

Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance

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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Wolfgang Weiss, *Shakespeare in Bayern und auf Bairisch (Shakespeare in Bavaria and in Bavarian Regional Dialects)*, Passau: Verlag Karl Stutz, 2008, 1st ed. Pp. 201. ISBN: 978-3-88849-090-3.

Reviewed by Sonja Fielitz^a

Among the many books on the reception of Shakespeare in Germany this monograph deserves particular attention because it is the first full-length study of translations and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in an indigenous language with its various dialects in a cultural region. The author, Professor Emeritus of the University of Munich and former Director of the Munich Shakespeare Research Library, has chosen Bavaria and the Bavarian language not only because it is his native language but also because there is an old and still highly vivid tradition of popular theatre in the Bavarian language regularly performed by professional actors as well as amateurs in many towns and villages. Being one of the most distinguished European scholars in the field of Shakespeare studies, Weiss at the same time draws attention to a much neglected tradition in Shakespeare's German literary and theatrical history, that is, his reception in popular theatre (*Volkstheater*). This tradition has long been overshadowed by the more spectacular 'discovery' of Shakespeare by German poets, dramatists, and critics in the eighteenth century, hailing the Bard as a liberator from French literary hegemony and propagating him as their new literary model. This enthusiastic reception together with numerous translations for the educated classes resulted in Shakespeare's naturalisation and finally in his enthronement as the third German classic poet beside Goethe and Schiller in the early nineteenth century.

Weiss therefore, begins his study with the origin of the Shakespeare reception in popular German theatre of the Early Modern Period, that is, with the travelling English actors who had also adaptations of some of Shakespeare's plays in their repertoire when they performed in market places, inns, and elsewhere in Bavarian towns and princely residences from Shakespeare's lifetime until well into the Thirty Years War. After the war, German travelling players followed in their steps, and they

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also included some versions of Shakespeare's plays in their repertoires, among them the famous German version of *Hamlet*, that is, *Der Bestrafte Brudermord (Fratricide Punished)*.

After a learned discussion of some of the less successful translations of German poets of the eighteenth century who regarded Shakespeare as a popular dramatist rather than as the great literary genius, the author deals with Shakespeare's plays adapted for the Bavarian popular theatres performed by amateurs. He then traces the Bard's influence in many plays written by the so-called *Bauern-Shakespeare (peasants' Shakespeare)* Johann Georg Schmalz (1792/3-1845) for Germany's oldest popular theatre in Kiefersfelden (founded in the seventeenth century) and also diligently analyses the first extant Bavarian version of a Shakespearean play, that is, the anonymous *Hamlet, der Prinz von Denemarkt*, first performed in Seebruck in 1845. The concluding chapter traces modern adaptations in various Bavarian dialects, e.g., adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, and a most impressive *Macbeth* translated into the dialect of the Bavarian Forest.

The author also deals with narrative dialectal phrases of Shakespeare's plays, adaptations of Sonnet 18, as well as individual monologues from the plays. Furthermore, lists of plays and sonnets in other dialects in Germany, Austria and Switzerland are included to encourage further research activities. All in all, this learned and extraordinarily original study proves that Shakespeare's plays can highly successfully be adapted for dialectal performances – a fact that has been not only neglected but also despised by many critics and scholars as an inappropriate medium for Shakespeare's work. Weiss' monograph also demonstrates most admirably that in order to stage Shakespeare's plays successfully, they should not be translated literally. From a cultural point of view, it appears advisable to adapt and even to transpose plots, characters and settings into the target culture, because dialects serve as expressions of regional culture to a much greater extent than High German superimposed above the many German indigenous dialects.

Manfred Pfister and Jürgen Gutsch (eds.), *William Shakespeare's Sonnets for the First Time Globally Reprinted: A Quatercentenary Anthology (with a DVD)*, Dozwil: Edition Signathur, 2009. Pp. 752. ISBN 978-3-908141-54-9.

Reviewed by Ralf Hertel^b

William Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are an extraordinary piece of translation and appropriation. Published in 1609, they are late exponents of a veritable craze in early modern England for the strict, fourteen-line long Italian form of poetry popularised above all by Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (printed 1470). As the Renaissance reached England with considerable delay, it took more than seventy years for Petrarch's poems to be translated into English first by Thomas Wyatt and then Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and another four decades until the form of the sonnet cycle found its way into the English language in Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) and Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595). A closer look at these pre-Shakespearean attempts at sonneteering demonstrates that translation, both of individual poems and of the poetic form of the sonnet cycle, is always appropriation, too. Not only do the English poets transpose Petrarch's verbal miniatures into a markedly English landscape, they also resituate Petrarch's Platonic concept of love, in which the beloved Laura must of necessity stay elusive since she represents heavenly beauty itself, in the context of sixteenth century England. In a country ruled by a self-stylised Virgin Queen, the desire for the woman so hard to get reverberates with political implications and expresses, not least, a wish for social advancement. In addition, the spiritual and religious augmentation of love appears dubious to Protestants, and to study the ingenuity with which English poets adjust the fourteenth century Italian form to their specifically sixteenth century English needs is one of the particularly rewarding tasks for the present-day reader.

The quatercentenary anthology *William Shakespeare's Sonnets for the First Time Globally Reprinted*, edited by Manfred Pfister and Jürgen Gutsch, thus only takes to its logical end a particular trait of Shakespeare's sonnets. If Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are the result of intriguing processes of translation and appropriation themselves, Pfister and Gutsch focus on Shakespeare's own poems as springboards for innumerable instances of artistic apprehension. Assembling translations of individual sonnets in no less than 72 different languages, the two editors have accomplished a truly Herculean task. Not only does the volume present the reader with versions by well-known writers in major European and non-European languages, we also find Shakespeare's sonnets speaking to us in unexpected tongues. Amharic, Armenian, Basque, Cimbrian, Esperanto, Frisian, Gaelic, Icelandic, Maori, Rhaeto-Romanic, Swiss German, and Klingon – the range of languages and dialects represented in this volume is so large that one may speak of a global reprint indeed. In fact, in some cases the editors even stimulated first translations into individual languages if they could not find

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extant translations, as for instance in Maltese. Even a translation in sign language is available on the added DVD.

The specific sections of translations are preceded by essays that provide an account of the reception of Shakespeare's poems in the corresponding culture. These essays demonstrate how translations of Shakespeare's sonnets especially into minority languages often serve to validate and ennoble these tongues, demonstrating that languages and dialects considered marginal by some might well be capable to capture the artistry and refinement of Shakespeare's verse. At the same time, these introductory texts tell us as much about the culture the sonnets are translated into as about Shakespeare's poems themselves. This is the case, for instance, when they reveal a predilection of a specific country for an individual sonnet, as for example the obsession with the world-weary sonnet No. 66 ('Tired with all these, for restful death I cry') that the editors encounter in Cuba.

In the case of this anthology, translation is not restricted to the transfer of sonnets from one language to the next. Translation here may also indicate a crossing of artistic genres, and the DVD includes visual and musical appropriations of Shakespeare's sonnets in drawings, video clips, and songs. As in their choice of verbal translations, the editors here demonstrate a 'particular interest in what is marginal and non-canonical' (13), and instead of Sting's well-known pop-songs from his album *Nothing like the Sun* we encounter chanson-like versions by Norah Krief, Finnish songs by Samuli Edelmann, or Janine Cooper Ayer's American country-music versions. The sonnets are music in themselves, though, and the recitals by native speakers from the language communities assembled in this tome demonstrate this powerfully. Making out the structure and tone of individual sonnets in recitals spoken in languages the reader is entirely unfamiliar with proves a particular pleasure of this mighty compilation.

***Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia*, ed. Poonam Trivedi, Minami Ryuta, New York: Routledge 2010, 1st ed. Pp. 201. ISBN: 978-3-88849-090-3.**

Reviewed by Aleksandra Budrewicz-Beratan^c

The book focuses on Asian perspectives on and experiments with ‘Shakespeare’ understood as both literary and theatrical author. It is mostly the Western (American and British), and the global perspective/interpretation of Shakespeare that was juxtaposed and turned into the Asian one. “Re-playing” is here both a concept (the staging of Shakespeare in Asian theatres) and a metaphor (re-interpreting Shakespeare, a non-Western perspective). What these essays depict is how “Asianised” Shakespeare have become, how the Asian scholars and performers engage with Shakespeare’s works, what is the result of these aesthetic meetings of different cultures, can it be successful and readable for audience etc. The important terms which are frequently used and explored by the authors of the essays are adaptation, appropriation, acculturation and re-writing. It is not only the theatrical dimension, but also aesthetic, cultural, political, historical and social perspectives that form a basis for many discussions presented in the book. This is also one of the reasons why this study offers such a rich and thorough viewpoint, an impressive diversity of both production and reception of Shakespeare in Asia.

Certainly, this is not the first large study on Shakespeare in Asia, although Asian Shakespeare had been marginalized for years due to eurocentricism in the research on international Shakespeare. This is why a new book related to this issue was welcomed. This one is also a step further after *Shakespeare in Asia: contemporary performance* (edited by Dennis Kennedy and Li Lan Yong, Cambridge 2010). This well known study (often referred to in the book reviewed) whetted our appetite to expand our knowledge on Asian productions of Shakespeare even more. *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia* shows diversity of approaches to Shakespeare, taking into consideration various Asian languages, traditions, countries with their own internal conflicts, problems, and dependences on other nations or forced types of performances. How ‘foreign’ is Shakespeare to Asia? What does it mean to stage “a foreign author”? Does one need to be exceptionally faithful to the original work, or the changes are welcomed or sometimes even desired? How do they affect the audience’s understandings of Shakespeare? To what extent is he an intercultural author? The present study answers these queries and worries successfully.

The book contains 16 articles, grouped into four parts: Interculturality; Textuality / Theatricality; Ethnicity, Identity and Postcoloniality; Genre and Gender. The opening part starts with an important paper by James Brandon, introducing the readers very well into the whole area of problems, and giving a theoretical overview of Asian perspectives of Shakespeare. Difficulties with translating Shakespeare (preserving his authentic voice in vernacular languages), Western hegemony in understanding and staging Shakespeare, as well as three different “Shakespeares in Asia”

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(canonical, indigenous and intercultural) are interestingly discussed. Brian Singleton deals with Ariane Mnouchkine's performances (the 1980's), presenting "the Asian-ness of Asian theatres" (p. 52), which he sees as linking Asia and Shakespeare in the European cultural imagination, and an attempt to include elements of orientalism in staging Shakespeare. Also, he is one of many authors in this book who refer to Jan Kott's statements on spectacularity of Shakespeare. Poonam Trivedi's fascinating paper talks about two intercultural productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Their multiracial cast and multi-register lead to "multi-theatricalism" (p. 62) of these productions. Their key aspect was sexuality, which – together with cross-dressing – put some viewers and press off, but certainly distinguished these performances in terms of their sensuality. The Japanese performances of Shakespeare are discussed by Minami Ryuta. The author compares two performances: Fukuda Tsuneari's *Hamlet*, 1955 (in *shingeki*, or: New Drama), and Ninagawa Yukio's *Twelfth Night* (2005), adapted as *kabuki*. Attention was given to the issue of 'authenticity' of Shakespeare, the necessity to remaking or rewriting as faithfully as possible the 'genuine' Shakespeare who was still foreign and unfamiliar to the Japanese audience, but kept "haunting" the Japanese stage.

Part two is devoted particularly to theatrical aspect of Asian Shakespeare. Famous performances of *King Lear* adapted and appropriated by Suzuki Tadashi are described by Ian Carruthers. The author points to various omissions and cuts in relation to the original text (there is no Fool and Kent, for example), the changes in setting (the world is seen as Hospital), the omnipresent feelings of fear of dying alone (related to the director's nihilism, solitude and insanity), as well as the usage of symbols (a wheelchair as both seat of power and seat of powerlessness) and music (Tchaikovsky, Handel). An interesting linguistic aspect of translating and performing Hamlet's famous soliloquy in six Chinese productions (both *huaju*, spoken drama, and *xiqu*, sung theatre) is discussed by Li Ruru who gives an interesting comparative analysis of these texts proving them to be a challenge for adaptators. Japanese pop-versions of Shakespeare are analyzed by Yoshihara Yukari who aptly calls them "un-Shakespearean adaptations" (p. 141): *Metal Macbeth* is a story of a rock star who could not keep up with the new fashion in the pop music market; an animation *Romeo X Juliet* is set in the fantastical New Verona, with Juliet as a revolutionary leader. Tapati Gupta talks about Utpal Dutt's folk theatre *jatra* performances, different phases of Dutt's productions of Shakespeare, as well as translating Shakespeare. Gupta's historical and political perspective enriches the discourse and shows Dutt's efforts to extend Shakespeare's works "into a heterogeneous cultural field" (p. 172). The most extended part of the book is devoted to probably the most complex and sensitive issue, that is ethnicity and post-colonialism. The articles on Shakespeare in the Philippines (by Judy Celine Ick), in Korea (by Kim Moran), and Taiwan (by Wu Peichen) show how these countries' interpretations of Shakespeare are deeply rooted in the socio-political issues, how imperialisms, political occupations, and the British influence on Asia influenced the ways people wanted to depict their own "Shakespeares", and finally the extent to which the indigenous and local genres/theatres/forms are willing to accommodate Shakespeare's values, ideas, and characters. Nurul Farhana Low Abdullah and C.S. Lim's involving article shows that even a shadow puppet theatre (called *wayang kulig*) can efficiently borrow elements from *Macbeth* and include them in their traditional forms, turning Shakespeare into an intercultural dialogue with local traditions. Similarly, Alexander C. Y. Huan reads Shakespeare locally, and discusses two regional productions of *Romeo and Juliet* transformed into *huadengxi* (flower lantern opera) and *gezaixi* (Taiwanese opera). The author describes these

'localized' productions, and talks about their deep relation to the local internal conflicts (this is why his paper, together with W. Peichen's complement each other nicely, showing the impact the local conflicts have had on Taiwanese people). Also, according to Huan, rewritings of Shakespeare are tied to the languages of globalization.

Finally, part four explores how genre and gender affect Asian performances of Shakespeare. Recent Indian dance appropriations (Saibal Basu's *Wheel of Fire*, and Vikram Iyengar's *Crossings*) are discussed in Paromita Chakravarti and Swati Ganguly's article, showing various dance forms (*kathak*, *sadrinach*), as well as the importance of ancient Indian text related to aesthetics called *Natyashastra*. Referring to the title of Judith Butler's study, "gender trouble" is here presented a problem with constructing and portraying Lady Macbeth who transgresses the norms of femininity (the dancers putting on and taking off her jewellery while *she* gives Macbeth's well-known "Tomorrow and tomorrow" monologue). Another staging of *Macbeth* is discussed by John Emigh. He talks about a Bali production in 1999, as a form of *gambuh* (dance theatre), in which women's roles were played by men, and sexual/erotic relation between Macbeth and his wife were emphasized (a social dance called *joged* served that purpose). Special attention was given to the difficulties in adapting this tragedy to the conventions of the *gambuh* form. Another aspect of Taiwanese Shakespeare is explored in the final article in this book. The author (Bi-qi Beatrice Lei) mentions various Taiwanese productions of *Romeo and Juliet*: camp adaptations in a form of pastiche or farce, *opera drama* by Huang Xianglian, and a performance by the Golden Bough Theatre. The camp performances, with their colloquial language, and many vulgar and sexual references, gained popularity among the young viewers, and certainly contributed to the new and challenging re-readings of Shakespeare.

As can be noticed, both theoretical and practical perspectives are explored in the study, which certainly broadens the perspective of understanding the depth of the Asian reception of Shakespeare. This 'type' of Shakespeare is far from the commonly and globally known Western productions, as well as the anglo-centric approach. It is deeply rooted in the local tradition, performances, rituals and folklore. Jan Kott's *Shakespeare, our contemporary* and D. Kennedy's *Foreign Shakespeare: contemporary performance* were often quoted as the studies offering influential and inspirational approaches to Shakespeare. The present study shows and proves that there is much to be gained from "contextualizing the global in the local" (T. Gupta's expression, p. 161), or: staging Shakespeare either translated, adapted, or adjusted to the local expectations or interpretations.

"Quintessentially English and internationally influential"? This phrase, originally describing other British genius writer, Charles Dickens¹, can be successfully applied to Shakespeare as well. An interesting aspect of some of the Asian performances is that they surely refer to the events and politicians known in the contemporary world. Lear in Suzuki Tadashi's version (played by Anatoly Bely) looks and behaves like Vladimir Putin. Even recent British productions of Shakespeare aim at making him universal rather than typically English: take Kevin Spacey's thrilling performance of

¹ Deirdre David, Eileen Gillooly, 2009. *Introduction*, to: *Contemporary Dickens*, edited by D. David, E. Gillooly, The Ohio State University Press: Columbus, p. 1.

Richard III (The Old Vic Theatre in London, directed by Sam Mendes, 2011) who clearly and purposefully resembles contemporary dictators (M. Gaddafi or H. Mubarak)².

What the book discusses is in fact ‘Shakespeares’ in ‘Asias’, because of the diversity of Asian traditions, fashions, audience’s expectations and directors’ interpretations. It is truly captivating to enter the Asian world of the indigenous forms of its theatre, and to see how and why the Asian theatre has been using Shakespeare’s texts, what are the differences between Western, common ways of staging or interpreting Shakespeare, and the very Asian. It is a shame, however, that the book does not include an appendix or a short glossary with the explanations or translations of the specific theatrical names for various kinds of Asian theatres. There are many of them used and scattered in the articles, which is why it could be a good idea to collect them all and attach them to the book. It would certainly help the readers to organize the reading process, but also to learn these new and attractive forms of Asian theatre and drama.

Transforming Shakespeare into new languages always triggers unavoidable changes in relation to the original. A total or partial replacement of the original idea was often the only way for the producers to make the context understandable for the local audiences. It is the Asian theatre with its gestures, rich traditions, variety of dances, but also with its performance language that is at the very core of the book; because of this variety and significant differences, staging Shakespeare in various countries in Asia is challenging and fascinating at the same time. Recently comparative literature scholars (for example Susan Bassnett) have emphasized the necessity to include the Asian art (literature, culture etc.) into the discourse on analyzing literature in the 21st century. *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia* surely answer these calls. This is when East and West meet. The whole study points to the idea of Susanne Greenhalgh quoted by P. Trivedi but common to all the papers collected in the work, namely that Shakespeare is “no longer owned by any one language or culture” (p. 72). Therefore, to stage Shakespeare successfully in non-English countries means to adapt Shakespeare (the issue raised by M. Ryuta, p. 88).

² This notion is mentioned by both K. Spacey and S. Mendes in an interview published in a printed programme for the Old Vic production of *Richard III*.