

Screening Early Modern Drama: Beyond Shakespeare. Pascale Aebischer.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. xi + 274 pp. \$99.

Screening Early Modern Drama: Beyond Shakespeare gives a lucid survey of the field, rediscovering material using a nonbaroque pedagogical language. These are all things Aebischer is very good at delivering. However, a reader of the book might be forgiven for having repeated experiences of déjà vu. For Aebischer's argument is stale. She uses critical terms from the 1980s and early 1990s, such as "troubled" (11; "troubling . . . troubles . . . even more disturbing" [57]); she cites outmoded film theory (Laura Mulvey's famous essay from 1975 on the male gaze, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" [33]); she uncritically echoes the familiar yet mostly forgotten lexicon of cultural materialist work on Shakespeare from the 1980s and 1990s: *dissidence*, *radical*, *transgressive* are all positively valued terms. In other words, the book offers boilerplate. Instead of reading Shakespeare otherwise, or producing alternative Shakespeares, Aebischer reduces Shakespeare on film to "heritage Shakespeare," a phrase put in scare quotes, something she often does with other phrases for no apparent reason. Branagh stands in for heritage Shakespeare. Aebischer's supposedly homogenous Branagh Shakespeare is presumed "bad" in every sense of the word. And so is John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). And so too is Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous* (2011): Emmerich supposedly has a "reactionary view of Shakespeare's role in present-day film culture" (222). Why does Aebischer deem these Shakespeare films to be morally and politically on the wrong side? Apparently because they are "faithful" to the texts, because they don't make the past speak to the present, and because they reinforce "canonicity," and so on. Aebischer has to create a Shakespeare on film straw man in order to justify her study of putatively radical though admittedly minor Jacobean film adaptations. To be sure, sometimes academics need straw men to do what they want to do. One might charitably overlook Aebischer's straw Shakespeare man and get to her readings of Jacobean film adaptations. Shakespeare is food for powder. Fair enough. The problem is that when Aebischer does get to the films, many of which her reader may not have seen, she delivers more boilerplate, not original close readings of them.

Moreover, Aebischer establishes her own canon of Jacobean film adaptations: all of them she deems morally and politically good because they are faithful to an avant-garde theatrical tradition defined by the works of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht (see 19). The fourth and last chapter is devoted to an online "microcinema" that blurs the "boundaries between 'conservative' Shakespeare and 'radical' Jacobean" (11). This microcinema does not seem to blur very much of anything, however, because it uses the same "aesthetic and formal approaches" (such as anachronisms, nonlinear plots) and shares "the political radicalism of contemporary Jacobean films" (11). In this "cottage industry of microcinema," Aebischer heralds "an ever-growing grass-roots movement dedicated to moving beyond Shakespeare" (11). Here is a randomly taken sample of Aebischer channeling Jon Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* (1984): "It is this combination of

the 'transgression, dissidence, and desire' of the Jacobean with a reflexive attitude towards the structures and conventions of film itself that would form a source of inspiration for Jarman" (19). Here is another example: "If *Hotel* is a film 'about' how to produce a fast-food McMalfi for a contemporary audience, Figgis's use of the preposterous contemporary Jacobean aesthetic made the *Duchess of Malfi* a play 'about' the making of *Hotel*, 'about' man's control of transgressive sexuality in the medium of film" (103). Most of the time Aebischer describes rather than argues or analyzes. Film description can be a very illuminating analytical critical practice. In Aebischer's case, however, description reads like plot summary served up with all-purpose platitudes. Consider: "*The Revenger's Tragedy's* significance is reasserted in the middle of *Noroît* in a cluster of scenes that repeatedly re-enact the Duke's poisoning with Gloriana's skull in a manner that destabilizes the boundaries between play and audience, fiction and reality. The cluster culminates in Morag's melodramatic performance of Vindice's murder of the Duke as a play-within-the-film" (18). Worse yet are sentences Aebischer seems to think are informative but that merely state the obvious. Sometimes these sentences approach howlers. For example: "The development of digital media is thus not only crucial to the affordability of filming [fill in the blank] early modern drama, but also to the dissemination of knowledge about those films and the plays they adapt" (10). O brave new world that has such networks in it.

Had Aebischer been less concerned to write the "first" study and engaged with previously published work in the same area, she might have written a much stronger book. There is no point in going further. The reader of this review may go consult the book and see it for herself or himself. And to her list of films, let me add one Aebischer missed, namely, a 2003 script reading by the entire cast of the projected film of *The Spanish Tragedy* Alex Cox never went on to make. You may see it on YouTube here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDuvqnsKXl8>. And clips from films Aebischer discusses abound in what I call "cinoma" (cinema no more). Here is one: *Le bal de l'horreur dans Noroît (1976) de Jacques Rivette*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4zseAvDAtk>.

RICHARD BURT, *University of Florida*