

Loftis, Sonya Freeman. *Shakespeare's Surrogates: Rewriting Renaissance Drama*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Ben Fuqua, University of Georgia

Sonya Freeman Loftis's *Shakespeare's Surrogates: Rewriting Renaissance Drama* tackles adaptation and appropriation with fresh vigor. Rather than negotiating ownership, Loftis interrogates a species of adaptation subsumed in intrinsic connection. In the book, she balances two theaters, exploring all of the various discourses in between. A reader might be surprised that a book with an early modern bent is laid out according to the development of modern drama and its great figures. Her chapters trace — in chronological order — the works of George Bernard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, Eugene O'Neill, Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard, and Heiner Müller. The book's trip from high modernism to postmodernism is, however, ultimately concerned by the constant and necessary intrusion of the great early modern stage figures into the careers of the more recent dramatists. By investigating the modern stage, Loftis explains how it is built by but also rebuilds its early modern precedents. Sometimes this discursive interdependence is born of protest, sometimes loving embrace, and often through experimentation resting in the knowledge that discursivity is always already a given.

In lieu of "adaptation," Loftis chooses the term "surrogacy," and it proves to be a nimble metaphor, though sometimes hard to define. Through surrogacy (or surrogation), Loftis concludes that in her book, adaptation has been allowed to appear "as grave robbery, skinning, cannibalism, haunting, and even disembodiment. It has worn the guise of epic theater and theater of the absurd, of modern comedy and postmodern pastiche. It has been represented by both acts of memory and acts of forgetting" (136). Poles are constantly being built in her discussion of surrogacy, and by oscillating between them we see the palimpsestic nature of drama across periodization. Methodologically, Loftis immediately shows the need to conflate corpse and corpus. Drawing on Derridean "hauntology," Loftis writes that "the theater is a particularly haunted cultural space, the drama an especially haunted art form" (xvii). We draw closer to surrogacy as we understand how the actions of so many past performers color the present performance or how the mass of playtexts, especially those most noted and notable, indelibly mark the playwright-at-work. Perhaps the most apt definition Loftis lends surrogacy also helps to map her project: citing Joseph Roach, Loftis calls surrogation a process by which "repetition is change," through which society, even

in demanding evolution, always anchors itself in a past surrogate, demanding a Shakespeare to test how drama may then grow (2). Peeking back at the list, which unites cannibalism and acts of memory, a reader can expect a somewhat malleable surrogacy in Loftis's project, never exactly one thing but always the thing that allows early modernist work to seep into modernism, and for that matter, for modernists to look ahead as well as behind.

For example, personal displacement becomes Loftis's lens for discussing Shaw's surrogated relationship with Shakespeare. She combines the listing of Shaw's critical assaults on Shakespeare as well as readings of his plays to form a personal rivalry between the two men who lived centuries apart. For Shaw to exist in his own right, he seems to have believed he needed to supplant Shakespeare. Loftis's readings of *Heartbreak House* and *Cesar and Cleopatra* fashion an embodied, rotting, father figure who must be cast aside. In *Shakes versus Shaw*, Loftis concludes that Shaw cries out for the audience to understand that Shakespeare not only is but *must* be mortal. As his mortal body died, so must his legacy. Meditating on celebrity, influence, and creative innovation, Loftis ties Shakespeare to Shaw despite the latter's constant denunciations of the former, or rather, because of them. Shaw serves as a surrogate for Shakespeare, who must be dethroned if art is to evolve. Surrogacy becomes the difference between ignorance and cautioned influence in Shaw's case, when even the most acid critique pays service to what came before.

*Shakespeare's Surrogates* continues with these sorts of flourishes. It lingers on Brecht's obsession with deconstructing early modern works in literally visceral ways. As Brecht melts history away from *Edward II*, he focuses on literal instances of flaying. His *Duchess of Malfi*, originally hinging upon the "monuments" of the Duchess's seemingly dead family, is filled with the language of monuments, becoming a monument to monuments. Bodily violence makes violence to the literary corpus Brecht's strain of surrogation, even if in this case the corpus extends to Christopher Marlowe and John Webster (34). Less violently in O'Neill, Loftis reads Shakespeare as a surrogate father for the playwright, where memory of the father competes with performance of the same figure. Haunted by fathers, we enact their memories. Haunted by Shakespeare, we cannot help but retrace his steps. O'Neill's "rewriting of Shakespeare, while intended to mark his separation from his ghostly father, merely shows his indebtedness to him, as his use of Shakespearean quotations and motifs preserves the old text within his new text" (77). Conversely, Beckett and Stoppard happily engage with Shakespeare. Their conspicuous rewriting projects spell a new attempt to disrupt and surrogate Shakespeare's place in the canon as well as dramatic imagination. "Disrupt" is the key word in both cases. Attempts to forget Shakespeare in projects such as Beckett's *Endgame* or Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* only highlight the referent's absence. As Loftis writes of forgetting, it is "intricately entwined with the act of

remembering" (93). Doing violence to Shakespeare's text, attempting to escape it, or simply forget it, these playwrights have merely continued to build on it or at least from it.

Loftis concludes with a chapter exploring Heiner Müller and extended implications for the concept of surrogation. Having already highlighted favorite early modern tropes such as flaying, dismembering, and general violence, Loftis's project provokes yet again by using Müller's flights of postmodern tinkering with Shakespeare in *Hamletmachine* to highlight the grizzly classics of cannibalism and crawling back into the mother's womb (115, 127). That being said, do not mistake provocation for flash. As with all of her readings in this book, Loftis treats *Hamletmachine* with much care. It is this chapter where the promise of the book takes on a new valence. Müller's experiments, like all that preceded his, end with an inability to escape a Shakespearean specter; Shakespeare is unavoidably superimposed onto the modern stage. Loftis writes that in rewriting the original *Hamlet*, Müller "preserves the Shakespearean past" as we have seen previously, but continues "and yet creates the dramatic future" (120). Projection of the past onto the present — or early modern onto the modern — makes way for the projection of the present onto the future — or modern on to postmodern. Surrogation is not limited to Shakespeare alone. As Shaw insists on becoming a surrogate for Shakespeare's creative place for the sake of progress, the progress of creativity demands that at some point someone must become a surrogate for Shaw; contextual substitution becomes key in Loftis's discussion of Müller, where Müller begs for the reorganization of Western tragedy (128). As always, attempts to supplant become acts of surrogation.

For Müller, like Shaw and the many others explored in this book, no amount of violence or meddling can erase Shakespearean primacy on the stage. *Shakespeare's Surrogates: Rewriting Renaissance Drama* not only looks to the past but also projects Shakespeare into the future, where influence can never be totally rewritten but remolded as long as some kernel of collective memory holds consistent. Do not confuse Loftis's work for theory alone, as the discussion of the modernist plays themselves warrant as much attention as those who will turn to *Shakespeare's Surrogates* for its contributions to adaptation studies. The book's blurring discourse is worthy of study for those interested in adaptation, diachronicity, the stability of the subject, the subjectivity of the corpus, enacted memory, or any other study focused on the permeability of literary and subjective barriers.

## References

Loftis, Sonya Freeman. *Shakespeare's Surrogates: Rewriting Renaissance Drama*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.