

**SBReview\_3:** *Gothic Shakespeares*. Edited by John Drakakis and Dale Townshend. General editor, Terrence Hawkes. *Accents on Shakespeare Series*. New York: Routledge, 2008. ISBN 978-0-415-42067-9; 264 p. US\$39.95.

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This festschrift is dedicated to scholar-biographer-teacher Julia Briggs; it contains a collection of nine essays framed on one side by John Drakakis' *Introduction* and on the other side by Jerrold E. Hogle's *Afterword*. Four of the essays explore the use of Shakespeare as a signifier of English patriotism, identity, and the crisis of English nationalism: Stephen Craig's "Shakespeare Among the Goths," Dale Townshend's "Gothic and the Ghost of *Hamlet*," Sue Chaplin's "The Scene of a Crime: Fictions of Authority in Walpole's Gothic Shakespeare," and Angela Wright's "In Search of Arden: Ann Radcliffe's William Shakespeare." Three of the essays explore Shakespeare as a re-worked or re-constituted signifier of modern-day cultural anxieties and concerns: Peter Hutchings' "Theatres of Blood: Shakespeare and the Horror Film," Glennis Byron's "'As One Dead': *Romeo and Juliet* in the 'Twilight' zone," and Fred Botting's and Scott Wilson's "Gothspeak and the Origins of Cultural Studies." The remaining two essays (Elisabeth Bronfen's "Shakespeare's Nocturnal World" and Michael Gamer's and Robert Miles' "Gothic Shakespeare on the Romantic Stage") are anomalous. The former traces the use of darkness and night (pseudo-signifiers of the Gothic) in *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Merchant of Venice*; the latter is an exploration of Shakespearean influences on post-modern culture, although this reviewer found the essay to be fraught with cryptic and

unsubstantiated claims ("If Shakespeare were alive today he'd be the Cookie Monster on *Sesame Street* introducing Masterpiece Theatre" (196)). Nevertheless, the editors are to be commended for the variety in theoretical approaches and subject matter, and for the scope of topics and contexts. As with any good *mélange* of critical essays, there is something here to excite—and irritate—everyone.

*Gothic Shakespeares* explores intertextualities between Shakespeare and Gothic narratives in fiction, drama, film. "[T]he coexistence in one text of other texts" (Drakakis 9) can appear as "quotation, allusion [or] . . . appropriation" (12), and encompasses the "transforming [of] . . . originals" (9) or an intent to "*improve* the original" [sic]. The rise of Shakespeare as a scholarly industry clearly has its home in the eighteenth century, so the connections seem obvious enough, but the objective is more elusive than first thought. The essays touch on the Gothic moment of eighteenth century and Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* as pivotal moments, but two problems emerge from this critical necessity. First, attributing meaning to these intertextual moments is inherently problematic; while there is no shortage of Shakespearean epiphenomena in the eighteenth-century and beyond, the allusions often seem disappointingly incidental. For example, speaking about an intertextual moment in Tod Browning's 1931 *Dracula*, Peter Hutching observes that Renfield's use of "Words, words, words" "is sufficiently odd to be noticeable but insufficiently elaborated to be fully meaningful" (155). The same can also be said, regrettably, for many of the intertextual moments discussed elsewhere in this festschrift. One is reminded of Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth": "There's something happening here / What it is ain't exactly clear."

With regard to the second difficulty, intertextuality is complicated by the richly varied use of "Gothic." Walpole may have been clear in his own mind about the meaning when he used the label in the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, but subsequent uses reveal an oblivious resistance to distinctions of genre and refer fiction, drama, or even poetry. Gothic is associated with that specific moment in literary history between 1764 (Walpole's *Otranto*) and the 1820s, and yet literature before and after this period is also be said to be Gothic (viz. *Macbeth* and *Wuthering Heights*). The term also refers to the distinct genres of supernaturalism and science fiction (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*). Gothic also refers to ghost stories, satanic over-reacher narratives in the tradition of *Dr. Faustus* (viz. Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*), and has even been used to describe the anti-Gothic or rationalist tradition in Radcliffe and Austen. The term describes an ornate architectural style usually associated with church design, and Gothic ruins often become a dominant trope in the narrative. Gothic has also been used pejoratively in the sense of the "dark ages," and is associated with a kind of brutal primitivism (the *OED* shows Dryden using the term in 1695 to mean "[b]arbarous, rude, uncouth, unpolished, in bad taste"). The term alludes to exotic settings of time or place and is associated with motifs of frightful nocturnal anxieties, melodrama, darkness and fear, Catholicism, mysticism, forbidden desires, vulnerable heroines, themes of power and victimization, and a myriad of phobias, including agoraphobia, erotophobia, nyctophobia. And if all that is not enough, the term is also associated with conventions of *romance*. No wonder the meaning of intertextualities can be elusive.

The overarching, eighteenth-century moment that fused the Gothic with a variety of re-significations of Shakespeare is handled variously by the essays. Botting and Wilson claim that "Shakespeare is a Gothic invention, a fiction" (188) and Townshend suggests the invention of Shakespeare served as a very specific response to the insecurity of a newborn literary form: "In relation to Gothic, Shakespeare is at once, the revered subject and object of protection . . . . Shakespeare provides the dominant mode through which Gothic fictions seek to establish their aesthetic credibility, as well as their legitimate position [in the] literary genealogy that runs from Chaucer . . . . and beyond" (73). In a Derrida-derived essay that is unnecessarily self-obfuscating, Sue Chapin thinks *Otranto* expresses a "compulsive monumentalization and repetition of the past" (98) and came "to exist within this early modern juridico-literary economy as a site of power" that was also simultaneously "a site of transgression" (99). (In the end, Chapin's essay is as much about Derrida as Shakespeare and the Gothic). Using Radcliffe's Gothic adaptations of Shakespeare, Angela Wright's essay rejects the idea that all Gothic adaptations of Shakespeare are necessarily part of a "gesture of English nationalism during a time of French encroachment" (113). Wright's superb essay offers nuanced insight into the progressively sophisticated use of Shakespeare in Radcliffe's fiction. Dale Townshend's "Gothic and the Ghost of Hamlet" is a bookend piece for Wright's essay, and takes as its starting point, an anonymous poem published in 1750 and entitled "Shakespeare's Ghost" and traces the influence of Hamlet on several eighteenth century works, including Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* and *Udolpho*, Reeve's *The Old English Baron*, and, of course, the seminal *Castle of Otranto*.

Craig wants to distinguish between "Shakespearean Gothic" and "Gothic Shakespeare" (46), with the former referring to the eighteenth century's appropriation/use of Shakespearean themes and motif (what he calls "*presenting*" [sic] Shakespeare (56) or "assigning privilege to the present), and with the latter referring to Shakespeare's own anticipatory use (foreshadowing) themes and motifs that would subsequently become identified as Gothic. His essay is helpful in understanding essays in the collection, like Elisabeth Bonfen's "Shakespeare's Nocturnal World." Bronfen uses the word Gothic to mean ominous darkness; Drakakis calls her use of the term "sensibilities" (18).

The gem in collection is the intriguing Gamer-Miles essay which takes as its starting point Samuel Ireland's counterfeiting of a Shakespearean manuscript that duped many Shakespearean experts of the time. The essay explores the contours of the eighteenth-century biases about Shakespeare by showing which parts of the forgeries worked and why.

There is so much more that cannot be mentioned here, but the book will most certainly be of use to Shakespearean and eighteenth-century scholars and is well worth the read. *Gothic Shakespeares* is a pioneering foray into a vast landscape of topics; hopefully further discussions will ensue.