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Cultural Ecology and Chinese *Hamlets*

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I. Cultural Ecology and Cultural Mobility Studies

ECOLOGICALLY INSPIRED APPROACHES to literature and culture continue to receive much attention, not only in Anglophone varieties of ecocriticism but also in recent French and German versions of what is now frequently termed "cultural ecology."[1] In these contexts, the core concepts of "ecology," "culture," and "media" are frequently used as "traveling concepts" that are characterized by their speculative potential, their open structure, and their metaphoric qualities.[2] In other words, they are used for highly divergent ways of inquiry and analysis. Current varieties of cultural and media ecology combine a wide range of theories, models, and methods from disciplines as diverse as ethnology, sociology, the life sciences, history, and literary studies. They have created a transdisciplinary field of research whose possibilities and limits are anything but sufficiently explored.[3] Scholars in this area no longer rely on certain normative traditions that used to envelop the concept of culture, especially in European contexts; instead, the application of the concept of ecology to the study of culture emphasizes the "highly complex multiplicity of mutually supplementing and interlaced systems of mental worlds."[4] Some approaches in this new field also stress the concrete, material interconnections between objects, actors, and their environments. Hubert Zapf has underlined the affinity of cultural ecology to the ways in which knowledge is produced in the life sciences, thus registering its approximation to scientific, especially biological forms of thought. According to Zapf, "Literature is a privileged medium of cultural ecology" because it is "a form of cultural textuality that has developed in coevolution with, and in a relationship of tension to, the modernization and civilization process."[5] He leaves open, however, at what time this process is supposed to begin and why it should be literature, above anything else, that attains a privileged position in this process.

Why literature, and why ecology in literary studies? If it is to benefit the study of literature and culture, ecological thinking needs to deliver more than a new language game that may make it easier for the humanities to access research funding in competition with the sciences. In my

view, what such an alternative, genuinely transdisciplinary vocabulary has to offer is two-fold: firstly, it raises new questions and opens new vistas for the study of culture; and secondly, it holds the promise of new perspectives on old and well-worn problems in literary studies and literary history. Such questions include, among others, the autonomy of the aesthetic, the functions of fiction, and the durability of the cognitive and emotional effects of literature. In view of these promises, this article investigates the mobility and portability of literary effects across different media, different periods, and different cultural and geographical spaces; its intention is to offer a glimpse of what a continentally informed view of cultural ecology can contribute to the understanding of literary history as a cultural history of media effects.[6]

A term like "cultural and media ecology" certainly requires a much more detailed discussion than can be offered here.[7] Instead, this essay proceeds from the assumption that media and media formations, understood as cultural and institutional settings, are shaped by human beings and their natural and cultural environments. But media, far from being mere containers of cultural meaning and simple objects of study, also shape the possibilities of defining concepts like "nature," "culture," "the human," or—indeed—"meaning." Instead of presenting a detailed theoretical argument, this essay therefore presents a paradigmatic example from cultural and literary history to illustrate this research perspective by exploring the global cultural mobility of "Shakespeare." With a view to the two-fold promise of cultural ecology, it hopes to accommodate both the historical singularity of literary objects (mostly, but not exclusively, texts) and their multifarious continuations in other media configurations than the original, or originally intended, ones.

Mobility and portability are keywords in this perspective, but so are situatedness and durability: literary texts are open to situational rereadings and transformations (mobile and portable), but they are also capable of remaining highly stable in completely different media contexts, different spatial, temporal, and medial situations. Of course, the observation that texts "migrate" is neither new nor original: they circulate back and forth between authors, readers, and critics; they are actualized, again and again, in always new situations of interaction. In cultural networks, texts are passed on in different media forms (for example, oral, written, printed, or posted on a website). They can fulfill important, though not always exactly definable or historicizable functions, such as the social and cultural semantization of spaces and objects. Unless they are carved in stone or brick, they are no longer solely made to transcend temporal distances, but also intended for spatial movement and transmission. Clay tablets, papyri, codices, scrolls, and books are literally dragged through

world history. Print and the ever faster and cheaper production of books, followed by the creation of a book market in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, merely speed up and intensify the fundamental "bias" (in the parlance of Harold Innis) of *spatial* mobility that is already implied in the very form of textuality.[8]

Thus in a trivial sense many, if not most, texts are portable: they can be distributed by means of very different carrier media. A somewhat less trivial perspective is reached if, instead of focusing on physical carriers, one considers certain groups of texts, for instance in a specific historical period or according to certain selection criteria, for example, "the novel," as Franco Moretti has done in his global history of a single literary form.[9] Obviously there are a number of forms, such as long narrative texts in prose, that have become known the world over and have developed in parallel to one another, though asynchronously. Not only the book as a material object but also the novel as a genre has spread worldwide. The same holds true for lyric poems, plays, and short stories, a fact that is far from self-evident. Moreover, one can observe interesting, though more particular and situational, phenomena of intergeneric portability: the citation of ancient Chinese poems in the Japanese novel of the Heian period, such as the *Genji monogatari* of Murasaki Shikibu (where these poems are used for the stylization and codification of otherwise unrepresentable emotional situations), or the eclogues in the early modern European pastoral romance, such as Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia.* In this *context,* one can also point to the Sidneys' translation of the Psalms, which not only translates a scriptural text into English but also carries a catalog of lyric forms forward into the future, especially when this translation is transferred from manuscript to the medium of the printed book.

Mobility and portability, then, are not limited to objects like scrolls and books, but are also a defining feature of literary genres and forms, ensuring generic stability over significantly long periods of time. Sonnets have been written from the twelfth century to the present. This shifting of perspective from physical objects to texts, genres, and literary works also signals a problem for the scholarly definition of our object domain: the classic, impossible question "What is literature?" Literary texts, from the perspective of cultural and media ecology, are not stable objects that can be admired as "verbal icons" or analyzed as mere carriers of semantic information and cultural meanings.[10] Quite on the contrary, because of their medial condition, their particular dependence on highly distinct material media of storage and communication, literary texts are subject to historical variability, spatiotemporal portability, and—last but not least—semantic mutability (unless we believe, with E. D. Hirsch, that

original textual meaning cannot change). Readers can only arrest this dynamic of texts for a while, simultaneously furthering its continuation. Yet when thinking of the potential variability and historical variance of textual meaning,[11] we should also consider the *invariant* dimensions of texts: which are the patterns, the more stable patterns, that subtend the mobility of texts? In other words, this perspective calls for a kind of literary studies that is not exclusively, or even predominantly, driven by questions of interpretation and meaning (even in its most modern forms, such as narratology), but which seeks to develop a more systematic relation of the different levels of mediality, communication, and modes of materiality and presence;[12] less concerned with the material portability of texts than with the transmedial sustainability of aesthetic effects.

The question of stability and mobility necessarily leads toward a media studies perspective. Media, understood in a very general sense, combine the stabilization, for a longer or shorter duration, of discrete events (forms) with the dynamic of possible erasure and the overwriting of earlier traces. More concrete definitions of media reach from the elemental to the highly specific: from the sand that takes a footprint to the silicon wafer used for storing electronic data. So-called mass media, then, are merely a differentiated segment in a continuum of what Marshall McLuhan, writing in the 1960s, suggested calling "extensions of man."[13] In contrast to McLuhan, some poststructuralists, like Friedrich Kittler, maintain that human beings should be viewed as extensions of media. Even a literary theorist as unsuspected of any connection with German media studies as J. Hillis Miller has recently adapted a famous dictum of McLuhan's—"the medium is the message"—to announce that "the medium is the maker."[14]

Apparently, McLuhan's extensions theorem was still too strongly dominated by a view of media as *mere* tools rather than as the formative and potentially total environments we live in. Media surround and enclose us, so that nowadays the metaphor of the network appears to call for a change to the dominant anthropological description of humans as tool-using or tool-making animals. Media networks are more than mere tools; obviously, they are mostly human made, but they have a determining influence on our perceptions, our conduct, our modes of knowledge and self-knowledge.

The modern focus on media as environments, rather than on (mass) media as objects, leads away from a classical, ontologically determined concept of media. Media configurations are dynamic and flexible, and human beings can connect with them in an "actor-network."[15] Without privileging either human or technological agency, an ecological perspective on media can, through its focus on networks, stress the perceptual

and experiential dimensions of media as environments. Searching for a third way between the extremes of technological determinism and traditional humanism, Ursula Heise suggests the concept of a "functional ecology" that allows us to "find ways of relating the global connectedness of virtual space back to the experiences of physical space that individuals and communities simultaneously undergo" and thus to mediate between local and global forms of agency in natural and cultural (or media) environments.[16] Similarly, Bruno Latour argues against using conceptual constructs, like the term "society," as if they clearly denoted an object existing in reality. Instead of a grand unified theory of the social or of media depending on reified constructs, these scholars propose a theoretical and methodological toolbox for new explorations of uncharted territories. This is why an all-encompassing definition of media may not be possible or even desirable, especially in a historical perspective that regards media more as processes than objects.

This focus on processes makes it possible to avoid the pitfalls of limiting media studies to mass media as concrete, standardized objects (newspapers, TV, cinema, the Internet, etc.) or "as a sustainable mode of economy and nameable cultural presence."[17] Instead, it enables a focus on media configurations that can include human beings as performers, producers, or recipients in a networked environment. Rather than being "fixed natural objects," media thus come into view as "constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication."[18] Due to this focus, scholars become interested in the question "which medial aspects of a so-called medium—and not only those aspects that can be described in terms of form or content—have a tangible impact in the context of dynamic cultural media configurations."[19]

The effects, impacts, or affective potentials studied by media ecology are obviously related to the older humanist premises underlying traditional aesthetics as well as many more recent theories of culture and the arts, including the "aesthetics of reception" developed by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser in the 1970s (which in German is known as *Wirkungsästhetik,* that is, the aesthetics of effect). Yet without falling back on the humanistic pathos of traditional aesthetics, media ecology leaves room not only for Iser's "implied reader" but also for a whole range of different forms of involvement and agency in media production and reception. Cultural media ecology attempts to preserve this basic orientation while emphasizing the multiple media networks that influence and codetermine human experiences. It describes the ecological interconnections, natural as well as cultural or social, technological and material, with which, in which, and among which human beings live.

In the following, I would like to test the argumentative potential of this perspective for a study in cultural mobility, examining the transhistorical and transcultural valency of "Shakespeare"—not as a closed body of texts but as a continuing, now global, process of reception, adaptation, and appropriation. I refer to Shakespeare not as a historical author but as a more or less flexible label for a body of writings, literary traditions, and potentials of effect that has become "portable" and adaptable in many different historical periods and cultures. This portability does not inhere purely in the texts, in their form or structure, but is to a large extent attributable to social, political, and historical forces. Using the example of the adaptation of *Hamlet* in recent Chinese films, I would like to demonstrate how literary effects circulate in different media contexts across temporal and spatial distances, beyond the range of traditional "literary history." In the larger framework of what could be called "cultural mobility studies," these suggestions also attempt to overstep the self-imposed generic limits of current world literature studies and to find an alternative to their methodological problems.[20]

II. Shakespeare on the Move

Elizabethan and Jacobean theater and drama are ideal objects of study for cultural and media ecology because they call for reflections on the connections and exchanges between differently medialized social institutions, persons, and technologies, including modes of writing and staging "literature." These connections become intensely fascinating and problematic in the context of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English theatrical culture. New Historicism has taught us to see the vital process of exchanges or "negotiations" going on between what happens in the plays on stage and the "social energy" that "circulates" in the reality around the stage.[21] This mutual feedback is important, even though New Historicists have unduly limited their attention to the circulation of discourse. It is only more recently that scholars have included the material circulation of objects and other tangible presences in their work.[22] How can the different media dimensions of Shakespeare's theater be registered and coherently described both in their historical genesis and in their impact across history, media, and cultures?

Shakespeare is the most paradigmatic example of the lasting continuity of certain media effects, accompanied by a great intensity of variation in terms of concrete media configurations in space and time. His plays belong to the early modern period—indeed, for some, the field of early modern studies is almost synonymous with Shakespeare studies—but they

also belong to the present, which continually revisits and restages them in different forms and media, reiterating the view expressed by Jan Kott that Shakespeare is "our contemporary."[23] Both to isolate Shakespeare in his own historical moment and to transpose him into a modern or postmodern cultural figure are potentially hazardous maneuvers. In the words of Andrew Hadfield, "Shakespeare has become part of our intellectual furniture, so much so that his presence can serve to preclude thought rather than to encourage it."[24] In their balance between performative theatricality and literary complexity, Shakespeare's plays explore and exploit to the full the potentials and limits of early modern theatrical culture. While the plays were perfectly suited to the theatrical conditions of their own time, their portability prepared them for very different modern media configurations. In this, they are indeed "not of an age, but for all time,"[25] as Ben Jonson wrote in a poem included in the First Folio of 1623, though he would of course not have been able to foresee the truth of this encomiastic commonplace.

In the past twenty years, many Shakespeare scholars have focused their attention on concrete situational and material contexts: most notably, on early modern print culture and manuscript publication,[26] and on the original practices of staging the plays. Knowledge of the Shakespearean stage and historical practices of performance has grown not only through the work of theater historians and archeologists, but also actors and directors. Parts of the Rose and the Globe theater have been excavated from 1989 onward, and since 1996 visitors to London have been able to watch plays at "Shakespeare's Globe," a reconstruction of Shakespeare's most famous workplace on the South Bank.[27] The question is whether these practices of reconstruction, in trying or pretending to bring us closer to the historical reality of Shakespeare's time, provide a genuine new source of information through practical experiment, or whether they merely add another layer to the historical confusion. There is much that can be learned from staging the plays in a presumably near-authentic physical space, but this knowledge needs to be complemented by an awareness of the unsettled questions—of which there are many, ranging from the Globe's actual size, the shape of the stage, the entrance doors to the stage and to the auditorium, to the shape and function of the balcony, etc.

What is more, there is something of a paradox in these attempts to reconstruct, as precisely as possible, a particular playhouse, which, as experts say, "never deserved that unique status" because, at least from 1608 onward, the smaller indoor playhouse of the Blackfriars appears to have been the company's preferred, more profitable location.[28] Early modern playwrights, and Shakespeare was no exception in this respect,

had to produce plays that were portable, that could be taken on tour and adapted to many different locations, outdoors and indoors alike, from inn-yards to larger or smaller halls. Shakespeare and his fellow actors performed at the Globe, and the Blackfriars, but also at the Middle Temple or at court. They also toured the provinces. This very adaptability and the independence of his plays from a particular space or time has certainly helped to make Shakespeare a lasting global phenomenon. The plays have a timeless, but also spaceless quality: they can be embedded in highly different spatial and ritual contexts.

Like the medieval mystery and morality plays, or the Tudor interludes, early modern plays had to be adaptable to a great variety of spaces, and they had to allow for travel. Texts, even though they were (also) conceived as scripts for concrete performance situations, had to meet the criterion of portability—less a textual or a specific aesthetic quality than a media requirement. Like other plays of the time, Shakespeare's are written without "literary" ambitions of the romantic kind, but as part of a culture of coauthorship in the corporate style of an acting company.[29] The early quarto prints fulfill this criterion of portability in their own way; the monumental First Folio of 1623 is the first print of Shakespeare's plays whose purpose is not spatial portability but preservation in time. Ben Jonson's slogan can also be read as an advertisement for this endeavor. But what is perhaps more interesting than these material conditions of portability is their aesthetic consequences. Shakespeare's plays can literally be staged almost anywhere. They have been adapted in other media from film to manga to new digital environments, such as YouTube or Second Life.[30] Yet the multimedia Shakespeare of the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries is no aberrance, but a practical consequence of the media potential contained in the writing: the portability of its effects across spatial, temporal, and media boundaries was a necessity of Renaissance theatrical culture.

Where can one locate this portability in the texts? Predominantly, I would argue, inherent portability is factored into the space between Shakespeare's language and varying situations of performance. Shakespeare's (often intensely visual) image clusters, as analyzed by Caroline Spurgeon, Wolfgang Clemen, and others, can be adduced as evidence of the dynamics between meaning and presence, textuality and theatricality. They urge the listener to visualize what cannot be presented on the early modern stage, for example, civil war ("contention") in *2 Henry IV*, which is compared to "a horse / Full of high feeding" that "madly hath broke loose, / And bears down all before him."[31] This comparison is not merely argumentative or poetic, but on the one hand a very pertinent visualization and concretization of the problem of coping with

political and historical challenges, so characteristic of the history plays, and on the other hand a self-referential (metadramatic) illustration of the problem of representing anonymous historical processes on stage.

The space between language and performance: because of the limits of representational stage effects, theatrical illusion depends on the constant interaction between actors and audience. Such interaction (between text and performance, between actors and audience) can occur even in the staging of the soliloquies, which functioned probably less as representations of inwardness than as situations of dialogue between character and audience. Shakespeare connects representation and performance by combining language with the physical movements of bodies and objects on stage. Hence the texts are "portable" because they do not rely exclusively on an aesthetics of mimesis or representation, but on what Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster call "the power of performance."[32]

Thus the famous quotation from *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage,"[33] is concerned less with the world as a stage than, vice versa, with the stage as a world. Shakespeare's portable forms, balancing between modes of representation and performance, constitute the beginnings of modern theater. But their historical conditions of emergence cannot sufficiently explain their persistence in later media environments. Because they are neither merely theatrical nor purely literary works, and because they can maintain a balance between body-based performance and meaning-based representation, they are a crucial paradigm for a media ecology of culture based on notions of mobility and portability and interested precisely in the spaces between texts, communications media, and performative practices.

But why Shakespeare, and not Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton, John Webster, John Fletcher, or Jonson? Shakespeare's plays have come down to us from a rich theatrical culture, and his starting conditions ("little Latin, and less Greek") were not the most favorable. Yet, despite the closing of the theaters between 1642 and 1660, Shakespeare continued to be mediated and marketed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the basis of the First Folio—especially through regularly renewed editions that secured the Tonson publishing house a lasting copyright.[34] Reiteration is a form of intensification: the First Folio and its reprints arguably helped to secure Shakespeare's lasting fame in a way that permanently damaged his competitors' claims to attention in the media culture of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the early nineteenth century, Shakespeare's name had come to be affiliated with Romantic genius theory, and his place in the canon not only of British, but also of other European literatures (most notably Germany, which saw the foundation of its own Shakespeare Society in 1864) was safe.

Also, one might ask: why Shakespeare, and not Lope de Vega or Pedro Calderón de la Barca? This question is less easy to answer, but one can speculate that the global spread of the British Empire in the nineteenth century did not exactly help the Spanish competition. There is a political dimension to mobility that has nothing to do with the internal qualities of texts, or their allegedly universal thematic appeal, but everything with the forces that shape (world) history. Any theory of cultural mobility needs to acknowledge the asymmetries, dislocations, and discordances that arise from shifting flows of exchange and lines of conflict, rather than assume a unilinear process of globalization. As will become clear in the following case study, the global spread of "Shakespeare" in transnational media networks is marked by strategies of localization at least as much as by a (somewhat utopian) vision of universal cultural appeal.

III. Chinese *Hamlets*

As I have already noted, Shakespeare's plays function so well in different historical and cultural settings because they seem to be less firmly grounded in local spatiotemporal contexts—unlike domestic tragedies or city comedies, for example, whose locations are fixed in Yorkshire, Kent, or London, and whose plots sometimes expect the audience to know quite particular details about these places. In contrast, Shakespeare's geography is often vague, imaginative, fluid; he famously locates Bohemia by the sea. The avoidance of concrete spatial and cultural references (apart from the history plays, which are a special case in this respect) makes it easier for Shakespeare to be adapted by later generations and in completely different cultural surroundings, such as those of contemporary China.

The cultural mobility of Shakespeare is already evident in the early seventeenth century. One of the first documents that tells us about the staging of Shakespeare plays outside of England is the log-book of Captain William Keeling on board the Red Dragon, off the coast of Sierra Leone, in 1607: "I invited Captain Hawkins to a ffishe dinner and had Hamlet acted abord me w[hi]ch I p[er]mit to keepe my people from idleness and unlawful games or sleepe."[35] Since then, Shakespeare has become part of a global cultural economy—without necessarily evoking associations of Englishness or the British Empire. In Germany, the Romantics turned Shakespeare into a German classic by means of the Schlegel-Tieck translations; in China, where the first translations of Shakespeare did not appear until the 1920s, and where contact with English or British culture has been relatively limited, the case is somewhat different. But

even there, Shakespeare is now being reinvented as part of a global cultural repertoire.[36] The plays are adapted in diverse genres, forms, and media, often by means of pastiche, citation, and allusion, so that their origin in an author named Shakespeare would sometimes only be recognized by experts. Chinese moviegoers watching *The Prince of the Himalayas* or *The Banquet* (both from 2006) probably have had little or no exposure to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, on which the films are based. Thus the condition of the play's origin (a media setting where authorship was irrelevant) is replicated in today's Chinese film industry.

The history of Shakespeare in China, extensively surveyed in Alexander Huang's *Chinese Shakespeares* (2009), is a complex process of transcultural adaptations and reworkings—yet, unlike India and (parts of) Africa, for example, which enjoyed, if that is the word, a strong exposure to British culture, Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare are the result of a much more unlikely encounter between cultures and traditions. The story of Shakespeare in Japan, for example, is very different, and it is no accident that the Meisei Library in Tokyo owns so many copies of the precious First Folio. With the towering figure of Kurosawa Akira, Japan gave the world a pioneer of transcultural Shakespeare film adaptations in the 1950s. In contrast to Japan and even (Soviet) Russia, which started producing Shakespeare films in the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese Shakespeare films are few and far between, and they are (with very few notable exceptions) a much more recent phenomenon. In the following, I briefly discuss two recent Chinese *Hamlets* on film with regard to their local and transcultural actualization of the portability potential inherent in that play.

Sherwood Hu's *Prince of the Himalayas* (*Ximalaya wangzi,* 2006) translates *Hamlet* into ancient Tibet. Filmed with Tibetan actors, the film was then dubbed into Mandarin, and the only available DVD version has no separate audio track, so that the original language is lost. In effect, this is a double translation: from English into Tibetan and from Tibetan into Mandarin. The film might be said to use *Hamlet* as a vehicle to present a rather touristy perspective on the quaintness of ancient Tibet. Internationally, it was briefly shown at the AFI Fest in Los Angeles in 2007 but did not secure a wider release. The film goes beyond a simple "Sinicization" or "Tibetization" of *Hamlet*; it radically reinterprets Shakespeare's tragedy of blocked revenge. Because the ghost is unequivocally evil in this film, and the dead man is not Hamlet's father, his call for vengeance is of little consequence, though it does pose a threat to the transcendent order and harmony of the world. His opponent, a female shaman, is quite clear about this: "Your thirst for vengeance will bring disaster and offend the spirit world."[37] Later on, she reminds the

prince that "the sins of the past generation will not cause you to seek revenge in the present" (subtitle, 01:19:38). The film thus reinterprets Hamlet's passivity as a positive model for political agency. Since the revenge command is based on false premises, it would have led him to kill his real father. Most of the ambivalences and the messiness in which Shakespeare's play is so famously rich (leading scholars like John Dover Wilson to ask *What Happens in Hamlet?*) are elided, streamlined, and cleared up in this version, making it more easily consumable and also more suitable to the Chinese cultural and political ideal of harmony in the family, the state, and the cosmos.[38]

My second example happens to have been produced in the same year, but tells an entirely different story. *Ye Yan* (*The Banquet*), directed by Feng Xiaogang, transforms *Hamlet* into a martial arts epic. The setting is transferred to tenth-century (Tang dynasty) China. The hero, crown prince Wu Luan, has left the imperial court after his father has chosen Little Wan as his second wife. Yet the emperor dies of a scorpion's bite; as in *Hamlet*, it turns out that he has been killed by his brother, who makes Little Wan his empress. Here, Little Wan/Gertrude is not Wu Luan's/Hamlet's mother; they are roughly the same age, so the erotic tension between them can be motivated differently. We first see Wu Luan, dressed all in white (the Chinese color of mourning), engaged in an elaborate theatrical dance. This performance is interrupted by an equally spectacular assassination attempt by an entire troupe of killers dressed in black, slicing through Wu Luan's lookalike bodyguards as through so many bamboo stalks.

As in *Hamlet*, the prince returns to court, where as part of the celebrations for the accession of Empress Wan he stages a dumb show that exposes the Emperor's guilt. The Emperor then has the prince sent off to a neighboring realm, where Wu Luan survives a second assassination attempt. The tragic *dénouement* takes place at a nightly banquet. The Empress Wan wants to use this occasion to poison the Emperor with wine, but the poison is drunk by the Ophelia character, Qing Nu. The Emperor realizes that the Empress is behind this, and he recognizes the prince among the masked actors who accompany the feast with music and dancing. The Emperor then commits suicide because he has been betrayed by the love of his life. The Empress asks Wu Luan to kill her, but it is the Laertes character, Qing Nu's brother, who tries to pierce her with a poisoned sword in revenge for his sister. Wu Luan averts the blade but is injured and dies; the Empress stabs and kills Qing Nu's brother. In the film's last scene, she is killed by a blade thrown by an unidentified person.

Many details from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* remain recognizable in *The Banquet*, as in *The Prince of the Himalayas*, but once again the filmmakers

have taken great liberties in adapting the play. Many central characters have remained, others have been left out (there is no Horatio, no Rosencrantz or Guildenstern). Here, there is no ghost: the dead Emperor is merely represented by his empty armor and protective mask; yet there are some supernatural elements, such as blood seeping from the eye holes of the mask early on in the film. There is no accidental killing of Polonius and no madness; there are no soliloquies or voice-overs. Instead, in accordance with the kung-fu genre, there is a wealth of rather bloody combat sequences and symbolic use of emblematic colors: red to signal passion, associated with the Empress Wan; white as the color of death and mourning, associated with Wu Luan.

Yet one of the key features of *Hamlet*, its self-referential metadramatic theatricality, has survived the translation process. Masks are omnipresent in the film, and the prince is an accomplished actor and dancer. The Empress uses her own face as a mask to conceal her true feelings from the Emperor, and she even praises this art of dissimulation as a survival technique in conversation with Wu Luan: "The highest level is to use your own face and turn it into a mask."[39] The Empress—and the film as a whole—care little for Hamlet's "pale cast of thought" and his indecision: "Don't think too much," she tells him at one point (00:27:47). Yet at the end even this Hamlet does not avenge his father's murder, as one might have expected from a *wuxia* hero, but passively watches the murderer commit suicide.

For a Western audience, it may come as a surprise to see how little friction there is in this unlikely translation of *Hamlet* into the Chinese genre of the *wuxia* film, modeled on recent successes like Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and Zhang Yimou's *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). The literary traditions of *wuxia* (or "martial romance") are very old and include epic narratives like the fourteenth-century *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Outlaws of the Marsh*. Usually, the *wuxia* hero is a noble outlaw on a quest for justice, which makes this genre especially compatible with the revenge tragedies of the English Renaissance. In recent *wuxia* films, elements from Western culture are frequently "copied and pasted" into Asian traditions, recycled not merely for a Chinese audience but aiming at a global mainstream market. (*The Banquet* is available on a U.S. DVD with the somewhat corny title *Legend of the Black Scorpion*.)

Frequently, recent transcultural Shakespeare films present a fusion of elements whose national origins can no longer be identified with certainty. Similar to Bollywood, which has also produced its handful of Shakespearean adaptations (films like *Maqbool*, 2003, and *Omkara*, 2006), Mandarin and Cantonese filmmaking have now become a strongly hybridized transnational and transcultural industry in which national

expectations and conventions are being combined with many "foreign"
elements. In the case of *The Banquet*, the name of Shakespeare is no
longer even part of the film's marketing strategy: it goes unmentioned
in the credits (although it does—of course—show up on the back cover
of the U.S. DVD). For the Chinese film industry, making a Shakespeare
film is obviously not about Shakespeare as cultural heritage. "Shashibiya"
(the Mandarin transliteration of "Shakespeare") is a source for good sto-
ries and a repertoire of dramatic effects; just as Shakespeare and other
Renaissance playwrights pilfered stories from all kinds of literary and
historical source material in constructing their plays, the Shakespeare
canon is now being reopened for a similar process of adaptation, ex-
ploitation, and revision in Asia and elsewhere.

Twenty years after the first big wave of Chinese adaptations of Shake-
speare after the Cultural Revolution, "Shashibiya" is now ready for mass-
media popularization. It is not too improbable a speculation now that
the cultural exchange between China and the West, which Alexander
Huang has admirably surveyed in his *Chinese Shakespeares*,[40] will cease to
be unidirectional (that is, offering Chinese audiences and interested
Western scholars Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare, mostly in tradi-
tional dramatic and operatic forms, or offering Western audiences an
exoticized vision of China) and that we will see a mutual enrichment
of Asian and Western styles and genres. It is highly likely that, next to
developments on the Internet, film (rather than theater) will be a lead-
ing medium in this respect.

From the perspective of cultural and media ecology, transcultural
reworkings of Shakespeare (they are more than merely adaptations)
attest to the ways in which generic, formal, and media boundaries of
"literature" continue to merge and to complexify. Like many film indus-
tries that used to cater for regionally limited markets, Chinese cinema
has begun to compete on a transnational scale—aided, no doubt, by the
growing Chinese diaspora around the world. Using originally Western
material and giving it what one might call "the Kurosawa treatment"
(that is, presenting a Shakespearean plot as if it were part of one's
own cultural heritage, rather than an import from a different culture,
an approach that Japanese director Kurosawa Akira pioneered in the
1950s with *Throne of Blood*, his famous reworking of *Macbeth*) may well
be a strategy to reach a more culturally diverse target audience. *Prince
of the Himalayas* failed in this respect, since its concerns, both formally
and in terms of narrative content, are more local than transcultural; its
Shakespeare might be said to be more Chinese, in a traditional sense,
than that of *The Banquet*. Feng Xiaogang in this film even goes a step
further than Kurosawa in that he combines the "Asian" visual style of

martial arts, including elaborate combat choreography and extreme slow motion (using special effects that, since their export from Hong Kong to *The Matrix*, have become a staple of Hollywood action films as well), with arguably more "Western" expectations of costume drama as a genre of cinematic narrative. This impression of an increasing hybridization between "Western" and "Asian" forms is confirmed by the score of *The Banquet*: it combines, most notably in the play-within-the-play scene, the percussive style of Chinese opera with the harmonies of classical Western orchestral music. Moreover, Chinese film stars like Zhang Ziyi, who plays Little Wan, have become household names for Western cinephiles as well as Asian audiences. Chinese *Hamlets* attest not only to the global spread of Shakespeare, but also to the increasing transnational dynamics of *local* cultural productions and their networks of distribution.

IV. Conclusion

Owing to the technological upheavals of the digital age, literary and cultural studies increasingly focus on the media dimensions of literature and culture. Yet in cultivating our sensitivity to media-based problems, we should not fall prey to an all-too-simple presentism—nor, obviously, to simplistic versions of historicism—but attempt to develop a trans-temporal perspective on the connections between literature, culture, and media. Released from the sclerotic embrace of a literary canon, Shakespeare can be used to demonstrate how virtual worlds can come alive under certain material media conditions, but also independently of their origins in specific media—a dimension of "literary history" that New Historicism has largely neglected and that a cultural ecology might hope to address in focusing on the manifold interfaces and networked interrelations between textual forms, performative cultural settings, and materialities of media. Studying the cultural mobility of Shakespeare, we can demonstrate the tenacity of literary effects, between textuality and performance, that persist—because of their portability—even in radi-cal moments of change: from theater to printed text, from the printed text in various adaptations and translations to a new media presence, even across cultural boundaries. But we can also become aware of the strategies of localization that are applied in tailoring a pretext to the demands of new situations of performance and distribution.

Especially today, as we witness the transition from print culture to the era of digital multimedia, scholars of literature should not only be concerned with the past functions of literary texts in their historical specificity but also with the long-term patterns of mobility that charac-

terize formations of cultural and media history. One of the goals of a media-ecological perspective on literary and cultural history could be to show that the "sustainability" of literature, in ever-changing media settings, is more than the mere "persistence of the obsolete,"[41] and that literature is more than an increasingly defunct and defunctionalized relic to be studied by cultural anthropologists. Ideally and hopefully, to think about the mobility and portability of cultural objects and effects across boundaries of genre, periodization, and media would be a first step toward more sustained reflections on the cultural sustainability of "literature."

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NOTES

1   French thinkers in this mode include, among others, Edgar Morin, Michel Serres, and Félix Guattari; see, for example, Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: Athlone Press, 2000). In different ways, they follow the innovative use of ecological terminology in the human sciences as introduced by the Chicago School in the 1920s and later revived by Gregory Bateson; see Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972; Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000). In the German-speaking world, one can point to Peter Finke, "Kulturökologie," in *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Ansgar and Vera Nünning (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2008), 248–79: Hubert Zapf, *Literatur als kulturelle Ökologie. Zur kulturellen Funktion imaginativer Texte an Beispielen des amerikanischen Romans* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), and Zapf, ed., *Kulturökologie und Literatur. Beiträge zu einem transdisziplinären Paradigma der Literaturwissenschaft* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008). Ursula Heise is one of the few international scholars who have convincingly combined the otherwise distinct American, British, and continental European modes of ecocriticism/cultural ecology; see her *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008).
2   See Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2002); Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming in 2011).
3   When, in the 1930s and 1940s, scholars as different from one another as Ernst Kantorowicz, Kenneth Burke, and T. S. Eliot began to experiment with "ecological" thinking in the humanities, they could not foresee the impact of cross-disciplinary research in this field after World War II. Their own visions of an ecology of history, literature, and culture are now, for the most part, forgotten, but would be worth exploring at greater length. For Burke's use of "ecology," see Marika A. Seigel, "'One Little Fellow Named Ecology': Ecological Rhetoric in Kenneth Burke's *Attitudes Toward History*," *Rhetoric Review* 23, no. 4 (2004): 388–404; I wish to thank Gero Guttzeit for drawing my attention to this article. For Eliot's coinage "ecology of cultures," see his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 58; for Kantorowicz's "ecology of history," see Ulrich Raulff, *Kreis ohne Meister. Stefan Georges Nachleben* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009), 340–41. Nowadays, the

semantic range of the term "media ecology" stretches from sociological inquiries into data management in organizations to theoretical speculations about the consequences of modern technology and communication. See Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Ingo Berensmeyer, "From Media Anthropology to Media Ecology," forthcoming in Neumann and Nünning, *Travelling Concepts.*

4   Finke, "Kulturökologie," 261.

5   Zapf, *Kulturökologie*, 32.

6   This route of inquiry owes much to the German "aesthetics of reception" as developed by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser; see especially Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), but also K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, *The Protoliterary: Steps toward an Anthropology of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002).

7   In a sense that is close to the environmentalist meaning of ecology, cultural anthropologists sometimes use the term "media ecology" to study human culture against the changing background of technological media, from speech and writing (orality/literacy) to audiovisual technologies, computers, and the Internet. Critics and scholars writing in this tradition include Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Lewis Mumford, Walter J. Ong, and Neil Postman. In this view, basic anthropological "drives" remain more or less stable over very long periods of time, whereas their cultural actualizations come and go with the short-term innovations of technological media. Nowadays, globalized media cultures consist of many different layers of "mediality," so that metaphors of the (actor/media) network or of media as environments are now superseding earlier views of "man" as the "tool-making animal." Men and women may be, more than anything else, media-making and media-using animals who are partly made and used *by* media. This is why, in recent years, media anthropology has become a growing field in the study of culture, next to studies of technoculture, neuroscience, and brain research. Fuller's term "life among media" (*Media Ecologies* 5) may prove useful as a term that evades techno-deterministic extremes and allows for variable modes of including human and technological agency and interactivity in media constellations. Following the lead of media anthropology, an ecology of media can study media formations as interrelations between human beings and their media environments in what Clifford Siskin and William B. Warner call "the history of mediation"; see Siskin and Warner, eds., *This is Enlightenment* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010). In this perspective, terms like "medium," "mediation," or "medialization" form a fairly flexible semantic cluster, allowing for a range of established and emerging, competing and communicating methodologies. Replacing traditional views of representation and sense-making, the concerns of media ecology are to lay bare hidden or previously ignored forms of materiality and their formative role in literary history, book history, and the study of culture.

8   See Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (1950; Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2007).

9   Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, 2 vols. (Princeton,NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007).

10   W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954), a classic of New Criticism.

11   See Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982). For the conservative hermeneutic counterposition, see E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1967).

12   On a possible understanding of presence in contemporary literary and cultural theory, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press. 2004).

13 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 3.

14 J. Hillis Miller, *The Medium is the Maker: Browning, Freud, Derrida and the New Telepathic Ecotechnologies* (Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2009). Cf. Friedrich Kittler, "There Is No Software," *Literature, Media, Information Systems: Essays*, ed. John Johnston (New York: Routledge, 1997), 147–55; Jan Ll. Harris and Paul A. Taylor, "Friedrich Kittler: Network 2000?" *Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 66–86.

15 The "idea that communication *is* an environment" is the foundational assumption behind Neil Postman's development of "media ecology" in the 1970s; see, for instance, Postman's keynote address "Media Ecology: Communication as Context," delivered at the annual summer conference of the Speech Communication Association, Chicago, July 12, 1973, available online through the Education Resources Information Center, http://eric. ed.gov/PDFS/ED091785.pdf, 3. For an introduction to actor-network theory, see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005).

16 Ursula Heise, "Unnatural Ecologies: The Metaphor of the Environment in Media Theory," in *Configurations* 10, issue 1 (2002): 149–68, 166, 168.

17 Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 106.

18 Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 8.

19 K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, "Schwellen der Medialisierung zwischen Erfindung und Tatsächlichkeit: Vergleichende Skizzen zu Deutschland und Japan um 1900 und 2000," in *Schwellen der Medialisierung. Medienanthropologische Perspektiven – Deutschland und Japan*, ed. K. Ludwig Pfeiffer and Ralf Schnell (Bielefeld, Ger.: Transcript, 2008), 15–39, 15.

20 See Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54–68, and Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004).

21 Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988).

22 See, for instance, Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2003); Arthur F. Kinney, *Shakespeare's Webs: Networks of Meaning in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008).

23 See Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964; New York: Norton, 1974).

24 Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 2.

25 Ben Jonson, cit. in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et. al (New York: Norton, 1997), 3352. Further quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from this edition.

26 See Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003); Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008). For the general reassessment of print and manuscript publication in the early modern period, see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) and David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003).

27 For an assessment of the first decade of "Shakespeare's Globe," see Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper, eds., *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008).

28 On this view, and for a detailed list of unsettled questions, see Andrew Gurr, "Why the Globe is Famous," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 187–208. The quotation is on p. 187.

29 See Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002); Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*.

30 See Katherine Rowe, "Shakespeare and Media History," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare,* ed. Margreta De Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 303–24.

31 *2 Henry IV* 1.1.9–11. Cf. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge: The Univ. Press, 1935); Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1977).

32 See Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008). I give a more detailed account of the opposition between Shakespearean representation and performance in my essay "Stage(d) Life: Shakespeare and the Ecology of Media," forthcoming in *New Theories, Models and Methods in Literary and Cultural Studies,* ed. Ansgar Nünning and Greta Olson (Trier, Ger.: WVT, 2011).

33 *As You Like It* 2.7.138.

34 See James J. Marino, *Owning William Shakespeare: The King's Men and their Intellectual Property* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). For a concise overview of Shakespeare's reception in Europe, see Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1997; London: Picador, 2008).

35 Quoted in Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds., *Hamlet* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 54; see Gary Taylor, "The Red Dragon in Sierra Leone" and "Hamlet in Africa 1607" in *Travel Knowledge: European 'Discoveries' in the Early Modern Period,* ed. Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna G. Singh (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2001), 211–22, 223–48.

36 On the concept of a global cultural economy, see Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (1990): 1–23; on transnationalism, see Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1998); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton,NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000); Peter Hitchcock, *Imaginary States: Studies in Cultural Transnationalism* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003). Since the mid-1980s, Shakespeare plays have frequently been adapted into traditional Chinese operas; Zha and Tian observe the "many similarities" between the two: "Both are based upon the concept of 'supposition' rather than upon that of 'verisimilitude.' They do not attempt to create an illusion of reality but rather admit that they try to affect the audience with fictitious roles and events. This theatrical concept leads to great freedom in handling stage space and time. . . . The two types of theatre also have similarities in performing skills, in that both are symbolic in performance, and that both try to establish direct contact with the audience through asides and monologues. Structurally, both . . . adopt 'open' structure in most cases rather than the 'closed' one; i.e., both employ multi-scenes and multi-acts, both suggest the possibility that the story related in the plays might be continued, and so on." See Zha Peide and Tian Jia, "Shakespeare in Traditional Chinese Operas," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1988): 211; cf. J. Philip Brockbank, "Shakespeare Renaissance in China," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1988): 195–204.

37 *Prince of the Himalayas*, directed by Sherwood Hu (Shanghai: HVS Entertainment, 2006), DVD, 00=38:00, English subtitles.

38 Cf. Wu Xiaohui (Anne), "The Rise of China's Harmony-Oriented Diplomacy," *Politika Annual Journal* 2007, 22–26.

39 *Legend of the Black Scorpion*, directed by Feng Xiaogang (New York: Weinstein Co., 2008), DVD, 00:57:05, English subtitles. On the use of masks in *The Banquet* as a predominantly visual engagement with Shakespeare, striving toward a "global vernacular" (233), see Alexander C. Y. Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009), 231–34.

40   See Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares*, and Li Ruru, *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 2003). Huang's in particular is a vivid account of the ways in which transcultural definitions and performances of "Shakespeare" and "China," as "sites of fixation," mutually challenge one another in "multidirectional processes" of cultural interaction (5).
41   See the chapter with this title in Pfeiffer, *The Protoliterary*, 297–313.