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## Book Reviews

**Diana E Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare across Time and Media*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 289. ISBN 978-0801444197.**

**Reviewed by Alexander C. Y. Huang\***

To write about subject matters that straddle several centuries, disciplines and genres, is, by any measure, a bold move, even in a post-disciplinary age. One also has to make the argument pertinent to readers on the far side of the fence who may be otherwise unfamiliar or uninterested in it. Such are the challenges facing any scholar working on Shakespeare's long and unpredictable afterlife. Diana Henderson's *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare across Time and Media* reshapes our understanding of Shakespeare's afterlife. The book makes the case for the notion of writers' and artists' collaboration with Shakespeare. In her lucid analysis of this process of collaboration which Henderson calls "Shake-shifting as a means of self-authorization," Shakespeare's plays are likened to a kaleidoscope that modern artists shake up, after which Shakespeare's "glassy essence" is cut to bits to help create "newly evocative patterns" (2), allowing us to also "pick and choose our Shakespeares" (36). Of special interest to readers of this journal are the thought-provoking Introduction and Chapters 3 and 4.

Henderson's study of theatrical, cinematic and literary adaptations deftly carves a space for new ways to think about how Shakespeare's plays survived and evolved through time and media. At the heart of the Introduction and the book lies the concept of collaboration. Henderson finds such terms as adaptation and appropriation are limited in their capacity to explain the phenomenon. Therefore, she develops "Shake-shifting" and collaboration as notions that emphasize interpersonal interaction and reworking of Shakespeare in various forms. As demonstrated throughout the book, the notion of collaboration, while not new in textual scholarship, takes the discussion of Shakespeare's afterlife to a different level by attending to "the connections among individuals, allowing artists credit and responsibility, but at the same time refusing to separate them from their social location and the work of others" (8). These critical possibilities are usefully juxtaposed with a candid assessment of Henderson's own collaboration with or contentions against other critics' theories (such as Herald Bloom's *Anxiety*

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of *Influence*, Joseph Roach's theory of "the enactment of cultural memory by substitution" and "surrogation" among different generations, and Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation*).<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the book (Chapters 1 and 2) focuses on "novel transformations" of *Othello* by Sir Walter Scott (*Kenilworth*, 1821) and *Cymbeline* by Virginia Woolf (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925) and Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*). The second part (Chapters 3 and 4), draws upon modern stage and screen adaptations of *The Taming of a Shrew* and *Henry V* to explore works that appear to aspire to "nothing more (or less) than a seeming translation to the new medium – even when in fact they drastically altered both story and theme" (25) and films that provide rich opportunities for a reassessment of scholarship on both *Henry V* and its diachronic collaboration in the twentieth century (205-06).

Chapter 3, "The Return of the Shrew: New Media, Old Stories, and Shakespearean Comedy," invites the readers to "apprehend why this so-dated text can still provide a strangely modern experience" (201), and Henderson carefully points out that the appeal is distinct from a "timeless" experience. She examines a wide range of engagements with the figures of shrew and Petruchio, including a 1929 film version (Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.) that anticipates Franco Zeffirelli's film (1967) and Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), a version of the story told from Kate's perspective. Pickford's strategy of "keeping things light" contrasts with Freud's "perception of disturbing contradictions within the human psyche" in "A Child Is Being Beaten," an essay Henderson calls "the comedy's uncanny double" (166). This comparative analysis is followed by a discussion of Jonathan Miller's BBC-Time/Life television production (1980) that seems to be informed by Freud's interpretation, and an interesting observation on the creative use of video in *Kiss Me, Petruchio* (1981), "a pastiche of scenes, backstage moments, and audience responses from the New York Shakespeare Festival's summer production in Central Park" (179). Meryl Streep's Katherine has to "earn" her voice through her taming. Her voiceovers do not come in until the latter half of the production, while Petruchio's (Raúl Juliá) comments dominate the first part. These works demonstrate a paradigm shift from "collaboration-as-endorsement" to "collaboration-as-performance" (200).

The cultural logic of the erasure and subjugation of the feminine in adaptations of *Henry V* (a play Kenneth Branagh admits to be a "depressingly male piece") is the subject of Chapter 4, "What's Past Is Prologue: Shakespeare's History and the Modern Performance of *Henry V*" (240ff). The chapter moves elegantly between discussions of the strategies of such "historically based political 'collaborators'" as Queen Isabel of France and modern filmmakers' parallel processes of collaborating with Shakespeare and English histories. Despite Isabel's historical importance as a symbol that troubled the definitions of Englishness (217), she is erased from Branagh's 1989 film adaptation (first speech cut and final prayer for peace given to Henry). Though Isabel's role is retained – as Henry's accomplice – in Laurence Olivier's 1944 film version, she is subsumed by the male gaze in a "celebratory collaboration with the victor" (245, 242). As instructive examples of diachronic collaboration, these works can expose a number of problematic assumptions about adaptations that regard rewritings as either "a mere reiteration of a nostalgic past" nor "a narcissistic love affair with a falsely conceived present" (258).

Students and scholars of Shakespeare, film, theatre, and Romanticism, will have much to learn from *Collaborations with the Past* which is a pleasant read.

<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2000); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 80.