

Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage. By Gay Gibson Cima. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. 225 pages.

Performing Women, in its broadest context, attempts to define and create a useful theatre that is flexible and efficient enough to foster social change. To this end, Gay Gibson Cima provides fresh insight and practical re-definitions of the relationship between canonical male playwrights and female actors who have created new acting styles. The author has focused on such playwrights as Ibsen, Strindberg, Pinter, Brecht, Shepard, and Beckett, relating various elements of their works to female characters and female actors. Through thought provoking, well documented discussion, she defines how this relationship can be re-thought to provide subversive opportunities for reshaping views and attitudes about women and their roles.

Cima's assumption that acting styles provide insight into culture codes that influence behavior provides the through line for the book. Under this umbrella, she analyzes narrative structure in order to determine how the communication of meaning impacts the female actor. Furthermore, she contends that in spite of the dominance of the male playwright's influence, women have made and are making significant contributions in the area of acting styles that help to re-shape society's idea of "women."

The discussion of Ibsen focuses on his use of retrospective action and how it conveys past, present and future action simultaneously. According to Cima, it was the female actors of Ibsen's time who forged a new style in response to the structural demands of his plays. "Ibsen, the master builder of the new structure, provided them with what they experienced as a novel freedom in performance; the ability to demonstrate, and to critique, the performative nature of the role of woman" (30). A new analytical process was called for, unnecessary in the more familiar melodrama form, that clarified three levels of consciousness: as actor, as character, and as the role the character plays. The gap between these levels allowed the "audience to see the performance of gender as a series of repeated melodramatic acts, as a system of illustrative gestures quite separate from the character's more subversive, more critical autistic communication system" (53). Actresses of the time found they had to approach character from action rather than from type, explore new ways of dealing with the self-dramatized character, and create new modes of gesture.

Using Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, Cima explores the dematerial style that his plays seem to evoke. Though the play is a misogynistic parable of

Strindberg's life, it can have potentially liberating possibilities for the female actor. Cima suggests a transformational style that uses the frequent shifts in narrative to explore a variety of performance modes. The challenge to actors of Strindberg is that they "must evoke successive transformations of illusion as reality, employing Strindberg's 'dematerial' style of production. Actors need not search for keys to the past in playing Strindberg's characters but may focus on the considerable variety of performance styles prompted by the script" (79, 80).

In addition to a discussion of the transformational style inherent in Strindberg's plays, Cima deals at length with the misogynistic tone imbedded in the text. This comes, she says, from Strindberg's reliance on Eastern religious imagery and his misreading of the Hindu myth that according to Strindberg makes the female the destroyer of peace and serenity. It is this aspect that provides the greatest challenge for the female actor when searching for potential subversions.

The chapter "The Brecht Collective and the Parabolic Actor" is particularly rich, giving both a fresh historical view of the women known as the Collective, who were instrumental in the writing of many Brecht scripts, and possible interpretations that would show the results of this female input in greater relief. Cima uses *The Good Woman of Szechwan* which was written with the input of three members of the Brecht Collective to suggest a strategy for approaching other Brecht scripts which reflect women's voices in the writing of the scripts.

The performance codes present in Brecht's parables are explored as well as some inconsistencies in light of an alternative reading of the notion of parable. Because parables offer different readings to different audiences, create mystery rather than closure, and allow for divergent thought rather than the limitations of didacticism, Brecht's scripts, and particularly those that came out of the Collective, can provide subversive feminist possibilities. ". . .the Collective actor might explore Brechtian scripts, particularly in terms of sex and class issues and gender construction" (115). The imagined performer displays two competing narratives: the actual storyline and a contradictory one in which the character decides to do "not this but that." The contradiction invites the audience "to invent a different, more liberating fable" (119).

In an examination of Pinter's *Old Times*, the playwright's filmic structural methods are explored as well as the opportunities for the female actor that are inherent in Pinter's cinematic acting style. As the point of view constantly changes, pitting one reality against another, so does the gaze of the audience. "By letting his characters change the frames of reference at will, Pinter creates a new theatrical form and allows for a new approach and performance" (140). In light of this, the feminist director can exploit the subversive potential of the female gaze and fashion contradictory truths. In addition, the female actor can

choose from several meanings at any moment, not confining herself to a single spine. A new relationship with the audience is thus formed and the spectator is invited to view through a multiplicity of lenses.

By comparing Sam Shepard's artistic vision to that of visual artist Robert Rauschenberg, Cima gives the reader a unique look into the work of a playwright who is often thought of as patriarchal. By looking at Shepard's characteristic contradictory dramatic actions, she suggests an alternative view of Shepard's scripts: "By driving a thicker wedge between the two lines of action, the female actor and director can increase the subversive potential of his female characters" (160).

Shepard's use of realistic and non-realistic elements evokes an improvisational acting style that gives the performer new freedom that allows the audience to pull together meaning from disparate realities. The author encourages a free flowing collaborative style between actors and director, based on a sense of fun and play, as they explore multiple meanings. "Feminist directors may want to emphasize not only the two conflicting actions (men's blindness to the debilitating effects of the patriarchy) but also the woman's powerful act of exiting" (170). Women become just as prominent in the action as the male characters. The director can create a reality in which both share focus and the typical hierarchical gaze is not established.

"Beckett and the Nō Actor" draws a striking parallel between the elements present in Beckett's *Footfalls* and *Nonomiyo*, a Nō play by Zeami. Beckett's style is marked by paradox and mystery, economy and circularity of language, the storyteller voice that moves from character to character, strict controls, spiraling dramatic structures, mask, music and dance. These same elements are also found in the Nō plays of Zeami. Ms. Cima continues this discussion by exploring these similarities as they relate to the female actor.

Beckett has been applauded for his exploration of the condition of womanhood. He investigates many of his themes through female protagonists which operate on both individual and universal levels. Cima issues a warning to performers and directors that Beckett scripts have the capacity to harm female actors and spectators alike unless the distinction between the universal and individual are kept separate and clear. "Beckett's female actors face the possibility of a very real liberation and a seriously injurious attack. Released from the strictures of being attractive, they can be virtuous instead, achieving pleasure in the disciplined mastery" (220).

Ms. Cima's attempt to retrieve the contributions of female actors of the past century and her desire to inspire future performers and directors to re-think the uses of traditional canonical male playwrights will make this book potentially useful to both the historian and the practicing artist. Ms. Cima, an Associate

Professor of English at Georgetown University, has written a book that is a fair and well-rounded treatment of the subject, drawing on fresh interpretations and apt comparisons that add richly to the body of feminist theory.

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Sondheim by Martin Gottfried. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1993. ISBN 0-8109-3844.

Sondheim's Broadway Musicals by Stephen Banfield. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993. ISBN 0-472-10223-0.

Two new books examine Stephen Sondheim's musical theatre achievements in quite different ways. Martin Gottfried's celebratory *Sondheim* is a lavishly produced volume destined for the coffee tables of musical theatre buffs. Of greater interest to the serious student of Sondheim is Stephen Banfield's *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, which offers a more penetrating analysis of each major Sondheim musical to appear on Broadway (unfortunately eliminating *Assassins* [1991], a shocking and thrillingly theatrical journey into the bizarre world of presidential murderers, which was first staged off-Broadway at Playwrights' Horizon) than Gottfried's approach permits.

Sondheim has never made it easy on himself—or on his audience. He has consistently aimed to break new ground—and critics and audiences have often been caught unprepared to appreciate the originality of each innovation. With the recent opening of his newest work, *Passion*, Sondheim has once again confounded expectations with his unique variations on the traditional form of the musical theatre. Sondheim has since held fast to his own high standards for the musical stage in the face of the undoubtedly discouraging cries for more conventional librettos and "hummable" music. Sondheim sets his sights on the future of the musical stage, not on its glorious past. Now in his mid-sixties and still very much active, Sondheim's more than one dozen major musicals are now part of the musical theatre legacy. Although he has been among the most admired and controversial theatrical figures of his era, there has been comparatively little scholarly analysis of his work until recently. Aside from the occasional article or interview, there are only two previously published books devoted to his work. The first examination, similar to Gottfried's new book, was

Craig Zadan's *Sondheim and Co.* (New York: Avon, 1974), a tributary appreciation with flashes of the inside workings of the musical theatre via intriguing interviews with many of the participants in the composer-lyricist's pre-1975 shows (a Harper and Row second edition updates the record to 1986). Gottfried's tribute does not improve much on Zadan's, except in the spectacular production photographs (many in color), and a few new insights. The emphasis is on the original Broadway productions; Gottfried might have considered more attention to significant other productions and including illustrations demonstrating different visual treatments given to certain works (for example, the London production of *Into the Woods* differed greatly from the Broadway original and post-Broadway productions of *Sweeney Todd* radically reduced the visual spectacle that marred the New York production). Gottfried's breathless, opinionated text is not without interest, but it is the generous quotation of Sondheim's searing lyrics and the superb illustrations readers will find most pleasurable.

After Zadan's book, it was more than a decade before the next Sondheim book: Joanne Gordon's *Art Isn't Easy. The Achievement of Stephen Sondheim* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990). Like Banfield's new book, which is slightly more up-to-date, Gordon provides a scholarly accounting of Sondheim's work through 1987's *Into the Woods*. Banfield's prose is less academic than Gordon's, but his seriousness of purpose is no less admirable. For each of the musicals, Banfield emphasizes a close musical/dramatic analysis focusing appropriately on the ways songs and musical motifs illuminate characters and situations in the libretto. However, Banfield extends beyond this to place the musical in the historical and cultural context of its setting and in the development of Sondheim's art. Typically, Sondheim's music describes a sophisticated and complicated emotional universe, and Banfield articulates the density of Sondheim's music (as well as his lyrics) with precision.

Banfield's accomplishment is heightened by the cooperation of Sondheim, who supplied drafts, sketches, and letters providing the author with a unique glimpse of Sondheim's compositional process. The assistance of Sondheim also provides valuable information on the influences on Sondheim's career, from his youthful friendship with Oscar Hammerstein II, his student years at Williams College, his study with composer Milton Babbitt, and his early years as a lyricist (most notably for *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*) before becoming one of the American theatre's rare composer/lyricists. Banfield also explores Sondheim's reclusive nature and the ways in which his unhappy childhood affected his attitudes about human nature as reflected in his shows. This is an erudite and important study of a theatrical contemporary likely to loom larger in significance with each passing year.

These two complementary volumes, along with an array of new recordings and revivals of Sondheim's works, suggest that critics and audiences may finally be catching up with Sondheim's vision. At the very least, they demonstrate vividly that his contribution to the American theatre is both unique and profound; for Sondheim's admirers both books will provide rich pleasures, and for his detractors these explorations (particularly Banfield's) present the composer/lyricist's portfolio with clarity and no lack of passion.

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Studies in the Commedia dell'arte edited by David J. George and Christopher J. Gossip. Cardiff: University of Wales, 1993. ISBN 0-7083-1201-2. \$70.00.

Commedia dell'arte. An Actor's Handbook by John Rudlin. London and NY: Routledge, 1994. ISBN 0-415-04770-6. \$16.95.

The on-going examination of the complex and endlessly fascinating history, influence and performance techniques of commedia dell'arte continues in two new books. Commedia dell'arte, a theatrical form born in the Italian Renaissance from the remnants of the ancient comic stage, reigned for nearly two-hundred years before fading away during the Enlightenment—surviving only in such lower forms as pantomime, burlesque and music hall—until it was transformed in the era of the Romantics and Symbolists as a literary influence. It was also reborn at the dawn of the twentieth century as an inspiration for playwrights, directors, actors and designers in Europe's *fin de siècle* theatres. Since the cultural revolution of the 1960's, commedia's improvisatory performance techniques and street theatre elements have supplied collective theatre troupes and politically-inspired playwrights with a firm foundation.

Studies in Commedia dell'arte is a collection of essays on a variety of topics related to commedia, broadly defined, and organized in roughly chronological order. All of the essays, save one, are by faculty at the University of Wales. Although they offer a varying range of quality, and despite the obvious difficulty of illuminating so complicated and far-reaching a subject in a mere dozen essays, this collection does whet the reader's appetite for fuller examinations of many of the specific topics covered. Following an insightful introduction by co-editor David George, Andrew Grewar, citing Gordon Craig's claim that Shakespeare's comedies were the result of the collaboration of the playwright and commedia-inspired comic actors, assesses the relationship of Shakespeare and the actors of the commedia. Tom Cheesman offers an

interesting survey of the influence of commedia on the emerging German theatre circa 1700 and John Trethewey presents a fresh analysis of commedia elements in Molière's early plays. Bruce Griffiths examines the last golden days of commedia as exemplified by the success of the *Comédie Italienne*," and in "Lesage and d'Orneval's *Théâtre de la Foire*, the *Commedia dell'arte* and Power," George Evans astutely examines the relationship between high and low culture and questions issues of power in the eighteenth century, setting up Derek F. Connon's interesting examination of disguise, role-reversal and social comment in several of Marivaux's plays. The evolution of the character of Pierrot is explored in several articles, including Glyn Pursglove's "Ernest Dowson's 'Full Pierrot'," co-editor George's "Commedia dell'arte in Rubén Darío and Leopoldo Lugones," W. Gareth Jones's "Commedia dell'arte: Blok and Meyerhold, 1905-1917," and Susan Harrow's "From Symbolism to Modernism—Apollinaire's *Harlequin-Acrobat*." The last two essays bring the text to the modern era, which concludes with Gabriel Jacobs's survey of commedia in twentieth-century music, particularly in the works of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Busoni and Les Six, and in Christopher Cairns's superlative essay on the greatest contemporary exemplar of the commedia tradition, Dario Fo.

Following on the heels of a number of books on commedia, most pertinently the Southeastern Theatre Conference's *Theatre Symposium* volume of commedia-related essays, *Studies in Commedia dell'arte* is another valuable collection of generally thoughtful essays providing further evidence of the predominance of commedia in the development of European theatre and drama.

In John Rudlin's *Commedia dell'arte. An Actor's Handbook*, the author has attempted to distill the evidence of a century of commedia study for easy access by the actor. The book is divided into three parts: Part I traces the origins of the form, the use of the mask by its actors, and issues in the playing of commedia; Part II illuminates the individual stock characters, with particular emphasis on the *zanni*, the old men, the lovers, *Il Capitano*, and *Colombina*, with some attention paid to diverse others; and Part III briefly tackles the influence of commedia on twentieth century theatre, including such early modern artists as Edward Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Jacques Copeau and Charles Dullin, as well more contemporary figures like Dario Fo, Carlo Boso, Antonio Fava and such groups as the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Lecoq School, and TNT (The New Theatre).

Commedia dell'arte. An Actor's Handbook will be of great interest to the actor and to those with little familiarity with commedia; it will be of significantly less value to the serious commedia scholar since Rudlin attempts far too much and, particularly in his historical information, can only lightly survey ground that has been previously covered in greater detail.

Rudlin's inadequate bibliography includes few works that have previously covered much of the territory he surveys, particularly in Parts I and II. For example, no mention is made of Richard Andrews's *Scripts and Scenarios. The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 1993), Virginia Scott's *The Commedia dell'arte in Paris, 1644-1697* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1990), Kenneth and Laura Richards's *The Commedia dell'arte* (Oxford: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1990), Martin Green and John Swan's *The Triumph of Pierrot* (NY: Macmillan, 1986; University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1993), and my own *The Theatre of Yesterday and Tomorrow: Commedia dell'arte on the Modern Stage* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), among others, all of which offer (along with numerous articles by these writers and others), in their individual ways, a more detailed examination of much of what Rudlin recycles usefully in the shape of an actor's guide to the wonders of improvisatory, masked theatre—Italian style.

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The Age of HAIR: Evolution and Impact of Broadway's First Rock Musical. By Barbara Lee Horn. Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1991. ISBN 0-313-27564-5.

"As the sixties have had a dramatic effect upon the basic values of our culture, *Hair* has had an enduring impact on theater. And what *Hair* and the sixties continue to represent is the promise of American life in the future—because many of the questions they addressed still have not been answered" (138). Thus Horn provides her book's *raison d'etre* as she concludes her study.

Horn's primary thesis is that "*Hair* became Broadway's first fully realized concept musical, a form that would come to dominate the theater of the seventies" (127) and that *Hair* is thus significant in a way heretofore not recognized. She recognizes *West Side Story*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Cabaret* as *Hair's* predecessors, and she sees *Company* and *A Chorus Line* as *Hair's* descendents as concept musicals (128). Martin Gottfried, credited with coining the term "concept musical," defined it in an interview with Horn. "A book musical is called a book musical because it is based on a script. A concept musical is based on the production. . . . It starts out with some stage notion, it's theatrical . . . the concept musical is created in rehearsal" (82).

Hair has always been recognized as Broadway's first "rock musical," but Horn sees the play's importance as stretching far beyond the birth of that less-than-prolific genre. She also credits Rado and Ragni's play with being a catalyst which "revolutionized theater and the way of thinking, about not only theater, but about a way of life, and attitude, a philosophy" (137). She also seems to agree with Ellen Stewart's comment implying that *Hair* was more of an influence than

the Beatles, a concept this reader cannot reconcile either with my own strong memories of the times nor with the fact that the Beatles first appeared as a force in the United States early in 1964, while *Hair* did not surface until 1968!

The Age of Hair is, however, enjoyable reading as it takes the reader down the nostalgic path while providing a behind-the-scenes glimpse of how *Hair* came to be both written and produced. Unfortunately the book is marred with repetitive writing and incorrect "facts" such as "*Hair* was the first racially integrated musical" (134)—how could a book about the historical significance of a revolutionary musical fail to take *Show Boat* into account? Other less glaring errors also permeate the book, such as the contention that before *Hair* 1977, Scott Thornton had not "previously appeared in a version of *Hair*" (111). Thornton not only played the lead role of Claude in Memphis State University's 1970 production, but he also took over the role of *Dude* when that unsuccessful sequel to *Hair* was being given second chance productions. However, one can glean from *The Age of Hair* a pretty good idea of what the era, its personalities and conflicts were "really about." Horn points out the significant strides the play inspired in the area of First Amendment rights, the "new forms of expression in theater's holy ritual roots" (52) and its reflection of "a social epoch in full explosion" (41).

Chapter One, "*Hair* and the Hippies" provides an overview of the hippie culture, its predecessors, reasons for being, creeds and lifestyle. Horn declares, "*Hair* is many things. Thematically it is an antiestablishment protest vehicle that took dramatic and satiric aim at war, racism, sexual repression, and other societal evils. Theatrically, the show is a milestone in the evolution of the Broadway musical. But above all, *Hair* is a reflection of the hippies and the sixties" (1).

In Chapter Two, "Experimental Roots," Horn touches on the development of various experimental theatre groups, writers, philosophers and practitioners in the period leading up to *Hair*. "The Creation and Growth of *Hair*," Chapter Three, debunks the myth that Rado and Ragni were inexperienced hippies, ignorant in the ways of the theatre, and notes that they were in fact professional theatre artists before their collaboration on *Hair*. The chapter also includes sections on the involvement of producer Joseph Papp, composer Galt MacDermot, choreographer Anna Sokolow, the first productions at the Public Theater and the Cheetah discotheque, and the subsequent directorship and rewriting under Tom O'Horgan which resulted in the familiar Broadway version of the play.

The fourth chapter, "*Hair* on Broadway," gives a breakdown of the play's plot structure and story, noting the songs that highlight each section. Additionally, the chapter provides brief discourses on O'Horgan's experimental techniques, the casting challenges presented by the need to have an "amateur quality" while also needing people with various professional skills (54), the play's themes, staging, music and various controversial issues raised by the play and its production. These included the relevance of the nudity, the flag song—deemed by some as unpatriotic or anti-American, and the advocacy of drug use.

In "Beyond Opening Night," the fifth chapter, Horn writes of other contemporary professional productions, both domestic and foreign, and describes how several of them were given individual interpretations, in the fluid spirit of creation advocated by Rado and Ragni. She also writes of a 1977 and other more recent revivals of the work, as well as describing the movie version, which differed in large measure from the original play.

Chapter Six, "The Impact of *Hair*," contains sections on the rock musical, new audiences, First Amendment rights and the importance of *Hair* in a summary. Appendices include staff and cast listings for the first production, the Broadway production, the 1977 revival and the movie.

The Age of HAIR is a recommended volume for libraries specializing in musical theatre and contemporary theatre history.

Laura H-B Miller

The Dawning of American Drama. American Dramatic Criticism, 1746-1915.
 Edited and Compiled by Jurgen Wolter. Contributions in Drama and Theatre studies, Number 51. Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1993. 320 pp. ISBN 0-313-29028-8.

It is very often the case when the greatness of a book lies as much in what it leaves unexplored as in what it fully discloses. In the case of works of a bibliographic nature, a scholar can often have that feeling expressed by Pope, when, after climbing a high mountain, we reach the summit only to find there are more mountains to explore. Nevertheless, once the first mountain is conquered, later explorers find the way considerably smoother, and it is hoped they will not forget the author of the first enterprise. It is greatly due to the inspiration provided by one man's initiative in writing a Dictionary of the English Language that we have that monument called OED. If one man's initiative, his work on an unexplored field, and the questions his work leaves open, are indicators of a great work, then surely *The Dawning of American Drama* is a great work.

Unlike many books involving compilation of writings and bibliographic data, Wolter's book is not characterized by dry information designed for the specialist. Wolter wisely placed a historical survey of the criticism of American Drama of 1746-1915 (Chapter 2) before the selections from periodicals of that period. Perhaps this is the chapter which the non-specialist will find most immediately appealing, with its broad discussion of the subject in a chronological manner. The convenient section headings within the chapter show us the main periods of theater criticism in America with the topics focused on each period. Part of Chapter 2's title ("From the Devil's Den to the Nation's Temple") is indicative

of the American Drama's trajectory from a morally questionable phenomenon to a symbol of national identity. Wolter insightfully discusses the difficulties of the American theater in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as arising from basically two factors: the accusations of immorality and the initial obstacles to the creation of purely American theatrical productions. Wolter's argumentation is compelling throughout: we see that, thousands of years after Aristotle's *Poetics*, there were still debates as to whether the catharsis of drama was beneficial or destructive to society. We also see there were many followers of Jeremy Collier also on this side of the Atlantic, even as late as 1854. But, unlike the British theater which had only to cope with government laws restricting theatrical activities for moral or political reasons, the American theater faced issues involving morality and national identity. This is where Wolter's narrative gets more attractive: he manages to present American Drama as interacting with History, Politics, Religion, and national elements. In Chapter 2, the American theater appears as a sort of Promethean figure, battling its way through initial misunderstandings, accusations of lack of quality, and even a later revival of the morality question. By the end of Chapter 2, we are ready and willing to read the selections from periodicals containing theater criticism of the period, given in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 is obviously the result of a tremendous amount of work, and should be considered the heart of the book. Wolter's research covers nothing less than approximately 170 years of a period and a genre which, in the standards of Pope's mountains, lie somewhere between the Alps and the Everest. Anyone who is familiar with scholarly work on British periodicals of about two hundred years ago knows very well the troubles facing the scholar. A look at the *British Union-Catalogue of Periodicals* will be enough to convince anyone that the pains awaiting the scholar in that kind of work are colossal. From this fact we cannot help but admire Wolter's labors to collect articles covering a subject and a period which are not as well documented as our British counterpart. Chapter 4 will also give the reader an idea of the extension of Wolter's work. In that chapter, the reader will perceive two facts: first, that Wolter was judicious in selecting the periodicals, and second, that there is much more to be written and researched about the subject than it might be imagined. The number of periodicals from which Wolter did not print indicates that his talents as a scholar would be very welcome in subsequent books on this harvest waiting to be gathered in the scholar's barn.

If Chapter 3 is read strictly against the background of Chapter 2, some points arise. Wolter wisely places the selections not only chronologically, but he stresses the topicality of each article (in bold type between brackets) and links them with the context of Chapter 2's survey. So, even if someone does not have much time for an in-depth reading, he might find that a quick perusal can acquaint him with the main points of about two centuries' worth of theater criticism. As far as the articles' contents go, the themes of morality, national identity, and aesthetic values prevail. We can see that the bibliographic study and

the literary study *per se* can join hands and bear much fruit when undertaken in a conscientious way. The selections offer discussion on the quality of the theater, the impact of drama on American society, and the question of national elements in American drama, which take care of the theoretical part. On a more practical level, the selections provide ample room for very contemporary questions: is the American theatre still suffering the consequences of the same critical misunderstandings present two centuries ago? What basis does past criticism provide for the formation of an aesthetically and politically mature drama in America? And, what can we learn from accounts such as the beautifully graphic article of *The Boston Weekly Magazine* of 1818, about "Disorder in the Pit"? Wolter succeeds in presenting accounts which offer grounds for both theoretical and practical discussions on our theater, which should interest the professor of drama, the scholar, the playwright, the actor, and (hopefully) those in charge of theater productions. One only could wish Wolter had added notes to the selections in Chapter 3. The selections often refer to classical authors such as Cicero or Sophocles, and, as one might expect from pieces of criticism, quotations and/or references to literary figures such as Shakespeare (often), Johnson (p. 79), Wordsworth (p. 135), and even Chesterfield (p. 96). It would be very proper to inform the reader as to where those quotations come from, and, whenever possible, what are their relation to the context of the article's argumentation. Translations could be useful regarding the sentences in languages other than English, specifically those in Latin. Thus, the reader might be able to have a fuller grasp of the ideas conveyed by critics who assumed the readers' familiarity with some foreign languages and a number of authors. Even if we argue that today's readers are satisfactorily familiar with the authors quoted, it would still be helpful to mention in notes where those references can be found.

As we read Chapter 3, the evolution of theater criticism appears very clearly. At the same time, we see how it is hard to determine how specific critical issues fit in specific periods. We see moral issues appearing in the eighteenth century and still debated in 1827 and 1854 (pp. 66-7 and 117-8). The question of American identity in drama is discussed in almost all periods, remarkably in 1827 (p. 67), 1828 (pp. 77-80), 1859 (p. 158), 1890 (pp. 207-9), and 1904 (pp. 241-4). Appropriately, one of the last selections raises up a very contemporary issue, that of feminist criticism, which was already eloquently phrased in the 1914 piece from *Forum* (pp. 268-70). A feminist critic will particularly enjoy the paragraph printed on page 270, which shows how little change there has been in the concern about more realistic portraits of women in plays in the last 80 years.

After witnessing to Wolter's admirable research work, in Chapters 4 and 5, the reader finds a selected bibliography on the book's subject. This consists not only of bibliographic but critical works, and it is therefore useful to both scholars and the general student of American drama.

One of the most conspicuous merits of the book lies, then, in the scope of its appeal to readers. Scholars will be attracted by the bibliographic work, and

hopefully encouraged to pursue it further. The student or admirer of American drama will be delighted to read Chapter 3, and see how critics generally viewed the field. The student of the history of criticism of American drama will be pleased with the neat and comprehensive narrative of Chapter 2. But probably the books' greatest merit is its pioneering nature. And, as in most pioneering works, the work on a previously unexplored or not wholly explored field necessarily leaves much further work to be done and sources to be explored. The scholar will find, from Wolter's list of periodicals, that there is much more to be learned in the criticism of American drama between 1746 and 1915. As we finish reading Wolter's book, one of our impressions is that there is plenty of interesting work left for someone with scholarly and critical expertise in the specific period covered by Wolter. The dawning of the work on this area was most admirable; we hope the sunset will be just as beautiful.

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Metatheater: The Example of Shakespeare. By Judd D. Hubert. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. ISBN 0-8032-2355-2.

In a recent essay, William Kerrigan suggested that Shakespeare studies remain "gloriously out of control"—a sort of scholarly and critical carnival in which actual advances in method or knowledge must continuously jostle for attention with the downright "screwy." Even if this is so, there sometimes emerges from the hubbub a book of genuine interest to those of us who concern ourselves with the theory of drama. This brief but rewarding book by Judd Hubert distinguishes itself in this regard.

Hubert investigates the notion that theater tends to betray its awareness of itself as a performative realm even as it simultaneously presents us with representations that are ostensibly intended to convince us of their mimetic veracity. A fundamental question arises as we consider the persistence with which theater subverts the credibility of its own fables for the sake of directing our attention to its generic operations. Hubert defines the question in this way: "How can theater in the very act of proclaiming itself an illusion—of denying any claim to reality—move an audience?" (138). Ultimately, he finds an answer in the "irresistible performative surge of the medium."

As his field of inquiry, Hubert has chosen six plays by Shakespeare—each of which is peopled by characters who reveal an awareness of their performativity. This is a quality of character with which we already have familiarity, but Hubert substantially advances our understanding of it by showing

how characters such as Vincentio, Olivia, Leontes and Hamlet both participate in and precipitate metaphorical and performative displacements that may be seen to constitute theater as a "subversive power game" dedicated to the somewhat ambiguous pleasure of the audience (7). Further, Hubert effectively maintains that these displacements are part of a mechanism of double movement by which a play "unravels in the very act of building itself up" (10)—a suggestion which we might ordinarily expect to encounter in a discussion of *The Balcony* or *Marat/Sade*, rather than one about *Measure for Measure* and *Much Ado*. By the end of the book we are drawn to the conclusion that these displacements, reversals and exchanges—including the basic displacement between representation and perception—are an inevitable constituent of the theatrical experience, since theater itself can be considered as "a system of substitutions which serve to displace the referent while pretending to copy it" (139).

This last point is particularly interesting because it recalls so strongly a question that Bert States raised a decade ago concerning the effect of increasingly overt artistic mediation in the post-expressionist theater: does theater set out to "copy" reality, or does it actually endeavor to force reality from our view in order to commandeer its place? At least with regard to theaters like those of Artaud, Brecht, Beck and Genet, we have come to understand that mimetic signification is a very tenuous proposition. But Hubert jolts our categorical expectations by making a persuasive case for the presence of this kind of wholesale metaphysical displacement in the early modern theater—a notion that demands our attention.

It may be worth noting in this regard that, as with States, it is apparent that the origin of Hubert's inquiry can be located in Kenneth Burke's ironic-dialectic. Given this broadly phenomenological orientation, it is surprising that Hubert's discussion is at times given over to readings that rely on an uncomfortable merger between deconstructive strategies and a nearly Empsonian mania for word-play. But by and large, Hubert manages to keep his sights on the crisis of representation that informs his thesis and gives shape to his treatment of the texts. In fact, the most important contribution of this book may well prove to be the clarity with which it has identified metatheater as a crisis of representation, rather than merely as a theatrical trope.

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