Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs. By Stephen Barber. London: Faber and Faber, 1993.

We have reason to expect that a book about Artaud will be permeated by a sense of struggle. After all, Artaud's struggles with his body and his psyche have attracted a great deal of notice from biographers and critics, at least since the 1973 *New Yorker* essay in which Susan Sontag cast him as the quintessential "artist [as] consciousness trying to be." Like so much that has been written in English about Artaud during the last twenty years, Stephen Barber's book stays basically within the parameters of expectation that were established by Sontag. Artaud is portrayed here in a nearly continuous state of existential crisis, his life consumed by physical anguish, drug addiction, psychic turmoil and episodes of frenzy. It will be left to some other writer to examine the degree to which this conventional notion of Artaud fails to account for his capacity to articulate the experience of theater in ways that are often as challenging for their luminous clarity as they are for their more celebrated qualities of rhapsody and obsession. In any case, it may be sufficient to observe here that no testament to Artaud's sufferings can matter nearly so much as his own.

What immediately strikes the reader as odd about *Blows and Bombs* is the degree to which its writer seems to be laboring to discover through the process of writing itself exactly what it is that he wants to say. A paratactic effect is evident from the first pages of the book, as Barber forces qualifiers into uncomfortable conjunction. In the space of one paragraph, we read that Artaud's creative will was "stubborn and ferocious," that he was "glacial in his attitude" and that "the residue of his life's trajectory is fierce and volatile" (1). A few pages later, we are told that "Artaud's work is always extremely conscious, intentional and wilful" (7); still later that his "family atmosphere was deeply restrictive, heated and religious" (14). In addition to this clustering of adjectives, Barber's apparent abhorrence of substantives leads him throughout the book to a stunning dependence on terms such as "gestural" and "textual." The net effect of all this is that the subject eventually becomes plastered-over with adjectives and participles, and is effectively obscured from sight. Some closer editorial direction and scrutiny would have made this a better book, and it must further be noted that Barber's rather haphazard documentation does nothing to dispel this impression.

So it is somewhat in spite of itself that this book manages to make three points about Artaud that merit serious consideration. The first of these is Barber's brief but cogent observation that we need to attend to the ways in which

Artaud actually employed representation in his texts (5-6). This is an endeavor that would necessarily involve a reconsideration of Derrida's writing about Artaud and (in particular) his observation that "it is metaphor that Artaud wants to destroy." The second is that our understanding of Artaud would be enhanced if we devoted more attention to the visual images he created, mostly pencil drawings from the last three years of his life. This is surely the case, and the need for this particular aspect of the reassessment of Artaud was anticipated by the 1986 publication of the Thévenin-Derrida volume *Antonin Artaud: Dessins et portraits*. Finally, Barber insists that we ought to be more concerned with the creative output of Artaud's last two years. Indeed, it is the central thesis of *Blows and Bombs* that Artaud accomplished an important and hitherto neglected synthesis of text, image, sound and gesture in the work that occupied the period following his release from the asylum at Rodez.

Taken together, these two final points urge a decisive shift in our attention away from the 1920s and 30s, and toward Artaud's activities in 1946-48. This contention is well-founded, although it should be noted that such a shift would hardly seem novel to French and Québécoise scholars; a decided emphasis on Artaud's last phase was evident at the 1993 Université du Québec à Montréal colloquium, *Journées Internationales Antonin Artaud.* The really surprising thing is that Barber does not follow his own thesis in the organization of his book. Fully two-thirds of *Blows and Bombs* is devoted to topics such as Artaud's 1926 split with Breton and the Surrealist movement, his career in the cinema, the Alfred Jarry Theater, and the genesis of the writings that were brought together in 1938 as *The Theater and Its Double*. Barber adds little that is genuinely new to this overview of Artaud's activities prior to his incarceration in 1937.

Therefore it is primarily on the basis of its final sixty pages that this book lays claim to our attention. And there are times when this claim seems justified, as when Barber finally arrives at his treatment of the drawings from Rodez, images that "project Artaud's deep sense of his disrupted body and its disintegrated language" (114). After his release from the asylum, Artaud's crisis of corporeality and speech culminated with the aborted radio project *To have done with the judgement of god*, climaxing in an explosion of laughter and a scream that Barber asserts "demonstrates the extraordinary regaining of Artaud's voice after the imposed silence and physical restraint of his long asylum internment" (154). Barber allows the manic quality of Artaud's last outburst of creativity to emerge vividly in his discussion of these final performances and gallery events. Perhaps most importantly, Barber discovers in *Van Gogh the Suicide of society* the point at which Artaud may have attained his most complete construction of self: the "authentic madman," self-declared and self-defined.

At the same time, this treatment of Artaud's incarceration and his final creative phase is not without its disappointments. Early in his introduction, Barber makes note of the attention that Deleuze, Guattari and Kristeva have given to Artaud's texts (5-7). But in his final chapters, Barber's consideration of Artaud's madness settles into a narrative of his very dubious treatment at the hands of Jacques Lacan (who Artaud reviled as a "filthy vile bastard" [140]) and Gaston Ferdière, who emerges as the bungling, self-serving villain of the piece. All of this makes good reading, but the problem is that at this crucial point in the book, Deleuze, Guattari and Kristeva (not to mention Foucault) are all but forgotten, and Barber fails to adequately theorize Artaud's madness. A mere nod in the direction of the icons of poststructuralism is insufficient here. It should also be noted that, while he provides an interesting perspective on the conflict between Artaud and the patronizing André Breton that flared up following Artaud's 1947 reading at Vieux-Colombier, Barber's discussion of this extremely important performance event pales in comparison to Ruby Cohen's account in her 1987 book *From Desire to Godot: Pocket Theaters of Postwar Paris.*

The timing of the publication of *Blows and Bombs* could hardly have been better. There is currently a widespread surge of interest in Artaud, and a balanced and authoritative account in English of his life and the circumstances of his writings, graphic images and performances would add considerably to the reconsideration that is already in progress. It is to be regretted that this book does not, in the final analysis, fulfill that need.

Thomas Akstens
Siena College

Hamlet and the Concept of Character. By Bert O. States. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

Bert States will be known to many readers of this journal as the author of *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (1985), a book that appears on virtually every bibliography of drama theory. This is with good reason, since it would be difficult to think of many other studies that have been as successful at providing readers with a lens through which the forbidding questions of what drama is and how it works assume a manageable scale. This is not to suggest that States oversimplifies or finesses the knotty problems—he doesn't. Like all gifted teachers, he merely clarifies the possibilities that are inherent within the problems themselves.

With this in mind, perhaps the first thing to be said about *Hamlet and the Concept of Character* is that it is a worthy successor to *Great Reckonings.* In

part this is the case because it exhibits the same uncanny sense of balance between the large questions and its immediate, specific focus of investigation. In this instance, the focus is on Hamlet, both as an exemplar of the nature and function of dramatic character and as the manifestation of his own unique gestalt. And as States' exploration establishes, there is definitely a Hamlet gestalt—in precisely the sense of an entity that is a good deal more than the sum of its independently fascinating and perplexing parts. Put another way, Hamlet is "a formation of presence and absence, a sort of instant history of himself" (13).

One key to States' approach to character may be found in a phrase from his introduction: "the impression of psychological depth" (xix). The operative word, of course, is "impression." Character is an illusion, a contrivance that tricks us into psychological assent—and the ultimate issue is the effectiveness of the illusion. As Jorge Luis Borges knew (and discussed in his 1949 lecture on Hawthorne) the first question we need to ask about *Hamlet* is whether we find Hamlet himself to be credible. Borges went on to assert the primacy of character to plot, and to recall for us Conrad's startling declaration: "I believe that Schomberg is real." Like Borges, States is interested in the reasons why most of us do believe in Hamlet, and in the workings of the processes by which we come to respond to the illusion as if Hamlet, too, is real.

But unlike Borges, States makes the case that character and plot reciprocally check and balance one another, and that this equilibrium is the reason that character functions to make action comprehensible in thematic terms. Further, it is character that "takes us to the human base of drama on which all of its subtleties of motive and morals are built" (19). As dynamic and volatile as Hamlet might seem to be (and we might substitute Volpone, or Rosalind), States encourages us to consider that character actually succeeds because it is a constant, a motivational center without which the action of the play would be literally senseless. As a constant, character counterpoises the continually changing situational atmosphere. And it is precisely because it maintains motivational unity that character allows for the expression of all sorts of behavioral contradictions. The rather unexpected conclusion at which we arrive is that an important reason we find Hamlet credible is because he does not really surprise us.

And while we ought to respect States' protestations that these arguments do not add up to a "humanist" position, it is evident from the outset that these essays are the product of thinking that is genuinely independent—informed by current theory but never in thrall to it. When he considers a question as basic as why we care about dramatic characters in the first place, States looks to our experience of fragmentation, but also acknowledges that the anxiety that is its result forms its own kind of commonality: "Our curiosity about character . . . is deeply centered in our need to assign more or less permanent features to things in a world driven by mutability and vicissitude" (xiv).

States is at his full stride throughout most of this book, and this is particularly the case in the last of his ten chapters, "The Melancholy Dane." In this discussion of the making of word-pictures in which Hamlet and the other

characters compulsively indulge, States manages to turn our conventional understanding of the play's intense pictorialism on its head. The rank garden of malformed and stinking plants is suddenly replaced with a tapestry of luxurious depth and color, a tapestry that depicts all aspects of the world Hamlet occupies—a sort of Renaissance shield of Achilles. One wishes only that States had extended his discussion of Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary* as a pictorial model for the way in which Ophelia is "virtually lost to the eye, which rather sees the participation of nature in her drowning" (175). In any event, here is an ingenious treatment of the relationship between the play's visual imagery and the character of Hamlet as we experience him in his social, psychological and physical environment.

In all of this, States sounds energetic and convincing, even though some of the essays that have been revised for this book were published in the 1970s and mid-1980s. The difficulties with the book are minor, as when States quotes "So, oft it chances in particular men . . ." as support for his discussion of how character is interrelated with the temporality of plays to form an impression of a seamless connection between character and atmosphere. One would expect that the fact that this speech (1.4.23-38) is among the problematical lines that are not in F_1 ought to be brought to the reader's attention, at least by means of footnote. But on the whole, *Hamlet and the Concept of Character* is an invigorating book that offers us a chance to have a fresh look at the most familiar character in dramatic literature.

Thomas Akstens
Siena College

Acting Out: Feminist Performances. Edited by Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Feminist performances often strategically highlight visibility— "acting out, acting up, coming out" (10) and the nineteen provocative essays in *Acting Out: Feminist Performances* engage potential transformative spaces where boundaries between the imaginary and the real are transgressed. Solo performance, collectives, stand-up comedy, plays, public demonstrations, and popular culture, are addressed to interrogate critically women's oppressive cultural scripts. Separate introductions by Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan indicate the complex, diverse critical and theoretical perspectives offered. They suggest the exciting movement and process of ever-evolving feminist work by tracing historical transformations of both the artists' work and the contributors' theoretical stances. As must occur in every feminist attempt to change the power dynamics inherent in patriarchal, heterosexual hegemonies, *Acting Out* speaks to expansive divisions and oppositions within feminist thought. Germane photographs illustrate the female body as culturally disciplined but also as the space for a proliferation of

possible subjectivities and subversive sites of eroticization. Engaging the imbrication of art, politics, race and gender, this work deserves serious attention by those interested in feminist theory, queer theory, identity politics, performance of desire, and audience response.

Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano addresses Cherríe Moraga's *Shadow of a Man*, and *Giving Up the Ghost*, exposing the manifold interrelations among multiple sites of oppression. She examines the sexism inherent in the traditional heterosexual Chicano family, and the mother's complicit role in perpetuating masculine privilege and value. She also explores the misogyny of Chicano gay men in relation to Chicana lesbians. Sandra L. Richards focuses on the complex intersections of gender, race and class in Anna Deavere Smith's *On the Road, Gender Bending*, and *From the Outside Looking In*. Richards notes that by performing interviews which were previously conducted with audience members and self-reflexively enacting the oral history of others, Smith engages contradictory identity positions and intimates that individuals continually "act out" social roles.

C. Carr interviews Karen Finley, who along with Holly Hughes was defunded by the NEA in 1990. She deliberates Finley's radical works which perform the female body "inappropriately" and transgress and trouble theories of the dominant male gaze. The material impact of social and political realities, such as funding and censorship difficulties, informs Carr's analysis.

Tracing transformations through time, several essays stress the interrelated problems of funding and race/class issues experienced by feminist performance collectives. Julie Malnig and Judy C. Rosenthal track the history of New York's Women's Experimental Theatre Company, founded in 1975 and dissolved in 1985; Joyce Devlin follows England's lesbian-feminist Siren Theatre Collective through confronting problems of class and race; Janelle Reinelt recounts the political theatre group Monstrous Regiment's struggle for existence under the Thatcher government. Rebecca Schneider delineates the difficult differences over race and sexual preference which resulted in the 1981 split of the original Spiderwoman collective into the lesbian-feminist Split Britches, and the Native-American Spiderwoman. Schneider theorizes complex issues of memory and countermemory, and of the body as the site both of the inscription of desire and of material inscription of societal oppression. She suggests that Spiderwoman's satiric feminist performances invite a complex double vision; they provide a chance to understand the socially-constructed split subject (how natives are "constructed" as natives) and provoke the audience to imagine new alternatives.

Raewyn Whyte's essay "Robbie McCauley: Speaking History Other-Wise" foregrounds McCauley's use of her body to articulate how women's bodies have been imprinted by history. In one scene of *Sally's Rape*, McCauley stands naked on a bench before a slave auctioneer - the ultimate depiction of women's space as victim, as object in the heterosexual economy of exchange. Her "body" staged in memory is infused with complex experiences of racism and sexism. Implicating race and sexual preference, McCauley's white partner Jeannie

Hutchins exhorts the audience to participate as slave market bidders. Defining complex operations of the gaze, Whyte emphasizes each individual's complicity in the historical process.

Issues surrounding audience response, such as the performer's visibility, authenticity, mimicry, reality, and the dangers of appropriation, focus many articles. Lynda M. Hill discusses Zora Neale Hurston's plays; Philip Auslander addresses the anger and political motivations of stand-up comedians such as Kate Clinton and Roseanne Barr; Amy Robinson deliberates Madonna's performances: do they interrogate or reinscribe patriarchal scripts of desire? Considering "origins" via Plato, Brecht, Kristeva, and Irigaray, Elin Diamond asks the question: "Can there be a feminist mimesis?" Focusing on the highly problematic and appropriative representations of pregnant bodies and fetuses by the predominantly white male anti-abortion demonstrators "Operation Rescue," Phelan suggests that the political consequences of visibility and invisibility need to be more fully comprehended and require our vigilance.

Questions of lesbian representation in performance ground Kate Davy's "From *Lady Dick* to *Ladylike: The Work of Holly Hughes.*" She offers a provocative overview of *The Well of Horniness*, indicating why this performance achieves the status as a lesbian play by staging alternative desire(s) on their own terms. Davy also gives an absolutely compelling close reading of *Lady Dick*, investigating the subversive potential of the detective genre for feminists. Davy addresses the question of whether the "lesbian identity" of the performer/writer imbues the work with a readable lesbian discourse. She suggests that lesbian erasure in the psychosocial register of the visible is oppressive; at the same time lesbian representation offers a destabilizing space for disruption of phallocratic culture.

Jill Dolan's "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat" deliberates issues of lesbian desire, spectatorial communities, appropriation, identity, and pornography. Dolan troubles her previously utopian view of lesbian subjectivity and desire as a place to envision alternative possibilities for representation. She explores recent studies on audiences which emphasize the spectator's complicated and active performance reception, and blur margin and center binaries.

Hilary Harris proposes a lesbian-feminist theory of sexual and gender performance, a project "of locating a site at which a radical theory of sexuality can profitably intersect with a (refunctioned) notion of gender" (269). Vivian M. Patraka's "Split Britches: Performing History, Vaudeville, and the Everyday" explores a world without men where women construct their own realities and imagine utopian future possibilities.

A complementary essay, Hart's "Identity and Seduction: Lesbians in the Mainstream" confronts essentialist versus social constructionist discourse on sexual identities, as well as the risks (and "intimate violence") of lesbian performance being assimilated into and appropriated by mainstream audiences. Hart interprets Lois Weaver's and Peggy Shaw's performance of Split Britches' *Anniversary Waltz* as an overt celebration of their ten-year lesbian relationship

which parodies static, excessive images of heterosexual marriages. Building upon the provocative positions of Diana Fuss and Judith Butler, Hart debates the ongoing controversy of lesbian visibility. Since Hart's words provide strategic grounds for future discourse on feminist performances, I conclude with her observation that "As the figure who makes possible the entry of lesbians into the visible, the butch balances uneasily on the divide between disruption of rigid heterosexual sign systems and assimilation or reification of the heterosexual dyad" (125).

The sense of feminist criticism as itself performative and vitally in process is a major merit of these diverse essays on feminist performance. The volume is an absolutely invaluable and significant contribution to discussions of lesbian representation in performance. Other than a very small quibble concerning the exclusive New York/London Anglo-American frames of *Acting Out*, I enthusiastically recommend this compelling, uncompromising work.

Lynda Hall
University of Calgary

Susan Glaspell: A Research and Production Sourcebook. By Mary E. Papke. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work. By Veronica Makowsky. New York & Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.

American Women Playwrights, 1900-1930. By Frances Diodata Bzowski. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992.

After many years of marginalization and outright neglect of American women playwrights, numerous books are now being published which give proper attention to their work. Earlier books such as *Women in the American Theatre* (Chinoy and Jenkins), *Notable Women in the American Theatre* (Robinson, Roberts, and Barranger), and *American Women Dramatists* (Coven) are now being supplemented by books which will provide scholars with information for their classes and their research.

Mary E. Papke has written an excellent sourcebook on Susan Glaspell. This is part of a series edited by William W. Demastes which will fill in numerous gaps on research on American playwrights. Papke's book begins with a chronology (correcting some generally accepted inaccurate information) and a short but excellent overview of Glaspell's life and work, with emphasis on her relationship with the Provincetown Playhouse. In this section she quite properly gives credit for "the reawakened interest in Glaspell's life and art" to three

scholars: Marcia Noe, author of *Susan Glaspell: Voice from the Heartland*, Arthur E. Waterman, author of *Susan Glaspell*, and Gerhard Bach, author of the very useful book (even for those who do not read German), *Susan Glaspell und die Provincetown Players*.

In the next section of the book the author provides summaries, production history, and critical reception of the plays. She states, "The summaries of plays and performance reception offered in this chapter should enable the reader to see both the development of Glaspell's aesthetic and the development of her public stature as an American woman playwright." Following is a bibliography of primary sources for the plays and Glaspell's fiction. It is really remarkable to see how many publications there have been of Glaspell's plays; Papke gives a *partial* listing of publications of *Trifles* in thirty-eight books! This section is particularly important because the reason often given for not including plays by women in classes is the lack of availability of texts. The section will also be useful to instructors who would like to read fairly detailed summaries of Glaspell's novels and short stories for class discussion. Likewise, the section on non-print sources provides the reader with a number of films and other materials which would be useful in class.

The bibliography of secondary sources is very detailed. There are 195 reviews of productions of Glaspell's plays beginning with a 1916 review of *Trifles* by Heywood Broun and concluding with a review of a 1991 production of *The Verge* at Brigham Young University. The book concludes with 314 analyses of entries in books, newspaper and magazine stories and reviews, and scholarly articles about Glaspell. The author succinctly sums up the point of view and the perspicacity (or lack of) of the various writers included.

The book is valuable in all ways and the author reveals excellent judgment throughout. Perhaps the most valuable section is that in which Papke suggests "five actions which must be taken in Glaspell studies" which will ensure a broader interpretation of the plays and fiction which have often tended to emphasize a rather narrow celebration of "female bonding or female epistemological superiority." For example, Papke comments appropriately, "critics need to reread Glaspell's opus in terms of her 'Americanness.' I would argue that her vision of what it means to be an American was as important to her as what it means to be a woman in America."

Another useful addition to research on Glaspell is Makowsky's engrossing analysis of "the maternal metaphor" in Glaspell's writing. The author writes gracefully and interestingly about the implications of motherhood, both literal and symbolic, for a writer who had suffered a still-birth and several miscarriages. She examines the relationship between Glaspell and her husband George Cram Cook and her relationship with her younger lover Norman Matson (whom she called her husband). Although Glaspell collaborated on plays with both of these men, Makowsky has chosen to consider only the writing she did alone. Makowsky offers interesting insights into the female characters in Glaspell's writing, preferring to explore themes and implications from a feminist perspective

than to analyze structure or theatrical techniques. Although the author notes that "What reputation Glaspell has today can be credited to her plays, which are more radical and experimental [than her fiction]," she places more focus on the novels and short stories in her book. That she is more at home with the fiction than the plays is indicated through her analysis as well as her mistaken description of the heroine in *The Verge* shooting her lover when she, in fact, strangles him. Nevertheless, her interpretations of both the plays and the fiction provide the reader with challenging outlooks. She concludes the book with a comment on the plays, saying, "As we turn into a new century, we may be discomfited by the fates of Glaspell's heroines and wish that she had written happier, more encouraging endings for them and for us. Susan Glaspell, however, though she is frequently called an idealist, is ultimately a realist in depicting the entrapments as well as the aspirations of a century of American women." Makowsky's book will be of particular interest to those readers interested in seeing Glaspell's plays interpreted in close connection with her many novels and short stories. Because this book is fairly short, it is an attractive introduction to readers who have only a vague idea of Glaspell's life and work and simply wish to get a little more information about this important American playwright. For much of the factual material the author draws on Waterman and Noe.

A final book which will be of great use to teachers and scholars of dramatic literature is Bzowski's *American Women Playwrights, 1900-1930.* The author writes that her interest in the subject was initiated by reading Glaspell's *Trifles* in an undergraduate course called "Women in Drama." The result of her interest is a book which provides a checklist of hundreds of plays written by American women. The author states that she stretched the boundaries of the word "play" to include "all kinds of dramatic presentations—plays, pageants, stunts, exercises musical comedies, masques, operas, cantatas and dialogues." The author has also included not only plays for adults, but plays for children and for holiday celebrations. (I remember those from elementary school!) The book is clear, useful, and incredibly thorough. Many of the plays were never published and can be found only in manuscript form in libraries and collections throughout the United States and Canada. Not surprisingly, most of the women playwrights whose plays are listed are unfamiliar. Bzowski begins her list with Eleanor Hollowell Abbott (whose one play *Man's Place* can be found in a 32 volume collection of plays at Brown University) and concludes with Rida Johnson Young (a prolific playwright from the earlier part of the century who wrote *Brown of Harvard* and *Naughty Marietta*). The book is full of surprises such as the fact that playwright Zoe Akins fashioned a screenplay, *Anybody's Woman*, from a short story by Gouveneur Morris (one of the signers of the Constitution, in case it had slipped your mind). The entry on Akins demonstrates the rich information available in the book. It indicates the published plays, most of which have been forgotten, and also lists all the screenplays she wrote as well as unproduced plays and the location of typed manuscripts. Surprisingly, typed copies of manuscripts by Akins and other women playwrights exist in many locations. The Akins

screenplay mentioned can be found at Ohio State University, University of California at Los Angeles, and the Huntington Library. Bzowski's book will save hours of work in the library and should draw attention to long-lost plays which deserve to be introduced in courses and presented on stage. In addition to its serious use as a resource for production dates, etc., the book provides pleasureful glimpses of long-forgotten plays which reflect the times in which they were written. One of the most charming entries is that of Duckie Smith who wrote only one play, *The Pink Scarf* in 1912, which is described as a "bright little sketch." That entry for such an obscure work indicates the immense amount of research involved in preparing this book and the breadth of the coverage.

These three books will simplify research, provide introductions to playwrights and interpretations of plays, and contribute generally to the awareness of American women playwrights. It hardly needs to be stated that this is an area which needs many more high quality books like these.

Yvonne Shafer
University of Colorado at Boulder

Dusky Maidens: the Odyssey of the Early Black Dramatic Actress. By Jo A. Tanner. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992.

After researching the life of the White American actress and playwright Anne Cora Mowatt, Tanner began to ask questions about the development of the first Black women to perform in drama on the American stage and the dominant influences on their emergence. *Dusky Maidens: The Odyssey of the Early Black Dramatic Actress* contains the answers to her questions.

Theatre history books seldom record with any depth the noted work of actor Ira Aldridge, let alone the early progression of Black American women actresses. And like Aldridge, many pioneer Black actresses were respected more in Europe than the United States. Sources about early American Black artists have been scarce, and this monograph begins to address that void.

This study about American Black dramatic actresses is a useful tool to artists, scholars and educators. Not only is it well-written, it is absorbing from both an historical and an artistic perspective. What emerges from this study is not only historical data about Black women artists, but cultural history. In this respect, this monograph is slightly reminiscent of the British author Kwesi Owusu's *The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain.*

Tanner's preface states that hers is the story of the evolution of the Black dramatic actress. The focus of the book is oriented to placing turn-of-the-century entertainers in an historical context, therefore making it easier to understand the magnitude of the contributions of Black artists who were trailblazers.

This account of the arduous odyssey taken by American Black artists is well researched and detailed. The preamble to the actresses is preceded by a helpful historical overview that includes the socio-economic information about the status of Black women in America between 1890-1917. Since theatre is not created in a vacuum, the overview helps explain the appearance of the theatrical phenomenon of Black women on stage. A segment of the overview includes background and statistics about the emergence of professional and educational positions such as lawyers and teachers within the Black community, as well as additional demographic shifts concerning occupations and residency (urban versus rural developments). Throughout the five chapters background information about legal, legislative, educational, or sociological developments that affected theatre is included. Additionally, Tanner confronts the sexual exploitation of Black women by White men as a key feature of racial oppression in America that continued from slavery until the 1960s up until the intervention of the Black nationalist movement. The study claims that his oppression was an attempt to justify the myth that Black women were responsible for their own victimization. Black women began to defend their moral integrity and oppose the stereotyping of Black women as ignorant savages with immoral vices. All of this information is necessary to have a better critical sense of this aspect of theatre history and the roles the actresses portrayed. Brief recounting of racial solidarity, self-help doctrines and discussions of better economic development as more effective ways of obtaining racial advancement than integration and politics, are woven throughout the book. Painful details about racism and lynching make it easier to understand the numerous artistic and cultural handicaps confronted by all Black actresses.

The chapters include specific areas of interest with a focus upon the Black female artist and the American stage prior to 1890, glorified "coloured" girls or women who appeared in turn-of-the-century Black theatricals, Black singers and dancers, and the early Black dramatic actress. Tanner traces how Black women first entered the professional theatre as singers and dancers in musical shows, only later performing in dramatic roles. The socio-economic research is a successful attempt to explain the shift of Black actresses from the musicals into the "Mammy" roles.

Tanner begins her accounts with Inez Clough who appeared in the first recorded dramatic production on the professional legitimate stage in America. This 1896 production was a play ironically titled *Oriental America*. However, it is the pioneering work of the early Black actresses Anita Bush, Laura Bowman, and Abbie Mitchell which is the focus of the monograph. These three actresses are used as examples to show how the legacy of the Black actress was impacted by racism and forced artists to play certain roles on the professional stage within a prescribed framework.

Tanner points out how the American theatre has lagged in reflecting the pluralism and experiences of the American culture. The conclusion of the book is that Black performers are still struggling with issues surrounding the producing,

casting and writing of plays that are more truthful reflections of the lives of Black women; the conclusion echoes the theories and practices of the Black Arts Movement.

A problem with many sources on Black theatre is the lack of production information. In *Dusky Maidens: The Odyssey of the Early Black Dramatic Actress*, ten photographs fill in visual gaps rarely found in other sources. Several interviews are extremely useful in piecing together aspects of historical Black productions and the influence of these productions upon other genres of theatre. An example is an anecdote about the cakewalker Dora Dean or the "Black Venus" who was part of the first dance team in vaudeville. Many of Dean's gowns cost more than $1000 each and were copied by Lillian Russell, Sarah Bernhardt and other Broadway stars. This and other anecdotes help reinforce the impact of Black theatre.

Dusky Maidens should be recognized as solid scholarly research accompanied by the research roadblocks that are inherent in researching this subject. Many Black theatres have been unable to catalogue their history due to limited space, money or assistance. Tanner admits that specific biographical information about many of the women performers is scattered and that it was difficult to obtain all the details of some roles, venues or dates of performance. However, the major weakness of the book is beyond Tanner's abilities: the limited amount of high quality critical response to the performers studied. This lack of critical response has been noted in other studies of theatre history and criticism and is not likely to be rectified for numerous historical studies. Ironically, this problem parallels a common complaint of xenophobia against critics amidst Black artists in Great Britain. It is hoped that the increased number of historical and critical recordings of Black artists in America and elsewhere will deter future xenophobic charges and ease the hurdles of intercultural research.

Mary Jo Sodd
Susquehanna University

The Theatre of Yesterday and Tomorrow: Commedia dell'Arte on the Modern Stage. By James Fisher. Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.

James Fisher has compiled an overview of *commedia dell'arte's* wide-ranging impact on European and American theatre in this century. From its sixteenth-century origins in the Italian Renaissance, *commedia* spread throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, transforming itself as it encountered national traditions and preoccupations in such countries as France, England and Germany. In the nineteenth century, as realism assumed a dominant position on "legitimate" stages, popular theatre forms such as the Russian

Petrushka puppet show, the English pantomime, and the American minstrel show continued a tradition of broad characterizations, audience interaction, and performer versatility. But it was in the modern era that *commedia* experienced a renaissance in the world of high-art theatre, specifically as an alternative to realism's fourth-wall scenic and acting style and its psychologically-based characters.

Although much scholarly attention has been devoted to Italian *commedia* itself, and although the phenomenon of *commedia* as inspiration has been widespread throughout the arts in the modern and postmodern eras, few scholars have attempted full treatments of its later impact. One such attempt was Martin Green and John Swan's 1986 book, *The Triumph of Pierrot*, which surveyed *commedia* imagery in all aspects of modern culture. In *The Theatre of Yesterday and Tomorrow: Commedia dell'Arte on the Modern Stage*, James Fisher provides a much-needed overview of *commedia's* effect on the world of theatre, through the work of many of the century's key performers, directors, and playwrights. (An appendix gives brief summaries of the impact of *commedia* on the visual arts, film, literature and music).

Fisher casts a wide net, and organizes his vast amount of material into eight chapters on separate countries or regions: Italy, Spain, England, Russia, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, Germany, France, and the United States. By structuring his book in this way, Fisher has chosen to emphasize national continuities (rather than stylistic similarities or chronological influences across cultures). Just as Goldoni and Gozzi treasured very different aspects of *commedia* according to their own personal theatrical goals and tastes, the twentieth-century manifestations of *commedia dell'arte* vary widely from artist to artist. Some are interested in the use of the stock characters; some are attracted to the specific characters themselves (to Arlecchino or Pierrot); others prize the acting technique, with its use of improvisation and audience awareness; for others it is the mood or spirit of commedia that matters, although that mood may range from the mysterious to the innocent, from the gay to the disturbing.

Fisher's organizational strategy (by country) does little to sort out these differences and his writing style often obscures the issues. In their book on Pierrot, Green and Swan coin a term which Fisher also employs throughout his study: "commedic," meaning *commedia*-inspired or related. Fisher's use of this adjective is inherently problematic in that it often serves as a shorthand which enables him to avoid further analysis. The term is of course deliberately open—Fisher intentionally employs a broad definition of *commedia*—but its vagueness is often unsatisfying. To what aspects of *commedia* is he referring in a reference to "Fellini's commedic film, *The Clowns*" (160) or when he states that "Gogol's masterpiece *The Inspector General* . . . as especially popular during the years immediately following the Russian Revolution, when it was given several commedic productions" (106)? By using this adjective to describe modern works, Fisher in many instances asserts a *commedia* influence without defining that influence or analyzing its implications.

I agree with his premise that *commedia dell'arte* is one of the keys to understanding theatrical modernism, but one must be wary of the temptation to see "commedic" elements at every turn. In one sense, Fisher is writing a complete history of twentieth-century theatre, recast not as century of anti-realism or the age of the directors but as the century of *commedia* revival. Thus, few key figures are left out, despite the fact that their links to *commedia* might be tenuous: "Although not overtly commedic, Grotowski's simplified, audience-participatory, improvisatory performance style suggests the influence of commedic technique" (153). Is every non-realistic performance style influenced by *commedia*? At times it even seems that all comedy is "commedic" as when Fisher connects *commedia* to the plays of the eighteenth-century Russian writer Denis Fonvizin, or to the plays of Friedrich Dürrenmatt: "Dürrenmatt, like Brecht, is a master at making harrowing anxieties into comic theatre, and at creating characters who are grotesquely absurd. These aspects are traceable in part to commedia" (197). Such a broad interpretation of *commedia* diffuses its real power and significance.

The book is most satisfying in its detailed accounts of *commedia's* unquestionable centrality in the work of such major figures as Craig, Copeau, Reinhardt, and Meyerhold. But Fisher also writes convincingly of other diverse *commedia* devotees: Pirandello, Lorca, Barba, Littlewood, Brecht. Other interesting tidbits pepper the text, as Fisher discusses George Sand's private theatre, the plays of Danish writer Ludwig Holberg, or Luigi Chiarelli's *teatro grottesco*. In his final chapter, he demonstrates the impact of *commedia* on the American practitioners of political theatre in the 1960s and of new vaudeville in the 1980s. The case for *commedia* grows. When their emphases on improvisatory performance and mask-like characters are considered, the performances of Fo and Rame or of the San Francisco Mime Troupe do emerge as modern, political versions of *commedia*.

In his introduction, Fisher expresses the hope that his book will be a valuable resource, and indeed it has enormous potential as a starting place for future studies. Fisher alludes to many issues which await further analysis, such as *commedia's* particular power as a political tool, its impact on twentieth-century acting theories, twentieth-century versions of *commedia's* construction of gender, and the relation of *commedia* to modern clowning, puppetry, and circuses. Although his study cannot address any of these topics in depth, James Fisher has created a useful reference book, charting *commedia's* fascinating history as one of the central obsessions of twentieth-century performance.

Lurana Donnels O'Malley
University of Hawaii at Manoa

John Gay and the London Theatre. By Calhoun Winton. The University Press of Kentucky, 1993.

This book examines the life and times of John Gay as directly related to his stage plays, the political climate of the times and his friendships with other writers and persons of influence. Author Calhoun Winton details the production histories and the period's theatrical personages, complete with personality quirks, conflicts and feuds.

The book is laid out in chronological order, with the first chapter "Apprenticeship—A Prelude" giving the background of Gay's interest in the theatre and the early life experiences which provided him with the knowledge of street urchins and other "lowlife" types which would serve him so well in his later plays, particularly *The Beggar's Opera.*

Winton then describes the "production history" and political significance of *The Mohocks*, which he declares to be an imaginary London gang created by Gay. The play was not produced, but the gang's name entered the English history and language erroneously, according to Winton, as a reality. The play was in some ways a finger exercise for Gay's most famous work as Gay shows a criminal being "taken for police officer, a rogue for a gentleman" (15).

The next three chapters concern Gay's lesser works as they reflect his love of Chaucer, his work with lyrics and music and other short plays which proved to have varying degrees of success. A final chapter touches on Gay's last plays.

The bulk of the text deals with *The Beggar's Opera*; three chapters are devoted to the play, with an additional chapter on its unproduced sequel. *Polly*, which was censored for political reasons, as detailed by Winton. The history of several "Newgate plays" which preceded the Opera is given, a valuable summary proving that while Gay's opera can well be dubbed the "best" of this genre, it was by no means the first play to portray Macheath-type characters. A chapter detailing the opera's place in theatre history reveals that contrary to popular assumption, Colley Cibber did not reject the play due to a lack of foresight, but rather because it was the wrong play for his theatre and audience.

Winton presents several interesting theses including the idea that the character Jenny Diver may have been a lesbian. He also challenges the generally accepted belief that the political satire in *The Beggar's Opera* was recognized by the audience on the opening night, but here he fails to convince this reader. He also challenges, with more persuasive arguments, the idea that Gay was trying to discredit Italian opera with his own.

Overall this is an interesting book and it would make a fair addition to a library specializing in musical or Eighteenth Century theatre. The writing could have been better edited, but it does provide some thought-provoking concepts and gives a good review of the period's theatre history.

Laura H-B Miller
Crawfordsville, Indiana

Systems of Rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook. By Shomit Mitter. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

"Usually each single project has only one aspect . . . a facet of the truth. . . . But always I've been searching for a more complete expression, a theme, and a way of expressing it that enters as many aspects as possible of living experience and that succeeds in making links between many contradictions." Peter Brook is thus quoted at the beginning of Mitter's Epilogue. This epilogue, in fact, contains the heart of his book, as it provides the reader with the comprehensible marriage of ideas which are put forth, sometimes with clarity, but far too often with strained "academese" in the main body of the work.

On the surface, this book appears to be an exploration of the directing styles of four directors: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook, with the focus on how Brook borrows from and adapts the styles of his three predecessors. Mitter states his early thesis, that Brook's reputation for innovation was not deserved and that "Brook seemed to me more a mimic than an innovator" (3). Three lengthy chapters detail the rehearsal styles of Brook's three role models as Mitter explains how Brook borrowed from each of them.

Chapter One, "TO BE: Konstantin Stanislavsky and Peter Brook," takes the reader first through the career and development of the father of "the method." Mitter points out the "failures" of Stanislavsky's system, while at the same time crediting Stanislavsky with discovering these faults for himself as his career progressed. The debate is between role development as a progression from "body to mind" or from "mind to body." "Merely to imagine is to imitate, whereas to feel is to become" (10) Mitter writes, as a defense of the "body to mind" system. He cites Stanislavsky's failure as overanalysis, i.e. too much "mind to body," and he illustrates this by declaring "the worst dancers look at their feet while dancing" (15). He touts inspiration as the best form of acting, and implies that Stanislavsky would agree: "Stanislavsky's system is therefore intended to be a body of work which actors can use as a safeguard against the failure of spontaneous inspiration" (15-16). Mitter then writes of Peter Brook's use of Stanislavskian methods in his production of *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* He postulates that acting is not so much a way of dealing with a text, but is rather an examination of "impulses that make words necessary" (36).

Chapter Two, "TO BE AND NOT TO BE: Bertolt Brecht and Peter Brook," follows the same format as the previous chapter. Mitter writes of Brecht's importance as an influence in modern theatre and of Brecht's own use of Stanislavsky's method, while he developed his own seemingly contradictory style of presentation. Mitter again brings in Brook's use of derivative techniques and shows him advocating such practices as taping rehearsals so that actors can then watch their own performances. He also advocates actors switching roles and imitating each others' performances in order to "distance" (57).

In the third chapter, "LET BE: Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook," Mitter notes similarities between Brook and Grotowski. On the issue of driving actors too hard, he quotes Brook as not knowing "what that means" (117).

The Epilogue is Mitter's analysis of the styles Brook wove in and out of *Le Mahabharata.* Mitter contends that with this work Brook has finally achieved a style of his own, albeit with the borrowing that he has hitherto engaged in: "Much as we may deride Brook's inexcusably prolonged inability to find a personal idiom, we must nevertheless admire the well-nigh unique facility by which he is now able to make his imitations cohere" (135). Mitter gives examples in *Le Mahabharata* of Brook's use of varied styles including realism, alienation, suggestion, symbolism, metaphor and metonymy. Mitter finds much of value in Brook's daring blend of styles and he concludes "while art usually distills the unbounded incoherence of life into a form, this drama [*Le Mahabharata*] brings to the discipline of form the abundance and contrariety of life" (144).

Laura H-B Miller
Crawfordsville, Indiana

Early Commedia dell'arte, 1550-1621: The Mannerist Context. By Paul Castagno. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1993.

Commedia dell'arte, the improvised Italian theatre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, remains a source of fascination to both scholars and performers. It has been closely studied (and often misunderstood) and, remnants of its style and substance continue to cling to the modern and post-modern theatre, influencing actors, playwrights, and stage visionaries. These scholars and artists have often found unique and contradictory meanings in this undeniably potent theatrical resource.

Searching for methodologies in an attempt to understand commedia, scholars have tended most often to view it through those similar performance traditions that survive, in some form, on the contemporary stage. As a result, virtually any theatre emphasizing the art of the actor, improvisatory techniques, masks, and a broadly farcical style are believed to be the reappearance or recreations of commedia. Often this approach has been fruitful, particularly in the work of nineteenth and twentieth century practitioners who themselves studied commedia and its traditions seeking to interpret them through their own individual artistic visions. Another approach has been a literary study of commedia scenarios, which often tends to yield only disappointment at the skeletal remains of a form that only truly lived in the actors' art.

In his new book, *Early Commedia dell'arte, 1550-1621: The Mannerist Context,* Paul Castagno offers another valuable approach—a learned and highly detailed iconographic study of Renaissance art featuring commedia images. Castagno's jumping off point is the age of Mannerism, a term, he explains, used

to characterize Renaissance art after 1520, the time in which commedia first appeared on the scene. Understanding the Mannerist era itself is a problem which Castagno takes on from the outset. He explains that it has, in the last thirty years, generated a vigorous debate over its meaning as either an aesthetic or a stylistic term. Some scholars view Mannerism as merely a way of conceiving the fine arts of that period; others have seen in it broader historical significances. For Castagno, Mannerism is

> a style that it typically exaggerated, distorted, lacks compositional unity, substitutes rhythmical effects for harmony and balance, obscures spatial relationships, utilizes figural crowding, *sprezzatura*, *effetto meraviglioso*, and other definable traits that make it distinctive from the classicistic Renaissance style.(4)

In Part One of a vivid and well-written text, Castagno traces the development of Mannerism and its broad influence on Italian culture in the sixteenth century. Part Two illuminates the socio-cultural crosscurrents present during the rise of the commedia companies, and the details of their basic organization and operation. In the remainder of Parts Two and Three, Castagno cogently examines a strikingly diverse collection of Mannerist art depicting commedia scenes and characters. Here, his argument bears the richest fruit, as the magical world of commedia truly comes alive in a fresh and powerful way. Along with the invaluable *Recueil Fossard* and Jacques Callot's similarly necessary *Balli di Sfessania*, Castagno touches on both well-known and rarely seen works by such diverse artists as Jacques de Gheyn, Marten de Vos, Lodewyk Toeput (Ludovico Possoserrato), Johannes Sadler, Leandro Bassano, Sebastian Vrancx, Leon Davent, Diana Scultori, Joos de Momper, Dionisio Minaggio, and others, most of whom are represented among the many illustrations in the volume. If a non-literary theatre form like commedia can be reconstructed, surely this kind of evidence, along with a study of comic actors of similar and more recent traditions, provides the only valuable materials from which it can be recovered. For commedia, in its truest sense, was necessarily dependent on the visual aspects and movement techniques that are, at least to some degree, captured in these works of art—and the finest of these artists, communicating their own individual reactions to these performances, offer the viewer the nearest thing to a first-hand report.

Detailed notes and an extensive bibliography on both Mannerism and commedia are included in *Early Commedia dell'arte, 1550-1621: The Mannerist Context*, a book destined to be regarded by scholars and performers alike as a canonical work in the on-going study of this extraordinary and continually enriching theatrical phenomenon.

James Fisher
Wabash College

Scripts and Scenarios. The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy. By Richard Andrews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Although there are numerous theories about the origins of *commedia dell'arte*, in *Scripts and Scenarios. The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy*, Richard Andrews makes a compelling and astutely scholarly case that this improvising form of theatre was part of the same phenomenon that produced the scripted plays in imitation of Plautus and Terence that created literary drama in the Italian Renaissance. Far more varied in tone than sometimes assumed, works by Ariosto and Machiavelli had, in Andrews' opinion, more to do with the non-literary *commedia dell'arte* than once thought—and that both of these extraordinary theatrical developments are better understood when the written plays are examined with an eye toward their implied performance techniques than for their literary quality.

The influence of *commedia erudita*, the scripted plays of the Italian Renaissance, on the work of such later dramatists as Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Molière, Lope de Vega, and others, is well-documented and has been widely studied—but almost solely by literary scholars. The impact of these plays on *commedia dell'arte*, however, and its subsequent influence on later playwrights, and the ways in which plays were produced and categorized, is just beginning to be fully understood and appreciated.

Following an introduction examining the cultural conditions of sixteenth century Italy, Andrews divides his study into seven chapters. He lucidly traces the forerunners of Italian Renaissance theatre and the stage rules and traditions that were in place in Chapter 1 (Precedents). Chapter 2 (The first 'regular' comedies) chronicles the revivals of Roman comedy and the first developments toward a new vernacular dramaturgy in Ferrara, Rome, and Florence. Here, and in Chapters 3 (The second quarter-century, outside Venice) and 4 (The second quarter-century, Venice and Padua), Andrews traces the steady evolution of this new dramatic experiement and its movement from elitist court theatres to the popular stage in the streets. Andrews than turns his attention in Chapter 5 (Improvised comedy) to a cogent explication of the relationship of the evolving literary comedies and *commedia dell'arte*. He argues that improvised comedy depended to a great degree on the characters, plots, and techniques of the literary comedy, and that, in the final analysis, "there was simply a split, in which the professional performers of farce and the gentlemanly composers of literary comedy went their separate ways."(168) In Chapter 6 (Obstacles to comedy), Andrews deals with some theoretical stumbling blocks faced by both the comic dramatists and the commedia performers, and, more interestingly, with various attempts to suppress or censor both. Finally, in Chapter 7 (Scripts and scenarios), Andrews briefly discusses the meaning of "serious" comedy and the myriad changes in Italian plays after 1550.

The handsomely produced volume lacks photographs, but includes a general bibliography and copious notes, as well as a particularly useful chronological bibliography of Italian comedies from 1500 to 1560. While literary analysts may find Andrews performance-conscious treatment of the plays of Ariosto, Machiavelli, Aretino, Bruno, and others distorting, it is more likely that theatre historians and theorists will be grateful for his attempt to free both the literary comedies and *commedia dell'arte* from the rigid categories in which they have typically been forced to exist. By examining the literary and improvised comedy as part of a collective process of growth, *Scripts and Scenarios. The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy* convinces that these forms—both of them together—provided a firm foundation on which modern comedy is built.

James Fisher
Wabash College