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Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper, and Peter Holland, eds, *Medieval Shakespeare: Past and Presents* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), xiv+263pp., ISBN 978-1-107-01627-9, £80.00.

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In her Introduction to this essay collection, Helen Cooper suggests that the very idea of a 'medieval Shakespeare' (as opposed to a Classical, Renaissance, or early modern Shakespeare) would have seemed anathema just a decade or so ago. Although much of Shakespeare's popular reputation rests on his supposed universality – after all, as Ben Jonson reminds us, 'He was not of an age, but for all time' – the cadre of professional scholars and critics who collectively constitute the 'Shakespeare industry' have, for the most part, sought to locate both author and work in a particular historical moment: that of Renaissance England. It has tended to draw upon the complex network of literary, cultural, social, and religious contexts and associations of that period when commenting on, explicating, and evaluating the plays and poems. As Cooper notes, this has had the effect of producing a critical tradition which – at least when thinking about Shakespeare historically – has tended to exclude Shakespeare's medieval inheritance, concentrating its attention instead either on Shakespeare's debt to the classical past (a past which the Renaissance was supposed to be reviving), or on the ways in which Shakespeare, the 'early modern'

twenty-first century playhouse re-creations. Some may even add to a body of knowledge that will, in time, be seen as anachronistic scholarly debate rather than firm early modern evidence about theatre practice and/or materiality. Whatever side of the reconstructed playhouse divide you belong, whether 'original practices' aficionado or circumspect sceptic, *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance* will stimulate your senses, and your scholarly imagination.

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Alexa Alice Joubin, *Weltliteratur und Welttheater: Ästhetischer Humanismus in der kulturellen Globalisierung* (Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2012), 214pp., ISBN 978-3-8376-2207-2, €27.80.

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Weltliteratur und Welttheater is a critical inquiry into the driving force of humanism in the process of cross-cultural exchange that engenders the globalization of literature and theatre. In the course of her analysis, Alexa Alice Joubin asks several key questions, which inform her theoretically informed, site-specific readings: What was (and is) the function and role of humanism as artists throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries create hybrid experimental forms that transcend linguistic, cultural and national boundaries? How do elements of 'aesthetic humanism' appear in surprising forms, particularly in literary and dramatic works that are the result of global cultural cross-fertilization? And how do aesthetic humanist texts merge Chinese and Western forms to engage with, respond to and shed light upon vital themes of modernization, politics, aesthetics and art? In its broad historical conception which spans both the modern and postmodern periods, and in its fore-grounding of the two related genres of world literature and world theatre, this book composed in German not only presents novel readings of iconic Chinese texts but also the multifarious interconnections between Western and Chinese expressions of humanism.

Before delving into in-depth discussions of concrete authors and texts, Joubin begins the book by tracing the evolution of humanism amid what Walter Benjamin called the 'aestheticization of politics' (10) in the twentieth century. In today's art, writes Joubin, humanism can no longer be associated with 'political slogans, rigid

rationalism or scientific positivism' (10), with which it was often identified. Instead, the humanistic impulse becomes a 'common basis for communication between artists and their audiences' (10) as it 'influences the creation of autobiographic narratives and plays, emphasizes personal experiences as opposed to impersonal institutional history and encourages new interpretations of Western canonical texts' (10). To reveal how precisely the values, ideas and aesthetic forms of humanism are an integral part of intercultural literature and art is Joubin's purpose in the ten chapters that follow the introduction of the book.

The first chapter examines the interplay of tragedy and comedy in the humanistic endeavours of Lu Xun (1881-1936), often considered to be 'the father of modern Chinese literature', whose oeuvre includes formal experiments in satire and political caricature. Lu Xun's disrespectful, sarcastic and iconoclastic critique of the 'tragedy' of early twentieth-century Chinese society is well known. Joubin, however, offers a re-examination of Lu Xun's heritage by tracing tragicomic elements in Lu's ostensibly non-political experimental works which, she argues, nevertheless function as effective social commentary. So as to reveal how Lu Xun utilized laughter as a form of critique, Joubin presents readings of several stories in the collection *Old Things Newly Packaged* (*Gushi xinbian*), written between 1922 and 1935, in which Lu Xun recreates well-known classical Chinese stories in novel ways. By retelling these old tales, and portraying the philosophers Laozi, Mozi and Zhuangzi as clowns in utterly absurd situations, Lu Xun evokes an interplay of humanistic and comical parodic elements so as to destroy the reader's respect for these revered figures of classical Chinese culture. Allowing the sages to speak in a humorous mix of classical Chinese, English and vernacular expressions, he further succeeds in creating a 'tragicomic space between the consciousness of the individual and the collective' (29) which emphasizes the tragic loneliness of the individual, whose persistent efforts to imbue the world with coherent meaning are repeatedly transformed into mere farce. This tension between the tragic and comic dimensions of Lu Xun's work exemplifies this modern author's conception of the solitude, meaninglessness and absurdity of life. Like Nietzsche, Lu Xun shows the 'fatal silence of the darkness' (34), doubts his own ability to help bring light to the world and reveals moments in which mankind, average people as well as heroes, become aware of the ludicrous comedy of their existence.

Joubin then moves on to a discussion of the 'world citizenship' (41) of Lao She (1899-1966), one of the greatest modern Chinese humanists, who also wrote in a comical-satirical vein. Interestingly, she presents Lao She as a true cosmopolitan who engages the problem of living between cultural identities. By means of her discussion of the protagonist Dr. Mao in Lao She's story 'The Sacrifice' ('Xisheng', 1934), Joubin foregrounds the difficult situation faced by Chinese students who had studied abroad and returned to China, and whose cultural identity was therefore fractured, neither Chinese nor Western. The world traveller Lao She depicts here does not embody the idealized cosmopolitan self, articulated by Chinese thinkers since the May Fourth period, in which local and global culture is harmoniously fused. Instead, Dr. Mao's cosmopolitan identity is based on superficial imitation of the

West and the display of outward material symbols, such as a Western-style bathtub in his home. Lao's effective use of such comic metaphors thematizes the dialectic between the local and the global and raises questions about cultural belonging as well as the possibility of true cultural blending. His text interrogates modern Chinese cosmopolitan subjectivities, which are intertwined with China's situation within the global world system. What does it mean to be modern in China? How do China and the West represent mutually intertwined cultural identities? And what are the human traits that bind Chinese and non-Chinese people together in a common humanity?

In the following chapters, Joubin expands her discussion of humanism in Chinese literature by illuminating Mo Yan's (1955-) unique form of humour, particularly in his important text *The Republic of Wine* (*Jinguo*, 2000), which enables Mo to reverse communist iconography and create a 'counter-narrative' to objective history. In her study of the early twentieth-century translator Lin Shu (1852-1924) Joubin beautifully illuminates how Lin, in his artful translations of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) into classical Chinese, infused his creative literary adaptations with elements of Chinese Confucian humanism. Joubin further expands her discussion of 'Chinese Shakespeares' by tracing the 'reproduction of the beautiful' (93) in Liang Shiqiu's (1903-87) rewriting of Shakespeare's Sonnets in Chinese. Liang, seeking to enrich the modern Chinese language, recreated the Sonnets in vernacular (rather than classical) Chinese and simultaneously formulated a new theory of translation which was strongly influenced by Irving Babbitt's (1865-1933) notions of the universal function of art.

In the second part of the book, Joubin moves into the post-modern age in which Chinese-French author Gao Xingjian (1940-) transforms the experience of exile and escape into the guiding themes of his 2002 play *Snow in August* (*Bayue xue*) in which he blends Chinese and Western cultures as well as Shakespearean and Greek tragedy. In his tireless search for a 'total, omnipotent theatre' (105), Gao adheres to his guiding principle of 'cold literature' (*leng de wenxue*), which privileges individuality and the portrayal of distinct voices. Fusing a variety of different theatre genres and cultures, the play is a polyglossic pastiche of many different voices, theatrical modes and languages, and refuses to be reduced into one culturally coherent form.

Joubin expands this idea of transcultural theatre in her exploration of classical Chinese theatre ('xiqu') as it continues to evolve in dialogue with Elizabethan texts. Partially basing her studies on her book *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (2009), Joubin examines Shakespeare performances in the Chinese cultural realm and proves that numerous similarities exist between the original Shakespearean and Chinese plays. Finally, Joubin also shows the differing roles Shakespeare played at various moments in modern Chinese history, as the 'idea of Shakespeare' as well as the plays themselves came to represent the essence of Western humanist ideals. In her final chapters Joubin traces the 'Afterlife' of Shakespeare by analyzing performances of 'Chinese Shakespeares' on the stages of Europe. Throughout her detailed readings, she emphasizes the creative energy of this theatre, which in fact thematizes the history of globalization in cultural terms.

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