The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After. Edited by Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. 212 pp.

This collection of essays on the late tragicomedies of Shakespeare and his successors originated in a conference on the politics of drama 1610-1650. The conference organizers and collection's editors, Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope, aimed to recuperate tragicomedy as a genre important to historical studies of Renaissance drama. Many of the plays considered are rarely studied even by specialists in Renaissance drama and are never performed. The books collective focus on radical elements and undertones in the plays serves as a useful corrective to the more usual critical view that Stuart tragicomedy is shamelessly royalist in its orientation and thus renders the genre more politically acceptable as a subject of study in contemporary English departments. The book does little, however, to encourage the nonhistoricist student of drama to examine any of these plays that are not already canonical (primarily those of Shakespeare) or to induce anyone to attempt to stage them. Lois Potter's essay on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is exceptional in discussing the play's political implications in terms of its theatrical history, including a recent production of this rarely performed Shakespeare-Fletcher collaboration.

Though the collection as a whole is explicitly concerned with historicist rather than generic issues, McMullan and Hope in their introduction do discuss Fletcher's definition of tragicomedy in his preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess*, arguing that it is misleading for an understanding of subsequent tragicomedies. Their reading of Fletcher's definition is partial and rather literal: they object, for example, that Fletcher specifically allows gods in a tragicomedy but then almost never introduces any in his own tragicomedies. Surely the point that Fletcher is making when he says that both "a God" and "meane people" are legitimate in a tragicomedy is that the genre is not bound by the separation of social classes required by neoclassical theory in tragedy and comedy but is more comprehensive than either of its constituent genres. The editors do not discuss at all Fletcher's assertion, borrowed from the most famous part of Guarini's definition of tragicomedy ("the danger not the death"), that tragicomedy lacks deaths but brings some near death. This particular requirement (things are often not what they seem), in fact, is largely responsible for the characteristic doubleness or ambiguity of Renaissance tragicomedy and for the strain or awkwardness erent in so many tragicomic endings that have had to pull happiness out of sorrow and comedy out of tragedy. It is this doubleness of tragicomedy that provides a congenial

environment for the subversive politically radical elements that many of the contributors to this collection rightly find in plays that are ostensibly royalist, harmonious, and optimistic about the political *status quo*.

Among the most telling arguments for radical subtexts in the plays are those of David Norbrook and Walter Cohen. Norbrook in his essay on *The Tempest* urges the need "to allow more generous intellectual horizons for Shakespeare and his audience than some critics have been prepared to grant." He argues convincingly against recent anti-colonialist critics that *The Tempest* is not simply "absolutist propaganda" but rather "subjects traditional institutions to a systematic, critical questioning." For example, Prospero and Miranda's view of Caliban as properly their slave is not endorsed by the play as a whole (as, one might add, most productions of the play make clear). Walter Cohen, surveying a wide range of plays, suggests that the subversive voices of Stuart tragicomedy can be found in those elements of a play that the dramatist has been unable to incorporate harmoniously in the generically required final reconciliation. For examble, in *The Fair Favourite* Davenant's royalist defense of the character of the play's monarch leads him to blame unprincipled courtiers and a complaining populace for the king's problems and thus, albeit inadvertently, to present in his play a divided society that foreshadows the events of the 1640's.

Other arguments for the radical potential of tragicomedy in the period 1640-1650 are offered by Margot Heinemann, Sophie Tomlinson, and Erica Sheen. Heinemann demonstrates the presence of democratic ideas in tragicomedies of the popular theatres such as William Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me*. Sophie Tomlinson argues that women acting at the court of Henrietta Maria "provided a model for female insubordination in the cultural sphere" and possibly for the active role of women in the revolutionary period—a rather large claim for the influence of coterie theatre. Erica Sheen finds that the presence of Seneca's *Hercules furens in Cymbeline* provides the play with a radical subtext, but the echo strikes me as so submerged as to be unavailable to any theatre audience. In contrast to the majority of critics in this collection who find political radicalism in their chosen plays, Martin Butler argues that Jonson's late plays contain very little criticism of the court. Kathleen McLuskie's essay on Fletcher, previously published as a chapter in her *Renaissance Dramatists*, refreshingly takes into account the way in which theatrical effect complicates our understanding of a play's ideology. She acknowledges that "Marriage and sexual relations were as much dramaturgic elements which could be combined in various ways as they were social institutions." Fletcher's witty heroines seem more liberated than their predecessors, but it is not clear how far we should see their relatively liberated status as a real development in the social position of women and how far it is determined by dramatic convention.

The Politics of Tragicomedy contributes to literary scholarship rather than to dramatic theory, but the collection does suggest that attempts to stage Shakespeare (unfortunately the only Stuart tragicomic dramatist likely to be performed) as the ally of the progressive forces in the late twentieth century are not amiss.

Verna A. Foster
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Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre. By Brenda Murphy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 201 pp.

As director of the original New York productions of both William's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Elia Kazan was a pivotal figure in the movement to "domesticate the avant-garde" by helping develop and refine the distinctive American theatrical style of the 1950s, which Brenda Murphy here calls "subjective realism." (The third creator of these seminal productions was stage designer Jo Mielziner, who contributed a visual language of "abstract realism.") As early as the mid-fifties, a critic writing for *The Hudson Review*—in an article from which Murphy quotes—was already singling out the work of this collaborative team as "'*the* singular dramatic achievement of the postwar decade on broadway'" in its fostering of "a curious dialectic" between realism and fantasy, nature and artifice.

Although Kazan came to directing Broadway plays (as well as Hollywood films such as *On the Waterfront*) from an immersion in Method acting as practiced by The Actors Studio, as Murphy repeatedly demonstrates, his aesthetic aim was not necessarily toward greater realism in the theatre but toward greater stylization; the presentational staging of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, in Kazan's words an attempt at "'busting out of the goddamned proscenium theatre uptown'" through its long monologues spoken directly to the audience, is a case in point. Whereas Murphy understands expressionism as maintaining a clear demarcation between the separate realms of outer and inner reality, she sees the Williams/Kazan partnership as resulting in a "middle ground" that, without jettisoning the "epistemological assumption of realism," allows full expression to character interiority and subjectivity.

Professor Murphy's meticulous dissection of the Williams/Kazan collaboration raises central issues for theatre teachers, scholars, and practitioners, forcing a rethinking of the question of authorship in drama and of the nature of the dramatic text. On a purely practical level, which edition does one choose for talking and writing about drama: the standard, oft-revisited, authorized "reading" editions (in this instance, the multi-volume *Theatre of Tennessee Williams* published by New Directions), or the "acting" versions that more nearly preserve the gestural elements of the original performance (such as those printed by Dramatists Play Service)? Without explicitly saying so, by her methodology Murphy implicitly valorizes as "the text" those acting versions that best inscribe the initial productions. As Kazan would remark about *Streetcar* in his autobiography: "William's play was to undergo the great change, become a production, no longer what Thornton Wilder termed a 'text'—a word I loathe in the theatre. It now had to be transformed into a living thing, and I had the responsibility of supervising the metamorphosis."

Understandably, then, the debate over authority was entered into originally by the principal participants themselves, by the dramatist and the director as they attempted to come to terms with who "owns" the play and meld their sometimes disparate visions during a lengthy creative partnership that brought both *Streetcar* and *Cat* and also *Camino Real* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* to the stage—but that always involved "substantial changes" on William's part. Kazan, although professing that once "the playscript [,] the essentially important element, . . . is finished, actors, designers, directors, technicians 'write' the play together," in effect still believed in the director's role as "artistic tyrant"; even so eminent a critic as Eric Bently (also himself a playwright) would canonize Kazan's work as more centrally important "'than that of any current writer.'" While Williams would concede, in assessing *Camino*, that "A book is only the shadow of a play. . . . The printed script of a play is hardly more than an architect's blueprint of a house not yet built or built and destroyed," it comes as little surprise that he eventually chaffed under what came increasingly to seem "a deep psychic violation" of his self-definition and integrity as an artist during the production process.

A few of the specific alterations Williams either acceded to as his works went from rehearsal draft to stage (or later initiated as they went form stage into print) will highlight the interpretive differences contingent upon the choice of variant—acting/performance or reading/printed—texts. In *Streetcar* as performed, for example, Blanche made her final exit to the sanitarium dressed in lavender and not in Williams's desired Della-Robbia blue found in the standard edition, thus reducing the religious undertones of the violated Madonna; and Stanley's groping inside Stella's open blouse was eliminated in performance, rendering the

closing sculptural tableaux "less overtly sexual" and, once again, undercutting potentialities for discerning inverted religious imagery of an (un)holy family. On stage, *Camino* existed minus the prologue that it would have in print, and so the overarching form of the play as Don Quixote's dream vision was totally absent in production.

Not least of Professor Murphy's achievements here is her mastery of the variant texts for these four plays (drafts, rehearsal scripts, divergent printed versions, etc.) and her combing of the documents (particularly unpublished letters in research collections at Austin and Lincoln Center) to accumulate salient details. Her method is accretionary and reiterative (the many appearances of the words "kinesic" and "encode" in some form or other admittedly become slightly wearing), deliberately more descriptive than interpretive. Her fine discussion of metatheatrical elements in *Sweet Bird* might, for instance, have connected the incessant role-playing and monologues and stage mirrors with Williams's thematic emphasis on a retreat into egoism and solipsism that cut one off from mutuality and human communion. And some might wish that Professor Murphy had attempted to theorize more fully and open-endedly about precisely what might constitute an "ideal" theatrical text for the classroom or the study on the basis of this exploration of what remains undoubtedly the most important collaboration ever in the history of American drama.

Several years ago, Stephen Greenblatt, commenting on the impossibility of any longer regarding a "text," particularly a "collective" one, as a "freestanding container of all of its meanings," remarked that "There may be a moment in which a solitary individual puts words on a page, but it is by no means clear that this moment is the heart of the mystery and that everything else is to be stripped away and discarded" (*Shakespearean Negotiations*). What Brenda Murphy has admirably accomplished is to recover and re-engraft onto the library versions of four Williams plays essential elements, oftentimes nonverbal in nature, from their original productions. The result is that one can never again teach or write about these works—most particularly about *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which from the printed editions has always seemed so representational in its handling of character—in quite the same way.

Thomas P. Adler
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Pirandello's Major Plays. English Versions by Eric Bentley. With a Foreword by Albert Bermel. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991. 187 pp.

Eric Bentley has contributed mightily to the study of contemporary European drama. He has especially, and most effectively, championed the works of two dominant playwrights, Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello. Bentley's recent *The Pirandello Commentaries* (Northwestern University Press, 1986) and the perennial *Naked Masks* (E.P. Dutton, 1952), a collection of Pirandello's plays introduced and edited by Bentley (including his translation, with Gerardo Guerrieri, of *Liolà*), along with numerous articles and productions, has kept theatrical production and English-language scholarship on Pirandello conspicuous. Bentley's new English versions of four of Pirandello's finest plays collected by Northwestern University Press in a modestly priced volume ($29.95 in cloth, $12.95 in paper) is another valuable contribution to Pirandellian studies. Although two volumes from Riverrun Press in 1987 and 1988 contain the same plays (and more), at equally modest prices, the overall quality make Bentley's versions preferable.

In his plays, Pirandello examines the contradictory, paradoxical, and absurd aspects of life, through a mixture of comic and tragic elements, emphasizing conflicts between appearance and reality, and between the comic mask and the tragic face (or alternative mask) hidden by it. In every seemingly real situation or statement that he makes, Pirandello plays out its opposite as well. Illusion and reality, madness and sanity are perceived by his characters and audiences to exist within the same moment in time. The action in his plays often escalates a normal state of affairs onto a plane of intensity where truth and reality are illusive and incomprehensible at best. Placing extraordinary characters in absurd and densely complex situations with seemingly impossible resolutions delighted Pirandello. His plays are similar to *commedia dell'arte* scenarios in that they create surprising and fantastic situations that seem too complex to unravel. He manages a return to the ordinary through his magical ability to resolve the complicated contradictions. Pirandello's finest works are mature and polished *literary* achievements, not rough commedia scenarios, yet he depends heavily on the skill of the actor. Albert Bermel's introduction focuses particularly on Pirandello's "comic agony," an approach which creates a dilemma for both actor and audience. He astutely points out that in Pirandello's plays

> The comedy will make itself felt. Pirandello's plays deal in large part with the refusal of some characters—some human beings—to

> comprehend the suffering of others; and while the sufferings will be blatantly visible and audible, so will the incomprehension which, as it arises from time to time, put the suffering at a remove and confers on it a layer of comic callousness. (x)

Right You Are (1917), *Six Characters in Search of An Author* (1921), and *Emperor Henry* (1922), three of the four plays included here, are typically Pirandellian, and certainly rank among his greatest works (one wishes Bentley had added the hard-to-find *To-night We Improvise* to this collection; perhaps it could be included in a second volume). Bentley's versions are straightforward, fluid, and tightly edited. *Six Characters* and *Emperor Henry* are widely available in other fine translations, and Bentley's versions, along with his *Right You Are*, have been previously published, but this collection, especially at the modest paperback price, will be widely appealing. Undoubtedly aimed at classroom use, it is certain that this collection will also be of great interest to those wishing to produce these plays, since Bentley's own skill as a dramatist has clearly made for highly actable treatments.

The volume is attractively printed and bound, with spacious margins. Since it is likely to be used in introductory courses in dramatic literature, inclusion of a chronology of Pirandello's life, a bibliography of basic resources, and information about significant productions of the plays included should have been included. This is a minor quibble, however, as this collection is likely to bring Pirandello's art to an ever-widening audience.

James Fisher
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Acting as Reading: The Place of the Reading Process in the Actor's Work. By David Cole. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992. 287 pp.

David Cole offers us a compelling study of acting as a physicalization of the reading process. He effectively dismisses the traditional perception of reading and acting as dissimilar, if not mutually exclusive, activities. Borrowing form the psychoanalytic theories of Norman Holland, Cole argues that reading is a "displacement upward" of what were once bodily processes (most notably eating) and that acting manifests these displaced physical processes and the satisfaction associated with them.

Acting as Reading is well organized into seven chapters which develop the author's argument effectively. The first two chapters, "Acting as Reading" and "The Reader as Actor," are something of "a teaser" in that Cole introduces us to the idea that acting is the "recovery of a 'lost' physical reading" (1), but neglects to state what that "physical" is; the second chapter briefly mentions the work of reader-response, phenomenological, and hermeneutical critics (Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Georges Poulet, Hans-Georg Gadamer) only to dismiss their work in favor of Norman Holland's psychoanalytical theories. In essence, this short chapter dispels any notion a reader may have about *Acting as Reading* as a text which attempts to interweave or, at least, connect theories of acting and those of reader-response. The following chapter, "The 'Lost' Physical of Reading," is what in this context might be called "the meat and potatoes" of the text's thesis. Cole restates Holland's thesis of the reading experience as a reenactment of the infant's passive acceptance of food from a loving mother. Introjection and incorporation are the "displacement upward" of feeding and digestion (*Dynamics of Literary Response*, 1968). For Cole, the lost "physical" of reading is, hence, eating. This chapter is provocative and highly effective in the presentation of a well-argued foundation for his theory of acting. "Acting as the Recovery of the 'Lost' Physical of Reading," builds upon the previous chapter by setting up a continuum that links the processes of eating, introjection, reading, and acting. Cole divides acting into the categories of speech, movement, improvisation, transaction with character, and relationships with other characters. Within each "level," the orally *active* and *passive* (author's emphasis) impulses, as well as a third impulse which merges and so counterbalances the other two, come into play. It is in his discussion of these equalizing impulses that Cole's arguments are the most persuasive. For example, he argues that those desires associated with improvisation, "I produce (make up, 'write') a text of actions" and "I consume (use up, 'read') a text of actions," are 'set equal' or leveled through a third dynamic, "I consume by my actions the text my actions produce." Cole discusses each of the processes and their respective impulses in detail, illustrating them with examinations of several fictional scenes of reading from *The Divine Comedy* and *Don Quixote* to demonstrate how the active-passive dichotomy compels the characters to break off from passive reading in order to act. "Scenes of Reading as Scenes of Acting" contains further applications of the reading/acting/eating theory. Examining scenes from dramatic texts (*The Birds*, *The Coventry Cycle*, *The Sea Gull*, and postmodern performance pieces, most notably the work of Richard Foreman and The Wooster Group), Cole argues that as reading is represented, so acting is understood. For the Greeks, acting retained a structure of aspect of reading, namely mediation and interpretation, which made the culture rather uncomfortable with it. The Medieval Expositor, an actor-who-reads, was also regarded with ambivalence. The Chekhovian reader/Stanislavskian actor ushered in a new perception of acting: "*unable to read in and act from the text, one reads into the text something which, as already one's own, it is impossible to act upon*" (182). In other words, a performance levels or stabilizes interaction

between the passive text and the active reader/actor. The postmodern performance pieces literally stage the act of reading as a dramatic event. Cole concludes that while the history of acting has been an attempt to reconcile the conflict between reading and acting, present-day performance pieces accept the conflict and stage it as precisely that. "The Audience as Read To" returns to the argument that acting and reading are mediations experienced as the unmediated presences of a text (219). Such an argument suggests to this reader a discussion of "good" and "bad" productions in light of past "readings." How does a previous reading of a text affect a present reading? Or, to what extent does a mediated presence of a text affect a performance? How do directors, actors, and members of the audience reconcile a previous reading with a performance—a mediation—they are currently witnessing? Such questions are, perhaps, food for thought, and given Cole's perception of performance, a discussion along these lines would have enriched his argument. "The Actor-Reader as the Author, Reading" discusses the relationship of a dramatist to actors and audiences as that of a writer with two different readerships who *writes them into action* as readers.

Acting as Reading offers compelling insights into the role acting plays in theatre. Cole's underlying argument—reading as a displaced physical activity reawakened by and expressed through acting—dismisses the distinction between theater that is "all talk" and theater that is "full of action" (author's quotation marks) cogently. Arguing that the shaman, the actor, and the reader, representatives of tribal/ecstatic/bodily or textual/verbal/literary theatre, share displaced versions of the same experience, he questions the arbitrary practice of diametrically opposing these two types of theatrical vision. He argues convincingly that these two types of theatre cannot be distinguished easily, given their shared experience of reading/acting ("expulsive orality"). Moreover, his examination of the various types of acting provides directors and acting instructors with ideas that may lead to new techniques. The author's discussion of improvisation as the simultaneous production and consumption of a text is worth testing in the classroom, and his analysis of interactions between actors as a series of conflicting passive-aggressive impulses which lead to dramatic conflict offers a useful directorial insight.

Unfortunately, this fine analysis is weakened by what appears to be the author's need to justify his choice of texts and critics. It would have been far more effective to state "the reading as eating construct" in the opening chapter, rather than tease the reader with phrases such as "lost physical of reading" (1), "lost physical dimension of reading" (18 and 28), and "lost bodily origins of reading" (20). His defense of the use of Holland's theories "work" for theatre; if they were not applicable, one would assume that the author would have chosen another theorist. Once the continuum of styles of acting has been explicated, another justification appears (why the examination of scenes of reading taken from narrative, as opposed to dramatic, texts). By talking around his subject in such a manner, Cole draws attention to these distracting stylistic practices. The development of his theory of acting add his use of psychoanalytic theory and of

literary examples (of which there were more than enough to demonstrate his points), need no justification. Consequently, his preceding explanations tend to diminish, rather than enhance his arguments.

Acting as Reading, which builds upon psychoanalytic theory to develop an alternative study of acting, presents ideas worth examining, especially for the director looking for something new to bring into the rehearsal room.

Ann Marie McEntee
Illinois College

The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention. By Baz Kershaw. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. 281 pp.

The principal focus of this study is the rise and development of alternative theatre in England (and the 7:84 company in Scotland) from the sixties to the nineties. As informative and well-aimed as this survey is, it is the pursuit of certain basic, and familiar, underlying questions that gives it more general, more urgent interest—certainly to those of us who were not witness to the events so effectively described. These are the questions that dog every activist who seeks to use art to effect social change, but which become particularly acute in this most directly social of art forms.

The first question is put most simply on the paperback jacket: "Can theatre influence socio-political history?" It is followed by the more specific query, "How can radical theatre avoid incorporation into the status quo?" Given the author's assumption that "performance can be most usefully described as an *ideological transaction* between a company of performers and the community of their audience," (p. 16) this is also a key question. It points to the problem of balance in communication that confronts the would-be change agent: in order for the "transaction" to be effective, the audience must be able to understand and respond ("the totally passive audience is a figment of the imagination" [p. 16]), but if the theatrical language and strategies are too familiar, the performance will confirm the status quo rather than inspire the questioning thereof.

Behind this approach, as an informal conceptual framework, lies the anthropologist Victor Turner's theory that social identity, *communitas*, is fostered by such celebratory, free-for-all performance rituals as the carnival. In Kershaw's application, the simultaneous observance and breakdown of conventions that can occur in the theatrical version of this ritual, "the paradox of rule-breaking-within-rule-keeping" (28), allows the imagination of the audience to "play" with the possibility of change within a structured aesthetic environment, and carry that

possibility out of the theatre and into the real world. The author concentrates on what he calls the "oppositional" forms of alternative drama, those forms which seek revolutionary change by grounding themselves in this communal act of imagination. He thus throws into relief his abiding question of social efficacy.

The phrase "rhetorical and authenticating conventions," and its permutations occur entirely too often in this book. The concepts, however, provide a useful lens through which this paradoxical process is explored. "Rhetorical conventions" are those which confirm the theatrical forms and signs to the audience (the rules that are kept). "Authenticating conventions" are those by which the audience is drawn into the particular dramatic fictions and then led to connect them to the real world (in "oppositional" theatre—although certainly not exclusively—the rules are broken).

Kershaw puts considerable effort—largely convincing despite occasionally intimidating abstraction—into establishing this theoretical groundwork and an accompanying theatrical typology ("carnival, agit prop, celebratory protest"). His description and assessment of some three decades of community-based "cultural intervention" is illuminated very effectively by this effort. Through careful use of contemporary reviews and other accounts, interviews, histories, and reference sources, he avoids the danger of distorting history in the service of theory. Contributing to the clarity of both the history and the theory is a useful statistical picture of the explosive growth of alternative theatre in the first two decades, the concomitant rise of government funding, and the reversals in the Thatcher era.

Kershaw concentrates on a key theatrical group and its community interaction in each decade: the community drama projects of John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy in the experimental 60's, the populist political theatre of John McGrath and the 7:84 company, particularly in Scotland, in the 70's, the community projects of Ann Jellicoe and the Colway Theatre Trust in the 80's, and for the beginning of the present decade, the theatrical celebrations of John Fox and Welfare State International. These chapters are vivid and laced generously with quotations from the dramas Although the author is intent upon applying his theoretical framework to each of his histories, the results are illumminating rather than obscuring. Even if the reader is not always persuaded by his generally optimistic view of the revolutionary potential in alternative theater, Kershaw offers sufficient information to allow for independent conclusions. In short, this book works well both as a richly suggestive exploraion of those essential questions of social efficacy and as a vivid survey of an extremely interesting, and important, phase of theatrical history. He has made excellent use of both his practical experience as a participant in that history and his thorough grasp of the major social and aesthetic questions that surround it.

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The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Theatre of Empowerment. By Amelia Howe Kritzer. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. 217 pp.

Caryl Churchill's plays have become perhaps today's best known and most frequently produced body of postmodern drama. Such Churchill plays as *Fen, Top Girls, Serious Money*, and especially the somewhat notorious comedy *Cloud 9* have been staged with frequency recently in North America, Europe, and elsewhere. Churchill's relish for breaking and making theatrical conventions in those and other works, as well as her evident feminist social concerns, have certainly been significant reasons for the expansion of her following among both producers and audiences in the United States in the 1980s and '90s. In *The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Theatre of Empowerment*, the first comprehnsive, full-length published work on Churchill's entire dramatic output, Amelia Howe Kritzer presents convincing arguments as to why these two aspects of Churchill's work are inextricably linked, as well as providing a thorough descriptive and structural analysis of each of Churchill's dramatic works, from her early days of writing radio scripts through 1989's *Icecream.*

Kritzer begins her analysis by carefully outlining the theoretical underpinnings of Churchill's self-declared socialist-feminist content. Most Marxist-feminist writers, as cited by Kritzer, "share a recognition of the primacy of consciously held but largely unexamined gender-and class-related assumptions in structuring the conditions that oppress women and the working class." To demonstrate how Churchill's works attack these assumptions, the author suggests and develops at length a gender-sensitive perspective on theatre—a perspective which is refreshing in terms of its greater applicability as theory to the practice of drama and theatre than the theories of most feminist film criticism. In Kritzer's view, the overtly sexist plots and themes of much of drama are supported by a more covert bias toward patriarchy and capitalism in the very conventions of theatre. Drama's "archtypally masculine form parallels a combative courting ritual, conquest, and release of sexual energy"; the distinct division between player and role mimics the "division and hierarchization" of self and other and especially, masculine and feminine; the dominance of the playtext's written word over the player's spoken word supports a patriarchal literary authority; and the supposed objectivity of uified production which supports and is supported by play production "reduces the range of meanings within the boundaries of a single voice", usually to a single, objectified message.

Feminist theatrical production, according to Kritzer, attempts to "shatter the unitary [masculine] viewpoint into a range of perspectives, "using the alienation devices devised for estrangement by Bertolt Brecht, but going beyond this "partial fragmentation" to "give the audience more than one way of seeing," through such "gestic experiment" (in Janelle Reinelt's term) as symbolic images, narratives disrupted by "shifts of style and viewpoint," focus on situation and social construct rather than storytelling, and open-endedness which encourages continued

questioning and a search for answers outside of the theatre on the part of the audience.

Kritzer then shows how Churchill's plays exemplify feminist theatre production because they "question the conventions of theatre as sharply as they question societal norms of gender and class." She does this through a fairly detailed and yet comprehensible description of the actions of, as well as cogent analyses of, each of Churchill's professional works, from the eight radio plays from the 1960's and early '70s (such as *The Ants* and *Schreber's Nervous Illness*) through her then most recent works, a *A Mouthful of Birds* (a collaboration with David Lan) and *Icecream.*

Kritzer's demonstration of how Churchill handles her dual goal of questioning theatrical conventions and societal norms in the central seven chapters takes two forms. Excellent descriptions of each of the plays in terms of the interplay of plot, character, image, and production lead to further explication and "deconstruction" of the plays. In her analysis, Kritzer traces Churchill's experimentation with and career-long development of key theatrical elements: her use of a "before / during / after" structure, as opposed to standard climactic structure; her focus on the role / player (and self / other) relationship through multiple role-playing, cross-gender casting and cross-racial casting; her frequent development of plays in workshops with performers and other production personnel; and her "gestic experiments" with the interplay of such functions as stage time and real time, possible actions and situations and impossile actions and situations, the range of potential meanings to be derived from a situation, and the potential found in the open ending. This tracing allows the reader to follow the evolution of a particualr convention or thematic choice over the length of Churchill's career.

At the same time, Kritzer's roughly chronological grouping of the plays uses apt chapter titles which highlight the playwright's most important emphases at various stages of her career and also stress the relatedness of the plays covered in each chapter. *Vinegar Tom, Light Shining in Buchinghamshire* (both 1976) and *Softcops* (1984) are all examined for their pursuit of "Reclaiming History." A chapter entitled "Labour and Capital" looks at *Top Girls* (1982), *Fen* (1983), and *Serious Money* (1987). (Incidentally, the placement of *Softcops* seems skewed, until one finds, through Kritzer's careful research, that *Softcops* was originally begun in 1978, and, thus, is in its rightful place.) Through this framework, Kritzer allows the reader to see the evolution of convention and theme on a more closely-perceived, microcosmic scale.

Kritzer's final chapter admirably summarizes her findings and underscores the methods used by Churchill to "empower audiences to look at society, and at their own relationships with patriarchal. capitalist institutions, from the standpoint of process and creation, rather than as a set of immutable givens." The author returns to her original focuses on the message and the form taken by Churchill's plays, now referring to these as a paradigm dyad of "what is said" and "'the conditions of speaking,'" Furthermore, Kritzer suggests that Churchill's theatre

is a place where both form and content encourages feminine subjectivity—the experience of a multiplicity of perspectives and possibilities—in both performance and audience involvement.

The Plays of Caryl Churchill ends with Kritzer's citation of what might be an archtypal Churchill image: the impossible but theatrically tangible song of May, the mute, which concludes *Fen*—an image which makes tangible both the limitations through a process of questioning and redefinition. The choice, like the image, is harmonious and haunting. Kritzer's work is worthy of consideration by all interested in Churchill or in any aspect of contemporary drama and theatre.

Michael Swanson
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