work. The second chapter, by Aidan Norrie, discusses the fictional relationship between Shakespeare and Elizabeth I. Norrie describes how portrayals of this relationship are often responses to audience expectations about Elizabethan England and tend to reflect an attempt to humanize Elizabeth as a monarch, rather than any real historical accuracy. This section showed a different and enlightening take on the idea of adaptation, showing that Shakespeare himself has been "adapted" just as much as his works have. Additionally, as both articles point out, there is far less information available about Shakespeare as a man than there are about his plays, and as a result, adaptations which focus on his life tend to reflect the intentions of the works' creators than truths about Shakespeare himself.

The fourth and final section, 'Adapting the Plays', considers the ways that contemporary film adaptations which update Shakespeare for a modern audience often treat Shakespeare with what Gerzic and Norrie describe as "reverent irreverence" and that these adaptations often fail when their focus is either too faithful to a source or too overly didactic. Jennifer Clements' article on the film *Hamlet 2* discusses how the rewriting of Hamlet into a redemptive comedy endorses a neoliberal notion of success which is shown to be achievable in an ultimately unrealistic way. Christian Long discusses the effects of film adaptations of Shakespeare which replace early modern concepts of nobility with a sports-based meritocracy. Lastly, Sonja Klejj discusses the children's film *Gnomeo and Juliet*, suggesting that the film only somewhat successfully challenges Shakespeare's views on gender and familial relationships.

This book brings important critical attention to mediums of adaptation which have been previously underexposed, such as burlesques, comics, fantasy novels, web series, and children's books. These mediums are often seen as unserious or lacking in the *gravitas* that subjects with as much critical capital as Shakespeare is often given. The chapters in this collection show that such playful mediums are perfect for highlighting these themes in Shakespeare's works and those by Roberta Gradi, on Victorian burlesques of *King Lear*, and Katie O'Reilly and Phillip Zarrilli, on the creative process behind their play *richard III redux OR Sara Beer IS/NOT Richard III*, were particularly insightful and entertaining contributions to the collection's overall aim. I would particularly recommend these chapters to those interested in theories of Shakespearean adaptation. *Playfulness in Shakespearean Adaptations* introduces a range of both mediums and methods of adaptation, many of which have received relatively little critical attention, and all of which highlight the importance of play and playfulness to adaptations and cultural understandings of Shakespeare's works.

Anna Quercia-Thomas

The University of Western Australia