

# Book Reviews



*Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*. Stephen Orgel. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. ISBN 0-521-56842-0.

The representation of gender on the English stage remains one of the most energized fields of inquiry in the study of early modern literature and culture. Stephen Orgel's *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* endeavors to carry this inquiry forward. It was Orgel's 1989 essay "Nobody's Perfect: Or Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?" that helped launch the surge of interest in these topics that continues to the present. In the past decade, Orgel's entertaining essay has gained status as one of the models of cultural analysis.

"Nobody's Perfect" provides the basis for "The Performance of Desire," the second chapter of this new book. The change in title is interesting because it submerges a significant question—why Orgel originally chose "the English Stage" as his declared subject, rather than "the English Audience." And the difference between "stage" and "audience" here is certainly not inconsequential. Consciously or not, Orgel's discussion of gender representation has been mostly conducted in the field of authorial intentionality—why and how the printed text wound up being the way that it is. Whatever cultural exchanges may be operative in Orgel's view of textual production, the response of the audience is undervalued here; his analysis generally fails to acknowledge that there might be such as thing as a *performance* text. Even in his third chapter, where Orgel sets out to address the issue of whether the audience saw "the female character or the boy beneath the dress," (31) he lapses into considerations of non-dramatic literature and anecdotes of Elizabethan sodomy that, whatever their interest, serve to take us away from the dynamics of the playhouse.

For while Orgel exercises caution in positioning his ideas with reference to the work of cultural materialists and gender theorists to a degree that sometimes makes his own work seem derivative, he reveals little awareness of recent developments in audience theory and performance textuality. And it must be said that these are ideas that would have helped to bring his readers closer to an understanding of the audience's response to such complex representations of gender. There should be, after all, no essential incompatibility between cultural analysis and audience theory. This is particularly true given the anthropological basis of much of our recent understanding of what the audience is and how it works, and given the fact that audience theory is by-and-large supportive of a collaborative model of textual production. The culture finds no fuller manifestation on the stage than it does in the pit.

Perhaps it's time to ask whether the materialist project is actually getting us anywhere in terms of our understanding of what made plays tick on the English stage four hundred years ago. Could it be a sign of stagnation that Orgel has found it necessary to return to issues that Jan Kott explored so engagingly in the 1960s? And Kott, it bears remembering, had no theoretical baggage to carry—he worked almost entirely on the basis of a refined instinct for what goes on in the theater. We certainly have more commerce in anecdote than we did then—and as a result we appear to know more about early modern sexual practices and other social behavior—but we might well ask the value of all of this historicizing if the conclusions are ultimately less stimulating and challenging than those Kott arrived at thirty years ago. Perhaps what really needs to be addressed is the kind of charge that William Kerrigan made in his recent *Hamlet's Perfection*: that new historicism is sterile in its striving to be "self-canonizing, wanting above all to have made a difference. . . ." Otherwise, we might be left to wonder if these modes of cultural analysis have not begun to exhaust themselves.

The most interesting passage of Orgel's book seems as if it had been written in anticipation of these objections. Here, Orgel offers a rationale for the historicist agenda that seems to confound what has always seemed to be the fundamental assumption of cultural materialism—that the text matters foremost as a product of its specific cultural moment. It is Orgel's contention that "all historical claims, even the most tactful and unpoliticized, are ultimately concerned to make the past comprehensible, usable and relevant to our own interests—to make it, that is, present" (64). The radical refiguring, the "demystification, destabilizing [and] deconstruction" of the text that "has increasingly become the business of criticism" finds its defense here on the grounds of an inevitable push in our cultural moment (as in any other) to make the text our own. Orgel's claim here is that we "interpret only with our own minds, which have been formed by our own history"—that we, in effect, invent the text (64). While it's stunning enough to find here rhetorical echoes of the high conservatism of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," the very significant implication that emerges is that the text matters not as a product of *its* own cultural moment as much as it does as a product of *ours*. In an odd way, this assertion by Orgel may serve to justify both Kerrigan's critique and the new historicist project itself. We don't have to take Orgel very much further to arrive at the conclusion that cultural analysis may be vulnerable to self-delusion in its effort to give us a reconfigured, historicized and contextualized understanding of, say, Rosalind's epilogue to *As You Like It*. But it might also be said that the real value of such analysis is manifest in what it tells us about ourselves. The issues of how Rosalind is costumed and how transparent her gender representation is as she teases the men in the audience are, after all, our issues. We have created our own Rosalind, and

created her in our own likeness. Perhaps we should simply acknowledge as much, and get on with it.

Fortunately, Orgel does get on with it, and the rest of *Impersonations* provides us with some valuable perspectives on the apprenticeship system under which young actors lived and worked, as well as on the more general relationship of costume to constructions of femininity and masculinity in a world of overriding male prerogative. Still, the real importance of this book may ultimately be found in its interrogation of "our notion of the hegemony of patriarchal structures" in early modern England (129). Orgel's final chapter, which deals with Penelope Rich, Bess of Hardwick and Mary Frith ("Moll Cutpurse"), simply refuses to obfuscate the "complexities and contradictions in patriarchal attitudes, and the radical inconsistency in the construction of the feminine" (129) that problematize the kind of unwieldy generalizations that seem to find their way into many discussions of the role and status of early modern women. And throughout, Orgel never lets us lose sight of the fact that the representations of women on the early modern stage "depended for their success to a significant degree on the receptiveness of women" (11). Orgel's unflinching treatment of these issues brings credit to his entire book. For all of its shortcomings as a discussion of the theater, *Impersonations* still deserves the attention of readers who are concerned with the relationship of costume, power and the representation of gender.

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*Out of Inferno: Strindberg's Reawakening as an Artist.* Harry G. Carlson.  
Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996. ISBN 0-295-97564-4  
and ISBN 0-295-97503-2.

Author Harry Carlson states within the acknowledgments that his monograph was first published in Swedish in the spring of 1995 in a slightly different form as *Genom Inferno: Bildens magi och Strindbergs fornyelse*. *Out of Inferno: Strindberg's Reawakening as an Artist* recounts Strindberg's difficult years from 1889 to 1897, and how his return to his old love of painting provided him with a framework to develop a new view of the role of the visual imagination in the arts. The monograph considers how Strindberg's process of shifting stylistic gears took longer and "was more painful for him than for many other artists" (4). Carlson's view is that though Strindberg was an astute, politically conscious realist/Naturalist, "anxious to imitate nature faithfully and objectively

and careful to emphasize social relevance over entertainment in his art," there was another side of the artist (4). Strindberg's other part was one of being a highly inventive dreamer, who, though suspicious of the seductive power of the imagination and its "visions" or "hallucinations" as he called them, "nevertheless often instinctively trusted those 'visions' over sociopolitical intentions" (4).

The thrust of Carlson's study states that it is no surprise that the tensions and contradictions between realist and dreamer, layered by the frustrations Strindberg suffered, helped precipitate the collapse of his career in the Inferno years. Carlson clearly states, "My argument is that only after he was able to reconcile these contradictions was he able to return to productive creative activity" (4). The reconciliation was made possible because Strindberg's faith in the imagination, and specifically the visual imagination and its Romantic legacy, had been restored (4). Strindberg's "route to reconciliation" during the traumatic Inferno years began with a fateful decision. Strindberg had declared himself finished with drama and fiction and in need of inspiration, turned to his old love of painting (4). Carlson points out this time of many styles ranging from Impressionism to Symbolism to Synthetism, revival of interest in the mystical arts of the occult, and enthusiasm for Orientalism and medievalism charged Strindberg's visual imagination and inspired the writer to return to work (5). Strindberg was exposed to a "virtual smorgasbord of artistic and philosophical choices" (5). Playwrights like Strindberg and Maeterlinck and painters like Edvard Munch and Paul Gauguin (both of whom Strindberg knew well during the early 1890s) challenged the 500-year domination of the arts by Renaissance perspective realism. This sparked changes when old conventions were pushed aside, "new freedoms opened up for painters in the treatment of color and line, and for dramatists in the handling of character and plot and of time and space" (5).

This train of thought leads to Carlson's point that a critical aspect of the challenge to perspective realism, "particularly for my discussion—involved the conflict Strindberg endured between the artist's responsibilities to mimesis and to the imagination" (5). A key question becomes how much should Strindberg imitate nature in a "truly objective way (a necessary goal in an age of scientific realism), and how much should he allow his imagination to incorporate fantasy and the supernatural into his work?" (5).

Carlson responsibly intersperses Strindberg's writings throughout to strengthen his arguments. The book is divided into two main sections: Part I is labeled "The Making and Unmaking of the Artist;" Part II is titled "The Remaking of the Artist." The first part is devoted to Strindberg's ways of seeing as "a realist or Naturalist during the 1870s and 1880s . . ." (10). Part I was most

interested "in seeing through the delusionary facade of middle-class society to the lies, hypocrisy, and social wretchedness underneath" (10).

The four chapters are clearly divided into headings that are quickly accessible for scholars. In chapter 1, "The Nature of the Artist: Romantic Legacies and Archetypal Images" considers diversified topics ranging from Rousseau, Christian imagery versus Indic imagery, or nature and the grotesque. Carlson presents nature, history, and myth as Strindberg's tools since "both the fiction writer and the playwright were essentially image makers, feeling trapped in an unusual love affair with the image-making capacity, the imagination" (51).

Returning to an occidental perspective, chapter 2, "Imitation and Imagination," begins with classical debate from the Aristotelian versus the Platonist. However, Carlson shifts gears and crosses into the realm of critic Georg Brandes and the realist revolution, to the Nameless Society and literary critic Carl David af Wirsén. Carlson states that these cultural leaders "represented respectively, for many young Scandinavian artists and intellectuals, the promise and the danger of seeking new, 'scientific' artistic goals" (63). The chapter continues with discussions of association psychology and the imagination, metaphor, the spiritual versus the carnal, and Strindberg's Christian iconography.

Chapter 3, "Masters, Servants, and the Drama of History," briefly spans the incorporation of history, medieval pastiche, revolution and carnivals upon Strindberg's drama. Carlson points to Strindberg's returning interest in the Prometheus theme and how "it usually carried the same kinds of symbolic freight: the Titan as prototype either of the artist as rebel or of the rebel as artist" (110). This chapter concludes with a discussion of rectilinear history versus cyclical history since "in the late 1880s, Strindberg sensed that the time had come to abandon History and the Bible as fundamental sources of truth and to turn in earnest to the third text: Nature" (114).

"Naturalism: Evolution and Devolution," or chapter 4, ponders the heart of Strindberg's Naturalism which "was a view of nature that was complex and riddled with inconsistencies. . . ." (119). Carlson recounts two important groups of sources who influenced Strindberg: from Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Ovid, and Darwin, "came ideas in the form of mythic images that energized his [Strindberg's] imagination;" from the second group, Henry Thomas Buckle (an English historian) and French experimental psychologists, "came theoretical concepts that challenged and stimulated his scientific ambitions" (119). By the end of the chapter, Strindberg is characterized as an artist experiencing changes that outpaced his preparation. As attitudes toward naturalism and the "role of the imagination in the creative process" shifted, Strindberg found himself not only once again unwelcome in his native land but, "what was even worse, regarded as

a has-been" (153). It would be almost a decade before the artist "would find his way back again to a productive creative life" (153).

In "Part II/The Remaking of the Artist," Carlson explains how Strindberg's new ways in the 1890s are summarized by "the different ways he used a Swedish figurative word, a word connected with sight and seeing: *genomskada*, "to see into, through, or beneath the surface" (10). During the last 15 years of Strindberg's life, *genomskada* took on a transcendental dimension using the 18th century Swedish scientist-mystic Emanuel Swedenborg as a model. It was Swedenborgian philosophy plus other inspirations in the post-Inferno Period that "influenced him most in his investigation of new ways of seeing and in the recovery of his faith in the imagination" (10).

Chapter 5, "The Visual Imagination and the Challenge of Nature," addresses how after the Inferno period Strindberg's new view toward the whole concept of a realistic, illusionistic imitation of nature, became the artist's basic point of departure that "altered his understanding of the aesthetic foundations of realism/Naturalism [*sic*]" (157). This chapter intertwines numerous influences including those of Wassily Kandinsky, Caspar David Friedrich, and Strindberg's transforming of reality via woodnymph-like instincts.

The remaining three chapters are titled: "The Romance of the Occult," "Oriental Renaissance and Medieval Nostalgia," and "The New Seer: Putting It All Together." These chapters saliently depict and synthesize Carlson's arguments as he ponders the numerous people, artists, styles, and sources that influence Strindberg's art after the Inferno. Carlson also assembles other Strindberg scholars such as Goran Stockenstrom, Martin Lamm, and Gunnar Brandell to further debate his theories. These chapters are particularly arresting and, once again, reiterate the modernity of Strindberg to artists and scholars.

The illustrations are essential to this study, and Carlson includes color plates of Strindberg's *The Solitary Toadstool* and *The Wave VIII*, and two plates by Paul Gauguin. Additionally, Carlson refers to sixteen figures spanning imagery from a 1795 copper engraving of *Fingal's Cave*, Strindberg's illustration of the cave to other various images of Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch and a temple frieze from Borobudur, Java. Though the plates support Carlson's theories, a weakness of the study is the lack of existing plates that underscore Strindberg's evolution where his visual artistry leaps into his theatrical texts and productions.

This book is explicitly laid out for any scholar or teacher. The "Contents" includes illustrations, acknowledgments, conventions used within the book, the introduction, and specific chapter divisions. The monograph also includes two appendixes. The first includes Strindberg's plays spanning from 1869 through 1909. Appendix 2 is titled "Nondramatic Strindberg Texts Mentioned in Book;" these pages begin with *The Visit* in 1868 and end with *The*



*Occult Diary* written during 1896-1908 with a facsimile edition published in 1977. Two main contributions by Carlson's study include 30 pages of detailed notes, and a 15-page bibliography that contains sources from multiple languages. The 22-page index, includes references sources and anecdotal information that are easily accessible. Examples are as diverse as *Fingal's Cave* to the Berlin Schwarzen Ferkel or Black Pig Tavern nicknamed by Strindberg when it was visited by a largely Scandinavian circle of artists including Edvard Munch (163).

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*The Critical Response to Tennessee Williams*. Editor: George W. Crandell.  
Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996.

Tennessee Williams, America's most acclaimed dramatist, produced an enormously varied canon which in turn has generated an emerging, theoretically diverse response. George Crandell has helpfully distilled this enormous body of work on Williams in his book *The Critical Response to Tennessee Williams*. Although Crandell does not chart in detail the views on all 75 of Williams's plays, he does offer a perceptive overview of criticism, and judiciously includes a wisely chosen selection of reprinted critical essays and reviews to help readers appreciate some of the changing critical reactions to Williams's work over the last 50 years.

Crandell does not simply record criticism or collate it but rather proposes both to indicate the different shifts that have occurred in the critical response to Williams's work, and to offer some explanation for the different reactions to his plays. Through the selections in this volume, dating from 1940 to 1995, Williams emerges as a developing playwright working for a changing theater, into a Broadway legend, and then into a quirky genius writing convoluted experimental drama.

Crandell's introduction offers salient insights into the trends in Williams's scholarship, and usefully divides the criticism into three chronological categories—(1) the early criticism which displays a reluctant acceptance of Williams as a new playwright; (2) the period between 1950 and 1962 which is characterized by a widespread recognition of Williams's skill, and (3) after 1962, the period in which critics find Williams's plays too autobiographical and less accessible. The response to Williams fluctuates from reviewers like Claudia Cassidy in the early '40s who refers to Williams as "unbelievably lucky" to have his plays fall "into expert hands" (16), to later reviewers such as Walter Kerr who

honors Williams as "our finest playwright" (266). Crandell also includes off the path responses to Williams such as one by Sylvia Gassel on *Sweet Bird of Youth* who surprisingly but interestingly criticizes Williams for his "ultra-conservative view of life" (168).

By focusing on major productions in his selection of reviews, Crandell observes that performances of Williams's plays affect the critical opinion of his work, but while his decision to ignore Williams's novels, poetry, and short stories may fit logically with his emphasis on theater productions, this omission seems to do the volume some small disservice considering its claim to diversity. Also, Crandell should have perhaps included other work, besides Thomas Adler's criticism on *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a play that has received huge attention. In addition, the absence of criticism on some of Williams's better-known plays such as *Baby Doll* and *Suddenly Last Summer*, plays which have provoked both a large and interesting critical response, is slightly disappointing; other unrepresented plays include *American Blues: Five Short Plays*, *27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other One-Act Plays by Tennessee Williams*, *Three Plays of a Summer Gone*, and *The Two-Character Play*.

However, Crandell's *Critical Response* does cover 28 of Williams's plays, chosen to emphasize the crucial relationship between the written text and the staged performance. Crandell does focus on Williams as both poet and dramatist, emphasizing the writer's internal struggle between these two vocations. In large measure, Crandell's response to Williams's plays is divided "along lines similar to Williams's self-assessment" (xxvii). Crandell shows that "reviewers routinely praise[d] Williams for the lyrical, poetic aspects of his work, while critics who find fault with Williams generally point[ed] to his failure of dramatic craftsmanship" (xxvii).

Crandell's collection also illustrates "the extent to which the application of differing methodologies can be usefully employed in the study of Tennessee Williams" (xxxviii). The selections range from Glen Embrey's formalist approach in "The Subterranean World of *The Night of the Iguana*," to Albert J. Devlin's biographical essay that examines Williams's later career, to Philip C. Kolin's post-colonial reading of *Kingdom of Earth*. The collection includes examples of reactions to Williams's work that shift from shocked and hysterical responses on subjects such as rape and homosexuality, to essays such as Paul J. Hurley's "Tennessee Williams: The Playwright as Social Critic," which offers a less controversial analysis of Williams's concerns as a dramatist.

In compiling this volume, Crandell gathers a broad variety of newspapers and journals rather than relying exclusively on a few easy-to-find sources; the essays he includes combine landmark criticism with less well-known, though significant, studies, both providing intriguing perspectives on Williams. While

he selects important pieces published by Philip C. Kolin and Thomas P. Adler, other influential critics such as David Savran and C.W.E. Bigsby do not, alas, appear except in the selected bibliography.

Altogether, Crandell pulls together a diverse collection of reviews and critical essays; his book will stand both as a more useful guide than anthologies that focus exclusively on one play such as Jordan Yale Miller's *Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire*; a *Collection of Critical Essays*, and as a more comprehensive resource than publications like Gale's *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. With its useful chronology, bibliography, and index, *The Critical Response to Tennessee Williams* offers a handy and representative collection for scholars searching for patterns in both Williams criticism and in his works.

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*Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*. Editors: Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. ISBN 0-19-812372-8.

Since it consists of essays by eleven different writers, it's a bit of a surprise that *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History* ultimately provides us with such a coherent and balanced historical treatment of Shakespearean stagecraft. This book consists of essays that were commissioned and published to honor the redoubtable editor and critic Stanley Wells. The volume is, in reality, a sort of "stealth" *festschrift*—and we can be thankful that under the editorship of Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson, the mustiness that characterizes many such projects is nowhere in evidence.

Unlike most tribute volumes, this collection has more than enough flair and substance to capture and hold the attention of both interested playgoers and serious undergraduates. In part this is true because of the wealth of illustration—and while most of the hundred or so images here are familiar enough, they have been gathered with an eye that is simultaneously selective and inclusive; the result is what may be the best readily-available collection of images of Shakespearean performance.

At the same time, there is enough depth and sophistication in this appealing volume to satisfy the interest of teachers of Shakespeare, performance, and stage history. This is particularly true of Robert Smallwood's excellent discussion of "Director's Shakespeare" and Russell Jackson's treatment of

Shakespearean performance since the 1950s, in which Jackson effectively drives home a theme that is shared by nearly all of the essays—the extent to which performance participates in the cultural moment that produces it: "Shakespearean performances express, with the institutions producing them, the social and political anxieties of a period. . . ." (212). Or as Peter Thomson states it elsewhere in the volume, "We should expect a living theatre to record movements in the society that contextualizes it, sometimes even to initiate them" (162).

As gracefully as Thomson articulates the prevailing materialist point-of-view, the alert reader will discern the muted sound of axe-grinding in his discussion of politics and pursestrings in the rise of Arts Council funding of Shakespeare. Thomson growls about the degree to which public subsidy of the theater imposes an excess of accountability, but he is quite correct to emphasize the theater's primary accountability *to itself*, which he sees as having been squandered in "spuriously decorated school texts . . . products of an industry under threat" (161). For all its testiness, Thomson's essay raises the most serious implications in the book regarding the institutionalization of performance—and his zingers can certainly be entertaining. "The theatre's propensity for congratulating itself camouflages the important fact that it is very difficult to present Shakespeare's plays adequately, let alone well" (161). And in the final analysis, it must be admitted that Thomson has seen more Shakespeare on stage than a taxicab-full of the rest of us taken together.

While it would be unrealistic to expect that essays by so many hands would be altogether consistent in terms of methodology, there is quite a bit of consensus among the writers on some important issues. As I have mentioned, cultural context is one; textuality is another. Jackson, for one instance, exhibits a strong sense of the Shakespearean text as process—a notion that is further explored in Anthony Davies' thorough treatment of the Old Vic and Inga-Stina Ewbank's engaging examination of the influence of Brecht and Ibsen on British stagings of *Coriolanus* and other plays, and "the almost impossible task of disentangling performed Shakespeare from the whole phenomenon of Shakespeare as a literary and cultural force in Europe" (129). Correspondingly, Michael Dobson's chapter on adaptations and revisions to Shakespeare in the period after the Restoration is nothing less than excellent in its examination of the ways in which economic and cultural forces can combine to fuel the evolution (and perhaps the devolution) of the text.

Surprisingly, it is in its treatment of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages that this book is somewhat uneven. Undergraduate readers, in particular, would have their interests better served by R.A. Foakes' model discussion of playhouses and players in the 1990 *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* than by his corresponding chapter here on "Shakespeare's Elizabethan Stages."

For while Foakes offers some intriguing suggestions about the function of the "heavens" as an acoustical sounding-board, his chapter is lacking in scope. Martin Wiggins' chapter on the Jacobean stage is more successful, and this is at least in part because Wiggins maintains a consistent focus on the importance of the audience in the dynamics of the theatrical experience. The result is a provocative view of the relationship between the theater-going public and the King's Men, who "like all successful entertainment industries . . . thrived on the management of desire" (34).

This kind of authoritative voice prevails throughout *An Illustrated Stage History*, making it an essential addition to the reserve shelf for any course on Shakespeare, theatrical history or performance studies.

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*Analysing Performance: A Critical Reader*. Editor and introduction: Patrick Campbell. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.

In his essay, "Postmodern performance," Steven Connor discusses Tom Johnson's music-performance piece, *Failing: A Very Difficult Piece for Solo String Bass*. Connor notes that Johnson's performance highlights and embodies the "complex interchangeability of success and failure" (121). Citing the complicated relationship between speaker and performer, language and music, success and failure, Connor quotes from the spoken text of *Failing*: "In other words, I will not be able to fail unless I am trying to succeed, and I won't succeed in interpreting the piece sensitively unless my performance turns out to be a failure" (121). Simultaneously functioning as the performer's monologue and his or her stage directions, Johnson's text could further serve as a description of the collection within which Connor's essay is featured. *Analysing Performance: A Critical Reader* succeeds precisely *because* it fails.

Like the performer of Johnson's *Failing*, the volume's authors attempt to pay equal attention to what they (the authors themselves as well as performance practitioners and researchers they cite) are *saying* and what they are *doing*. Replicating the etymological paradox tensively constructed within the term 'performance,' this collection aspires to *act* and to *enact*. With the documentation of performance event and performance critique as twin organizing principles, Campbell has set a difficult editorial task: a contribution to, and a synthesis of,

current scholarship on the productive activity of performance analysis across the spectrum of performative and artistic forms.

In his introduction, Campbell states that the compiled essays "while seeking connections across the performing arts, (they) transgress the established boundaries erected by these disciplines, and, in some cases, provide arguments or examples that signal the erasure or at least the elision of traditional lines of demarcation between different areas and categories of the performative"(1). In order to maximize the benefits of disciplinary cross-pollination, Campbell has thoughtfully organized the text thematically rather than categorically. The volume is divided into three sections delimited by their engagement with "Feminisms and Performance," "Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, Politics and Performance," and "Issues in Performance." Of course, the intellectual, artistic and political concerns overlap, double back, and, occasionally, contradict each other. Fortunately, each essayist writes with a critical awareness of the volume's purpose and the other authors' contributions, compelling an integrated rather than atomistic reading.

Generally, each essay attempts to triangulate a theoretical/methodological framework (feminisms, postmodernism, deconstruction, semiotics, psychoanalysis), a performance medium (theatre, dance, music, performance art, video), and an issue of topical interest (transgression and resistance, low and high art distinctions, quality and evaluation, representational strategies and institutional modalities). The exceptions to this model, such as Sarah Rubidge's piece, "Does Authenticity Matter?," apply a general issue such as authenticity across theatre, dance, and music. Needless to say, the theoretical and practical scope of this project is ambitious, and the resulting breadth of the collection is both its greatest strength and most telling weakness.

*Analysing Performance* realizes the elision of disciplinary boundaries remarkably well; read together, the essays create a contiguous dialogue among various approaches to performance and performativity, "forging connections" (Kaplan 101) rather than replicating tired oppositions. However, this critical reader also suffers from its breadth, erring toward generalization, even dilettantism. While most of the essays are grounded in the specifics of particular performance events, the theoretical and methodological rationales deployed by the authors are, in some cases, insufficiently complex to be of use to the specialist in a particular artistic field.

While extremely useful to scholars and students interested in the study of performance analysis across artistic mediums and theoretical stances, few of the articles achieve a radically original contribution to the particular discourse(s) within which they are participating. Perhaps necessarily, the primary methodological mode that characterizes this volume is description, either through

critical review of the pertinent literature or comparative analysis of performance styles and strategies. In many cases, this approach is merited; nascent scholarship in some areas *requires* descriptive survey at this point in time. For example, Sophie Fuller's "New Perspectives: Feminism and Music" glosses feminist music analyses ranging from classical symphonies to 19th century opera, from female conductors to divas, instructively documenting the convergences within this growing field. However, Lizbeth Goodman's piece on "Feminisms and Theatres: Canon Fodder and Cultural Change" could have benefited from a more critical approach; work in this area is not only well documented but more developed than her article would suggest. Similarly, A. Ruth Tompsett's piece on "Changing Perspectives" merely rehearses familiar arguments for diversifying the arts, promulgating an oversimplified analysis of the power of representational politics.

While primarily descriptive, some essays manage to advance theoretical discourse *through* their analyses of performance practice. It is this accomplishment that most recommends *Analysing Performance*. Articles such as Jatinder Verma's "The Challenge of Bilingual: Analysing Multi-cultural Productions," Sandra Kemp's "Reading Difficulties," Baz Kershaw's "The Politics of Performance in a Postmodern Age," and Lucy O'Brien's "'Sexing the Cherry': High or Low Art? Distinctions in Performance," assume the integration and mutual enrichment of theory and practice. Verma's essay, for example, provides a lexicon of multicultural performance modes, helpfully distinguishing between multicultural, crosscultural, integrated, intra-cultural and racially mixed productions.

To this multicultural performance vocabulary, Verma contributes the neologism, Bilingual. "Bilingual is a term I propose to denote a distinct contemporary theatre praxis: featuring Asian or black casts, produced by Asian or black theatre companies" (194). Bilingual productions directly challenge hegemonic British theatre conventions, confronting the ideological limits of acceptability and authenticity. The term's invocation of "English" is not accidental. Conceptualized as a form of speech *in process* and an ambivalent sensibility toward cultural and political ethnicity, Bilingual performance provokes/promotes Other-ness through language, as Verma's argument demonstrates. "Ownership of the text was being contested through the sounds of the English language" (197). The Bilingual productions that Verma analyzes in this essay perform the tricky negotiations of self and Other, *langue* and *parole*, the familiar and the strange that constitute theatrical praxis.

Baz Kershaw's contribution, "The Politics of Performance in a Postmodern Age," seeks to dismantle the loaded opposition between theory and practice from a different angle. Kershaw attempts to dispel a particularly pervasive assumption that underpins performance criticism: alternative theatrical

practices produce 'political' theatre and dominant or 'apolitical' theatrical practices (re)produce the status quo. Delineating the politics of performance through a postmodernist lens, Kershaw contends that stable categories, such as 'political theatre,' 'experimental theatre,' and 'popular theatre' are no longer tenable (if they ever were). "My overall aim is not to deny that 'all performance is political' but to encourage discrimination between the different ways in which, and degrees to which, particular kinds of performance may be more or less politically efficacious" (134). His model for performance analysis privileges context and location; within any particular performance event the multiple, intersecting representational realms may contain many different kinds of politics, signaling political engagement differentially.

Kershaw's analysis of *Glasgow All Lit Up!*, a community event that culminated in a procession of over 10,000 people marching with over 8,000 hand-made lanterns through the streets of Glasgow, keenly demonstrates his argument. Parading in groups, the marchers' lantern designs and attendant signs and banners proclaimed allegiance to particular communities and political factions. However, the presence of these diverse communities within a single event seemed to advocate a collective, national-cultural identity. While striking juxtapositions that characterized the march were largely unplanned, the contradictory plurality of representational politics engendered by the procession modeled, for Kershaw, "processes for the formation of a new kind of democratic collective" (147). Evaluating the political efficacy of this street performance would be impossible given its structural complexity and internal contradictions. "Its politics of representation, in the semiotic sense, were resistant to dominant discourses, but its politics of representation, in the cultural, civil and governmental senses, engaged with the dominant in ways that were more challenging" (146). Ascribing a range of political engagement—conservative, conciliatory, adaptive, resistant, transgressive—to a spectrum of performance events—community theatre, studio art, street theatre—Kershaw problematizes the construct of political performance while arguing for the analysis of the politics of performance *vis-a-vis* location and context.

Other essays also complicate the theoretical landscape of theatre and performance studies, asking probing, difficult questions. For example, Patrick Campbell wonders the vulnerability of performative practice in his essay, "Bodies Politic, Proscribed, and Perverse: Censorship and the Performing Arts." Noting that the presence of the performer's live body seems to elicit suppression more readily than the 'mute' absent author of the text, Campbell questions the viability of the artistic merit argument cited as defense by censored artists. Furthermore, Campbell problematizes the representational, visibility politics that delimit the discursive parameters of this debate.



Elaine Aston's article, "Gender as Sign-system: The Feminist Spectator as Subject," challenges the masculinist assumptions operative in traditional theatre semiosis. She argues instead for the incorporation of the female subject(s) addressed by and produced through performance contexts in developing theories of reception. Astutely, Aston notes that "the feminist spectator cannot be squeezed into the frame: rather she exceeds, troubles and disturbs it" (63). Advocating for the study of real spectators (as opposed to the theoretical construct of the ideal, or model, spectator), Aston centralizes gender and sexuality as factors conditioning spectatorial subject positions.

Finally, Elizabeth Wright rereads psychoanalytic theory *vis-a-vis* theatrical practice in her essay, "Psychoanalysis and the Theatrical: Analysing Performance." Emphasizing the complexities of subject formation within psychoanalysis, Wright situates postmodern theatre as a potential site of multiple identifications outside the conventional Western paradigm of the humanist Individual. Analyzing the performances work of Pina Bausch and Heiner Müller, Wright concludes that "the resulting conflict between subject and role testifies to the fact that what we are watching is the theatrical in everyday life: postmodern performance theatre explores the world as theatrically constructed, rather than the theatre as mirror of the world" (180).

The notable absence within this text of familiar theoretical tropes that characterize performance and theatre studies in the States will be of particular interest to American readers. Most obviously, the hotly contested relationship between performance and performativity goes relatively un(re)marked in this collection. As though perversely to provide an illustration of the historicized, contextual nature of discourse, to paraphrase Patrick Campbell in his introduction, *Analysing Performance* refuses the (particularly American, it would seem) distinction between performance and performativity. A close reading of this collection reveals that performance and performativity are conceptualized as "kind(s) of Becoming, or continuous emergence(s) of significance rather than a fixing or manifestation of Being" (Connor 115). Although marked by disparate disciplinary trajectories, performance/theatre studies and performativity/speech act theory are not considered distinct intellectual and creative activities. Quoting Handke's *Offending the Audience*, Connor encapsulates this position: "We express ourselves by speaking. Our speaking is our acting. By speaking, we become theatrical. We are theatrical because we are speaking in a theatre" (26). While a position that assumes the radical interdependence of theatre and politics, theory and praxis and performance and performativity may be arguable, it does offer a model of performance analysis and criticism refreshingly free of the stultifying binaries that can paralyze performance and theatre studies.

*Analysing Performance* is an often brilliant, somewhat uneven, critical reader in performance. Its greatest success is the extent to which it troubles conventional boundaries between disciplines, mediums, theoretical and methodological frameworks and, perhaps most significantly, between what is considered a success and what is considered a failure in terms of political performance.

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*Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays.* Editor: Jonathan Allison. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. ISBN 0-472-10445-4.

The title of this collection of critical essays calls attention to the difficulty implicit in any attempt to determine W. B. Yeats's political sympathies. Few writers resort to contradiction as much as Yeats; fewer still shape their nations with their words and images to the degree that Yeats has affected Ireland. The critique of canonical Modernists as sexist fascists has become old hat. But the question concerning Yeats persists, due to both the impossibility of fixing his ideological position(s) and the continued strength of his influence. Editor Jonathan Allison's introduction offers the reader a brief history of the "revisionist" strain in Yeats studies, which explores the "ideological resonances, implications, and contexts" of Yeats's texts (2). Thankfully, Allison does not choose sides. Indeed, the perspectives gathered together in *Yeats's Political Identities* stimulate the Yeats debate through their variety.

Because of Yeats's active role in the formation of the Irish nation-state, his views were controversial in his own time. But the centenary of his birth, in 1965, provoked a renewal of critical attention to the ideological implications of his writings. Leading the case against Yeats was Conor Cruise O'Brien, whose essay of that year, "Passion and Cunning," is excerpted. While O'Brien concedes that Yeats's death in 1939 prevented his awareness of Fascism's capacity for atrocity, he argues that Yeats was "attracted to Fascism as the best available form of anti-democratic theory and practice" (40). O'Brien supports his claim (in this excerpt) with passages from letters and poetry by Yeats. Only a passing reference to *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and an anecdotal footnote citing a dispute over Yeats's desire to stage *Coriolanus* at the Abbey ("for purposes of 'Fascist propaganda'" [54]) relate ideology to dramatic and theatrical work. Elsewhere, O'Brien stresses precisely this relation, but Allison includes this only bibliographically.

Sadly, the same holds for much of *Yeats's Political Identities*. Those interested primarily in the dramatic texts and theatrical practice of Yeats will be disappointed to find scant reference to either in the eighteen essays (plus introduction) gathered by Allison. It is strange to focus on the reflections of lyric poetry or private correspondence, at the expense of the necessarily more communal expressions to be found in Yeats's dramatic and theatrical legacy. Yeats was arguably more politically engaged as Manager of the Abbey Theatre than he was as a Senator of the Free State. Yeats himself questioned the political consequences of his dramatic work in the famous couplet from "Man and the Echo": "Did that play of mine send out/Certain men the English shot?"

The passages in *Yeats's Political Identities* which do address the plays and theatre work are rewarding. Seamus Deane, in his "Yeats and the Idea of Revolution" (1985), explores the "strange opacity" of *A Full Moon in March* as a "ritual enactment of Yeats's version of the Irish revolution" (141). Deane views the Queen's dance before the decapitated head of the Swineherd as a resolution of the antinomies of aristocrat and peasant. This leads Deane to conclude that Yeats's "so-called fascism is, in fact, an almost pure specimen of the colonialist mentality" (142).

In "Yeats and Antithetical Nationalism" (1991), Hazard Adams refuses the leftist oversimplification of Yeats as an Anglo-Irish Fascist, as well as the aestheticizing defense of Yeats which ignores his politics. For Adams, the issue at stake is not Fascism but nationalism, and that Yeats sought not to choose or reconcile opposing views, but "to keep alive the dynamics of contrariety, to oppose the tyranny of order" (321). This is the poet's proper role, and *The King's Threshold* dramatizes the "moment when the poet is driven out of official power into antitheticality" (321). Adams notes that Yeats changed the ending, from an earlier version in which the poet triumphs, to support this antithetical politics/poetics. Yeats's eventual disillusion with the Abbey (as it achieved popularity), and his attempts at a more exclusive and experimental theatre, are in line with this antitheticality.

The interpretation of *Purgatory* is central to Ronald Bush's contribution, "The Modernist Under Siege." He shows the limitations of W. J. McCormack's Marxist reading of the play as an example of a false historical consciousness. For McCormack, the play represents a modernist wishing away of history; the Old Man's murder of his son is read as a fascist "ritual moment of social purification" (329). Through examining Yeats's drafts of *Purgatory*, Bush argues against any reading which reduces the play to a "consistent ideology" (331). Rather, Bush suggests, "the play dramatizes the conflicting intellectual positions of its author, and, as in most of Yeats's work, its essential power flows out of that very real intellectual drama" (331).

While *A Full Moon in March*, *The King's Threshold*, and *Purgatory* are the only plays to receive more than parenthetical mention in this collection, other essays will certainly appeal to those interested in that side of Yeats. Richard Kearney's discussion of the sacrificial mythologizing of the Irish nationalist uprising and Seamus Heaney's reflection on the death of Yeats both stand out as essays which warrant further attention. For those interested in the political aspects of Yeats's poetry and personality, this collection offers a comprehensive introduction. While the wealth of material on this subject makes a complete treatment an impossibility, Jonathan Allison does well to bring together several of the most significant critical works from radically disparate perspectives. Spanning more than three decades of this ongoing debate, *Yeats's Political Identities* is an indispensable contribution to Yeats scholarship.

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*"A Man Who Does Not Exist": The Irish Peasant in the Work of W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge.* Deborah Fleming. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995. ISBN 0-472-10581-7.

One might expect a book about two of the leading figures in the development of the Irish theatre at the turn of the century to concentrate on the artistic medium in which both played important roles. But Fleming's title, discussing the "work" of the two men, means what it says, and theatre scholars should be aware that Yeats's poetry and Synge's prose come in for a good deal more analysis here than the drama of either man. This is not a criticism of the book, of course, and it is only fair to note that the plays do receive considerably more attention than might be suggested by the curiously-constructed index, which lists pages on which a work's title is mentioned rather than those on which the work is discussed. Still, one gets the sense that this book does not entirely cohere, that the analyses of Yeats and Synge are parallel strands that are never woven into a single critical work.

Similarly, the "postcolonial perspective" promised on the dust jacket is realized only in fits and starts. There is a fair amount of theoretical scaffolding erected in the early part of the book, but the analysis itself shies away from theory except as the roughest of contexts against and through which to read the works in question. To my mind, the book is none the worse for this, but those seeking a more theorized articulation of ideas will no doubt find Fleming's work wanting

in this regard. More to the point, perhaps, the Appendix, subtitled "The Irish Peasants," provides a coherent, balanced representation of the historical status of the Irish peasantry. But the charge of "overstat[ing] the religious homogeneity of both landowning class and tenant population and underestimat[ing] the complexity of the land system," (188) levelled here by Fleming against a nineteenth-century commentator, applies, alas, to the foundation of much of Fleming's argumentation, as well.

The fundamental premise of the book, that both Yeats and Synge constructed fictive images of the Irish peasant, is undeniable. That they did so in order "that their readers might continue to believe in national culture and the imaginative power of the ideal" (75) is more than plausible. That their different means to a similar end suggest that the ideological and cultural differences between the two men were perhaps greater than has previously been understood is at least arguable. But the idea that Yeats and Synge were incapable of understanding peasant culture because they had not grown up in it (182) is more problematic. Indeed, the rather sweeping generalizations based on (especially) class constitute the book's primary weakness. This is unfortunate not merely in its own terms, but also because such overstatements obscure the cogency of much of Fleming's analysis. That is, throughout the book Fleming does an especially good job of articulating, for instance, the complex relationship between Yeats and class: his linking of the peasantry with the aristocracy (a common enough motif since the days of Robin Hood, but more explicit in Yeats than in most other writers of his time), his romanticizing of peasant culture with all the admiration and condescension that accrue to such a project, and so on. And it is no doubt accurate, if a little glib, to say that "he was anti-middle class in the most middle-class way" (74). But the legitimacy of the argument is seriously undermined by Fleming's next sentence, which begins, "Like all middle-class people . . .". To say that such over-generalizations run rampant through the book would be an exaggeration: but they occur to such a degree, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that the reader comes to question all of the author's conclusions, even those which are linked to their evidence by a more careful line of analysis.

Similarly, the reader will likely weary of seeing the same few points repeated rather than expanded from chapter to chapter. And the conclusions are often rather abrupt: for instance, a criticism of Synge for the ease with which the once-blind beggars Martin and Mary Doul in *The Well of the Saints* recognize color, physical attributes, etc., would be much stronger if Fleming were to contemplate, if only to dismiss as irrelevant, the notion that not all blind people are born that way.

For all its flaws, however, this book does at least represent an attempt to contextualize Yeats and Synge within social, political, economic and religious

environments. It calls attention to the fact that Yeats and Synge, though friends and colleagues, were not interchangeable in terms of their respective relationships to their milieu. It underscores (if sometimes accidentally) the problems inherent in viewing any culture as monolithic. And it provides often cogent analysis of some of the lesser-known works (in particular) of two of the most significant figures in the Irish Literary Renaissance. So while this volume is not a "must read" for the average critic or historian of the theatre, considerable portions of it will prove useful to those with a particular interest in Irish drama, cultural studies, and the representation of class in art.

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*American Dark Comedy. Beyond Satire.* Wes D. Gehring. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997. ISBN 0-313-26184-9.

In *The Stunt Man*, a 1980 film, Peter O'Toole plays an egocentric movie director who audaciously claims that "If God could do the tricks we can do, he'd be a happy man" (36). The presumed unhappiness of God—and humankind—and our absurdly futile attempts to face the catastrophes of existence might not at first seem the most likely subject for comedy. Satire and "dark comedy" provide an effective means of surviving by seeking the humor in the bleakest corners of existence. Wes D. Gehring's *American Dark Comedy. Beyond Satire* is excellent for several reasons, but not the least of which because he covers this ground so effectively, from nineteenth century literary and theatrical sources to the cinema of the twentieth century. The result is an engaging multi-tiered riff on "comic irreverence that flippantly attacks what are normally society's most sacredly serious subjects—especially death" (1). Gehring most clearly states his thesis on dark comedy when he writes that "This man-made absurdity is the result of both general species incompetency and its perpetuation in human institutions" (xii).

Gehring, the author of several Greenwood Press bio-bibliographies (Charlie Chaplin, W.C. Fields, Laurel and Hardy, and the Marx Brothers), as well as other studies of humorist Robert Benchley, the genre of screwball comedy, director Leo McCarey, and Groucho Marx, is almost uniquely suited to the task he has set out in *American Dark Comedy*. Gehring creates a foundation for his theory of the development of American satire through an examination of the literary beginnings in such works as Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* (1857), Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1902), Erich Remarque's *All*

*Quiet on the Western Front* (1928), and Humphrey Cobb's *Paths of Glory* (1935), as well as numerous contemporary works. Gehring believes that the crushed dreams of the "lost generation" of World War I, followed by the catastrophes of the Second World War, the horror of the Holocaust, the dropping of the atomic bomb, and the tragic escalation of the Vietnam War, produced, as David M. Davis has written, "an invitation for black comedy" (14).

Following the establishment of the literary and philosophical background, Gehring continues through five subsequent chapters to examine particular motion pictures that play out the central themes identified. Chapter Two, "Selected American Dark Comedy: Films and Themes," wisely focuses on two masters of anarchic screen comedy, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, and their vivid establishment of what Gehring describes as a comically human battle against death. Since he has previously written on Chaplin, Gehring is particularly articulate on Chaplin's work. Much attention is focused on one of the least typical of Chaplin's feature-length films, *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), which, along with *The Great Dictator* (1940), is one of the master's darkest works. Gehring astutely writes that "here was cinema's most memorable comedy artist—then and now—abandoning film's all-time most beloved character [The Little Tramp] for an engaging yet undeniable murderer. This was a great artist pushing the envelope, refusing to play it safe" (25). From this point on, Chaplin emerges as Gehring's touchstone by which myriad developments of dark comedy are measured.

Chapter Three, "Dismantling Dictators: 'Marxist' and Otherwise," narrows the focus to three particular films that, in Gehring's view, present "misguided leaders and the inevitability of the wars which follow them" (xvi). These are The Marx Brothers' legendary *Duck Soup* (1933), directed by Leo McCarey; Chaplin's aforementioned *The Great Dictator*, in which he satirically impersonates Adolph Hitler; and, Ernst Lubitsch's classic *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), all of which brilliantly demonstrate Gehring's point. From Groucho, who goes to war for the formidable Margaret Dumont, to Chaplin's savage assault on Hitler and Lubitsch's wackily romantic tale of a broken-down Polish theatrical troupe escaping the Nazis, this triumverate is convincingly revealed as pivotal examples of a uniquely American brand of satiric comedy that came to full flower in Stanley Kubrick's searing *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), among others.

In Chapter Four, "Coming of Age . . . With a Vengeance," Gehring surveys numerous youth culture films, with particular emphasis on such seemingly diverse efforts as *Harold and Maude* (1972), *Heathers* (1989), and *Natural Born Killers* (1994). Cynicism about the "rules" of society—or the failure of society to live within its own articulated values—are a common link connecting these quite different movies. The point is made most effectively by the elderly "Maude"

(played memorably by Ruth Gordon) in *Harold and Maude*, who states, "It's best not to be too moral. You cheat yourself out of too much life. Aim above morality. If you apply that to life then you're bound to live it fully" (91). The flouting of morality—and the transgressive nature of this extended type of satire—is a significant common bond among the works examined.

Gehring is at his best in Chapter Five, "When Film Noir Becomes Dark Comedy." Here he lucidly describes the two separate genres and the points where they intersect, often to striking effect, as in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), and Robert Altman's *The Player* (1996). Tracing the roots of film noir in the post-World War II existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, Gehring proposes that film noir expresses "the botched American success story" (135) and depicts the isolated man or woman in an unfriendly and random universe. This, in the author's view, is the significant point of contact between film noir and dark comedy traditions as Gehring describes them. These works, which also include *M.A.S.H.* (1970), *Catch-22* (1970), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Network* (1976), *Prizzi's Honor* (1985), and *Raising Arizona* (1987), he posits, "seem best posed to meet the dark comedy needs of today" (162).

In the sixth and final chapter, Gehring brings closure to his arguments by taking the reader back to the place he began—with the necessity of discovering a comic view of the harrowing absurdity of existence in order to survive. Amusingly noting George Orwell's assessment of H. G. Wells ("Wells is too sane to understand the modern world" [xvii]), Gehring concludes by stressing the Orwellian notion that the shock of existence can only be absorbed by the buffers of the comic sensibility so amply provided in the examples Gehring presents.

*American Dark Comedy* features a useful selected filmography, but one wishes that the author had expanded the comparatively brief selected bibliography to more fully cover the voluminous materials on related subjects. However, that might require another whole book. There are fifteen illustrations included in the text, from Edvard Munch's "The Shriek" (1896) to stills from several of the movies discussed at length in the text. More illustrations would enhance this book, but otherwise it is a potent assessment and accounting of the frequently overlooked value of comedy which, at its best, can take us to the brink of tragedy easily as well as that more honored form does.

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*American Drama: The Bastard Art*. Susan Harris Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-521-56384-4.

One might well imagine that a book chronicling the history of American drama studies in U. S. colleges and universities might result in a bland recitation of names and dates, but Susan Harris Smith strikes a note of lurid intensity with the first lines of her book, and sustains it to the end. American drama, we are told, is a canary gasping for air "in the mine shaft of American literary and cultural studies" (1). The book is a passionate, even melodramatic narrative, telling of a "bastard art" that has been "buried alive" (11), subjected to innumerable slights and persecutions for centuries by a hostile multitude—from Puritans to the New Critics, from PMLA to *The New York Times*. "Did She Jump or Was She Pushed?" reads one chapter heading on American drama studies, darkly insinuating that the field has met a sordid and untimely end. In the course of the book, such celebrated figures as Henry James, John Gassner, Joseph Wood Krutch, Lionel Trilling, Eric Bentley, Harold Clurman, Robert Brustein and Ruby Cohn are all taken to task for contributing to the marginalized state of American drama in collegiate departments of English. (Throughout the volume, American drama is so roundly and relentlessly persecuted I could not help but recall a line from *All About Eve*—"she had everything but bloodhounds snappin' at her rear end").

If you have thought that some of the figures on the above list were not only supporters of American drama, but contributors to it, you first need to understand Smith's grounds for complaint. First, she believes, and convincingly demonstrates, that American drama has tended to be slighted in comparisons with its European counterpart. Secondly, she believes that an emphasis on production has encouraged that slight. Her definition of drama is literary; she argues for "the primacy of the literary text in the study of dramatic literature" (199). For that reason, the growth of Theatre departments and courses in theatrical production have necessarily damaged the cause of serious study of drama as a literary form. Thus, it should come as no surprise that George Pierce Baker emerges as one the villains of the piece. She notes with disdain his movement from dramatic literature to production, including courses in design, and relishes the way lighting effects overwhelmed his pageant, *The Pilgrim Spirit*, as appropriate poetic justice for a writer who compromised with production. She sniffs with disapproval at the collegiate hiring of theatre professionals without academic degrees. Drama is a literary form and can only be taught by appropriately credentialed (i.e., literary) scholars.

This prejudice leads to serious imbalances. Smith painstakingly demonstrates the low status suffered by all non-Shakespearian drama in English

departments. Her care and thoroughness in this area is exemplary. But when she turns to Theatre departments, we are met with bald presupposition. One never learns, for example, how much American drama is taught in Theatre departments. Indeed, Smith seems to assume that very little learning of any kind happens in Theatre departments. She takes for granted that performance can only thrive at the expense of critical sophistication. She not only ignores courses in dramatic literature frequently taught in American Theatre departments, but also assumes that the rehearsal hall, and the acting, directing and design class are necessarily inimical to intellectual rigor and critical sophistication. She reveals an embarrassing naivete about theatrical production when she asserts that "a production is, after all, no more than a director's enacted interpretive reading of the script and a designer's imaginative visualization of the setting" (16). Not only does this model prove sadly inadequate for such innovative directors as Ann Bogart, Robert Wilson, and Tadeusz Kantor, but it fails to do justice to the myriad of complex negotiations in any collaborative art form. Smith's total effacement of the actor's contribution reveals her literary bent; the director is the equivalent of a scholar who produces an interpretation, and the actors are apparently nothing more than the keys on the word processor. The further one moves from written text, it seems, the further one moves from meaning and agency.

How, then, can Smith sustain her indignation at her anti-theatrical colleagues in English who lack respect for her field of study, when her entire enterprise is marked with a loathing for the theatrical? This volume revels in the privileging of the written word over all other forms of expression. While Smith is most adept at targeting the marginalizing activities of her colleagues in relationship to her field, she is completely blind to how her critical stance marginalizes others. Writing/Speaking, Academy/Theatre, Scholar/Practitioner, Non-Commercial/Commercial, Intellect/Emotion, Instruction/Entertainment—in each binary, the first element is extolled, the second, vilified. It is surprising that Smith, who is so fervent in her attacks on elitism, is oblivious to how her dichotomies reproduce a very familiar hierarchy, in which the English professor is at the top of the ladder, the acting teacher further down, and the production manager near the bottom. This elitism also manifests itself in the author's total contempt for Broadway. She can embrace a minstrel show with antiquarian enthusiasm, but the very idea of teaching *Harvey* provokes a sneer from her. The traditional hierarchy is not radically questioned by such reflexes, but merely re-arranged.

Indeed, when Smith finally puts forth her proposal for a re-thinking of drama studies in American colleges, and calls for a radical interdisciplinarity, one wonders how her insistence on the primacy of the written word could actually

accommodate such studies. While Smith's presentation of Theatre programs is cursory, her presentation of Performance programs is non-existent. Smith sketches out an academic world that she says is crippled by a division between drama and theatre, and ignores the serious work done in many programs to bridge that gap. Smith seems absolutely unaware that the person who teaches dramatic literature and playwriting, directing or acting is not an oddity. She completely ignores the development of the dramaturg as a person especially trained to mediate between the realms of drama and theatre. Sadly limited by her unwillingness to look much beyond her position in an English department, she can only reprise tired debates about literature versus performance.

*American Drama: The Bastard Art* is a curious document. It is an well-researched analysis of the development of institutionalized anti-theatricalism in many English departments in this country, but it is itself so completely implicated in the intellectual presuppositions of the structure that it criticizes that its critique falls far short of the mark. At the best, the book reads like a bold shot across the bow of English department complacency; at its worst, it reads like one more tired and humorless attempt of an English department to defend old turf.

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