Book Reviews

Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History. By Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 290 pages.

This text—well-written, thoroughly researched and eminently readable—is an intriguing entry in a relatively new subgenre of theoretical studies: the 'cultural history,' based upon analysis of the protracted recycling of a play, character or set of tropes over an extended period of time. Such studies often posit that the incarnations of consistently reutilized texts or tropes reveal shifts in social attitudes in the process of intracultural transformation. Other texts of this type—such as Paul Davies' *The Lives and Times of Ebeneezer Scrooge*, Stephen Forry's *Hideous Progenies*, and Lucy Hughes-Hallett's *Cleopatra*—achieved their aims to varying degrees of success, and the Vaughans' text is among the more successful. *Shakespeare's Caliban* is a useful and often fascinating text, although it focuses more of its attention upon things literary than theatrical. Nonetheless, scholars will find it valuable for any course on or investigation into the later Shakespeare, the theatre of the 17th and 18th centuries, or contemporary modes of analysis and their relationship to cultural ideology, and directors, designers, et. al., will find in the text an immensely valuable research tool.

Shakespeare's Caliban focuses upon the evolution of perceptions revolving about that single character from Shakespeare's day to the 1990s, tracing the presentation of Caliban from biological mongrel in the 17th and 18th centuries, through Darwinian symbol in the mid- to late 19th century, to carrier, in our own time, of questions about imperialism, colonialism and their attendant racist attitudes. The book is successful in its assigned task, but is, to an extent, undermined by its sharp focus; by following their oft-stated intention of limiting the scope of the study to Caliban and the social attitudes revealed by his theatrical, literary and iconographic manipulation, the authors are forced to neglect areas of exploration which would have expanded our understanding of their central focus. The most glaring of those areas is the treatment of Prospero; any text that posits that the treatment of Caliban leads historically to his assumption of the role of carrier of imperialist anxieties owes its readers more than a cursory treatment of the incarnations of Prospero, who symbolizes

imperialist actions. This criticism is not to diminish the Vaughans' accomplishment (which is considerable), but to reflect upon the difficulties of creating cultural studies through the analysis of texts that have achieved pan-generational usage.

Alden Vaughan is a scholar of history, specializing in the founding of America; his command of primary cliometric source material is a great advantage in this project, most specifically for the investigation of theories of Caliban's origin and its possible relationship to the exploration of the New World—and this has, obviously, resonances with those later schools of thought which interpret the play as an expression of colonial, racist and class tensions. Virginia Vaughan's expertise in Elizabethan culture and literature provides equal buttressing to their joint work, most clearly revealed in their analysis of the production history of *The Tempest* in the two centuries following Shakespeare.

The book is arranged into two major sections, one devoted to a review of the extant theories of the origins of Caliban as a character, and a larger section devoted to 'receptions' (ironically, the text lacks true audience reception analysis—'usages' might have been a more accurate term). Their conclusions end the book; this section collates indications the authors have provided throughout the text of their own opinions. These opinions do not dominate or direct the text, but serve to gather together the strands of interpretational criticism and provide them with needed clarification (I found myself quite convinced, for example, by the authors' position that the origin of Caliban lies not so much in his potential extrapolation from travelers' accounts of Shakespeare's day as much as from indigenous English myths of the figure of the wild man). Each of the major sections actually divides itself into two; the Origins section devolves into considerations of those interpretations foregrounding the human side of Caliban and those favoring the non-human. The Receptions section bifurcates into a consideration of those productions or texts which emphasize the positive side of Prospero's authority (whatever their individual effects upon the interpretation of Caliban), and those that emphasize the negative, in which Caliban is universally portrayed as a member of an oppressed class or population. The analyses are very well done, their sources ranging from theatre productions through movies and television, to lyric and longer poetry, painting and an intriguing collection of iconographic depictions of Caliban from a variety of sources.

If there is a major lacuna in the book, it is the lack of audience reception or detailed production analysis. No perspectives of contemporary critical viewers are provided to indicate whether, for instance, post-colonial productions of the play positioning Caliban as a rebellious representative of

oppressed indigenous populations are finding root in the various segments of the collective social mind. And although their analysis clearly shows that such interpretations provide the bulk of contemporary usage of the text, such a phenomenological analysis does not reveal so much about cultural perceptions as it does about perceptions of the producers of cultural artifacts. This is highlighted by the authors' analysis of media productions of *The Tempest*, which reveals that traditionalist approaches are used almost exclusively. This indicates, among other possibilities, that revisionist interpretations of *The Tempest* and Caliban have not leached into popular culture, are being rejected by 'mainstream' culture, are being repressed by hegemonic, economic interests for ideological reasons, as being too subversive. Using reception or production analysis to define the social effects of Caliban's more modern transitions (beyond the simple isolation and investigation of its phenomenological truth) might help the reader of *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* to decide exactly what "culture" is being analyzed.

Brian Rose
Ohio State University

A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer. Edited by Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, translated by Richard Fowler. London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

Since Eugenio Barba founded the Odin Theatre in Oslo in 1964 he and his theatre, which relocated to Holstebro, Denmark, in 1966, have dedicated their efforts to investigating and training the tools available to the actor. The success of these investigations can be appreciated by the fact that the Odin Theatre has been invited to perform throughout the world and that Barba and his group are considered by many as one of the most innovative theatres in the western world.

Since 1980 Eugenio Barba has also led the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) whose work focuses on studying "the human being in an organized performance situation" (5).

Between 1980 and 1990 ISTA held ten conferences in different places in Europe. These conferences included attendance by oriental and occidental actors, directors, psychologists, physiologists, dramaturgs, theatre historians, anthropologists, etc., invited by Barba to assist him in elucidating his

investigations into the principles of performance at work in a variety of theatrical forms, including, for example, Kabuki, Noh and Balinese dance. It is the result of this research that comprises this book. Individual and joint articles by Barba and Savarese, who teaches the history of theatre and performance at the University of Lecce, Italy, are arranged alphabetically according to subject along with contributions by other scholars, including Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner and Ferdinando Taviani. With headings such as "Balance," "Dilation," "Dramaturgy," "Hands," "Montage," "Omission," "Opposition," "Pre-Expressivity," "Text and Stage," etc., the book explores and codifies physical principles at work in the performance situation.

The dictionary form of the book, listing subject areas, is part of its strength and usefulness. Whereas a presentation in the usual comprehensive narrative/causal style would have had to "prove" an ultimate hierarchy and fitted-ness of the individual items, the dictionary format allows the reader to use the book in a variety of ways, making use of that part of the book currently most useful to him/her. The dictionary format also quite clearly leaves "room" for a lot of material yet to be formulated. ISTA's investigations are not over and the discipline of theatre anthropology (as understood by Barba) is far from exhausted.

A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology is an extremely useful book for most people involved in theatre studies, from theatre history and dramaturgy to practical actor training. Though much of actor training in the western world is based on a predominantly psychological orientation, theatre pedagogues would do well to heed the physical principles of performances outlined in this book. Here we can read about the manner in which the play of opposite forces generate the energy an actor needs to propel her/his body into performance. Or, we can learn about the difference between the daily use of balance and its performance use, its extra-daily use.

While many pedagogues will already operate with an intuitive sense of these principles, the remarkable thing about this book is that here they are named and unpacked, made accessible for conscious application.

In my estimation, this book is indispensable for any theatre library. It represents some of the most exciting and widely applicable research in the area of theatre anthropology, indeed, it may well be the most important book on acting technique since Barba edited Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*.

The effectiveness of *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* is much enhanced by a spectacular gallery of photographs and illustrations. The visual aids elucidate the text, making some of its more difficult notions immediately understandable and testable. Richard Fowler's translation is precise and easy to read in his rhetorically effective prose.

This book is truly a must read.

Per Brask
University of Winnipeg

Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style. By Steve Vineberg. New York: Schrimer Books, 1991. xvi + 364 + illus, index, bibliography. ISBN 0-02-872685-5.

Method acting emerged as a distinctive acting style in the twentieth century. Since then this style has been immersed in controversies and confusion as to what exactly the Method really is and more importantly what its dynamics are and how it is supposed to work. Even today the confusion has not dissipated and the debates remain unresolved. And yet, it is apparent that many performers continue to use it on stage and screen and continue to mesmerize audiences through its emotional evoking power.

Theater and film critic Steve Vineberg gives us two complementary aspects about the method in his book *Method Actors: Three Generations of American Acting Style.* Firstly, Mr. Vineberg attempts to build a solid framework about the Method by redefining certain aspects and clarifying others. His definition is based on training and technique and he goes further to include in his definition a response on what is actually seen when audiences watch performers committing themselves to "psychological truth" and "emotional candor." In his own words, the "books definition of the Method is based on what Method actors have done since the days of the Group Theater" (xii). Secondly, Vineberg provides diverse portraits of some of the most prominent practitioners of the Method, spanning an era of three generations. In doing both these things Mr. Vineberg chronicles not only the Group Theater and the Actors Studio (the two primary institutions in this country associated with the principals of Konstantin Stanislavski) but he is also able to chronicle "an approach to acting and of three generations of Method performers who have personified it" (ix).

Vineberg's chronicle opens with a fairly detailed description of the origins of Method acting on the stage. Vineberg claims that the "American Method acting actually began in Russia with Konstantin Stanislavski, who in collaboration with Vladimir Nemirovich Danchenko, opened the Moscow Art Theater in 1898" (3). What is striking about the historical description of the origin is the rift that it creates within various infant practitioners in America. Since then very many of the Method teachers have chosen to stay on one side of the fence created by the Strasberg-Adler debate concerning the relevance of "affective memory." Adler stressed emotion and tended to neglect "given circumstance" and "truthful action." Apparently, even Stanislavski criticized her for this. Strasberg refused to give credibility to Adler's revised version of

Stanislavski's theories and this compelled him to abandon the Group in 1937. Mr. Vineberg illustrates the frustration of practitioners not being able to reach any consensus on how the Method is actually intended to work and its ramifications since.

Vineberg claims that there has been much confusion about what exactly the Method has come to mean in the United States. Undoubtedly there is no clear consensus or treatise which lays down certain absolutes and fundamental assumptions. In fact, Vineberg creates his own "unofficial" amalgamation of tenets since the defenders and detractors of the Method have failed to come up with such a list. Vineberg's list is based on a careful synthesis of prominent texts by prominent Method practitioners and on his own observations with Method performers. Some of the books that he looks to are Robert Lewis' *Method—or Madness?* (1958) and *Advice to the Players* (1980), Charles McGaw's *Acting is Believing: A Basic Method* (1966), Edward Dwight Easty's *On Method Acting* (1966), and Uta Hagen's *Respect for Acting* (1973). Vineberg comes up with eight tenets listed as follows: (1) Verismilitude, (2) Justification and Super-Objective, (3) Genuine Emotion, (4) Drawing on the self, (5) Improvisation, (6) Ensemble, (7) The Prop as a Method instrument, and (8) Mysticism in Acting. On the surface level this list is extremely deceptive and looks almost too simplistic. In fact it may even come across as unoriginal and restating the obvious. But Vineberg is clever enough to define things with a fresh understanding of the terms and in doing so he gives greater coherence to the confusion that is inherent in earlier definitions of the Method.

As Vineberg chronicles the trials and tribulations faced by the different factions of the Method movement and its attempts at taking root in the dominant artistic ventures since the 1930's, he initially presents us with a careful scrutiny and evaluation of the work of playwrights such as Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Clifford Odets and directors like Elia Kazan. As Mr. Vineberg proceeds to historically document the coming of the Method style to America and its eventual incorporation into the theatrical realm of production and performance, he is sensitive to all the social, economic, cultural and political variables present in the American system at the time which either thwarted or aided the establishment and proliferation of the Method schools and their proponents.

Vineberg chooses to deal with the work of Williams, Odets, Miller, Clurman, and Kazan because he asserts that their work formed the initial repertoire of generations of Method performers. Interestingly enough, and perhaps uniquely, Vineberg pays close attention to the process whereby there was mutual enhancement between the Method and its practitioners. Hence he is able to claim that "if Williams plays affected the development of an American acting style, it's equally fair to say that the Method influenced the development of his writing" (129).

Having dealt extensively with the origins of the Method in America and the work of directors and playwrights that provided a repertoire for the actualization of the Method's ideals, Vineberg sensitively and anecdotally portrays the brilliance that existed within the three generations of American acting since the 1920s.

Vineberg expounds on the work of the first generation performers including John Garfield and Lee J. Cobb who in turn influence heavily the evolution of the second generation performers such as Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, Julie Harris, James Dean, Rod Steiger, and Eva Marie Saint. Eventually, Mr. Vineberg's time travel machine brings us to exponents of the third generation such as Jack Nicholson, Paul Newman, Blythe Danner, and Dustin Hoffman.

Vineberg devotes an entire chapter to the work of Jason Robards especially in light of his interpretation of some of O'Neill's most celebrated and legendary roles. Vineberg is sensitive to the fact that Robards is not officially associated with the Method school of thought. However, it is impossible to deny Mr. Robards' "emphasis on genuine emotion and personalized characterization." Vineberg very confidently asserts that "the process he [Robards] undergoes to discover these characters may be a subconscious-instinctive-application of the Method, but there is no more powerful example, this side of Marlon Brando, of how the process works" (250).

Vineberg's book is a very thorough study of the subject that he has chosen to exploit. The strength of his work lies in the evidence that the material has been very thoroughly researched and chronicled with a valuable emphasis on anecdotal proof and narrative power. Mr. Vineberg does not resolve the debates inherent in any discussion of the Method school of thought and neither does he profess that he can or wants to do so. In fact there is power in the way in which he is able to generate some very thought provoking ideas surrounding these debates and controversies. He unabashedly presents the polarities and discrepancies on both or all sides of the debate. This is seasoned very meticulously with his own opinions and critiques of various performers, practitioners and their work which he does with literary elan and confidence. Yet, his opinion and critiques never seem unfounded or whimsical. He builds a solid definition of the Method at the onset and everything that follows is built credibly on this foundation. Most importantly Vineberg's style is for the most part captivating as he unfolds the results of his labor and love for the subject at hand. It is apparent that what Vineberg says must be true when he prefaces his work with the claim that "this book is my way of explaining a vision of acting that has given me more pleasure and excitement, as a spectator and as a critic, than any other single element in the theater, in movies, or in television" (xiii). Mr. Vineberg has been generous enough to share this passion with us.

Although Vineberg deals extensively with certain practitioners of the Method as mentioned above, he also discusses the work of a plethora of other artists, keeping in mind that the Method movement is a prominent one with a galaxy of past, present and future stars. Vineberg has been bold in attempting to deal with not only a rich cosmos of Method performers but also with a wide array of mediums from the live theater to film and television.

Two other elements that add authenticity to this entity are a series of illustrations portraying several Method actors in their best work and a fairly comprehensive bibliography of books, plays and screenplays, articles, and dissertations and theses on or about the subject matter. Throughout the text Vineberg also includes extensive lists of performers and works in which they have used the ideologies of the Method style. In this Vineberg's book also becomes a very rich resource and database for further inquiry and study.

Mr. Vineberg seems to be dealing with too much material all at once. Yet, rarely does the final product betray his ambitions and our expectations. However, there are times when Mr. Vineberg's critiques of performers and their performances becomes too subjective and the process behind the Method used in these performances is lost. Mr. Vineberg might have been served better had he investigated more directly some of the actual "methods" used by the performers he deals with rather than drawing conclusions from his observations.

This book is a must for all students who subscribe to the Method and its ideology. Perhaps those who oppose its tenets might learn from the book too, since Vineberg is honest in presenting the alternatives to and criticisms of the Method. Above all, Vineberg elucidates with a steady clarity and honesty that helps us reaffirm the fact that the Method is indeed "an acting style in constant, glorious flux" (322).

Kaizaad Navroze Kotwal
Ohio State University

Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950. Edited with an Introduction by Kathy A. Perkins. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989. ISBN 0-253-34358-5.

Black Female Playwrights offers a collection of both American Realistic and experimental drama of the 1920s and 1930s. As Perkins explains in her

Introduction, early twentieth-century black playwrights chose to represent the black experience as realistically as possible in an effort to dispel the stereotypes that cluttered American theaters—the comic minstrel, the tragic mulatto, and the happy slave. And yet, black male playwrights and entertainers who wrote for the commercial theater continued to present such images (Sisle and Blake's *Shuffle Along*, *Chocolate Dandies*, and *Runnin' Wild*, and Hughes' *Mulatto*). Black female playwrights, on the other hand, went beyond their male counterparts to address both racism and sexism. Diverse in their geographical locations and subject matter, female playwrights offered a greater sense of the black community than black male playwrights whose works either focused upon life in Harlem or attempted to maintain cultural stereotypes (which assured a certain economic, if not artistic, success). Perkins convincingly argues that black female playwrights contributed to the emergence of two decidedly distinct genres of "Native Drama": "race" or "propaganda" plays which attempted to eradicate racial oppression and so effect social change on the stage, and "folk" plays which portrayed the black cultural experience without an emphasis on racial tension. "Native Drama" contradicted the work of white dramatists, most notable Eugene O'Neill. *All God's Chillun Got Wings* and *The Emperor Jones*, when compared with the Native Drama generated by black playwrights, offer only superficial aspects of black culture, most notably dialects and stereotypes imposed upon that black culture. As W.E.B. DuBois explained in the inaugural playbill of the Krigwa Players, "the plays of a real Negro theatre [Native Drama] must be . . . *About us . . . By us . . . For us . . . Near us*."

While DuBois' Krigwa Players produced "race" or "propaganda" plays, Montgomery T. Gregory and Alain Locke promoted "folk plays" at Howard University. Many of these "folk" plays, which cast women in major decision-making roles and stage the action in living rooms and parlors, are fine examples of American Realism, an aesthetic to which Gregory and Locke contributed through their professional theater training program at Howard University. Several of the playwrights in this collection (Zora Neale Hurston, Shirley Graham, Mary P. Burrill, May Miller, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Eulalie Spence) received their initial training as writers, honed their craft as playwrights, or saw their work produced through their association with the Howard Players.

"Folk" plays presented a less racially sensitive side of the black experience. Topics included church matters, class conflicts, morality, and love relationships. Eulalie Spence avoided racial themes altogether, and focused her attention upon love relationships. *Undertow* (1929) presents a thwarted lover who returns to Harlem to reclaim the man she has always loved from his wife. *Her* (1927) stages the revenge of the ghost of an unhappy Filipino woman whose

---

Quoted by Perkins, "Introduction" 5.

black husband robbed her of her inheritance. May Miller's comedy *Riding the Goat* (1925), another love story, explores how education affects young lovers' perception of cultural traditions.

Other "folk" dramatists wrote about black history. Such dramas, performed in schools, were considered an invaluable form of education. May Miller's *Harriet Tubman* and *Chistophe's Daughters* (1935) offer realistic, yet heartwarming portraits of black heroines who risked their lives to retain the safety and honor of their respective peoples. Zora Neale Hurston's *The First One* (1927) presents the Biblical origin of the Negro race as a curse of Noah upon his youngest son. Other history plays explored the ills of slavery. Shirley Graham's *It's Morning* (1940), written in the style of a Greek tragedy, examines a mother's decision to kill her child so as to prevent the child from being sold into slavery.

Several of the playwrights in this collection also tried their hand at "Race" or "Propaganda" plays. The theme of lynching appears in the work of Georgia Douglas Johnson. *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925) and *Blue-Eyed Black Boy* (193?) uses lynching to explore relations between the black and white races in the Deep South. Mary Burrill's *Aftermath* (1919) presents the portrait of a black World War I veteran who seeks revenge for the needless lynching of his father. May Miller's *Stragglers in the Dust* (1930), staged in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, illustrates racism through the use of white characters who find it inconceivable that the "unknown" soldier could possibly be black.

Race relations also appear in the plays of Marita Bonner. *The Purple Flower* (1926), which presents a conflict between the "Sundry White Devils" and the "Us's", states that a blood revolution is the only solution to the race problem. Its use of surrealistic staging, characterizations, and contrapuntal dialogue reveal Bonner's understanding of German Expressionism, and perhaps demonstrates a more effective use of the aesthetic than that found in the early work of Eugene O'Neill. *Exit: An Illusion* (1929), explores the revenge of a jealous lover whose anger leads to the death of his woman. Naturalistic in staging, this experimental drama explores the issue of miscegenation within the black community. Bonner's playwrighting style, which departed from the realistic mode to address very realistic issues, foreshadows and influences the work of Adrienne Kennedy.

The negative impact which miscegenation placed upon black women is also a subject of several "Race" plays. Zora Neale Hurston's *Color Struck* (1925) presents a heroine whose feelings of insecurity, which stem from her dark complexion, drive her lover away from her. Georgia Johnson's *Blue Blood* (1926) reveals the absurdity of "mixed" races: a young, engaged couple, both of whom are mulatto children, cannot marry when their respective mothers reveal that they have both been raped by the same white man.

This collection of nineteen plays reveals a significant stage in the development of black drama. The playwrights transformed and staged the oral

tradition of storytelling, a decidedly black female experience by which history and culture were disseminated. Moreover, both their subject matter and aesthetic experiments with Realism, Surrealism, and Naturalism paved the way for the black theater movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Their recreations of the black culture are a critical juncture between the work of anonymous nineteenth-century storytellers and the dramas of Wilson, Hansberry, and Kennedy.

Ann Marie McEntee
Illinois College

Re-Interpreting Brecht: His Influence on Contemporary Drama and Film. Edited by Pia Kleber and Colin Visser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. xiii + 220 pages.

Part of the (perhaps slightly morbid) interest of this collection is that most of it originated before 1989 made a mockery of Real Existing Socialism (the term with which the GDR liked to flatter itself) and consequently cut to size the intellectuals who had been the lapdogs of power, many of them smugly sure of their possession of Brechtian orthodoxy. Some pre-cataclysmic East German voices are still heard in this volume, but the meaning of the title might now be extended beyond its original intent, to inquire not only after Brecht's actual influence, but after the influence he *should* justifiably have in the wake of recent events, and whether a new, liberated Brecht and Brechtianism can (dialectically) emerge from the ashes of late Stalinism.

The collection, then, commences with an essay by the eminent Manfred Wekweth, the intention of which, according to the editor Pia Kleber, is to "restor[e] to a pristine meaning terms dimmed by three decades of misuse" (3). Any true Brechtian dialectitian, of course, should treat the appropriative gesture of such a phrase as "pristine meaning" with scorn, and indeed Wekwerth's essay amounts to the kind of sly usurpation (and subsequent defusing) of Brecht's radical ideas by Real Existing Socialism which he himself so assiduously resisted while alive.

Much the same holds for Joachim Tenschert's apologia for the Berliner Ensemble. The Ensemble is of late in an undeservedly bad way, as the new German cultural bureaucracy has placed it in a kind of suspended conservatorship. But Tenschert, longtime dramaturg of the venerable theatre, is writing at the height of BE's glory, and he delivers an unabashedly laudatory

history of the Schiffbauer-damm, in which Brecht figures as the savior of a morally and financially bankrupt post-war German theatre.

East German theatre professor Rolf Rohmer inspects the influence of Brecht upon the second and third generation of East German playwrights who, though having "interiorized" (60) Brechtian techniques of writing, have also rejected what they perceived as the confining didacticism of the Master in favor of an "open-endedness" (61) more in tune with the demands of a socialist society. Rohmer's survey is characteristically ambivalent, for although he sees that Brecht never could adapt his dramaturgy to the requirements of the socialist state, and he concedes that a resurrection of the *Lehrstück* model in the GDR failed due to lack of public enthusiasm, he eyes the departure of the epigones from Brecht's model warily, chiding Heiner Müller's "excesses" (61) and giving the more daring (and less conformist) authors like Christoph Hein short shrift.

The three East German essays are in many ways the most interesting in the collection, because they are so intent on proving the late GDR's claim of cultural ownership of Brecht by asserting an unbroken ideological and aesthetic continuity, a claim which had fallen into discredit even before the state that made it.

Klaus Völker, John Willett, and Bernard Dort take stock of Brecht's currency in Britain, (West) Germany, and France. Though each country has been characteristically different—sometimes indifferent—in its reception, there is a consensus on the "Brecht-fatigue" (64) that prevails unabated. Völker diagnoses a German malaise that seems to allow only for a choice of evils between "school-marmish" didacticism and "vacuous comedy" (72/3) despite some promising recent productions by younger directors like Jürgen Flimm and Alfred Kirchner. Willett's informative essay reveals the considerable traces Brecht has left in the British theatre landscape and the peculiar status ("both seminal and boring," 86) accorded him there. France has never embraced Brecht wholly, and the contemporary theatre "considers him crude and obtuse" (98). Dort is frank about Brecht's present "lack of relevance," but argues for a reappraisal that acknowledges such tangentiality and rediscovers a "fragmented, historical, and Utopian" Brecht instead (103).

Such a Brecht may perhaps he found outside of Brecht's own canon. Paul Walsh reports on an intriguing production of *Hamlet*, a play that obsessed Brecht (he wrote a radio adaptation of it as early as 1931). In 1979, Benno Besson mounted a revisionist *Hamlet* in Helsinki with a comic actor in the lead, giving it a "desentimentalized" reading emphasizing the systemic contradictions of Elsinore and Hamlet's part in the preservation of the status quo. In such a "reappropriation of classic texts" (116)—more common in the European theatre by far—Walsh sees the survival of a crucial Brechtian legacy.

In perhaps the most satisfying essay of the collection, Marten van Dijk analyzes the Anglo-American fear of following Brecht's own recorded practice, in effect "blocking" Brecht and denying his technique of "complex seeing" in

favor of a misguidedly polished and sentimentalizing narrative (he skewers in particular the RSC's failed 1983 *Courage*). In the process, he reminds us how fatal the consequences can be when one tries to second-guess the practitioner Brecht, and he makes an eloquent case for the use of the model. Van Dijk's article deserves particularly close scrutiny from any American director setting out to do Brecht.

For women artists, Brecht's flagrant double standards in sexual matters must be troubling; he is an uncomfortable ally. Nevertheless, Karen Laughlin finds a surprising degree of receptiveness to his work here, contending that American feminist playwrights have both "adopted and adapted" (149) Brecht's methods by reconfiguring the actor-audience relationship, historicizing their materials, and embracing epic structures. And in Renate Möhrmann's judgement German feminist filmmakers, after initially accepting a Brechtian class analysis of women's oppression, have more recently made him their "dialectical partner" (165) by embracing his sense of entertainment while rejecting his narrow notions of the political. Despite the rich irony in seeing the patriarch Brecht cited as a father of feminist dramaturgy, construing such a direct dependency is perhaps an overstatement, indeed, what Eric Bentley in a later essay calls a "fallacy" (187)—*post hoc* is not necessarily *propter hoc*.

Brecht's legacy may now be most apparent in film. Thomas Elsaesser in fact sees a Brechtian discourse at the work in the cinematic avant-garde's attempted deconstruction of Hollywood's hegemony. Departing from Brecht's emphasis on self-reflexivity and montage and passing through Lacan's analysis of the Imaginary, current film theory has returned to a post-modern version of Brecht that still espouses his political aims but has of necessity amended his formal methods to fit an age of ubiquitous images that has little faith in the *prima facie* representibility of truth. Elsaesser's brief but fascinating discussion of the Brecht/Lang film *Hangmen Also Die* (183/4) shows how Lang recognized before Brecht that in film, truth and falsehood are categorically inseparable.

Finally, Eric Bentley delivers an Olympian meditation on the meaning (and anxieties) of influence, which, he concludes, is a blanket term that does not necessarily denote anything good. This granted, one may disagree with him (where he dismisses Elisabeth Hauptmann as Brecht's mere mouthpiece) or concur where he censures the often erroneous reception of Brecht's theories in America.

Brecht's influence must truly be contemplated dialectically today. His plays have all but vanished from the commercial theatre, and no end to "Brecht-fatigue" seems in sight. Yet, as this volume teaches us, his disappearance into the ranks of the classics, deadly for most who suffer it, has freed our appreciation for Brecht in a minor key ("brecht"?): the teacher and director, the deviser of *Modellbücher*, the adapter and appropriator, the influencer. This is a useful and commendable collection which had the misfortune that its three lead essays were "historicized" by events even as the

ink dried. On the other hand, could the paradoxes of Brecht's influence be made any more apparent?

Ralf Erik Remshardt
Denison University

The History of the English Puppet Theatre (second edition). By George Speaight. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990. 366 pages with illustrations.

Puppets Agonistes

> "A morris-dance, a puppet play,
> Mad Tom to sing a Roundelay . . ."
>
> St. Paul's Church
> Henry Farley (1621)

Like variety, vaudeville and carnival acts, puppets have long languished as an afterthought to theatre. Relegated to an underclass status as a mildly amusing children's entertainment, scholarship on puppetry has been scarce. Yet this remarkable and abstract performance form has had a profound influence on theatre touching innovators as diverse as Edward Gordon Craig, Konstantin Stanislavski and Peter Sellars. Still puppets are largely ignored as a topic for serious study.

Fortunately, George Speaight's *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (second edition) fills important gaps in our knowledge of the progression and significance of puppet production. His 300+ pages skillfully weave a lively but structured analysis of puppet origins and lineages in England. He begins with a simple definition: "A puppet is an inanimate figure moved by a human agency," and follows with introductory chapters on English puppetry's precursors, including such diverse influences as Roman mimes, European puppets (principally from France and Italy) and English fools. Speaight sees these heterogeneous strands as weaving into an English puppet tradition that was an inevitable and natural outgrowth of indigenous, British historical and cultural forces.

The writing is lively and entertaining, filled with detailed scholarship (forty pages of notes follow the text, sans academic mustiness). At the same

time he is not afraid to raise interesting and provocative speculations, about holes in the historical record. He encourages many avenues for scholarly investigation that no one has yet addressed. For example, he thinks the Greco-Roman origins of puppets may have been children's jointed dolls or statues that were manipulated during religious observances.

Likewise he posts routes for puppetry's survival through the dark ages. From 400-1200 AD, puppetry, like theatre, suffered a decline, and no records of performance exist, yet Speaight conjectures that the Roman Atellan farce survived and inspired middle ages puppetry. This in turn generated a puppet renaissance in the Elizabethan era.

Numerous examples bring the book to life. His detailed examination of the use of puppetry in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* in particular gives a good account of the daily operation of a puppet theatre in the Jacobean period. Here, the puppets are vulgar, low and lively ("A pox on your manners; kiss my hole here, and smell") as they pummel their way through a version of the myth of Hero and Leander.

Although careful to make puppetry a distinct art from its cousin, the theatre, Speaight finds various connections between puppets and other performance forms. The madness of puppetry is linked to the antics of the English fool tradition. The stunts of fools, such as Will Kemp's heroic four week Morris dance journey from London to Norwich, are feats worthy of a puppet farce. Another connection is made with the Medieval morality plays, didactic plays intended by the church as vehicles for moral instruction to an illiterate populace. As these plays secularized, the characters of the Vices assumed comic personas, a quality that carried over to the Vices and other villains in puppet productions.

There are numerous examples of the curious development of puppet texts. Some had origins in traditional plays, such as the comic treatment of Hero and Leander (in *Bartholomew Fair*) and a puppet interlude in a theatrical treatment of *Don Quixote*. Speaight describes the disturbing lack of seriousness accorded puppets as a real stumbling block to the development of a strong puppet literature. Unlike Japan's Chikamatsu, it seems that English puppetry had no literary champion. But as the tradition grew, the variety of puppet play sources grew. Yet even the most fundamental source, *Punch and Judy*, was tainted by a debilitating lack of seriousness. Speaight reports that the author of an early puppet history and an original transcriber of a Punch and Judy script, one John Payne Collier, "experimented with the forgery of literary evidence" (188). Still the repertory grew with puppet plays borrowing from varied material. The performances of the 19th century Royal Marionette Theatre included satires of Shakespeare. (*The Sixth Act of Romeo and Juliet*), the fairy tale of *Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp* and political broadsides.

The heart of Speaight's history, (a fifth) is devoted to the epic age of English puppetry, the 18th century. He draws on a variety of sources including letters, contemporary commentaries, and poems to build a colorful portrait of

the times, but it is the biographies of the puppet showmen themselves that are perhaps most intriguing. Martin Powell is certainly one of the greatest. His Punch's Theatre at the Little Plazza at Covent Garden was a total experience with witty dialogue, original plays, brilliant settings, crafted marionettes and of course the amusing antics of the puppets themselves.

But as often as puppeteers are portrayed as innovators, they are also portrayed as eccentrics and outcasts. Powell himself was a hunchback and an object of popular ridicule. The man credited with Punch's early popularity, Piccini, was a one-eyed Italian who drank rum to get in the spirit of the show. Though he was said to have made over 10 pounds on some days (excellent wages for the era), Speaight reports he died in a workhouse, unrecognized and unwanted. Yet another fascinating innovator, Charlotte Charke, Speaight said would be sadly judged as a "psychopathic lesbian," today (108). Elitist, Madame de la Nash sought to avoid the government licensing imposed on theatres (including puppet theatres) by placing her puppet stage in a breakfast tea shop which became a fashionable eatery for the upscale West End crowd. But the life of puppet entrepreneurs was never an easy one and Speaight's tales of showmen Harry Rowe (who toured, publicized and performed all the puppet arts with his mistress) and Mr. Griffin are filled with violent swings of temporary success mixed with abysmal failure.

At the center of the history is the inestimable significance of Mr. Punch, the puppet who made his English debut in 1662, a product of restoration culture. At the 'Punch' juncture, the threads of Speaight's work converge: European theatre and the commedia tradition of Punchinello, Italian puppetry and its beautiful craftsmanship and English puppetry with its blend of sophisticated and bawdy humor combine to create the prince of clowns, Punch, the distillation of these various theatrical impulses. In fact, Speaight argues that Punch was as much an English cultural creation as a continental commedia import.

The Punch and Judy shows went through various forms and Speaight details the swing from marionette to glove puppetry, mostly an economic issue, gloves being easier to transport. What is striking about the Punch and Judy show is its incredible violence. Punch is a murderer, who beats his shrew wife to death, succeeds in hanging the hang man, and in some versions clobbers the devil back to his hellish den.

Throughout, the research is eye opening. For example, women were puppet performers long before they were allowed on the English stage. Speaight also uncovers the snobbish prejudice against puppets. Despite their popularity, they never obtained the dignity of traditional theatre and were stuck in out-of-the-way corner booths, denied fixed performance spaces and mired in a critical backwater as a variety act along with tumblers, singers and conjurers.

Speaight continually sees puppets as an entertainment on the brink of oblivion. Ironically in the late 18th century, just as technical sophistication

began to dignify the puppet form, there was a simultaneous decline in interest only halted by the infusion of foreign imports. Speaight describes two foreign invasions that reawakened the form. In 1770, the Italian Fantoccini visited, spending an unprecedented 21 months in continual residence in London. Like The Fantoccini, The Ombres Chinoises, were another sensation of the era blending complicated stick/shadow puppets, mythological tales and exotic orientalisms. It is interesting to note that these music/magic shadow shows were similar to the Javanese shadow plays that influenced 20th century Western theatre.

In the concluding chapters Speaight follows the decline of "art" puppets in the 19th century and the re-emergence of puppetry as a children's entertainment in the Victorian era. He closes by discussing the puppet movement of the 20th century and draws connections between adult puppetry and anti-realistic theatre production in the writings of Arthur Symons and via Edward Gordon Craig's conception of the Ubermarionette.

Speaight throughout is a self-examining writer, careful to document findings and eager to comment on the veracity of sources, suggesting that some historical accounts may be more accurate than others. With over 40 illustrations of the Ombres Chinoises, Punch and Judy and the "booth" style of performance, readers get a strong visual sense of the puppet production. His speculation is never the idle thinking of a scholar, but based in his own extensive career as a professional puppeteer. His staging of puppet shows in the 20th century Old Vic Revivals of *Bartholomew Fair* make him unusually qualified to speak on puppet practice.

Without hectoring the reading audience, Speaight makes it clear that puppets have suffered critically from their association with children's theatre, comedy and satire. Yet it is exactly this diminished stature that has made puppet theatre a safe haven for experimentation and social commentary. Speaight's work helps the reader to understand the metatheatrical role of puppets. That is, there is a freedom gained by manipulating the inanimate form that creates a power to outrage. The spirit that infused puppetry now is seen in stand-up comedy, animated cartooning, and improvisational performance. True, we no longer know Mr. Punch as Punch, but thanks to Speaight's insights we can see his archetype lives on in such diverse forms as *The Muppets*, Bart Simpson, Andrew Dice Clay and The San Francisco Mime Troupe.

Stuart Lenig
Mariner Theatre Project
Payson, Arizona

Farce: A History from Aristophanes to Woody Allen. By Albert Bermel. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990. 464 pages. (First published by Simon and Schuster, 1982).

In his opening chapter, Albert Bermel says that once he had decided to write a book about farce, he began to feel like Alastair Sim in the film, *Laughter in Paradise*: a proper gentleman who has been forced into thievery attempts to snatch a pearl necklace from a jeweler's case; but as he pulls, the strand continues on and on for yards and yards, a seemingly endless string, impossible to stash in any pocket. It is just this quality of inclusiveness and vast critical energy (impelling the author to look for farce in surprising places) that makes Bermel's book so enlightening and the source of such pleasure. As the author of books on Moliere and Giradoux and as translator/adapter of a popular series of "acting versions" of Moliere and Gozzi, Bermel is well-equipped to write a book on farce in the theatre. The fact that Bermel goes well beyond the theatrical model and brings in farcical material from such wide-ranging sources as *You Bet Your Life* and *Pogo* makes this an especially welcome re-issue of one of the very few critical books to have been written on the most dangerous of genres.

The greatest value of the book is likely its first four chapters (they form a unit called "Recognizing Farce") that deal with the theory of the form: its psychic power, the meaning of its violence and frantic threat. Bermel declines the task of defining farce but chooses instead to describe it in these early chapters and then offer several hundred examples in the historical tour through theatre, television, film and other media that comprises the remaining three-hundred pages.

Bermel's description of farce in those acute opening chapters emphasizes the violence and radical violation of norms that are the lifeblood of farce. In harmony with much contemporary reconsideration of popular forms (he gives special credit to Eric Bentley's much-admired chapter on farce in *The Life of the Drama*), Bermel sees the antic behavior and dangerous situations of farce as enactments of a nightmare consciousness. Like our night-time visions of helplessness and entrapment, farce plays out the greatest horrors our unconscious can dream up. Nightmarish situations such as being suddenly nude at school, or running wildly from an attacker but getting no farther away find exact enactment in farce. They are grotesque experiences; in our perception as spectators, such moments in farce are at once comic and horrific. "Farce deals with the unreal," says Bermel, "with the worst one can dream or dread. Farce is cruel, often brutal, even murderous" (21). At the same time as it plays with horror, farce provides a pleasurable vision of violation of norms, the freedom to perform any act of aggression or desecration. Here

Play Reviews