

**Aneta MANCEWICZ. 2022. *Hamlet After Deconstruction*.
Palgrave MacMillan**

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In many ways this is a long overdue book. While Shakespeare Studies has responded, albeit belatedly, to Derridean notions of deconstruction in books such as *Shakespeare and Deconstruction*, edited by Douglas G. Atkins and David M. Bergeron (1988) or Maurizio Calbi's intermedial 2013 *Spectral Shakespeares*, there has been no full-length volume which links perhaps the most canonical of Shakespeare plays with deconstruction or that links deconstruction with theatrical and dramatic adaptation. As Mancewicz points out, a deconstructive approach offers an alternative to Romantic interpretations of the text and the protagonist in its foregrounding of the play's ambivalences and ambiguities, while the focus on adaptations of *Hamlet* enables a critique of notions of fidelity to an original in favor of a view of adaptation as unsettling and questioning the source. The book is part of a series on adaptation in theatre and performance and the adaptations on which Mancewicz focuses range from the 1960s to 2010. They include well-known dramas such as Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967) and Heiner Müller's *The Hamletmachine* (1977), contemporary performances such as Alice Birch and Katie Mitchell's *Ophelias Zimmer* and Janusz Glowacki's *Fortinbras Gets Drunk*, and mixed reality experiences such as CREW's *Hamlet's Lunacy* (2019). The range of these adaptations – dramaturgical, geographical and historical – is one of the strengths of the book.

Structurally, the book follows the same accessible format throughout. It hones in on a central concept within deconstruction (in this case supplement, *différance* and trace), discusses Derrida's use of the term and the ways in which each can be applied to adaptation, before analyzing dramatic and theatrical adaptations of *Hamlet* from these different perspectives. The section on supplement explores works where the character Hamlet is relegated to the background, while the section on *différance* discusses works where the play becomes a tissue of literary allusions, historical and political references, and dramatic conventions. The section on trace examines works where Hamlet is banished only to haunt the works as trace. Within the chapters on the adaptations, partic-

ular themes are highlighted through apparent oppositions which break down under the force of deconstructive strategies (absent/present or action/inaction, for instance). This format gives coherence and consistency to the book and the different chapters function cumulatively to provide an expansive notion of the operations of deconstruction. They suggest not only the ubiquity of *Hamlet* but also the ubiquity of deconstruction as a theatrical method. The section on *différance* (do we still need to put the word in italics when it has been so thoroughly appropriated into critical discourse?) as both difference and deferral is perhaps the least successful of the sections. While the ways in which the two works construct *Hamlet* as machine and defer meaning through excess is clear, they are such different works both aesthetically and politically that it is more difficult to read across them. Moreover, so much has already been written about *The Hamletmachine*, even if it has not been from an explicitly deconstructionist perspective, that it is harder to find new angles on this revolutionary piece. Nevertheless, *Hamlet's Lunacy* is an intriguing combination of early modern and contemporary worldviews and technologies and certainly worth including here. The other two sections of the book function more effectively. Although the three works in the section on supplement differ in terms of history, dramaturgy, and intention, for example, the notion of not making Hamlet the central character unifies the chapter in a way that allows the reader a diverse but coherent approach to the concept.

Throughout the book, Mancewicz outlines her notion of what she labels "deconstructive adaptation," of which she considers *The Hamletmachine* "a prototypical case" (131). In the introduction, she argues that a deconstructive adaptation "assumes that source texts are inherently incongruous, polysemantic, and paradoxical rather than unified, coherent and complete." It "involves extensive reorganization of the source by means of omissions, reductions, shuffling of scenes, juxtaposition of high and low, contemporary language with archaic diction or tragedy with burlesque" and rejects psychological explanation (10). These are certainly features of the adaptations she discusses but they are also increasingly features of many mainstream productions of *Hamlet*, especially those in non-anglophone contexts. What distinguishes a deconstructive adaptation from these more mainstream productions? The concept itself tends to shift throughout the book because deconstruction itself changes with different political, dramaturgical, and performative contexts and it would have been interesting to return to this idea of transformations in understandings of deconstruction in the conclusion

more fully. It would also have been useful to focus more on changing approaches to tragedy. As Mancewicz points out, on the one hand, there is a sense that tragedy is unperformable nowadays but at the same time, an avoidance of conventional notions of tragedy in many of these adaptations reveals other forms of personal, social, and political tragedy that are moving and closer to the lives of contemporary readers and viewers. Yet perhaps the key question about the operations of deconstruction raised by the title of the book is what happens to *Hamlet* after deconstruction. Mancewicz makes clear that these deconstructive adaptations rely on knowledge of *Hamlet* to measure their *différance* from it. In the present, this suggests a certain elitism in those adaptations between those in the know and those who are not, but in the future, after fifty or so years of deconstruction, generations to come might only know *Hamlet* as supplement, *différance*, or trace. Does that matter? In a context of growing social and political inequality, who will have access to *Hamlet*? The award-winning Italian play *Kitsch Hamlet* by Saverio La Ruina deals with some of these issues and is one of the most interesting chapters in the book, with the play's combination of pop cultural and local Calabrian references. Nevertheless, the fact that this book raises as many questions as it answers is very much a sign of a stimulating, well-researched, and important work that will be a useful resource for both teachers and students in a variety of national contexts.

References

- Calbi, Maurizio. 2013. *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century*. Palgrave MacMillan.
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