

*Peter Shaffer. A Casebook.* By C. J. Gianakaris. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991. 179 pp. \$25.00.

*Peter Shaffer. A Casebook* offers a valuable collection of insightful essays on Shaffer's plays, as well as an interview with Shaffer himself conducted by editor C.J. Gianakaris. Most of Shaffer's major works are examined, from *Five Finger Exercise* (1958) to *Lettice and Lovage* (1987), as well as his relation to other writers and diverse forms of theatre. In an introductory essay, Gianakaris describes the playwright as a "'moving target' with respect to dramatic styles and thematic interests, he is difficult to categorize within tidy literary designations. Is he primarily a realist probing the psychological and social issues facing the modern age? Is he a somber metaphysician seeking answers to universal enigmas? Or is he a teasing farceur who targets mundane human follies?" (3). This collection attempts to address those questions, and many others, in examining the work of a playwright whose significance reaches well beyond both his native country and matters of technique or theme.

Although Shaffer has his detractors, some of whom find his work too impersonal and detached from the central passions of his characters, his work emerges in this collection as infinitely varied, challenging, and singular. As a dramatist Shaffer has experienced enviable commercial success while also raising issues that would usually be unlikely to find wide-spread approval on the popular stage.

The eleven articles included are all by scholars who have previously published articles or books on Shaffer. They are clearly devotees of Shaffer's drama, but, as a rule, they offer a balanced analysis of their subject. Charles R. Lyons examines Shaffer's use of realism in *Five Finger Exercise*, concluding that Shaffer ultimately abandoned this weakened convention to strive for a more eclectic approach. Lyons writes that the play is a "highly conventional and derivative text that attempts to address the domestic and social issues of its moment with originality at the same time that it exploits, with varying success, the conventions of late-nineteenth-century realism" (54), but he concludes that the play's strength lies in its dialogue "which embodies the kind of wit that amplifies the delight of *Amadeus* and supplies the material for the rich pleasures of Maggie Smith's performance in *Lettice and Lovage*" (54). Gene A. Plunka deals with issues of integrity and self-awareness as Shaffer's characters face the struggle between individual freedom and restraining society in Shaffer's earliest plays. Plunka states that these early dramas "provide a framework for the dialectic that we encounter in the later works between individual freedom and more carefully

structured institutionalized behavior" (73). Barbara Lounsberry focuses on metaphysics and philosophical issues in Shaffer's dramas, emphasizing the search for personal identity and spirituality, especially in *Lettice and Lovage*, which, like Shakespeare's late comedies "can be seen as a fantastical parable of Shaffer's dramatic enterprises" (92). In a complementary vein, James R. Stacy traces Shaffer's search for worship, particularly in those dramas in which Shaffer is most committed to the subject, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*, stating that the "crux of Shaffer's exploration into these worships is in the admiration the nonbelievers develop for their primitives" (107). Felicia Hardison Londré offers a close examination of the tragic and comic aspects of Salieri in *Amadeus*, noting that the "parallel is obvious between Mozart's betrayal of his father and Salieri's betrayal of God" (124), while Gianakaris contributes a companion essay on the treatment of Mozart in the same play. Gianakaris questions whether Shaffer has attained dramatic excellence while also rearranging the facts of Mozart's life, concluding that the result is "an authentic, candid portrait of Mozart that opens up his more human qualities" (131). Game-playing, an oft-repeated motif in Shaffer's major works, is surveyed by Dennis A. Klein in four works, *Shrivings*, *Equus*, *Lettice and Lovage*, and *Yonadab*. Klein sees dramatic unity in the techniques of these games, while also pointing out a "circular, geographical unity" (149) in Shaffer's plays. Finally, the autobiographical nature of Shaffer's most recent dramas is analyzed in a penetrating essay by Michael Hinden, who finds *Yonadab* "so insistent, and the play so revealing" (153) as an autobiographical revelation.

Most interesting of all is Gianakaris' 1990 interview with Shaffer. Following a brief discussion of the problems of getting *Lettice and Lovage* to Broadway, and the stumbling blocks that have thus far prevented a New York production of Shaffer's 1985 drama, *Yonadab*, Shaffer stresses the value of literary and literate drama, noting that "Shakespeare is my god, and I worship him" (35). He is guardedly critical of political correctness in so far as he sees it as a rejection leading to the ultimate destruction of the traditionally dominant artistic and social achievements of Western culture. Emphasizing that Western culture has always sought to assimilate new ideas and works of diverse societies, he stresses that "I don't mind being called a conservative if by that you mean I recognize what the human race has *most* and *best* achieved and then want to preserve it. To conserve something is not an altogether bad thing anyway" (30). In response to a question about which issues are currently in most need of examination in modern drama, Shaffer believes that most importantly dramatists should be assaulting "—the taboos of our world. I think that nobody sufficiently addresses himself to the total disparagement by our civilization of its own achievements" (30).

Gianakaris has included a useful listing of Shaffer's plays and their opening dates along with a brief bibliography of sources. In tandem with Eberle Thomas' *Peter Shaffer. An Annotated Bibliography* (Garland, 1991) or Gianakaris' *Peter Shaffer* (Macmillan, 1991), *Peter Shaffer. A Casebook* illuminates an eminent and continually intriguing dramatist whose plays of ideas, despite their controversial nature and technique, are likely to challenge artists and audiences far into the future.

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*Confronting Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire. Essays in Cultural Pluralism.* Edited by Philip C. Kolin. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993. 255pp. + illus. ISBN 0-313-26681-6.

"I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth. I tell what *ought* to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!" This romantic cry from the troubled heart of Tennessee Williams's Blanche Du Bois serves as her tragic credo, but they are also heartfelt words from the equally troubled heart of the author himself. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, despite the passage of time and the occasional obscuring by imitative works, remains a play of staggering passion and more truth than Blanche would probably care to hear.

*Confronting Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire. Essays in Cultural Pluralism*, edited by Philip C. Kolin, presents the play from a variety of diverse critical and theoretical perspectives. Kolin stresses that the essays are not to be viewed as offering an homogenous view of the play, but "as polyphonic voices, quarreling with, advancing, complementing, subverting, extending, modifying each other"(x) expanding "our understanding of *Streetcar* and its place in American (world) culture"(16). Kolin has not overstated the case: this collection of generally distinguished essays does indeed invite a deeper understanding and reassessment of a play Martin Gottfried has quite persuasively described as "art and its art will endure. For it is an exquisite play—perhaps the most romantic, poetic sensitive play ever written for the American theatre"(6). Despite the availability of two earlier collections of essays on *Streetcar*, Jordan Y. Miller's *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire* (G.K. Hall, 1971) and Harold Bloom's *Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire* (Chelsea House, 1988), this significant collection presents wholly original essays that extend our view of the play forward. Although its historiography is ample

and scholarly, *Confronting Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire* provokes distinctly contemporary notions of the play and should provide fertile material for future productions and some fresh ideas about the entire Williams canon.

The essays are indeed as provocative as they are diverse in their approaches to the play. Herbert Blau's penetrating essay, "Readymade Desire", sets the scene for the entire volume as he focuses on the play as a social text within the context of postmodernism. The majority of the essays examine the play in light of various theoretical studies: William Kleb sees *Streetcar* via Foucault's concepts of the struggle to control by the power of knowledge and the manipulation of truth; Calvin Bedient makes use of Julia Kristeva's essay "Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection and Black Sun" to comprehend the play's cathartic elements; Laura and Edward Morrow offer an holistic reading by using the recent theoretical constructs Chaos and Anti-Chaos Theory; June Schlueter argues for a dual reading of the play based on the theories of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss; Laurilyn Harris, using perception theory, calls *Streetcar* "a tragedy of misperception, thwarted creativity, and misplaced priorities"(98); Mark Royden Winchell focuses on the mythic aspects of the play (inspired by Leslie Fiedler), drawing distinctions between popular and elite culture; and Robert Bray presents a contemporary Marxist reading of the play. Two essays deal with feminism and the play: Kolin's own essay incisively applies feminist thematics to Eunice Hubbell, a character he believes has been inappropriately marginalized as a secondary comic figure; Bert Cardullo argues against what he calls superficial readings of the plays—feminist and sociopolitical interpretations—stressing that Blanche and Stanley are two individual human beings, not political or social symbols. The collection is rounded out by W. Kenneth Holditch's well-argued interpretation of *Streetcar* in light of two Southern novels, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and William Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*, as a way of understanding Blanche's dilemma; Lionel Kelly provides an interesting examination of ethnicity in the play; Jürgen C. Wolter surveys the influence of *Streetcar* on German culture; and Father Gene D. Phillips traces the history of the play and its translation into film.

The text includes a few interesting production photographs and Kolin has appended a particularly valuable bibliography of previous scholarship on *Streetcar*. As the reassessment of Williams's art continues, one can only hope that his other major plays receive the quality of attention Kolin and his contributors have lavished on *Streetcar*.

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*The Commedia dell'arte. A Documentary History* by Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards. Oxford: Basil Blackwell for The Shakespeare Head Press, 1990. xxi + 346 + illus.

Recent publications like Thomas F. Heck's thorough bibliography, *Commedia dell'arte. The Primary and Secondary Sources* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), Virginia Scott's detailed and fascinating history of the Italian players in Paris, *The Commedia dell'arte in Paris. 1644-1697* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1990), Robert L. Erenstein's survey history, *De geschiedenis van de Commedia dell'Arte* (Amsterdam: International Theatre Bookshop, 1985), and new editions of Allardyce Nicoll's seminal study, *The World of Harlequin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and Henry F. Salerno's translation of Scala's scenarios, *Scenarios of the Commedia dell'arte* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989), have sparked new interest in the significance and widespread influence of *commedia dell'arte*.

Within the past three years, the Italian Institute of Culture in London has hosted a conference on *commedia*, featuring performances by Dario Fo and Carlo Boso along with papers and discussions, and Actors Theatre of Louisville's "Classics in Context" Festival brought together scholars and performers (including American clowns Bill Irwin and Geoff Hoyle, the Piccolo Teatro's long-time Arlecchino, Feruccio Soleri, and France's mime master Jacques Lecoq) to focus on *commedia*'s impact on the contemporary international theatre, and other performances, conferences and festivals celebrated various aspects of *commedia*. Kenneth and Laura Richards' *The Commedia dell'arte. A Documentary History* now adds a valuable new resource to the on-going examination of *commedia*, perhaps the most fascinatingly elusive and widely influential theatrical form in western culture.

For the first time in English translation, the Richards' book brings together substantial excerpts, as well as complete historical documents, shedding light on *commedia*'s antecedents, actors and companies, masks and roles, *scenarii*, performance techniques, influence outside Italy, and subsequent decline in the mid-eighteenth century. In a very brief conclusion, the authors also survey the *commedia* revival in the twentieth century on diverse international theatre artists, including Craig, Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, Tairov, Reinhardt, Copeau, Barrault, Juvet, Strehler, Fo, along with visual artists like Picasso and composers including Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

The book is handsomely published, includes many excellent black and white illustrations, a substantial bibliography and notes, and a useful chronology of significant *commedia* events in European theatre between 1545 and 1763. The Richards' introduction briefly explains the problems of interpreting the surviving documentary evidence of *commedia*, and traces the locations of the most signifi-

cant collections of primary commedia sources. Each chapter in the main body of the text offers two parts, the Richards' commentary followed by the documents themselves. The Richards generally create a lucid and insightful context in which to fully appreciate the evidence. Recollections of actors and spectators, letters, government documents, *scenarii*, early historical studies, and contracts between actors and managers illuminate commedia in a way that far surpasses most of the straight historical surveys that attempt to reconstruct it.

Aside from the surviving *scenarii*, and later reconstructions by Goldoni and Gozzi, there is no literary evidence of this profoundly significant entertainment which pervaded Europe between the early sixteenth century and the mid-eighteenth century, along the way influencing the plays of Lope de Vega, Shakespeare, Molière, and countless others. Conflicting notions of commedia's importance on performance traditions of the past two centuries persists. Commedia's performance techniques and its stock characters have been widely interpreted by actors and directors since the eighteenth century, and although *The Commedia dell'arte. A Documentary History* fails to resolve the many contradictory interpretations of commedia's characters and performance techniques, it serves at least as well as any other commedia resource to inspire interest in the form.

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*Shakespeare and Feminist Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography and Commentary* by Philip C. Kolin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1991. 420 pp.

In the introduction to *Shakespeare and Feminist Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography and Commentary*, Philip C. Kolin points out that feminist criticism has made many important contributions to the study of Shakespeare. The last twenty years have been a particularly productive period as Shakespeare's plays and his women have been explored from a distinctly feminist perspective. Further, feminists have studied related topics that provide a new understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare's plays and poems while recovering and restoring women's place in those works. *Shakespeare and Feminist Criticism* thoroughly documents the feminist discourse on Shakespeare's works from 1975 through 1988. Kolin identifies this period, beginning with the publication of Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), as the first wave of feminist response to Shakespeare. Included in the bibliography are

works that challenge feminist criticism of Shakespeare. Kolin's goal is not simply to document feminist methods and interpretations but also to show how they have sparked and influenced a new direction in Shakespeare studies. Necessarily, he includes:

. . . wide-ranging works on language, desire, role-playing, theatre conventions, marriage, and the complex ideologies of Elizabethan and Jacobean culture as they shed light on Shakespeare's views on and representation of women, sex, and gender. (46)

Kolin's bibliography, containing 439 entries, is an extremely useful resource, not only as a reference tool but as an informative, readable overview of feminist writings on Shakespeare. Books, collections of essays, articles, and notes are annotated; reviews are also supplied to assist the reader. Dissertations are included but not annotated, though DAI reference information is supplied. Kolin's extensive annotations are clearly and carefully written. In an effort to "maintain the author's perspective...without simplifying or distorting an argument" (47), each work is carefully summarized, often incorporating key quotations (with page numbers on which they are found) and including cross-references to additional works the author found useful or influential. These mini-essays (arranged in chapters by the year of publication) offer a synoptic introduction to the history and development of feminist critical writing on Shakespeare.

In his introduction and commentary, Kolin discusses the contributions of feminist criticism to the study of Shakespeare and several significant topics feminists have explored. This section is particularly useful for the student as Kolin diligently guides the reader to specific authors, articles, books, and review essays in each area.

While Shakespeare himself "has been claimed as a feminist, a protofeminist, a cryptofeminist, and an antifeminist" (68), Kolin notes that some feminists are reluctant or opposed to drawing conclusions about Shakespeare's personal beliefs. Further, quoting Sue-Ellen Case, Kolin points out that "it is misleading for feminists to even talk about Shakespeare's women, since he did not write for women nor did he present them on stage" (12). Despite these warnings, it is clear that feminist criticism is initiating a new reading of Shakespeare's works and influencing the contemporary dialogue on the interpretation of those works. *Shakespeare and Feminist Criticism* is a necessary tool for anyone hoping to contribute to this discourse.

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*Strategies of Drama: The Experience of Form* by Oscar Lee Brownstein. Contributions in Drama and Theater Studies, Number 39. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991.

A chasm persists between the academic study of drama and the practice of theater—a chasm that has proved troublesome for students of drama theory. Most academics of the 1960s appeared to regard the writings of "theatereticians" like Jan Kott as a nuisance. In the 1970s, Martin Esslin's brief introduction to his *An Anatomy of Drama* had the tone of someone peering forlornly over the edge of the rift. Perhaps Esslin envisioned his delicate diagrams of arcs and loops as bridges; if so, they have proved as fragile as the lines that represented them on the page. The 1980s seemed to present us with a new strategy—fill the chasm up with books and papers about semiotics and audience response, and we might simply be able to walk across. But the terrain continues to defy us; the reconciliation of academic theorist and theorist-practitioner hasn't occurred.

Oscar Lee Brownstein's *Strategies of Drama: The Experience of Form* is written from a perspective of familiarity with both sides of the chasm. Early in his book, Brownstein recounts his discovery of the limitations of "criticism," (xiv) and declares that the intuitive language of the working theater (and presumably his own work with new playwrights at Yale) has provided him with the basis for this exploration of the mechanics of the inherently "nonrational" (xiv) experience we know as drama. It is clear that, in Brownstein's mind, the dichotomy persists. It might be pointed out that an integrated critical methodology did not appear to hinder Northrop Frye's excursion into the irrationality of Shakespeare's later plays, but Brownstein has chosen his way—and it leads him to a phenomenological approach to drama. And while Brownstein's declarations about pitching his tent with the practitioners may seem somewhat overdone, his approach has yielded a study that is both engaging and potentially valuable to anyone interested in what happens in the theater.

Brownstein's focus is on our "experience of discovery" (xvii) in the theater, and on the ways in which the various prospective and retrospective strategies of plays inform that experience. His focus on the rhetoric of dramatic structures endows his readings with vitality, if only because it necessarily emphasizes *how* the plays work and (ultimately) what they are in the first place. This is particularly true in the case of his readings of *Streetcar*, *The Chairs*, *The Zoo Story* and *Oedipus Rex*. Indeed, there are times when Brownstein's work on individual texts arrives at the essential point itself: Oedipus' incest and patricide, for example, are not his crimes—they are his punishment. Throughout the book, Brownstein's readings maintain a coherent, but not dogmatic, relationship to his premise that "emotional and intellectual experience is both the means and end of drama" (139).



It follows that this experiential approach to drama involves a consideration of the nature of audience response, and it must be noted that Brownstein's exposition of how dramatic strategies work to Marco De Marinis' notion of a continuum between the frustration and gratification of audience expectations, except for the fact that Brownstein's spectators generally seem to be not much more than targets of the playwright's machinations. His audience is capable of complicity, at least to the extent that its empathy can bridge aesthetic distance—but the audience here is hardly a dynamic "maker of meanings," as De Marinis has asserted.

Brownstein's inquiry is ultimately aimed at the question of how drama accomplishes its meaning. If we extend his hypothesis to its apparent logical conclusion, we arrive at the idea that drama *is* what it means. The shadow of Artaud—although there is no reference to him in the book—may be lurking in the background here. For Brownstein's phenomenological approach inevitably leaves us with the question: If drama is what it means, how can it accomplish the representation of anything other than itself? Brownstein's answer—that the experience of drama provokes the spectator to independent, analogical thought—may be seen as a negotiation of the terms of the problem, rather than a confrontation with the problem *per se*.

Taken as a whole, however, *Strategies of Drama* is a stimulating book. For example, Brownstein's carefully delineated distinction between the elements of "story" and "plot" in plays recalls Hayden White's work on the function of narrative in the representation of history—and should provide an impetus for additional study of the narrativity of drama. And it is noteworthy that Brownstein's consideration of prospective, retrospective and climax strategies employs the texts of plays concretely, but in a manner that allows the texts enough latitude to speak for themselves. His study has the virtue of not smothering the plays with analysis, while his uniformly confident writing offers readers a genuine opportunity to enlarge their understanding of how the plays express their structure.

Thomas Akstens  
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*Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage* by Nicholas de Jongh.  
London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

This book examines the portrayal of male homosexuality on the London and New York commercial stage between 1925 and 1985—a much more specific topic than is indicated by the book's title. De Jongh, who is a London theater

critic, has divided his chronological survey into chapters that treat discrete periods in the dramatic representation of homosexuality. As the overwrought heading of one of these chapters suggests ("Out of Bondage Towards Being"), it is de Jongh's contention that the enactment of gay experience in mainstream theater has undergone a radical change for the better since the late 1960s.

De Jongh is most persuasive in his discussion of plays from the first half of his chronology, when gays were represented by stereotypes that were as destructive as they were absurd. He argues that the restrictive Licensing Act—which endured in Britain until 1968—actually encouraged the representation of gays by code words and stereotypical behavior, since it precluded any frank portrayal of gay experience. Homosexuals were routinely depicted as the woeful victims of a malignant obsession; homosexuality itself was treated in literal terms as a disease. Reading *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in this context, de Jongh argues effectively that Brick's unacknowledged homosexual desires cannot be dissociated from Big Daddy's unspoken terminal cancer as a source of the fear and denial that motivates the play.

De Jongh is less convincing in his consideration of more recent plays. Early on, he asserts that gay drama "began to recover or reconstruct [its] history from a new perspective" (5) following the Stonewall riot and the repeal of anti-sodomy statutes in England. According to this sanguine analysis, gay liberation has effectively neutralized oppressive social and sexual orthodoxies, permitting homosexuality in the theater—as in society—to escape its marginal, closeted status. The emergence in the 1970s of a play like Martin Sherman's *Bent* would initially seem to support this view. Sherman's uncompromising exploration of both the darker realities of gay history and the validity of gay identity simply would not have been possible on the commercial stage of the 1950s. But as de Jongh himself reveals in significant new material based on interviews with Sherman, *Bent* faced substantial difficulties finding production even a decade after the supposed watershed of liberation. Here, and elsewhere in the latter half of the book, we see de Jongh negotiating problems that result from his rigid chronological schema and the narrowness of his thesis. It comes as little surprise when he must ultimately acknowledge that Joe Orton's work "does not seem to fit within this survey" (94).

Moreover, de Jongh is unforgiving of any text that does not affirm the metropolitan gay zeitgeist of the 1970s and early 80s, as he sees it defined in plays as different as Michael Wilcox's *Rents* and William Hoffman's bristling *As Is*. This is most apparent in his treatment of Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy*, which de Jongh criticizes on the basis of its "highly conservative theory of gay identity" (171). De Jongh objects to what he presumes to be Fierstein's sexual politics. He refuses to allow for any degree of operative irony in the play, assuming that Arnold Beckoff's domestic fantasies somehow mandate a reactionary model of gay relationships that circumscribes sexual freedom. In at least this case, de Jongh's reading appears to have been subordinated to the political demands of his historical argument.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this somewhat uneven book results from de Jongh's initial decision to focus his attention on the commercial theater, rather than on the Fringe and Off-Off. *Not in Front of the Audience* merits attention because it encourages us to consider the extent to which Broadway and the West End have tried to redefine their public social consciousness in response to the social changes that have followed gay liberation and the AIDS crisis. The results of this redefinition have sometimes been perplexing. As de Jongh shows, there was a hollow and self-congratulatory ring to the commercial production of Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*, given the revolving door of "name" film actors in the lead role—an accommodation to market considerations that inevitably divorced the play from the very community that was being ravaged by AIDS. De Jongh's survey ultimately helps us to realize the degree to which the theater must sometimes struggle with conflicting economic and social demands in order to fulfill what has historically been one of its important functions—to allow society to enact the gender and sexuality differences it inevitably discovers within itself.

Thomas Akstens  
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NEW FROM

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Professor of Theatre &amp; English

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