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Shakespeare and East Asia by Alexa Alice Joubin (review)

Yeeyon Im

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Front Cover: Sharon Hayes, *In My Little Corner of the World, Anyone Would Love You*, 2016. Installation view, Studio Voltaire, London. Performers (left to right): Pangia, Evelyn Swift Shuker, and Mahogany Rose. (Photo: Andy Keate, courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin.)

Back Cover: Tadeusz Kantor: *Widma/Specters*. (Photo: Cricoteka/Zbigniew Prokop and Krzysztof Kućma.)

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is a model of performance analysis, attentive to the histories of individual end-times attractions, their pre- and post-performance elements, audience demographics, and the responses of other spectators at the performances she attends. For these reasons, her book will be of interest to students and scholars of performance, American evangelicalism, popular culture, and religious affect.

Last but not least among this book's contributions, Stevenson links the performances she writes about to broader apocalyptic anxieties about threats such as climate change and global pandemics. The pre-performance video for *Tribulation Trail*, for instance, contained clips about companies microchipping employees. As this study impressively demonstrates, end-time performances may have a centuries-long genealogy, but in the hands of today's evangelicals they respond to and enact a very contemporary zeitgeist.

STANTON B. GARNER JR.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

SHAKESPEARE AND EAST ASIA. By Alexa Alice Joubin. Oxford Shakespeare Topics series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021; pp. 272.

Shakespeare and East Asia is the latest addition to the flourishing scholarship on Asian Shakespeare. Unlike many other monographs that focus on a single nation or genre, it brings together notable film and stage works from Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore. The range and diversity of case studies offered in the book would often require multiple authors in the form of collected essays, such as *Shakespeare in Asia* (2010), *Re-Playing Shakespeare in Asia* (2010), *Shakespeare's Asian Journeys* (2017), and *Shakespeare and Asia* (2019). As a single-authored monograph, *Shakespeare and East Asia* presents a clear agenda of resisting national allegory approaches in favor of rhizomatic readings, which can highlight connections and cross-fertilization among Asian and Western Shakespeare works in intercultural, intracultural, and intermedial ways.

In the prologue, Joubin takes issue with what she terms "national profiling" and "compulsory realpolitik": "a tendency to characterize a non-Western artwork based on stereotypes of its nation of origin" and "the conviction that the best way to understand non-Western works is by interpreting their engagement with pragmatic politics" (7). Such an approach flattens the complexity of these works and impedes full appreciation of their artistic merits. Furthermore, it can unwittingly serve cultural imperialism by assuming Western practices as

norms and instrumentalizing global Shakespeares "for the purpose of diversifying the scholarship and curricula" in the West (8). Firmly breaking from such discursive practices, *Shakespeare and East Asia* focuses on "aesthetic and social functions of performances," situating them in "a postnational space of exchange" (12). Joubin identifies "four themes" noticeable in post-1950 East Asian engagements with Shakespeare: "form, ideology, reception, diaspora" (15). Each of the four chapters focuses on one theme, anchored in one cultural sphere.

Chapter 1 examines the formalistic achievements of two world-renowned Japanese directors, Yukio Ninagawa and Akira Kurosawa. Joubin focuses on Ninagawa's *Macbeth* (1988) and Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957), closely analyzing their visual, aural, and musical elements to show how they enhance certain themes effectively. While such analyses of the well-known productions may appear less exciting, they are carefully grounded within the Japanese cultural, theatrical, and religious contexts to bring out new meanings, as exemplified by her discussion of gendered pronouns unique to the Japanese language in *Throne of Blood*. Joubin also situates the aesthetics of the two directors in the history of Shakespeare's reception in Japan, draws parallels in their works, and traces rhizomatic cross-citations in other Japanese and Anglophone works, including Satoshi Kon's *Millennium Actress* (2001) and John R. Brigg's *Shogun Macbeth* (1985).

Chapter 2 looks into some Sinophone adaptations to explore "the myths of Shakespeare's remedial merit," or the belief that Shakespeare can improve personal or social circumstances (64). Joubin attends to the remedial recasting of gender roles through the empowerment of the Ophelia figure in Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet* (2006) and Sherwood Hu's *Prince of the Himalayas* (2002). Along with gender, she identifies spirituality as another prominent aspect in remedial Shakespeare, discussing various productions of *King Lear* as well as Buddhist allusions in Michael Almerlyda's *Hamlet* (2000). Her approach proves particularly insightful with her analysis of *Lear Is Here* (2001), a solo *jingju* performance directed by Wu Hsing-kuo, who negotiates Chinese performance tradition and his Taiwanese identity through Shakespeare. Through lively discussions of little-known works such as *One Husband Too Many* (1988) and *Shamlet* (1992) in comparison with Stoppard's play, Joubin shows how the myth of reparative Shakespeare is parodied as colonial legacy through metatheatrical devices.

Titled "Polyphonic Reception," chapter 3 examines differing views in production and reception of Shakespeare performances, with case studies from South Korea. Polyphony serves as a metaphor that links diverse discussions in the chapter. It is applied

to “artistically constructed echoes” (106) in *King Uru* (2000), which interweaves strands of different “voices” drawn from *King Lear*, Korean folklore, and shamanism. Joubin traces Shakespearean echoes in the 2005 blockbuster *The King and the Clown*, reading Gong-gil as a transgender woman echoing Ophelia. This interpretation differs strikingly from that of many Koreans, who seldom associate it with Shakespeare and read only a gay subtext in it, guided by the original Korean title *Wangui Namja* (The king’s man) that Joubin fails to mention. Her reading seems to be the very example of the “aberrant decoding” (120) she mentions in her later discussion of Oh Tae-suk’s *The Tempest* (2011) when British critics insisted on a national allegory despite Oh’s denial. While accusing it of being a case of “compulsory realpolitik” common in international theatre circuits, Joubin also takes such differing voices as a testimony of the richness of Asian Shakespeares.

Chapter 4 turns to the issue of multilingualism and diaspora in Shakespeare productions, focusing on examples mainly from Singapore. A brief discussion of Hong Kong-British director David Tse’s bilingual *King Lear* (2006) is followed by Joubin’s most rigorous analysis of some multilingual works by two Singaporean directors. She offers an in-depth discussion of the lesser-known film *Chicken Rice War* (2000) in relation to Singapore’s multiracialism and film industry, vividly describing the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural clashes in the film as the son and daughter of two rival families who run chicken rice stalls in a hawker center get involved in a college production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Joubin also shows how Ong Keng Sen’s intercultural trilogy of *Lear* (1997), *Desdemona* (2000), and *Search: Hamlet* (2002) challenges the notion of linguistic authenticity and cultural ownership through a localized reading that considers Ong’s diasporic positionality, intra-Asian history, and Singapore’s New Asianism.

With abundant case studies and constant cross-references, the book shows “a nonlinear, rhizomatic, transgenre network of transcultural flows” between Shakespeare and East Asia (193), as the author puts it in the short epilogue. Due to its rhizomatic nature, those who seek for a systematic development of arguments may be disappointed. Instead of relying upon one totalizing theory, Joubin draws on various concepts, such as Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome and deterritorialization, Derrida’s “the ear of the other,” Rita Felski’s discussion of reparative criticism, Umberto Eco’s “aberrant decoding,” and Judith Buchanan’s “textual penumbra.” The sheer variety of Joubin’s examples may appear overwhelming; many of them are accessible through MIT Global Shakespeares, an open-access video and performance archive (globalshakespeares.mit.edu) edited by Peter Donaldson and Joubin. *Shakespeare and East Asia* makes a significant contribution to

the field by showing new ways of engaging with foreign Shakespeare from various perspectives, not just as the Other of Anglophone Shakespeare. It also stresses the importance of East Asian cinema hitherto neglected in global Shakespeare studies. Rounded out by a glossary of Asian terms, a chronology that lists key East Asian Shakespeare works alongside historical events, and further reading with up-to-date scholarship, the book will prove an excellent resource for those who are interested in Shakespeare, performance, and East Asian culture.

YEEYON IM
Yonsei University

THE METHOD: HOW THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LEARNED TO ACT. By Isaac Butler. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022; pp. 512.

Isaac Butler’s engaging book aims to examine Method Acting as a significant cultural event during the twentieth century. According to Butler, the Method challenged previously accepted norms and techniques of performing, defining the Method “as a transformative, revolutionary, modernist art movement” that “brought forth a new way of conceiving of the human experience, one that changed how we look at the world, and at ourselves” (xx). Tracing the development of the Method from its birth at the Moscow Art Theatre, Butler spends the first quarter of the book on Stanislavsky and his epigones (Vakhtangov, Michael Chekhov, Boleslavsky, Vera Soloviova, Maria Ouspenskaya, Sulerzhitsky)—the founders of the System that became the fixture of this new acting style. Butler emphasizes two key components of the Stanislavsky System: the actor’s personal life experience, creating a state of “I am” (*ya yesm*) the character in performance, and *perezhivanie* (living through or experiencing the role viscerally), all of which coalesce through the required exercises that train the actor in relaxation, concentration, imagination, naivete, bits (later mistranslated as beats), sense and affective memory, the supertask (translated as super-objective), magic if, and the given circumstances of the play.

Butler then takes the reader across the Atlantic, as Stanislavsky’s ideas took root in America, first in the American Lab Theatre in the 1920s and later in the Group Theatre in the ‘30s. In the latter, Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford formed the style of American Method acting, versions of which were then promulgated by Strasberg as well as two other Group members, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner. Butler traverses the well-known feuds between Strasberg and Adler, as well as highlight-