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*Shakespeare Between the World Wars: The Anglo-American Sphere*, by Robert Sawyer. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. 314pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-137-59063-3. \$74.00 (ebook); \$95.00 (hardback).

The striking image of the Chandos Shakespeare portrait fitted with a gas mask informs readers of what is to come in Robert Sawyer's *Shakespeare Between the World Wars*. Emblematic of the period, the image conjures not just the destruction of the world, but of Modernity. It is clear from the cover that Sawyer's monograph will neither start nor end with one of the World Wars; rather, his work situates the World Wars as bookends to a period that is shaped by both.

In *Shakespeare Between the World Wars* Sawyer situates his study within a lineage of scholarship examining the creation of Anglo-American literary history in the Interwar era. Sawyer takes a distinctly localized approach to Shakespeare criticism and performance in the twentieth century, constraining his study to the Interwar or Interbellum era between World War I and World War II and to the Anglo-American sphere of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. In Sawyer's words, it is in this "paradoxically fertile wasteland" in which Shakespeare criticism found a new footing (Sawyer 2).

Sawyer frames this discussion through the lens of Hamlet's moment of confrontation: when "[Hamlet] challenges [Gertrude] not only to '[r]epent what's past'" but also to "'avoid what is to come'" (Sawyer 1). Returning to this idea throughout his justification, Sawyer uses the struggles of the Prince of Denmark as a metaphor to demonstrate Interwar and early modern connections. The text is divided by major thematic and geographic divides, retaining a full temporal look at the period throughout each chapter; chapters are divided by production history and critical history for the United States and the United Kingdom and are ordered inversely: UK and then US criticism, followed by US and UK productions. This inverted funneling of geographic region, bookending descriptions of the United States with those of the United Kingdom, encourages cross-connections between UK-US productions and literary critical history.

Yet, Sawyer's reading connects these localized queries to a broader one of the tenuous relationship between the early modern, the modern, and the post-modern. Citing the work of Walter Benjamin, Sawyer notes the Interwar's placement as the stronghold dividing those "retrenching to hold on to the past versus those moving into the Avant-Garde" (Sawyer 6). This engagement with

broader literary questions positions Sawyer's book as not just a re-telling of Shakespearean history, but also a history of Shakespearean criticism's engagement with this dynamic.

Readers may note similarities between Sawyer's book and recent texts that explore periods of wartime from the World Wars to the present day. Sawyer calls attention to Halpern's *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (1997) as a guiding text for examining Shakespeare's resonance in the era. However, while Halpern focuses on a broad, encompassing vision of the Moderns, Sawyer's text meditates on two essential programs: situating the critics and performances in this tumultuous period and critically examining previously understudied work and performers.

The chapters on criticism provide relevant critical background, while also situating a reader perhaps familiar with Shakespeare, but less familiar with the Interwar period, within the turbulence of the period. Intertwined with this contextualization, Sawyer comes to independent conclusions about British and American criticism of Shakespeare, particularly by weaving commonly disparate strands of criticism from the period. Working from the early 1900s to around the late 1930s in both critical chapters, Sawyer crafts an argument for an existence of an emerging global Shakespeare through the emerging connections across the pond.

Where Sawyer's monograph shines is in his discussion of performance history throughout the period. Particularly, Sawyer distinguishes his text through his robust discussion of the work of Paul Robeson and Orson Welles on the American stage and the American film landscape. Juxtaposed with the chapter discussing American criticism, Sawyer immediately complicates the vision of Interwar Shakespeare; critical Shakespeare was dominated by voices of the Agrarians and New Critical visions, yet the stage and screen had given Americans the performance of Paul Robeson as Othello, Orson Welles's unique "Voodoo" *Macbeth*, and "Fascist" *Julius Caesar*. Sawyer argues that in tying together these alternate Shakespeares, the same critical threads of modernist protest are illuminated, or, that "if we listen carefully to the sounds and voices of American Shakespeare... we will hear in those chords similar notes of eloquent engagement" (Sawyer 179). It is in these chapters on American and British performance that Sawyer connects how the critical history he lays out in earlier chapters influenced performance.

Sawyer's closing contextualizes the importance of the Interwar period; he notes the inevitable connections between this period and that in which we are currently living: unstable governments, rising proto-fascist regimes, and other moments of anxiety throughout the late 20th century. Leaving readers with the burgeoning similarities between the Interwar and today, Sawyer's text asks us to consider not just Shakespearean criticism in the Interwar period as a historical oddity, but also as a means of re-contextualizing our own current period of criticism and performance.