BOOK REVIEWS
EDITED BY EDWARD ZITER


Reviewed by Ananda Lal, Jadavpur University

There are few dependable books in English on political theatre in India. Professor Bhatia’s collection of essays, therefore, fills a long-felt need. She introduces the subject contextually, followed by four chapters chronologically examining key areas (British censorship of nationalistic drama, Indianizations of Shakespeare as an anticolonial statement, the Indian People’s Theatre Association as a mass phenomenon in the mid-twentieth century, and Utpal Dutt’s reinterpretation of Raj history in his play The Great Rebellion 1857), and concludes with a short epilogue on contemporary activist theatre by women. Most valuably for theatre historians, she places in the public domain many primary sources previously untapped in English, and unearths much secondary material that has escaped academic attention. Not least of all, she writes articulately and readably.

Bhatia’s introduction attacks the scholarly bypassing of theatre and the privileging of fiction, especially “for a recovery of dissenting voices.” She rightly points out that the novel “is (inappropriately) seen as the appropriate form and object of study for an analysis of postcolonial literatures” (4; her emphasis). That approach becomes all the more untenable for India with its low literacy rates—even lower in the nineteenth century. Most critics also forget that literacy first reached the elite, a class often compromised by relations with religious and political power; it trickled down slowly and much later. Moreover, we must consider the antitheatrical prejudice that influenced administrators, commentators, and society in that period, as it did all parts of the world at various times. It independently confirms the subversive nature of theatre.

In tracing the backdrop to proscenium theatre in India, Bhatia relies almost exclusively on happenings in Calcutta. Granted, the British made the city their headquarters, but references to parallel developments in Bombay and Madras would have bolstered her thesis. She ignores south India and gives no details of the hybridized forms that grew on the west coast in four languages: English, Gujarati, Marathi, and Hindustani/Urdu. She also glosses over Herasim Lebedeff, the mysterious Russian who pioneered an alternative Bengali theatre in Calcutta in 1795. He catered to a native, not sahib audience, and was the first to employ native actresses. Indeed, Lebedeff was the first genuine radical of colonial theatre. Bengali historians believe that the British, threatened by his success, conspired to discredit him and destroyed his playhouse by arson; Bhatia could have consulted Chittaranjan Ghosh’s play Lebedeff. Evidently, she does not know Bengali, which becomes a handicap since she deals so much with Bengali theatre. On the other hand, the archival articles in English that she rediscovers
include many valuable early accounts, such as one from the *Asiatic Journal* of 1837.

Despite Bhatia’s lack of Bengali, her chapter on the Dramatic Performances Act (1876) meticulously describes the circumstances behind its imposition and Indian theatre’s response to it. She illustrates the use of interpolations and improvised gags to circumvent the law, and observes that the clever reinvention of mythological drama not only disguised overt protest but also returned respectability to theatre by its choice of religious matter—and in turn encouraged nascent Hindu supremacist ideology, which now afflicts India. The landmark text and banner play in this history, Dinabandhu Mitra’s *Nil Darpan*, receives in-depth treatment, though one expected some analysis of the author’s personal background: As an employee in the Imperial Postal Service, Mitra must have felt endangered by the possible consequences of what he wrote.

As an exception, the chapter on Shakespearean adaptations covers mostly non-Bengali theatre in the Marathi, English, and Hindi traditions, suggesting that such regional appropriations disrupted the “singularity” and “universality” attributed to the Bard by the British. Ironically enough, by the time Bhatia concludes with two recent Bengali and Manipuri versions of *Macbeth*, she has actually proved Shakespeare’s universal applicability in terms of content. Curiously, she gives short shrift to Parsi theatre—the one enterprise that gloriously transmogrified bardolatry by marrying Shakespeare’s plays with Asian legends, conflating his plots, and converting them into spectacular musical extravaganzas. The scripts of this commercial touring repertoire deserved very close reading, particularly owing to Bhatia’s familiarity with their language. She also offers a somewhat lame excuse for not discussing the many Indian films of Shakespearean lineage: “their lack of availability and circulation within the metropolis” (68). The same difficulties did not deter her from documenting theatre.

Coming to theatre during the Independence movement and after, Bhatia investigates the genesis of the leftist Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) and does a service by reconstructing its early productions in Bombay in 1942. However, she assumes that high realism characterized urban Indian theatre in this period, against which IPTA’s *Nabanna* (1943) rebelled. Stage realism never touched naturalistic heights in India, where the dominant anti-illusionistic and melodramatic idioms always modified any realistic innovations. In fact, most Indian authorities credit IPTA with establishing truly realistic drama. Bhatia even quotes one such scholar without apparently recognizing the contradiction. She cites Balwant Gargi’s description of IPTA: “Their movements, gestures, expressions and speech had no theatricality; it was as real as the street scenes we experience daily. These faces were familiar to us in the poor quarters of Lahore. . . . [T]hey mirrored Indian life, the poverty and suffering under the heel of a foreign power” (86).

The thinnest chapter is on the Bengali revolutionary dramatist-director Utpal Dutt, because Bhatia has no access to Bengali scholarship about his work—a little like researching Brecht without understanding German. Thus, she
mistakenly thinks that his “choice of performing the play [The Great Rebellion in 1973] in Bengali was significant, representing . . . Dutt’s defiance of the colonial language in which he was educated” (107). Nothing of the sort; Dutt decided to switch to Bengali theatre as early as 1953, and never returned to theatre in English afterward.

Bhatia’s linguistic problem spills over into spellings as well. She erroneously transliterates some Bengali names according to their north Indian equivalents: Swami Vivekananda becomes “Vivekanand,” Amrita Bazar Patrika becomes “Amrit.” Other wrong transcriptions include “Yudhishtir” for Yudhishthir, “Bhasha” for Bhasa, “Jyotindra” for Jyotirindra Tagore, and “Bijana Bhattacaryara” for Bijon Bhattacharya. Mistranslated words occur, too, like tarabari (sword), rendered as “crusade.” Notwithstanding these discrepancies, the book is a worthy addition to the slender shelf on Indian theatre.

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Reviewed by Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., Loyola Marymount University

One of the greatest challenges to teaching world theatre history in the United States is that the vast majority of survey history books spend two dozen chapters on the theatre of the West, giving the theatres of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East a single chapter each at best. In addition, there have to date been no comprehensive histories of African theatre covering the entire continent, Africa north of the Sahara being linked for cultural reasons with the Middle East instead of geographically with the rest of the continent. A History of Theatre in Africa, edited by the pioneer of African-theatre scholarship, Martin Banham, is an excellent, if uneven, redressing of those imbalances.

This volume, whose contributors are “indigenous to the areas of Africa they are discussing or who have significant experience within the region,” presents eighteen essays in ten sections covering all areas of the continent to varying degrees of depth (xvi). The fact that some of the foremost scholar-practitioners from each nation are the contributors several times results in their writing about themselves and their own work in a larger historical context. Beginning with a brief preface by Banham, which promises that the volume will demonstrate the complexity, coherence, continuities and discontinuities, and diversity of performance on the entire continent—and observing that the terms “history,” “Africa,” and “theatre” are themselves sites of contested meaning, and seeking to define them as open-ended as possible for this volume—the book then offers an introductory essay by Kole Omotoso on “Concepts of History and Theatre in Africa,” which is useful for viewing the other pieces in the volume.

Ahmed Zaki provides an epochal history of theatre in Egypt, moving from the Pharaonic period to the Greco-Roman period through the subsequent
The presences of Christianity and Islam, finally arriving in the modern period. In
contrast, Kamal Salhi’s piece on Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—a piece as much
theoretical as it is historical—considers Arabic and French influences, as well
as indigenous paradigmatic performance forms and street performances. He
explores the complex relation between Islam and performance. A brief essay on
theatre of the Sudan by Khalid Almubarak Mustafa completes the section on
North Africa.

The next section, an exploration by John Conteh-Morgan of the theatre of
Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, represents a condensation, updating, and
complement to his excellent book-length study of the subject. Conteh-Morgan
explores the contested nature of the term “Francophone Africa,” and the
difficulty of using it as a marker of any real meaning when it refers to twenty-
one different nations. Conteh-Morgan divides theatre into the “recreational,”
(emphasizing “mimesis”) and the “devotional” (emphasizing “methexis”), and
proceeds to consider the theatres of a variety of nations such as Mali, the Ivory
Coast, and Madagascar from this model. This chapter is thus more of a
comparative essay than a history of the individual nations involved.

In the section on Anglophone West Africa, Dapo Adelugba, Olu Obafemi,
and Sola Adeyemi provide one of the most comprehensive overviews of theatre
in Nigeria from its precolonial period to the present. By contrast, James Gibb’s
subsequent chapter on Ghana focuses mostly on recent developments in
postcolonial theatre with a nod to the indigenous cultural traditions. Short but
valuable pieces on the theatre of Sierra Leone and the Anglophone theatre of
Cameroon by Mohamed Sheriff and Asheri Kilo, respectively, represent a huge
leap forward on English-language scholarship on these nations.

Jane Plastow presents a competent and informative overview of the theatre
of Ethiopia and Eritrea. The section contains an essay on Kenyan theatre by
Ciarunji Chesaina and Evan Mwangi and essays on Tanzanian and Ugandan
theatre by Amandina Lihambra and Eckhard Breitinger, respectively. David Kerr
covers “Southern Africa,” which includes Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, Namibia,
Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland. South Africa is covered in
a separate essay by Yvette Hutchinson.

Luís R. Mitras follows in Conteh-Morgan’s linguistic footsteps in an essay
about theatre in Portuguese-speaking Africa, five nations that Mitras divides into
continental nations (Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique) and island
nations (Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe), arguing that the latter, as
Creole cultures, have more in common with Brazil than with the continental
nations. Mitras also offers the historical survey approach, covering the
precolonial period to 2001. Roshni Mooneeram closes out the study of the
continent with a survey of the theatres of Mauritius and Réunion, which have
“no indigenous populations and . . . histories of settlement that go back a mere
few hundred years,” but which have a rich history of protest theatre (405).

The final essay in the book, by Osita Okagbue, concerns theatre in the
African diaspora. Called “Surviving the Crossing,” the piece purports to be two
things: “an examination of the contributions made by African cultures in the
creation of Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American cultures in the Caribbean and
South America, and an assessment of the influences on and the manifestations of these cultures in the performances and theatres of the Caribbean and South America”—which is a tall order for a mere seventeen pages, when entire books are dedicated to the same purpose (430–1). Even more troubling though is the conspicuous absence of North America. If the concern is to survey the history of African theatrical influence outside of Africa, why ignore African-American and Afro-Caribbean culture without even giving an explanation for the exclusion?

Overall, *A History of African Theatre* represents a welcome addition to African-theatre scholarship. Despite the unevenness of the essays and the inconsistency in style of the approaches to each area (historical versus contemporary survey, including versus excluding precolonial practice, geographic versus linguistic organization, etc.), which may not necessarily even be a drawback, the book has great value for both the scholar of African theatre and the student approaching the continent for the first time. In fact, the greatest problem with the volume is its prohibitive price tag, which virtually guarantees it will not be used in the very classrooms where it is needed most and would do the most good. This book is a textbook disguised (and priced) as a reference book, which is a shame.

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**Kazuo Ohno’s World from Without and Within.** By Kazuo Ohno and Yoshito Ohno. Translated by John Barrett. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004; pp. 344. $34.95 paper.

Reviewed by Kurt Wurmli, *University of Hawai‘i at Manoa*

Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata are recognized as the most influential creators of the contemporary Japanese dance form known today as butoh. Since its wild and avant-garde beginnings in the late 1950s, butoh has evolved into an established and appreciated art form throughout the world. Despite its popularity and strong influences on the international modern dance world, butoh only recently became an accepted subject for academic research in Japan as well as in the West. With the new opening of butoh research centers and archives—such as the Ohno Dance Studio Archives at BANK ART 1929 in Yokohama, the Kazuo Ohno Archives at Bologna University in Italy, and the Hijikata Tatsumi Archives at Keio University in Tokyo—serious scholarly attention has been given to the art of butoh’s founders. However, the lack of firsthand sources by butoh artists reflecting their own work still poses great limitations for a deep understanding of the art form. *Kazuo Ohno’s World from Without and Within* is not only the first full-length book in English about the master’s life and work, but also offers a rare inside view of butoh.

The book is divided into two main parts. Part I, “Food for the Soul,” by Yoshito Ohno, was originally published in Japanese as *Tamashii no Kate* (Tokyo: Film Art Sha, 1999). “Food for the Soul” is a series of Yoshito’s personal observations, experiences, and reflections of his father’s life and work compiled
in four thematically arranged chapters. Chapter 1, as the title “The Dancing Body” indicates, explores Kazuo Ohno’s approach to, and use and understanding of, the body and its different parts as a medium for creating art. Chapter 2, “Performance,” elaborates on dance concepts such as falling, standing, fluidity, femininity, and masculinity. Chapter 3, “Beginnings and Family Life,” shows the importance and influence of everyday life in the making of Kazuo Ohno’s dance and career. Chapter 4, “Admiring La Argentina,” reveals the origins, magic, and secrets of Kazuo Ohno’s signature performance, La Argentina Sho, which led him to world fame. These four chapters constitute the most instructive writings to date on Kazuo Ohno’s dance. The only aspect one might miss would be a separate chapter on, or more attention to, Ohno Kazuo’s choice and use of music.

Yoshito Ohno’s reflections on his father’s dance and life in “Food for the Soul” are the result of a lifelong intimate symbiosis. Ohno does not, as one might expect, describe his father’s work in an analytical or academic manner. Instead, “Food for the Soul” offers a close and rich inside view into Kazuo Ohno’s personal world of dreams, creations, and performances. The intimate and personal impressions gained from “Food for the Soul” are at least as important as the examination of eventual existing kata. It also provides detailed information on circumstances and contexts, which enable us to better appreciate this art form. Yoshito Ohno, an established performer and teacher in his own right, was also a close disciple of Tatsumi Hijikata from the very beginnings of butoh. His firsthand experiences of performing side by side with Hijikata in early performances, such as Kinjiki and Bara Iro Dansu, and subsequent years of exposure to the genre are all present in “Food for the Soul,” serving to set Kazuo Ohno’s world in a larger context.

Part II, “Workshop Words,” by Kazuo Ohno, was first published in Japanese as Keiko no Kotoba, also by Film Art Sha (Tokyo, 1997). “Workshop Words” presents a collection of 154 speeches or aphorisms given by Kazuo Ohno to students in his workshop studio over the past thirty years. The aphorisms are not in chronological order and are multifaceted in content and focus, addressing more than one theme or concern. However, the editors have chosen to divide the 154 aphorisms thematically into five different chapters. Chapter 1, “What Do You Mean When You Say, ‘I Understand’?,” includes speeches that explore the relationship between movement and soul and movement and intellect. In Chapter 2, “Please Just Do It; There’s Nothing I Can Teach You,” Kazuo Ohno reflects to a great extent on the importance of the way to approach dance in relation to motivation and technique. Chapter 3, “9 September 1989,” is a verbatim account of Kazuo Ohno’s speech given on that date in his studio in Kamihoshikawa. In this discourse he reflects intimately on his own art, touching on his affiliation with other artists, life and death, time and space, feelings and reality. Chapter 4, “Don’t Reveal Your Love,” treats the delicate interrelationship of the concept of love, in all its possible forms, with the creation of dance. Chapter 5, “The Wind Sweeping through My Soul,” addresses issues of the origins of one’s personal dance, the importance of the consciousness of the soul, and the inevitable affinity of past and future generations.
Though Kazuo Ohno’s teachings might seem vague at first glance, a thorough reading of the now available “Workshop Words” in its entirety reveals precise instructions on how to acquire the prerequisites for creating dance, which concern the consciousness and interrelationship of life and art. Since butoh does not have a generally defined form, or kata, one will not find concrete instructions on how to move. “Workshop Words” is by no means a handbook on how to dance butoh, but it offers a rare and unique way to approach and establish the essentials needed for one’s art to flourish.

A third part of Kazuo Ohno’s World from Without and Within, namely, the reproduction of some 150 photographs of Kazuo Ohno, deserves special attention. While those in “Food for the Soul” illustrate and visually support the text, in “Workshop Words” they are mainly anecdotal and not directly connected to the content. Nonetheless, viewed as an independent part of this book they paint a marvelous and kaleidoscopic image of Kazuo Ohno’s life as a performer and as a person. John Barrett’s translation is superb, especially if one considers the complex nature of the material and of Kazuo Ohno’s original poetic diction. The elaborate endnotes, also by Barrett, provide crucial background information, necessary for a thorough understanding of the text. Kazuo Ohno’s World from Without and Within is by far the most comprehensive and informative work on Kazuo Ohno available in English today, and belongs in the libraries of butoh artists and admirers, as well as theatre and dance scholars.

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Reviewed by Meenakshi Ponnuswami, Bucknell University

Gabriele Griffin’s study of black and Asian women playwrights in contemporary Britain fills a gap in British theatre studies. Although a comprehensive study of black British theatre has yet to see print, two developments have, in the past decade or so, begun to stimulate critical attention in the field. One is the publication of plays by black and Asian authors, including collections of plays exclusively by women (such as Khadija George’s edition of Six Plays by Black and Asian Women Writers of 1993), as well as the more systematic inclusion of works by writers such as Winsome Pinnock and Trish Cooke in anthologies of plays by new British dramatists. A second is the work of British cultural-studies scholars and sociologists during the same period, which has offered theatre historians some new approaches and challenges: Kobena Mercer’s Welcome to the Jungle (1994); Catherine Ugwu’s Let’s Get It On (1995); Baker et al.’s Black British Cultural Studies (1996); Heidi Mirza’s edited volume Black British Feminism (1997)—not to mention a vast body of work by Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, Paul Gilroy, and others. Still, as Griffin notes at the outset, while immigrant and second-generation novels and films have received
attention and accolades, black British theatre has tended to be ignored except by a handful of feminist theatre scholars.

That the time is ripe for Griffin’s study has also been made evident by the controversy over Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti’s Behzti in December 2004. Bhatti is a second-generation British Asian writer of Sikh descent whose play, performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, depicted the Sikh religious establishment as irremediably hypocritical, vicious, and corrupt. The production was canceled following mass protests; Bhatti went into hiding. However, the Rep plowed on, staging another potentially controversial play by another second-generation British Asian woman, Yasmin Whittaker Khan, whose exposé Bells (2005) condemns the exploitative sexual politics of courtesan houses exported from Pakistan.

Evidently, another wave of angry young artists has hit the British stage: second-generation black and Asian Britons, many of them women, out to unveil their elders as publicly as possible. (The poster for Behzti shows a woman defiantly holding up an enormous pair of underpants.) The plays Griffin discusses offer a richly multiethnic glimpse into the lives of immigrant and second-generation women in postimperial Britain. Her purpose seems anthropological rather than curatorial; she is less concerned with the preservation of important texts or the promotion of underestimated writers than with the importance of these works as a kind of ethnographic database, signposts of a nascent “diaspora space.” Griffin adopts this key concept from Avtar Brah’s influential Cartographies of Diaspora to explain that the multicultural space of contemporary Britain transforms natives and immigrants in equal measure. However, because “‘black’ is a constitutive part of the ‘Union Jack,’ as a metaphor for Britain,” Griffin argues that the theatre she discusses “does not . . . readily fit the categories of postcolonial, intercultural, or world theatre as these are currently understood, but should be viewed as part of British theatre now” (9).

Griffin’s approach is largely sociological, as the chapter topics suggest: “inhabiting diasporic spaces”; “re/turns to countries of origin by second-generation migrants”; “inter- and intra-racial differences”; “arranged marriages and polygamous households”; and the “racing of sexualities” (32–4). Her analyses are perceptive and persuasive, some exceptionally so, such as the discussions of Zindika’s Leonora’s Dance, Amrit Wilson’s Survivors, and Tanika Gupta’s Sanctuary (110–25, 224–31). The notion of the “diaspora space” as a place of mutual intercultural transformation occasionally gets lost, in part because the book’s particular focus naturally precludes the possibility of locating the blackness or Asianness of plays by white writers—and also because at least some plays declare an allegiance to British values by reproducing the binary of East and West that Griffin claims they destabilize.

If a “diaspora space” reshapes immigrants as well as natives, it might be interesting to consider whether it also transforms the institutions of native theatre or the aesthetics of native theatricality. However, although her book has been published (appropriately enough) in the series Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre, Griffin does not address the relevance of this material to
British theatre history. Griffin is also not concerned with the wider context of black and Asian British cultural history and politics from the 1960s onward, or the theatre of black and Asian men. Her book thus reminds us of the need for a comprehensive black British theatre history.

I have only one real dissatisfaction, which is that Griffin approaches the work with an apparent loyalty, a determination to reserve judgment. Her neutrality suits the archive-building nature of the project, and is perhaps inevitable given her critical standing in relation to “marginal” works by writers who are still “minor.” But Griffin accepts the ethnographic authority of the texts and authors somewhat unconditionally, never questioning their presuppositions or interpretations.

Griffin’s study is nonetheless valuable and significant. Black women’s theatre in Britain has a much longer and more complex history than is apparent from the published work, and she covers an astonishing variety of performance texts, many unpublished, while maneuvering a maze of languages, ethnicities, and religions. Like Stages in the Revolution, Catherine Itzin’s 1986 definitive guide to British fringe theatres, Griffin’s book is an important sourcebook and a map to what could well become a major movement in British theatre and performance.


Reviewed by Francesca Coppa, Muhlenberg College

Pity the scholar asked to review a biography of Kenneth Tynan; one finds oneself frantically searching one’s pockets for aphorisms, witticisms, or—at the very least—a shocking obscenity or two. After all, Tynan was the critic who so memorably dismissed a popular musical as “a world of woozy song”; met the question, “Who are the new English playwrights?” with the sarcastic rejoinder, “Who were the old ones?”; and who cried out for new playwrights to invade the British theatre because he would “rather be a war correspondent than a necrologist.” Then, of course, there is the famous first use of the word “fuck” on television and the staging of Oh, Calcutta! and the magnificent New Yorker profiles, not to mention the nearly singlehanded reshaping of British drama through the powerful combination of exhortation and satire. All in all, it is a lot for a reviewer to live up to, and while I have neither Tynan’s wit nor ability to provoke, I do find myself able to produce one single Tynanesque observation about Dominick Shellard’s Kenneth Tynan: A Life. This is that the book has been shockingly missubtitled.

The book should more properly be called Kenneth Tynan: A Context. Shellard’s book is not so much a biography as it is a history of postwar British theatre that uses Kenneth Tynan’s life as an organizing principle; in fact, Tynan is strangely absent for great chunks of the narrative. Shellard gives hardly any
details of Tynan’s Birmingham youth, his early hero-worship of famous film actors, or his developing interest in theatrical culture. Not in this book will you learn that the adolescent Tynan saw *Citizen Kane* multiple times, including once with his eyes closed to confirm that the film was an aural as well as a visual masterpiece. Nor will you read about Tynan’s early drama criticism as “KPT” at the King Edwards’ School or about the purple suits and polka-dotted shirts he wore at Oxford. In fact, Shellard passes up most of the famous Tynan stories, and more than once I was tempted to put the book down and rush to my bookshelf to confirm that I hadn’t invented these missing anecdotes.

It’s not just the “personal” Tynan who’s missing either; we lose sight of Tynan for pages at a time even during the height of his career as a critic. Shellard, the author of two volumes on Tynan’s competitor, the *Sunday Times* critic Harold Hobson, often seems at pains to demonstrate that some idea generally associated with Tynan was actually thought of by Hobson first, or at least simultaneously. Tynan therefore becomes only one critic among many, and the drama critics form only a small part of Shellard’s colorful theatrical landscape, which includes establishment figures like Olivier, Gielgud, Bagnold, Rattigan, Beaumont, and Tennant as well as new-wave talents like George Devine, Joan Plowright, Anthony Quayle, John Osborne, and Peter Hall. Shellard charts the battles, great and small, waged by those dynamic personalities: their arguments over the merits of particular productions, their crusades to establish institutions like the Royal Court and the National Theatre, their skirmishes over theatrical censorship and the worth of Brecht and Beckett. And those fights occur within a historical context also carefully explicated by Shellard: the national depression occasioned by Winston Churchill’s visible decline, the shock of Suez, the British reaction to American anticommunist paranoia, and the slow crisis of confidence faced by the Left.

And here, finally, we come to the great worth of the book; apparently Shellard, too, would rather be a war correspondent than a necrologist. This may just be another way of saying that Shellard is a better historian than he is a biographer; you can practically see him happily shoving pushpins into a map of London, marking the struggle to establish the English Stage Company, the beachhead for social realism gained by Osborne and Wesker, and the coming of new play after play like armed soldiers storming over a hill. If Tynan himself periodically vanishes from this narrative, the reader may be consoled by the fact that the world within which he lived is wonderfully and vibrantly drawn. Eventually a portrait of the critic does emerge—not from being painted directly, but as a silhouette revealed once the surrounding context has been supplied. The effect is rather like seeing a photographic negative where the subject is recognizable, but only in outline.

At various points in the book, Shellard reveals the reason for this highly contextual approach: He sees it as a corrective to a biographical narrative already (and wrongly) established by others. In discussing Tynan’s famous use of profanity on *BBC3*, Shellard laments, “From now on, [Tynan’s] huge contribution to the evolution of post-war British theatre would be overshadowed by his association with the word ‘fuck’, his involvement with *Oh, Calcutta!* and
the sad posthumous revelations . . . of his graphic sexual delight in spanking women.” Shellard adds, “Even Kathleen Tynan’s account of her husband’s life devotes barely 20 percent of its pages to his work as a theatre critic—the singular achievement of his life” (301). Shellard admits on the last page that his goal has been to shift the focus of Tynan’s story from “the flagellation and the star worship” back to dramatic “analysis and crusading” (350). This is a worthwhile goal, and no one who loves drama, dramatic criticism, or literature itself can disagree with Shellard’s last-paragraph assertion that having Tynan’s criticism out of print is a scandal. And yet, the misnamed Kenneth Tynan: A Life is more related to books like Dan Rebellato’s 1956 And All That or other works on postwar British culture by Robert Hewison or Alan Sinfield than to Tynan’s own biographical profiles. Although Tynan certainly believed, as Shellard notes, that “in theatre, context was everything” (236), it was also his particular gift to fall in love with the personalities of towering individuals and to be able to capture them in print.

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Reviewed by Mark Ringer, Marymount Manhattan College

Both Philip Freund’s The Birth of Theatre and Laurie O’Higgins’s Women and Humor in Classical Greece deal with Ancient Greek drama. Freund, a theatre historian, attempts a fairly comprehensive survey of both Greek and Roman drama as well as its influence on postclassical theatre, with particular emphasis on the past century. O’Higgins, a classicist, offers what at first glance appears a far narrower exploration that might only be of interest to other classicists. Of the two writers, it is O’Higgins who crafts a readable study that resonates well beyond its ostensibly narrow subject, whereas Freund’s book, geared toward a more general readership, is hampered by serious problems of presentation and organization that compromise his more ambitious work’s usefulness.

Laurie O’Higgins’s Women and Humor in Classical Greece explores the surviving or inferable traces of women’s joking speech within the cults surrounding Demeter and their influence on Greek literature. The first half of this well-written book will be of interest primarily to classicists, detailing aspects of Homeric Hymn and iambic poetry. The second half, however, contains an analysis of women both within the ancient audience and in comedy that should appeal to theatre historians. Recent Old Comedy scholarship, such as Lauren Taaffe’s Aristophanes and Women (1993) has focused on the issue of misogyny and the male control of female representation in the Greek theatre.
While these remain important issues, O’Higgins succeeds in putting women themselves back into Aristophanes’ work and the cultural forces that influenced his writing. She observes: “I suggest that his domestic knowledge of women’s conversation, his knowledge of the cultic exchanges in which women participated and, conceivably, his witnessing of men and women in Dionysiac cultic exchanges all contributed to an authorial experience that was more interactive, less self-referential, than we have imagined” (146).

O’Higgins positions “woman” both literally within the theatron audience as well as charting her representation throughout the course of Old Comedy’s development. O’Higgins offers fresh interpretation of the ambiguous evidence relating to whether women were in the audience for theatrical performances. She believes they were, citing persuasive circumstantial evidence from passages in Plato as well as from comedy texts themselves. Of particular interest is her citation of a fragment from Alexis’ Gynaikokratia, which “suggests that all women, except certain priestesses presumably, sat at the back in the last wedge of seats—but they were there.” The Alexis passage reads, “How we women have to sit in the very last wedge of seats (peri ten eschaten kerkida) to watch (theorein), just like foreign women (hos ksenas)” (138). From the back of the amphitheatre the women had not only a view of the spectacle in the orchestra but a bird’s-eye view of the spectacle of the male audience below them in the theatron. O’Higgins charts the course of female characters throughout the history of Old Comedy. She utilizes the fragmentary evidence very convincingly, detailing information on numerous lost plays without letting her narrative bog down. She consequently succeeds in restoring brief glimpses of lost dramatic literature.

The book’s high point, however, is O’Higgins’s analysis of Aristophanes’ two “women’s plays” of 411 b.c.e., Thesmophoriazousae and Lysistrata. Viewing the playwright not as a mere propagandizer of male hegemony—though he could certainly be that when he chose to—O’Higgins delineates a kinder, gentler Aristophanes giving voices to real women though his lines written for male actors to deliver. She suggests that Aristophanes’ plays “can be seen as the surviving part of an ongoing dialogue, albeit an unequal one” between the inhabitants of fifth-century Athens (146). In Thesmophoriazousae Aristophanes “echoes,” however ludicrously, “actual cultic themes and practices” (159). The play also “illustrates how the women’s cults functioned as a focal point of resistance to certain types of hegemonic discourse,” especially tragedy (160). O’Higgins views Lysistrata within the context of the developing profile of female characters throughout fifth-century comedy. She sees the play as “a turning point” in Old Comedy, signaling the genre’s growing interest in female characters as well as Aristophanes’ penchant for viewing his own female characters as a “shadow polis,” “a parallel world that he could use to discuss the city as a whole” (13). O’Higgins’s book offers sensitive insight into a complex subject that will stimulate classicists and theatre historians in general.

Philip Freund has worked for some thirty years to gather research for a monumental study of theatre history, the series Stage by Stage, to be published in three volumes. Freund’s series includes volumes on Asian theatre and the
medieval and Renaissance theatre. In the first volume, The Birth of Theatre, Freund clearly spells out his intended readership. The book “is not intended for perusal by other drama historians, of whom at most there are a handful, but for theatre people and the general reader who shares my interest in the . . . performing arts” (20). At a price of $80 and a length of more than eight hundred pages, one must be forgiven for wondering exactly who this “general” readership is. Freund’s target audience is “theatre lovers” and “thoughtful students and workers in the profession” (20). That said, the amateur and especially the “thoughtful students and professionals” deserve accurate information, and that is sorely lacking here. The bulk of Freund’s sources on the Greek theatre—derived from the body of his text itself since no bibliography is provided—are theatre generalists from the 1950s and 1960s. Most of the classicists mentioned are similarly antiquated, such as Murray and Kitto. The only relative newcomer is John Ferguson, whose Handbook on Greek Tragedy is quoted exhaustively. The results are unfortunately predictable. Freund informs the reader that fifth-century Athenian actors performed on a “raised platform.” The actors wore masks that had exaggeratedly high foreheads and with “brass megaphones” built in. They wore cothornoi, described as thick wooden shoes that “elevated them” (54–5). All of this is seriously outdated information based on earlier generations of historians’ confusion of Hellenistic and Roman practice with that of the fifth century. Scholarship now suggests that there was no raised stage in the fifth century. Masks were lifelike with neutral expression and without the swelled forehead (or onkos), which became a feature only of Hellenistic and Roman masks. There were no megaphones, and the tragic actors’ cothornoi were most likely comfortable, soft-soled shoes. Along with such discredited clichés, Freund includes ideas that seem made up out of whole cloth, such as the assertion that the protagonist “needed a strong tenor voice” while the deuteragonist “had to be a baritone,” and the tritagonist was a “bass” (57). This is presented not as supposition but as fact. These kinds of error could have been corrected by simply checking a recent edition of Brockett, whose History of the Theatre is cited in the text, or better yet, by consulting the abundant classical scholarship of recent years designed for the general reader, which distills our present state of knowledge.

Other errors are too glaring to ignore. Aeschylus’ Suppliant Women is described as that author’s earliest surviving play. This was definitively disproved in the 1950s by papyrus discoveries that shook Aeschylean studies to their foundation. Similarly, no mention is made of the fact that Aeschylus’ authorship of Prometheus Bound has been under considerable doubt for the past quarter-century. In the generous photo section, the same Roman copy of a bust of Aeschylus is presented twice, once correctly labeled, the second time, in another photo from a different angle, labeled as “Sophocles.” The distinguished classicist, translator, and poet Richmond Lattimore is referred to as “Richard Lattimore” throughout the long book.

The bulk of Freund’s book is taken up with covering dozens of modern productions and adaptations of classical plays. Here one longs for greater selectivity and clearer organization, as the narrative bogs down with seemingly
endless successions of block-quoted reviews averaging about a page in length, many of them from the New York Times. Important productions are often treated in as great a length as insignificant ones. “I do not voice my own judgment,” Freund states in a slightly different context, “I lack the arrogance that requires” (25). Yet precisely that kind of “arrogance” in the guise of greater critical rigor could have benefited this book, creating a tighter focus and improving its readability. In our so-called information age, anyone desiring to read such extended passages from prominent journalistic sources can easily access them from any library or online.

The Birth of Theatre is, as the author informs us, a “labor of love” and such an idea is not encountered enough in theatre-historical writing. Unfortunately the book’s “job” has been done far better in works also designed for general readers by J. Michael Walton, Rush Rehm, David Wiles, and Marianne McDonald. “Thoughtful students” in theatre history and performance studies courses should be directed toward those authors. I hope that Freund’s companion volumes avoid the problems that beset this present offering.


Reviewed by Edmund P. Cueva, Xavier University

In this brief but concentrated text, Rush Rehm attempts to go back to the “radical nature of Greek tragedy” (9), by which he means that he wants to go back to the roots, foundations, and sources of this ancient genre. Rehm carries out his plan in an unusual yet personal way: Dispersed throughout his study of the genre are his personal observations on such matters as the involvement of the United States government in Nicaragua, Haiti, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Chile, Granada, Panama, East Timor, Israel, and Cuba. The events of 9/11 are also central to the later chapters. These political statements and forays aside, the author makes clear in his “Introduction: Timely Thoughts” that the “stage per se—understood as a place for artistic enactments like Greek tragedy—has lost much of its power and significance” (13). Rehm has an equally negative disposition to performance study, performance theory, and a modern stage that has departed from the challenges posed by the “original form of ancient tragedy” (17). Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World is a stimulating read and worthy of note.

In Chapter 1, “Theatre, Artifice, Environment,” Rehm demonstrates that, unlike “theatres since the Renaissance,” the ancient Greek stage was not a temple to artifice (21). The Athenian stage incorporated a good number of the natural and political elements from which citizens could not distance themselves: The Athenian aesthetic was “aggressively public, part of the ongoing life of the city, subject to the forces of nature (the major dramatic festival took
place in early spring, the lesser ones in winter), played against a backdrop of the polis, acted out on a beaten orchestra, with the land, sea, and sky beyond” (22). The plot unfolded with the city, nature, and moving sun as parts of the scenery. Most important, the audience was one that was an active rather than passive participant of the productions. If we do not appreciate this complexity, Rehm suggests, we fail to understand the “radical” nature of tragedy (39).

Chapter 2, “Tragedy and Fear,” begins with this forceful sentence: “Greek drama deals with terrifying stories that have stuck to Western consciousness like leeches” (40). The author examines how the terror-inducing elements (e.g., phobos, tarbos, tarbeô, deos, deimainô, deima, deídô, tropaïos, tropaion, tremô, and tromeô) of these stories function philologically in the texts of the tragedies. Rehm’s conjectures that all of these terrors are not only felt on a personal level, but are also experienced at a communal level. For example, in Aeschylus’ Suppliant Women, the personal and the political mix when the citizen audience associates the fear of the Danaids with its own fear of repression, both personal and political. At this juncture the author points out through Charles Mee’s Big Love (an adaptation of Suppliant Women) that even a modern adaptation of an ancient text can miss the mark if it does not go back to the “radical” nature of the genre. In Big Love there is no communal outrage at the plight of the young Greek women who are fleeing from their betrothed Greek-American cousins.

Chapter 3, “The Fate of Agency, the Agency of Fate,” also engages in linguistic analysis. This time the focus is on the interplay between moira (fate) and tuchê (chance) and the human and divine forces that can be or are responsible for an individual’s actions. The latter two elements are rarely separated. Rehm uses in particular Aeschylus’ Oresteia trilogy and Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus to explore the interaction between these two forces: The individual asks ti drasô (“What shall I do?”) in the face of divine pressure. The only thing that remains constant in the genre is the individual’s inescapable obligation to answer the question. Rehm explains: “Human limits are the basis of what freedom we have, and Greek tragedy allows us to engage the paradox without closing our eyes or running the other way” (86).

In Chapter 4, “Tragedy and Ideology,” Rehm defines ideology as the “nexus of basic assumptions that members of a society hold (or are expected to hold), into which they are educated or indoctrinated, and for which they are rewarded” (87). A krasis that demands action often pushes this ideology into an active role. A krasis may also open opportunities for alteration or renovation in ideology, much like Greek tragedy of the fifth century did when it presented “alternative voices of undeniable power” (92) and resisted “truisms that cover up deeply intractable problems” (118). This chapter is very political in nature and may drive away those readers who do not identify with the liberal side of the political spectrum. Within its thirty-one pages, the reader encounters the controversial subchapters entitled “Patriarchy and male domination,” “Slaves and female captives,” “Warfare and militarism,” “Democracy,” “Education, indoctrination, identity,” and “Political form.”

The last chapter, “Tragedy and Time,” appears to take a Thucydidean
approach to the tragic genre. Perhaps the audience understood that tragedy encapsulated the various aspects of time that appear on the stage—“extended (chronos), epochal (aiôn), interventionist (kairos), and cyclical (hôra)”—in an effort to lead the active viewer to the insight that there exists a connection between “past and present” and a “volatile future” (138). Perhaps Thucydides’ mechanistic view of history found a parallel on the stage.

Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World is a book worth reading. It may be too political for some, but nevertheless it should engender some provocative thought and discussion. I recommend this book to graduate students and serious scholars of tragedy.

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Reviewed by Katherine West Scheil, University of Rhode Island

In their well-written and extensively researched book Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage, B. J. and Mary Sokol explore the connections between the legal world of Shakespeare’s England and the ways he dramatizes legal situations related to marriage. The result is a thorough and interesting contribution to the growing field of “law and literature” studies. The book moves chronologically through the legal issues connected to the stages of marriage, from arranged and consensual matches to the effect of death on marriage. Each chapter has a similar structure: first, an explanation of the legal conditions for the particular topic of marriage, followed by a discussion of how those issues are dramatized in Shakespeare’s plays.

Perhaps a better title for this book would be Law, Marriage, and Shakespeare; the book’s structure privileges the law over the individual Shakespearean play, making it easy to grasp the legal concerns related to marriage, but more difficult to examine the way Shakespeare uses law in a particular work. Plays are discussed piecemeal throughout the book as their particular parts apply to the legal topic under discussion, and the same play or passage thus can appear in several chapters. For instance, The Taming of the Shrew provides material for such topics as abduction; the Book of Common Prayer marriage service; domestic violence against siblings, suitors, and wives; dowries; and the remarriage of widows.

As part of their thorough introduction, the Sokols offer three “modes” that Shakespeare uses to dramatize the legal cruxes of his day. In some plays he creates a “dramatic mirrorland” where he realistically represents the practices of English law. Other times he invents a “legal fableland” where “folkloric, biblical, or stereotypical images” dominate a world of abuses of power or justice. Shakespeare’s third “mode” involves a “fantastical mooting” where “impossibly complex contrived legal situations” occur. In all of these variations, Shakespeare
nevertheless is concerned with “actual English legal problems, ambiguities, or enigmas” in his plays (8–9).

A brief glance at most of the plays in the index reveals how deeply entrenched Shakespeare’s plays are in the legal issues of his day, and how the playwright often turned to matters of law for dramatic fodder. The Sokols focus mainly on his plays as literary texts, and spend very little time on performance concerns: Not much is said about audiences or theatres. To be fair, their intent is not to speculate about the legal background of audience members, but rather to look at the laws and legal institutions of Shakespeare’s time as cultural backgrounds to the plays.

Chapter 1 considers the conditions for legally valid marriages in Shakespeare’s England, relying on fourteen Shakespeare plays for examples; the legal formation of marriage is clearly not “a topic that Shakespearians can afford to overlook” (29). Chapters 2 and 3 deal with influences on prospective marriages through families (arranged marriages) and legal impositions of marriages (e.g., wardships) in such plays as Romeo and Juliet, Othello, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Winter’s Tale, Pericles, All’s Well That Ends Well, and Cymbeline. Money connected to marriage, mainly through dowries, occupies the subject of Chapter 4. Shakespeare implies that the financial stability of households was a “matter of fundamental economic, social, and family significance” (72), and thus he deals at length with monetary concerns related to marriage in his plays.

Chapter 5 deals with the requirement to solemnize marriage through the Book of Common Prayer. Of course, not every marriage happened “by the book”; Chapter 6 looks at unsolemnized or “clandestine” marriages, as well as elopement, abduction, and rape. Shakespeare’s diverse treatment of clandestine marriage reflects “contemporary highly inconsistent social and legal attitudes and practices” (11). In turn, Shakespeare often satirizes or subverts the official English marriage ceremony, revealing his “aversion to the privatization of spirituality” implied by the Prayer Book ceremony and his refusal to endorse the idolatrous use of a “valuable physical object, a ring, in a sacred context” (92).

Although marriage was one of the “central institutions of private life” in Shakespeare’s day (12), it was also a public legal institution. Chapter 7 looks at the legal ramifications of marriage for individuals, particularly the relationship between husband and wife, property rights, and domestic violence. The final two chapters examine the legal conditions for problematic marriages and the ending of marriages through death, pausing to consider such topics as separation, divorce, remarriage, inheritance, bastards, widows, and orphans.

An extensive and thorough bibliography further contributes to the usefulness of Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage. Minor inconsistencies in the index at times impede the readability of this study; Shakespeare’s plays are listed by play title, while all other plays are organized according to author. One could perhaps wish for more engagement with Shakespeare’s biographical details in this book—there is no discussion of his own marriage or of his wife, and she does not even appear as an entry in the index. Admittedly, the details of
Shakespeare's marriage are few and often speculative; the question of why Shakespeare remained so interested in the legal issues related to marriage is a matter left for other scholars to consider.


Reviewed by Kevin De Ornellas, Queen's University

Frederick Kiefer's Shakespeare's Visual Theatre: Staging the Personified Characters is a deceptively modest study, focusing on staged abstract representations and deities such as Spring, Time, Juno, and Ceres: “walking, talking personifications” (13). Kiefer presents case studies of individual personifications in particular plays, always speculating on their appearance in original stagings, and, most important, stressing their significance for contemporary and subsequent readings of the action. In the process, he compellingly argues for the significance of spectacle in Shakespeare’s theatre. Though the length of the book might seem daunting, 138 pages are composed solely of impeccable notes, a meaty bibliography, and a useful index. The well-illustrated 220 pages of actual text are clear, jargon-free, learned, and convincing.

In his dense but readable introduction, Kiefer connects the Renaissance appetite for decoration to theatrical practice. Pointing out that even quite humble Elizabethans painted on quotidian items such as purses, tables, plates, and stools, Kiefer assures us that “English men and women lived in a culture that relished display” (7). He relates this fondness of seeing to Renaissance theatre, asserting that dramatists consciously presented visual as well as auditory stimulation. The first chapter focuses particularly upon the songs of Spring and Winter at the conclusion of Love’s Labor’s Lost. Stage directions tell us nothing about how those characters should be dressed. Kiefer seeks evidence from contemporary visual arts—mainly the accessible medium of the print—to establish the conventions for portraying these personified abstractions: Spring was almost invariably represented as a youthful, healthy, flower-carrying female; Winter, conversely, was usually depicted as a frail, bearded, fire-fixated old man. The Elizabethan theatregoer, confronted with these strikingly dressed personifications on stage, connected their combined message about the passage of life with their songs’ lyrics about sexual lust. The message is that the play’s main characters’ new ideals about fidelity will fade as inevitably as any Spring will turn into Winter. Theatrically and intellectually, this is a convincing reading of the play’s problematic comedy. However, Kiefer’s conjecture that the actors playing Dull and Jaquenetta may have doubled up as the two abstractions remains just that: conjecture.

In the second chapter, Kiefer gives a gripping account of the stylized appearance of a vengeful Tamora in Titus Andronicus. Non-Christian and deadly,
Tamora would appear dressed in red or black and wielding a dagger, as much an icon of Revenge as an individualized character. Her sons too might appear not just as characters but as abstractions of Murder and Rape. Appearing together as a malignant triumvirate, these agents of unholy violence affront Titus with a tableau of unswerving evil, one recognizable to Elizabethan audiences through their stereotypical costumes and props. Equally engaging is the next chapter’s interpretation of the role of Rumour at the beginning of Henry IV, Part Two. Kiefer is surely right to argue that this character unsettles audiences’ complacency by describing Hal’s wild ways. This is not the clean-living, single-minded Henry of the fawning Tudor chronicles, but a gallant whose moral character remains uncertain. Rumour, Kiefer writes, would probably appear in a costume decorated with tongues. That is likely, though it is also interesting to consider the possibility that Rumour’s speech may have been read loudly offstage (as it was by multiple voices during the Royal Shakespeare Company’s “This England” season during 2000). If we cannot see from where the rumors about a usurping king and his unreformed heir derive, then we become even more nervous about the kingdom’s future.

The third chapter is dedicated to Hecate and the witches of Macbeth. Hecate must display moral and physical degeneracy and, like the witches who may even have worn coarse cosmetics to enhance their ugliness, she must strike absolute terror into the spectators because these hellish beings symbolize an evil drive that so often energizes the tragic characters. Here, Keifer’s convincing analysis is sidetracked by lengthy discussions of the witches’ actual identity and whether Middleton or Shakespeare wrote the scene with Hecate. In his next chapter, Kiefer also credits Middleton with the appearance of the Five Senses in Timon of Athens. More important, Keifer connects the appearance of the Senses with their theatrical and moral function in Timon’s tragedy. The protagonist is too satisfied by the ephemeral, superficial pleasures afforded by flatterers who reward his sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste. Timon of Athens is the nearest that Shakespeare came to writing a basic morality play; the play suggests that unsuccessful people are shunned, and that rich people cannot regard any gestures as uncomplicated registers of genuine affection. Keifer’s insistence that the Five Senses represent a very visual display of the unwholesome pleasures of complacency and indulgence supports the play’s depiction of human folly and self-deception.

The final chapter deals at length with the masque-influenced, indoor-theatre-oriented appearances of gods and goddesses and personified abstractions in Shakespeare’s late comedies. Kiefer’s reading of the significance of the gray-haired, hourglass-carrying Time in The Winter’s Tale is especially useful. The personification’s appearance marks a significant change of tone and conduct of characters in the play. For Leontes in particular, bloody-minded recklessness gives way to measured responsibility: Temperance and truth are in effect delivered to the play’s world by Time. The book’s conclusion is crucial because it not only summarizes the importance of personifications in the plays, but accounts for their significance to wider Renaissance culture. Through moving and sensible readings of an engraving of Bartholomeus Spranger and his deceased wife and Robert Cecil’s elaborate tomb, Kiefer underlines that realistic portrayals of persons could be complemented by depictions of seemingly unnaturalistic typological figures. A
very lifelike sculpture of Cecil lies beside equally finely rendered sculptures of four Virtues. Renaissance dramaturges took similar care of personifications for their theatres. Abstractions shared the stage with individualized characters. Audiences of the period readily accepted drama that brought together realistic characters and pointedly attired abstractions drawn from classical and contemporary culture. To place typological personifications into a drama about peoples’ ordinary struggles was a universalizing strategy that conveyed uncluttered meanings to knowing audiences. It also, Kiefer convinces us, rendered the Renaissance stage as spectacular visually as it was spectacular aurally.

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Reviewed by Barry Daniels, independent scholar

The Theatre of the Book—first published in a cloth edition in 2000—is a groundbreaking work. It is an elegantly written and erudite book, with 129 pages of endnotes, a works-cited list of 42 pages, and 60 illustrations. As Peters states in the introduction,

This study is, straightforwardly, a history of the interactions between print and the theatre, but more broadly it might be seen as a chapter in the cultural history of communication, in how writing gets turned into action and how action gets recorded in writing, in how people conceive of the relation between them, in how they perform themselves to one another in the mutual mirrors of spectacle and the page. (2)

Peters has organized this study in five sections of three chapters each. The first section, “Printing the Drama,” offers a chronological study of the general subject. The subsequent four sections are organized by subject matter and are titled: “Theatre Imprimatur,” “The Senses of the Media,” “The Commerce of Letters,” and “Theatrical Impressions.” Peters deals with such ideas as the changing definitions of “theatre,” the author’s involvement or lack of involvement in the printing of the text, the position of the playwright in society, the publication of promptscripts, illustrations of theatrical texts, the economics of printing, and so on.

The subject is vast, covering four hundred years and dealing with theatre throughout Europe and England. “It is,” she states, “an attempt to offer a history of theatre as a phenomenon to the ahistorical characterization of the ‘nature’ of theatrical or textual reception—to offer an archeology of theatrical effects and a genealogy of ideas of theatrical reception as corrective to the static aesthetic model” (2). Her work is solidly based in a number of historical methods and theoretical approaches, but is mercifully free of jargon.

Although the book largely succeeds in this endeavor, theatre historians will
sense that it is weakest in the area of performance history. For example, in the
book’s discussion of the eighteenth-century printing tradition of placing actors’
names before scenes in accordance with their positions on the stage, she does
not refer to the staging tradition of having the actors placed in a semicircle at the
front of the stage near the footlights. Her discussion of the use of tableaux,
which became common in the late eighteenth century, does not really deal with
the fact that this was part of a new dramaturgy that was influenced by major
changes in the history of stage practice. Her works-cited list is weak in the area
of secondary sources that deal with the history of performance. For example,
one of Marvin Carlson’s numerous articles on the French theatre of the
nineteenth century are cited. Nor does she cite Carlson’s *Goethe and the Weimar
Theatre*, or Judith Milhous and Robert Hume’s *Producible Interpretation*, both
of which provide much insight into performance tradition.

There is much, however, of interest for the theatre historian in *The Theatre
of the Book*. Peters’s writing is intelligent, engaging, and thought-provoking. It
should be widely read in our field now that it is available in a paperback edition.

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*[Book Review Editor’s note: This review was commissioned by the previous
Book Review Editor, Jeffrey D. Mason, and was edited by Jody Enders.]*

**The Orient on the Victorian Stage.** By Edward Ziter. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2003; pp. ix + 235, 20 illustrations. £45 or $75 cloth.

Reviewed by David Mayer, *University of Manchester*

On 5 January 1813, an anonymous London theatre critic, reviewing
Covent Garden’s *Harlequin and the Red Dwarf; or, The Adamantine Rock* for
*The Times*, enthused over the pantomime’s oriental (i.e., Middle Eastern) subject
matter, insisting that:

> the “fable” of the East is the very wantoning of an imagination,
> overwhelmed by its own inconquerable fertility. Its forms of fantastic
> loveliness and supernatural power . . . pour upon the mind and memory in
dazzling and splendid confusion. . . .

That “very wantoning” of theatrical imaginations, placing upon the
English Victorian stage ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Moslem, and Hindu and
biblical worlds—some actual milieux and actual places scrupulously detailed
in their reproduction, some wholly and elaborately fictive but nonetheless
reflecting immediate interests and current anxieties—is the focus of Edward
Ziter’s superb *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*. By writing of these numerous
worlds, Ziter simultaneously reifies them and locates them in the realm of the
imaginary and nonreal, uncovering both a stage and a galaxy of Victorian quasi-
theatrical endeavors active in exploring and exploiting—and frequently
misrepresenting—the commercial, political, social, domestic, and sexual
implications of British interests and involvements in the Middle East from the late eighteenth century until the close of the nineteenth. It is a subject that calls for and receives careful theorizing and close analysis, and one that, to the reader’s pleasure, rewards with an intricate, lucid, and wholly enjoyable study.

Ziter’s approach is based upon recognition that the Victorian stage, gradually forsaking side-wing-and-drop, two-dimensional painted scenery for increasingly three-dimensional settings and then packing the “built-out” mise-en-scène with actual artifacts, parallels both greater familiarity (perhaps even over-familiarity) with the Middle East and with developments in Victorian exhibition and museum culture. Indeed, guided by Edward Said’s reassurance that “the Orient always means more than itself,” Ziter points to widespread synecdochic relationships in peoples’ pleasure palaces such as the Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition, such urban “museums” as the Egyptian Hall, and elaborate stage settings as well: the artifact, the costumed actor, the carefully copied winged Assyrian bull standing for an entire lost or recently excavated or subdued-and-occupied oriental culture. The artifact or actor or stage prop or dance of harem houris might be read as metonyms for a city irredeemably damned and lost through biblically narrated excess and vice, or it might signal British pluck, strategic military foresight, commercial acumen, and imperial possession. He describes a process of colonizing by trade and no less by ethnography, the British traveler ascribing racial description and alleged racial character traits to the locals whose culture has somehow survived without the blessings of industrialization and modern firearms. The women of these territories are figures of erotic theatrical fantasy, their veiled modesty and their bare or slippered feet apparent excuses for imagining them as lascivious or at least susceptible to, and immediately aroused by, the pink-skinned British traveler. The harem is the frequent locus for much erotic speculation, a place to be illicitly penetrated or escaped from. All is linked. Charles Kean’s 1853 revival of Lord Byron’s *Sardanapalus*, meticulous in its adherence to contemporary archaeological exactness, is concurrently the decadent, God-blasted *Old Testament* Nineveh and an environmental museum exhibition that offers spectators time travel, education, and moral messages as well as overwhelming spectacle.

Ziter shows how the focus of British theatrical and exhibition interest in the Middle East changed and developed, initially seizing upon the Egypt of the Napoleonic War as a land rich in indecipherable hieroglyphic mysteries, but then turning further eastward as travelers and cartographers sought a comparatively safe “overland route” between Europe and India. In turn, the stage and museums and lecture theatres were preoccupied by the Holy Land and then by the increasingly unearthed ancient Mesopotamian sites. Travelers who sketched alien sites and recovered artifacts were celebrated and turned into showmen. Other showmen such as Albert Smith parodied the travelers’ pretensions and vanities but nonetheless contributed to the Middle East as myth and exotic spectacle. Plays and pantomimes continued these shifting preoccupations.

The study is effectively organized. Ziter begins with the idea of the East as a region under surveillance, viewed from afar through the various stationary panoramas taken from sketches by English travelers who translated their notations
of alien topography into a continuous landscape. Eastern views were also seen in London theatre “dioramas” from the early 1830s, where painted backcloths, in some places transparent or strategically opaqued and backlit, were drawn across the pantomime stage. Panoramas are succeeded in time by dramas in which Europeans and members of Eastern ethnic cultures intermingle, fight, betray, and, when the heroine is of an otherness other than Asian, intermarry. Ziter then moves to museums and national exhibitions, to the three-dimensional displays of native people in “native villages” or foreign “quarters,” where the English might encounter an alien presence and purchase “authentic” souvenirs. Finally, Ziter returns to later Victorian stageplays, where the claims and justifications for empire are enacted.

It is difficult to argue with—or to part willingly from—a study as thorough as Ziter’s. Now completely hooked on this subject and greedy for more in the same vein, I could have wished for a close examination of Covent Garden’s 1811 revival of George Colman the Younger and Michael Kelly’s Blue Beard, an oriental equestrian musical spectacle of such alleged richness as to define theatrical orientalism for over a decade and to give rise to the fantastic orientalism of the Patent Houses’ 1811–15 seasons. I would have liked, as well, an investigation of the impact of those ebullient seasons on English domestic architecture and furnishings. I similarly would have enjoyed explication of such Belle Vue and Ally Pally pyrodramas (outdoor plays with fireworks) as The Battle of the Nile, The Siege of Khartoum, and The Battle of Kandahar. I would have been grateful also to have found the various Kiralfy Brothers’ Olympia spectacles, not least Venice and the drama of its defense against Turkish invasion, subject to Ziter’s scrutiny, or to have enjoyed Ziter’s examination of Wilson Barrett’s The Daughters of Babylon. I would have appreciated learning what he might make of the Assyrian Orientals versus Hebraic biblical culture in the various Judith of Bethulia plays and early films. His method and piercing analysis are already in place, wanting only the widening of his gaze. My hope is that Ziter will linger around his subject for a few more years and contribute a clutch of journal essays, especially as modern politicians and narrative mythmakers are still hell-bent on misunderstanding the lands and cultures East and South of the Mediterranean. We need Ziter’s perception, grasp of history, and sanity.

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Reviewed by Kate Roark, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

As the first published collection of early blackface-performance texts, W. T. Lhamon’s Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture provides scholars of American popular entertainment with a much-needed sourcebook. These texts are collected in service of the book’s larger purpose of evaluating the career of Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice, the
first superstar of blackface performance, who became synonymous with his most popular character, Jim Crow. All the songs and plays gathered in *Jump Jim Crow* were performed by Rice (with the exception of the “street prose” section, which includes two contemporary, pamphlet biographies of Rice). The texts work with Lhamon’s introduction to tell the story of Rice’s career, which is a case study of the larger topic: the history of blackface performance before the rise of the minstrel show in the mid-1840s. As the plays collected here reveal, Rice’s performance of blackface was fundamentally different from minstrel-show performance on many levels. The most important difference, Lhamon argues in his introduction, is that Rice’s performances encouraged the white audience to identify with his blackface character, to laugh *with* him rather than *at* him.

In his 1998 book, *Raising Cain*, Lhamon utilizes Marxist strategies of examining markets, specifically lower Manhattan’s Catherine Street Market and its surrounding neighborhood where Rice grew up, as a space where social barriers were necessarily relaxed to facilitate free exchange. While racial intermingling was not socially sanctioned outside the sphere of the market, the logic of capitalism requires a relaxing of social barriers inside the market. Lhamon argues that Rice’s blackface performances reproduced this market condition of exchange outside of its sanctioned space of the market in the cultural sphere. Rice and his Jim Crow character thereby constituted a threat to the elite class and to patriarchal society in general. In *Jump Jim Crow*, Lhamon further demonstrates the revolutionary threat of blackface performance through the case study par excellence of Rice and his Jim Crow character. Lhamon argues that the potent threat of Rice’s Jim Crow is in part revealed by its appropriation and transformation into its own opposite as a signifier of the oppressive laws of containment—the Jim Crow laws of Reconstruction and beyond.

Rice began his blackface career in the 1820s by singing and dancing variations of “Jump Jim Crow” and other songs. This collection features thirteen of Rice’s most performed songs, including five variations on the Jim Crow theme. The lyrics demonstrate how topical, political, and mercurial these songs were, adaptable at a moment’s notice to serve whatever ends Rice imagined. As Rice developed his performance of blackface into plays, these songs remained the highlights of the performances, and some of Rice’s early plays derived their plots directly from the songs.

The section of playtexts makes up the greatest portion of this book (238 of its 459 pages) and includes the nine extant plays performed by Rice: *Oh Hush!*; *or, The Virginny Cupids!*; *Virginia Mummy*; *Bone Squash*; *Flight to America*; *The Peacock and the Crow*; *Jim Crow in His New Place*; *The Foreign Prince*; *Yankee Notes for English Circulation*; and *Otello*. Lhamon has edited these plays with an eye to presenting the texts as closely as possible to the way Rice performed them. For most of these texts, the only extant sources are Rice’s handwritten manuscripts, held in the Lord Chamberlain’s collection at the British Library. The texts *Oh Hush!* and *Otello* are the only texts not primarily taken from the Lord Chamberlain’s collection; the text for *Oh Hush!* is the arrangement by Charles White for the Happy Hours Company and dates from circa 1873 (but it probably debuted in 1833), and the text to *Otello* was a stage manager’s transcription of the
play found in the New York Public Library. *Otello* then affords the best evidence of a play Rice developed for American audiences, and this is the play Lhamon devotes the most time to exploring in the book’s introduction.

*Jump Jim Crow* presents the best and most thorough collection of primary documents on early blackface performance available. Yet the fact that most of the playscripts are extant only in the form in which they were presented to London audiences presents a potential problem in knowing whether the London scripts are representative of how Rice performed them in America. Like other comic performers both in the nineteenth century and today, Rice adapted his plays and songs to each audience he played to, and undoubtedly he (and the English playwrights of five of the nine texts here) shaped his performances in London to cater to London tastes. England abolished slavery in all of its territories in 1834, just two years before Rice’s first visit. This fact seems to support the possibility of Rice shaping his performances to accord with the prevailing abolitionist tastes in London. This possible weakness is mitigated, however, by the *Otello* text, and the Charles White versions of the texts *Oh Hush!* and *Bone Squash*. These plays in particular support Lhamon’s argument—which he makes both in the introduction to *Jump Jim Crow* and in *Raising Cain*—that Rice’s blackface characters were not objects of ridicule and, therefore, encouraged white audiences to identify with his blackface characters. Nonetheless, the tenor of Rice’s American performances prior to the mid-1840s remains open to debate, given that Rice first performed *Otello* in 1844, and the White scripts—though undated—are certainly later.

Even so, *Jump Jim Crow* is an extremely valuable addition to the growing body of scholarship on the American phenomenon of blackface performance, chief among which are Lhamon’s *Raising Cain* as well as Alexander Saxton’s *Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (1990), David Roedigger’s *Wages of Whiteness* (1991), Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft* (1993), and Dale Cockrell’s *Demons of Disorder* (1997). All these works acknowledge the obvious reinforcement of racist stereotypes in all blackface performance, but they also all argue that racial ideology was often contested by inviting white audiences to identify with black characters. Though the question of consistency in Rice’s portrayal of blackface may continue to be raised, the evidence Lhamon has collected here is the best we have. Without evidence to the contrary, Lhamon’s characterization of Rice and his portrayal of Jim Crow deserves to be considered the authoritative history on this seminal figure in blackface performance.

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Reviewed by Anthony Vickery, *University of Victoria*

One of the seven titles in Southern Illinois University Press’s Theatre in the Americas series, David Rinear’s book elevates the early nineteenth-century
actor-manager William E. Burton to the front ranks of American theatre in the period of transition from stock companies to touring stars. As Rinear writes, “no one in the theatrical or literary world of pre–Civil War America left a mark so thoroughly on his age as William E. Burton. He was lauded as the greatest comic actor of his age, and his managerial acumen provided him with a tremendous fortune” (xii). Perhaps because Burton specialized in such little-studied areas as low comedy and management, this is the first thorough study to give due attention to his career.

Rinear’s book is divided into ten chapters that document Burton’s life from his birth in London in 1802 to his death in the United States in 1860. In addition, Rinear provides an epilogue that skillfully contextualizes Burton’s theatrical (and extratheatrical) career in midcentury America. Rinear’s first chapter covers Burton’s early life and entry onto the stage as a provincial player in 1821. This first chapter gives a good indication of the repertoire of a low comedian on his way up in the English provinces in the 1820s and 1830s. As interesting as his theatrical career was, however, Burton’s private life also provides good dramatic material. The end of the first chapter is marked by Burton’s departure to the United States in 1834—not just for the opportunities provided by greener pastures in the New World, but because he had entered into a bigamous second marriage and abandoned his first wife (and child) in England for a seventeen-year-old second wife.

The rest of the chapters cover Burton’s twenty-six years in the United States broken into two- to four-year segments. On arrival in America, Burton initially acted in Philadelphia (hoping the local papers would not carry the news of his abandonment of his first wife) and attained his first managerial position. Unfortunately, his first venture ended in bankruptcy in 1842, causing him to go on the road as a touring star. However, a few years later, he achieved a good deal of success when he again entered management and even theatre ownership. During his second managerial period, he controlled theatres in Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, and New York. Rinear’s biography grows ever more interesting when details of Burton’s extratheatrical activities are woven into the narrative. During Burton’s time in Philadelphia, he was publisher of The Gentleman’s Magazine (later renamed Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine), which he coedited with Edgar Allan Poe. It was one of the most highly regarded literary magazines of the day, and Burton’s negotiations and correspondence with Poe are a colorful addition to the book. Burton was also known for his growing collection of Shakespeare editions and related materials (including First Folios) which, by his death, would be counted as one of the largest collections in the United States. His Shakespeare scholarship would in fact contribute to his well-regarded productions of the comedies and romances produced in a style similar to that of Charles Kean at the Princess Theatre in London. During Burton’s time in New York during the 1850s, it seems that he acquired yet a third wife, who was mentioned in the playbills of the time.

Rinear’s study excels in analysis of Burton’s business dealings. In the chapter covering Burton’s time in the provinces of England, Rinear provides extensive hard data on the actor’s earnings through benefit nights, which give a
clear picture of his growing popularity and wealth. When the focus shifts to Burton’s theatre ownership and managerial period, Rinear supplies solid information on box-office practices, managerial technique, and overall earnings. Nevertheless, Rinear relies in these later chapters more heavily on secondary sources and newspaper articles, which causes the narrative to lose some of the detail of the earlier parts of the book, which draw on Burton’s own diary.

Rinear also succeeds in placing Burton’s work firmly within the social and financial context of his time. Burton’s first successes were all the more impressive given that they were achieved during a time of social upheaval and financial chaos. Rinear points out that Burton’s bankruptcy of 1842 was the result not only of poor management, but also of the reverberations of an economic depression dating from the speculative bubble burst in the Panic of 1837 and still affecting the country. Burton’s management after the bankruptcy excelled in part because, as Rinear points out, Burton capitalized on the growing temperance feeling in the populace of Philadelphia and New York by banning the sale of alcohol in his buildings and promoting his theatre as a place of clean, family-friendly entertainment. Also well documented are Burton’s sometimes vicious managerial practices, such as opening the same play a few days in advance of his competitors’ announced opening date in order to draw away audience members; he may even have vandalized Laura Keene’s scenery. However, Rinear does place Burton’s actions within the context of the unrestrained capitalism then dominating the business of the country as a whole. Rinear also shows that Burton’s more dubious activities actually backfired, causing him to lose rather than retain audiences.

The book includes twenty-two illustrations but lacks a needed bibliography. Despite this minor failing, Rinear provides valuable insight into the mechanics of running a theatre in pre–Civil War America and solidifies Burton’s position as one of the leaders of American theatre in the early to mid-nineteenth century.


Reviewed by Ellen Donkin, Hampshire College

Margaret Webster’s struggles and triumphs as a professional director in New York and London are not cited by theatre historians—especially feminist theatre historians—as often as they should be. Before her death in 1972, she had become the first woman director ever to work on Broadway, founded the American Repertory Theatre with her lifelong partner and colleague Eva Le Gallienne, directed a groundbreaking production of Othello with Paul Robeson in 1942, faced Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee, and she had published several wonderful books about theatre (the best known are Shakespeare Without Tears, The Same Only Different, and Don’t Put Your Daughter on the Stage).
However, Webster lived and worked in a period before feminist analysis had gained any sort of foothold either in the academy or outside of it, and she was herself reluctant to bring attention to the fact of her sex or her sexuality. In a world that was almost exclusively run by men, drawing as little attention as possible to the fact of being female was simply common sense. It helped that her training was classical, and that she was at her best directing the works of Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw. Being English and having a long and distinguished family history in the theatre (her grandfather had managed a theatre in London in the nineteenth century, and her mother was the actress Dame May Whitty) also lent her credibility. But during her own lifetime, she stayed carefully under the radar: She did not make a public case for more women directors or for more plays written by women, nor advocate that women should bring a particular point of view to theatre and theatre making. Her emphasis was always on professionalism, on the place of theatre in America, or on bringing clarity to a Shakespearean text, rather than on the anomaly of being a female director. So placing this remarkable figure into historical context raises some ongoing issues.

Milly Barranger’s biography has assembled the overwhelming volume of materials generated by Webster’s career into a shapely and compelling portrait. There is an evident struggle between getting the details of Webster’s career on record, and reflecting on what those details add up to. In those reflective moments, Barranger brings compassion and penetrating intuition to bear on her subject. She focuses particularly on the uneasily competitive relationship with Dame May Whitty (this is a recurring thread throughout the book), and on how Webster’s romantic relationships (most notably with Le Gallienne and the novelist Pamela Frankau) provided the respect and tenderness of which Whitty was apparently incapable. There is also important research that would not have been possible several years ago: In 2003, records that had been sealed for fifty years after Webster’s interrogation by HUAC in 1953 finally became available. Barranger provides a careful analysis of the discrepancies that emerge between the original transcript and Webster’s own recollections (published in her memoir Don’t Put Your Daughter on the Stage in 1972). Such use of multiple sources is more the exception than the rule. By necessity or design, the book relies primarily on Webster’s own memoirs, trusting the accuracy of her memory.

Ultimately it is the artist in Webster that we seek. Directing is notoriously difficult to document, and Webster’s directing is no exception. Barranger gives us selected glimpses into a woman who read Shakespeare with meticulous attention to details of language, textual variance, and character development. In other words, as Barranger tells the tale, Webster was a director who thrived on preparation and historical research. Her job, as she saw it, was to allow the text to speak, and to let actors do their work. She fought for clarity of context in order to create meaning. Barranger tells a wonderful story about a chorus of singers in a production of a little-known opera directed by Webster entitled Simon Boccanegra (215–16). The chorus, to their puzzlement, received from Webster mimeographed copies of her own translation of an aria—not one that they would sing, but one to which they had to respond. She was determined that
they understand what was transpiring. The expression on their faces mattered to her. She was nothing if not practical, inventive, and tenacious.

Barranger’s book cannot solve all the problems posed by this career, and she wisely does not attempt to do so. However, this volume lays the essential groundwork, with attention both to the public accomplishments and the private woman. As such it will be an invaluable tool for historians hoping to continue the work. In its balance and its attention to detail, it is exactly the kind of biography for which Webster herself would have hoped.

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Reviewed by Yvonne Shafer, St. John’s University

Many theatre scholars are familiar with the name Mercedes de Acosta but do not know the nature of her connection to the theatre—her close ties to notable actresses and the plays that she wrote. Robert A. Schanke has published two books that hope to clarify de Acosta’s place in theatre history. The first is a biography that takes the reader from her exotic background of Spanish ancestry and her stolen inheritance through her innumerable affairs with such figures as Maude Adams, Eva Le Gallienne, Nazimova, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, and Isadora Duncan. The biography concludes with de Acosta’s last years, impoverished, nearly forgotten, and lonely.

There were several difficulties for the biographer. First, there is a lack of objective information about de Acosta. Her love affairs were turbulent, and many ended in acrimony. The title of the biography comes from Cecil Beaton, who described her as “that furious lesbian.” Certainly her pursuit of women, often two or more concurrently, led to bitterness, as did her autobiography, Here Lies the Heart, published in 1960, many years after most of the important events she describes in detail. Schanke notes that after its publication, Greta Garbo and Eva Le Gallienne “denounced” her memory of the past and refused to speak of her again. Helen Sheehy, in her biography of Le Gallienne, points out the second difficulty Schanke faced. It is very difficult to accept de Acosta’s descriptions of her life and her relationships as accurate. Sheehy gives one obvious example: De Acosta claimed that she had been treated like a boy for her first seven years and had been dressed in male clothes. In fact, pictures of her with her siblings show her in ruffled dresses with long curls. Addressing this point in the “Introduction,” Schanke writes that the autobiography was criticized as containing lies, half-lies, and distortions. He
does his best to examine those, and sometimes includes differing versions of the same events in the endnotes.

Additionally, Schanke has made every effort possible to find material in letters, diaries, and books that add to the pool of knowledge regarding the woman who seemed to travel everywhere and know everyone. He interviewed the aging dancer Ram Gopal in London, where Gopal shared his fond memories of de Acosta. At that time she had been dead for thirty-three years. Perhaps the most exciting of Schanke’s discoveries was the material de Acosta sold to the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia. This contained literally thousands of letters and telegrams she had received from her lovers, publishers, and people in the theatre as well as such poignant things as black-velvet-framed pictures of lovers and an anklet of Marlene Dietrich’s smudged with lipstick.

Despite years of research, the material must focus necessarily on the private life rather than successes in the theatre. In fact, Schanke devotes a large section of the book to describing de Acosta’s sister’s life in the smart Parisian world of culture, where de Acosta was introduced to elegance, high fashion, courtesans, and lesbians at an early age. Schanke creates a vivid picture of this world and the woman who moved through it with style and boldness. He describes her startling clothing and appearance and supplements the descriptions with twenty-seven photographs of her alone and with Garbo, Dietrich, and others. He communicates the qualities that enabled her to steal women from other women and even from their husbands. Although she was seemingly driven by her pursuit of love, she also wanted recognition as a writer. Schanke notes that her successes in the theatre were not great; he carefully describes her early accomplishments as a writer with three books of poetry, two novels, and four produced plays between 1919 and 1928.

Six of the plays de Acosta wrote are published in Schanke’s companion book, all for the first time. By chance, Schanke discovered these scripts in the Library of Congress just as they were about to be discarded. He photocopied them and preserved them for other readers. After reading them, some readers may disagree with the pronouncement on the jacket that the plays are “decidedly stage worthy.” Only two were produced: *Jehanne d’Arc* and *Jacob Slovak*, but their performance history is very interesting.

*Jehanne d’Arc* was written for Le Gallienne at the height of her apparently devouring sexual obsession for the then-married de Acosta. It premiered in Paris in 1922. The two worked together on the play, Le Gallienne invested her own funds heavily, and Norman Bel Geddes designing the scenery and lighting. Despite Le Gallienne’s reputation and her passionate performance, the play brought neither critical acclaim nor financial rewards. *Jacob Slovak* achieved more success. It was first produced on Broadway in 1923, and was then produced in London with John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson. It was notable for its attack on anti-Semitism.

Both Le Gallienne and de Acosta worshiped the actress Eleanora Duse. In 1924, de Acosta wrote a one-act play for her called *The Mother of Christ*, which was never performed. After Duse’s untimely death, de Acosta tried to interest numerous other actresses in the play, including Jeanne Eagels and Lillian Gish.
The three remaining plays cast light on de Acosta’s personal views and her own struggles. In 1925 she wrote *World without End*, which closes with the suicide of the heroine (154). Similarly, *The Dark Light*, written a year later, features incest and suicide. The last play in the collection, *Illusion*, was written in 1928. It features lowlife characters, violence, and the death of Maggie, the prostitute, in the last scene. All of the plays offer insight into de Acosta’s worldview and her boldness in treating subjects regarded as unacceptable.

In these two volumes devoted to Mercedes de Acosta, Schanke has developed material that is merely suggested or briefly described in other theatre books and has dug deeply into previously unpublished sources. His volume of her plays may never draw new productions, but as the publicity for the book claims, they are a significant find for the canon of lesbian and gay drama. Schanke concludes his “Introduction” to the plays by saying, “Hopefully, these two books will correct certain myths about Mercedes de Acosta and will help in finally restoring her name to its proper place in history” (xxvii).

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Reviewed by Jeffrey D. Mason, *University of Oregon*

From 1947 to 1962, Broadway audiences enjoyed major works by Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller as well as plays ranging from *A Thousand Clowns* to *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and a string of durable musical comedies offering light and dark visions of the urban streets (*Guys and Dolls* and *West Side Story*), inspirational fables (*The Music Man* and *The Sound of Music*), and war in legend and in recent memory (*Camelot* and *South Pacific*). Meanwhile, Judith Malina and Julian Beck founded the Living Theatre, José Quintero and Theodore Mann established the Circle in the Square, Joe Papp offered his first free Shakespeare productions in New York City parks, and Joe Cino and Ellen Stewart led the development of Off-Off Broadway. This heterogeneous theatre scene comprised diverse and even competing representations of a complex but interconnected culture, and Bruce A. McConachie has undertaken the task of elucidating the workings of such art not in isolation but as cultural and social production.

McConachie makes several structural choices in order to shape his cultural analysis of Broadway theatre during this period. With specific but wide-ranging reference to events and material circumstances in a United States that he presents as preoccupied with cold-war politics, especially as expressed through domestic anxieties, he seeks to locate theatrical production “within the general cultural dynamics of the early Cold War.” Building on psychologists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s work on cognitive metaphors, McConachie focuses
on “cognitive processes that must occur before spectators can form any interpretive judgments” and elucidates “schema of containment” that Americans used to construct their cultural experiences. McConachie positions radiophony (the art and practice of creating and receiving radio broadcasts) as a principal force in shaping “theatrical constructions of the real.” He proposes three “containment figures” to reveal the attitudes and perceptions that shape the creation and reception of various works: Empty Boys, Family Circles, and Fragmented Heroes (8, ix, 11, 28, xi).

McConachie’s chapter on Empty Boys begins with a comparison of *A Hatful of Rain* and *The Seven Year Itch*, moves on to a consideration of Method acting with reference to Ben Gazzara and the Actors Studio, and uses the iconic figure of Marlon Brando to pursue related issues in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. During World War II, the nation had affectionately referred to all of its fighting men as “American boys,” and postwar culture admired the independence and apparent innocence of men who remained youthful in that they had not yet accepted the restrictions and responsibilities of maturity. McConachie argues that such boys were “empty” precisely because they had not yet developed adult personalities; they echo the Adamic innocence of Huckleberry Finn, but they are as troubled, incomplete, and confused as Jay Gatsby. Yet McConachie’s Empty Boy is not a strictly literary figure; McConachie traces its connections with the escalating militarization of America, the growing prestige and influence of psychotherapy, and the denunciation of the 1948 Kinsey Report because it suggested that any “American boy” might have homosexual potential and so become what McConachie discusses as the oppositional figure of the Queer Other. On stage as in real life, American men struggled with the competing demands of freedom and adulthood. Biff Loman, for example, realizes that he is like a boy because although he roams the West, obligated to none, he has no family, no home, and no permanence.

The Family Circle chapter explores domesticity, motherhood, and the suburbs before moving through the idea of the Racial Other to *The King and I* and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* and concluding with an incisive analysis of racial and political issues usually overlooked in *A Raisin in the Sun*. McConachie traces the Family Circle as both narrow, contracting to the nuclear family that protects its members from the dangers of society, and wide, expanding to include humankind as a global brotherhood almost in the manner of the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition, with the threat of nuclear extermination supporting both models. He explains how the liberal view of racial difference provided a challenge to the notion of the Family Circle and generated three narrative options for fictional representation: to reinforce the integrity of the white family by positioning racialized Others as aliens whose difference validates the insiders’ sense of uniformity; to challenge the Family Circle with an attack from the outside; and to assign insiders the project of expanding the Family Circle to include others. In applying these perspectives to *A Raisin in the Sun*, McConachie argues that only through a consideration of Lorraine Hansberry’s leftist politics can we fully understand her subtle analysis.
of social and racial problems and so grasp the play’s interactions among race, ghetto, money, home, and family.

McConachie considers cold-war fears of the atomic bomb and the Soviet Union to open up his examination of the Fragmented Hero, then focusing on Martha Graham’s *Night Journey* and Archibald MacLeish’s *J.B.* before turning to *The Crucible* and McCarthyism, frequently referring to the use of the jeremiad as a warning intended to urge reform. He traces the Fragmented Hero from its origins in postwar anxiety over national security expressed in personal, family-oriented terms that left adult men with untenable responsibilities. The woman, especially the wife, becomes the Female Other, the source of obligation and the threat to male initiative and authority. The Red Scare provides a rationale and a target for suspicion and frustration as well as a justification for the bomb, whose apocalyptic menace rendered all individuals impotent and insignificant. In this light, *The Crucible* becomes a reaction to nuclearism, a means of opposing the dominant culture but also a challenge to the rationalist ethics that most criticism finds as characteristic of Miller’s plays.

In his epilogue, McConachie observes that the strategies of cold-war theatre continued well into the 1990s, and he continues his exploration of art in relation to society, of psychology and behavior, and of containment and chaos, moving through television culture through more recent representations of family values and nuclear dilemmas, referring to such playwrights as Neil Simon and August Wilson, and concluding by locating Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* in opposition to “the Empty Boy presidency of George W. Bush” (299). In sum, this study makes a compelling case for the rich potential in studying theatre as inextricably intertwined with culture and society, and McConachie has offered refreshing perspectives on familiar material.


Reviewed by Barbara Ozieblo, *University of Málaga, Spain*

The theatre has long been recognized as a site from which national and social values can be promoted, and this was particularly the case with the Little Theatre and summer stock phenomena. Even when performing non-American plays, these movements addressed the education of the audience, as Dorothy Chansky and Martha Schmoyer LoMonaco make apparent in two rigorously researched studies. Both have chosen to focus on the audience as an integral component of the theatrical event and, eschewing postmodern theories of the
spectator’s gaze, they bring a sociohistorical perspective to their findings, which are based on in-depth research of theatre documents, memoirs, and reviews. Chansky examines how the Little Theatres constructed and educated their audiences, whereas LoMonaco, in tracing the history of a number of summer-stock theatres, uncovers the hold that the audience has on artistic and financial policies. The two books cover areas and aspects of theatre history not frequently studied; they examine the complex artistic and economic issues involved in founding and running a theatre, while also certifying that American theatre has never been contained by a few streets in the vicinity of Times Square.

In *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*, Chansky analyzes the interaction between the founders and practitioners of the Little Theatre movement and their audiences. Her fully documented and totally convincing verdict may come as a surprise to admirers of these self-styled rebels of bohemia, modernist and avant-gardist in so much of their work: Chansky demonstrates that, in spite of their progressive convictions, they recognized and exploited the didactic and nationalistic possibilities inherent in the theatre to promote values they considered necessary in society, values that today appear both sexist and racist. Moreover, as she points out, these values have changed little. The desire of the Arlington Friends of the Drama to provide “edifying leisure” at the end of the twentieth century is “vintage Little Theatre language” of almost a hundred years ago (216).

Chansky brings an overarching perspective, subtly entwining criteria culled from history, cultural studies, and gender studies to her exploration of the Little Theatre movement, and so she is able to break away from the generally held view that the only Little Theatres worthy of our attention are the three New York City groups: the Provincetown Players, the Washington Square Players, and the Neighborhood Players. Thus these three Little Theatres do not dominate her text. Chansky sees them as pertaining to a wider movement that brought theatre—frequently traditional rather than experimental or innovative productions—to the universities, small towns, and rural areas of America. To exemplify the effect of these Little Theatres on small towns, she examines Sinclair Lewis’s *Main Street*—later turning to Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* in her discussion of how society continued to look down on actresses, considering them to have devalued their femininity.

By adopting a holistic attitude to the Little Theatre movement, Chansky does much more than extend territorial boundaries. *Composing Ourselves* identifies the influences that enabled the American audience to be composed, or to compose itself (and the pun in the title is delightfully intentional). Rather than limit her study to the theatre building and what goes on inside, Chansky examines publishing, education, and the organization of social life. She argues that Little Theatre audiences were educated not only by actually attending performances, but also by reading the work of theatre theorists and writers, such as Hiram Kelly Moderwell, Sheldon Cheney, Kenneth Macgowan, and Oliver Hinsdell. She provides brief overviews of the work of these men and also of George Pierce Baker’s mythical English 47 class and Workshop at Harvard.

Chansky’s research has revealed a treasure trove in the reviews that Baker
expected his hand-picked audiences for Workshop productions to write, and she gives her readers a judiciously chosen sample. The reviews of Lydia Garrison’s *The Trap* that Chansky analyzes reveal a preoccupation with realism and authenticity. She returns to the latter subject when she deals with the representation of the African American and other ethnic groups by Little Theatres such as the Dallas Little Theatre and the Arlington Friends of the Theatre.

Chansky rounds off her list of influential figures in the process of creating an American audience with two women: the teacher and scholar Dina Rees Evans, who established the “values and objectives” (157) of high-school dramatics; and the playwright Alice Gerstenberg, who devoted so much of her energy to organizing community theatre. Chansky is perhaps overly preoccupied with the twenty-first-century problematics of political correctness, particularly in areas of racism and sexism. Although she admits that we should not judge an earlier period by our standards, she berates the Little Theatres for showing no appreciation of the culture and perceptions of recent immigrants, ethnic groups, and women. The central chapters of her book are dedicated to women in the Little Theatres, and the tensions between gender and professionalization, so well documented in areas such as medicine and literature, unsurprisingly reappear in the world of amateur and small-town theatre.

Martha Schmoyer LoMonaco’s in-depth look at the “uniquely American invention” (157) of summer-stock theatres in *Summer Stock! An American Phenomenon* is totally free of the imperatives of culture and gender studies, and is a descriptive account of theatre organization and management, of the buildings used for performances, and the people who made them possible. Although LoMonaco recognizes that summer stock was a nationwide development, she focuses almost entirely on theatres in the Northeast, from the Lakewood Theatre opened in 1898 in Maine to the Arundel Barn Playhouse opened in 1997 by Adrienne Wilson Grant, also in Maine. She points out that, on one hand, these theatres, frequently housed in old barns, were founded by educated, moneyed people, who could thus overcome the vestiges of a puritan distrust of theatre still latent in the idyllic rural areas they chose for their houses. On the other hand, they were ideally placed to exploit the need puritan-minded vacationers felt to fill their leisure with cultural, value-laden entertainment.

LoMonaco examines the motives and vicissitudes of eccentric visionaries such as Francis Grover Cleveland, Edith Bond Stearns, and Robert Huffard Porterfield, who all devoted years of their lives to running summer-stock theatres. Her historical perspective allows her to credit George Cram Cook, cofounder with Susan Glaspell of the Provincetown Players, with setting an example, not only of eccentricity, but—more important—of the community spirit that characterized these establishments, which offered many young actors the training and experience in all aspects of theatre production that they could not obtain on Broadway. She leaves considerations of race and gender aside, concentrating instead on the development of summer stock and on its gradual self-destroying professionalization. Tracing the history of these theatres from the turn of the previous century to our day, she points out the parallels with
American nineteenth-century theatre, compromised by the star system and Syndicate monopoly. Summer-stock theatres were not art theatres as the Little Theatres had been, but their survival also lay in their independence and, as LoMonaco insists, “most small summer barns ultimately succeeded because they remained small—and handled their finances with a deft hand” (186). Their survival, as she points out again and again, was also due to the ability to see their audiences as “paying customers” (186), whose likes and dislikes had to be pampered.

Read together, Chansky’s analysis of the work of the dedicated reformers of the Little Theatre movement and LoMonaco’s historical account of the birth and growth of summer stock explain the caution that managers and directors had to exercise when integrating European avant-garde influence into their work: care had to be taken not to antagonize audiences whose expectations did not go beyond “euphemistic realism” (Chansky, 3). Thus these ground-breaking studies become much more than analyses of specific groups of theatres; both authors delve into the social and cultural conditions of the early twentieth century and present their readers with many thought-provoking facts and issues. While LoMonaco stresses the economical need to create a theatre-loving audience, Chansky charts the socio-political ideology of Little Theatre visionaries, particularly the assimilationist line of thought regarding the education of immigrants.

Both books are well-illustrated. Composing Ourselves offers mostly cartoons mocking women’s ignorance of the high culture theatre aspires to be. These cartoons collude with Chansky’s unstated aim of unmasking the sexist and racist underpinnings of even the most progressive and modernist of Little Theatres. LoMonaco presents photographs of key summer-stock theatres and their actors, capturing the spirit of work and vacation in an endearing shot of the young Gregory Peck between rehearsals at the Cape Playhouse, throwing horseshoes on the beach.

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Reviewed by Thomas S. Hischak, State University of New York College at Cortland

While few would argue that commercial theatre on Broadway today is the artistic heart of the American theatre, fascination with Broadway and its productions has not diminished, as witnessed by Steven Adler’s thorough and
thought-provoking study of contemporary producing, *On Broadway: Art and Commerce on the Great White Way*. Having interviewed sixty-six professionals in the field over a period of five years, Adler is able to cover his subject from many angles as he allows each person to offer opinions on everything from the corporate involvement in Broadway to the absence of scenes from nonmusicals on the annual Tony Awards broadcast.

In addition to producers in both the profit and nonprofit arenas, Adler interviewed designers, actors, playwrights, critics, and even press agents. Much of the book consists of summaries or direct quotations of the remarks of those professionals; it is a colorful montage of voices but, as with the subject itself, few conclusions can be drawn from it. In fact, Adler is so fair in presenting both sides of every issue that often the book is frustrating to read. It is clear that no one knows for certain either the impact of recent trends or the future of the commercial theatre; and the collage of opinions seems to point to no consensus. Yet that is the nature of the contemporary American theatre; so the frustration probably grows from the subject matter rather than from Adler’s presentation of it. He manages to keep the balance by relating contrasting opinions, rarely imposing his own thoughts or conclusions on the debate. To Adler’s credit, he has gone to the right sources for this debate. For example, both Thomas Schumacher, who runs the theatrical wing of the Disney Corporation, and Daryl Roth, an independent producer of the traditional school, are thoroughly represented in extended quotations throughout the book. The fact that both are articulate, straightforward, and reasonable in their opinions only adds to the confusion. There are no villains in Adler’s presentation, and even the unions, often most blamed for rising costs and closing shows prematurely, are given a fair shake. Adler goes so far as to provide the statistics to dispel many misconceptions about unions, management, and the theatregoing public. When all is said and done, fault cannot be placed anywhere with any accuracy, and the frustration continues.

Although the book concentrates on Broadway, the discussion naturally leads to the areas that are affected by and have their own effect on the Great White Way. Noncommercial companies operating on Broadway (such as the Roundabout Theatre and the Manhattan Theatre Club), Off-Broadway (both commercial and nonprofit), touring companies, and regional or resident theatres all feel the impact; and Adler wisely quotes from major players in those areas as well. Of particular interest is the current love–hate relationship between Broadway and the resident theatres across the country. The latter groups pride themselves on not demeaning themselves by the “dumbing down” of the art, as often happens with the former; yet the guilty wish of every regional theatre still seems to be to send a production to Broadway. The thin line between nonprofit productions by Lincoln Center and a commercial Broadway entry seems to get thinner, especially when the ticket prices are the same and both compete for the same awards and prestige. The power of the tour managers is also explored—and, since becoming part of the League of American Theatres, their voices in everything from investing to voting for the Tony Awards have become louder. Adler spends a good portion of the book on the dilemma of corporations entering into the business of Broadway. Although Disney is the most visible...
presence, an argument is made that the defunct Livent Corporation and the still-active Clear Channel/PACE Theatrical have been involved longer and more frequently. Disney is credited with pushing forth the redevelopment of 42nd Street, but the huge conglomerate is still a secondary player in terms of number of productions and influence over the Broadway community.

This startling redevelopment of the theatre district occupies a great deal of the last chapter of the book. Once again, Adler finds as many rational voices who decry the mall-like atmosphere of Broadway (42nd Street, in particular) as he does those who point out the many benefits already enjoyed by theatregoers and theatre makers. As with all the other areas of discussion, no conclusion is drawn, and one is left with a calliope of ideas that support or challenge the reader’s personal opinion. It is reassuring to know that this confusion is not new and that Broadway has never been able to define itself successfully or predict its future. Adler’s book is very up to date and vividly expresses contemporary opinion. I wonder how ridiculous it may read twenty years from now when the gift of hindsight may show how wrong we all were.

John Bush Jones’s *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* concentrates on Broadway as well, but the economics here are those of the nation and of how the American musical theatre reflected both prosperous and hard times from the late nineteenth century up to today. As the subtitle states, it is indeed a social history, and no musical is discussed without a view toward the sociopolitical conditions that surrounded each Broadway season. Jones spends a good deal of time with landmark social musicals, such as the Depression-era satire *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) and the patriotic World War II–era *Oklahoma!* (1943). Yet he manages to find parallels between what happened onstage and what was happening across the country in even the fluffiest and most escapist shows. The early chapters, for instance, are filled with lighthearted musicals (mostly revues) that echoed the country’s fascination with motorcars, sportsmanship, gunboats, and cocky nationalism. In the days when Teddy Roosevelt was a hero as well as a president, musicals did not hesitate to attach themselves to his popularity through songs, production numbers, and lavish tributes. Escapist entertainment in the early years of the twentieth century seemed to have no desire to escape from the optimistic reality of those pre–World War I years.

Jones finds more telling musicals (and parallels) during the Depression, as the offerings on Broadway either hid from reality or used the lean times to point out the failings of American enterprise. Satirical but daffy musicals such as *Strike Up the Band* (1930) and *Let ’Em Eat Cake* (1933) are contrasted with more sobering works such as *Porgy and Bess* (1935), *Johnny Johnson* (1936), and *The Cradle Will Rock* (1938). Topical revues like *Americana* (1932) (which introduced “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?”), *As Thousands Cheer* (1933), and *Pins and Needles* (1937) serve Jones’s argument well, since the line between entertainment and the real world all but disappears when a show is born out of the headlines of the day. Quoting lyrics from these and other 1930s musicals, Jones is most persuasive. He is less convincing when he asserts that the musicals of the 1950s engage social realities. In a golden decade with dozens of popular book musicals that are still revived today, Jones can point to very few, such as
*West Side Story* (1957), that support his argument, and this potent era is all but ignored in the book. By the late 1960s there is plenty of fodder for looking at musicals as reflections of the times; and his coverage of the controversial *Hair* (1967), for example, is very thorough and still fascinating decades later. Recalling the uproar over musicals such as *The Cradle Will Rock* and *Hair* make one realize how rarely anything happening in the American theatre ever showed up in the headlines outside of the entertainment pages. Jones takes a sociopolitical point of view throughout the book, but too often one has to admit that our theatre, musical and nonmusical, has never been as political or controversial as those of other nations.

Any history tends to get a bit arbitrary as one approaches the present day, and many of Jones’s examples from the last three decades of the twentieth century are suspect. The short-lived and mostly forgotten musicals *The Me Nobody Knows* (1970), *The Club* (1976), *Runaways* (1978), *Working* (1978), and others fit his argument nicely, but they caused few waves then and are more like footnotes to what was going on than potent examples of theatre of the times. He is on safer ground with such adventurous Stephen Sondheim musicals as *Company* (1970), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), and *Assassins* (1991), but even here his attention paid to the brilliant *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984) does not convince that this masterful work reflected much of what was going on in America in the 1980s. Without the luxury of hindsight, it is difficult to predict the long-term effects of *Rent* (1996), *Parade* (1998), and the William Finn musicals. And ending the book with the questionable *Urinetown* (2001) as “heralding a return to those kinds of shows from the past decades in which a ‘serious musical’ and ‘entertaining musical’ were not a contradiction in terms” (358) is probably wishful thinking more than anything else.

The strengths of *Our Musicals, Ourselves* are considerable, and no other book comes to mind that manages to view one hundred years of musical theatre with such a specific point of view. Even readers familiar with the history of this rich and colorful art form will find Jones illuminating on several occasions as he paints a concise and vivid picture of each era and then shows how the musicals of the time grew out of the headlines and mind-set of that America. Finding such parallels in mass media like popular music, movies, and television is often obvious; to find them in the musical theatre is more daunting and, sometimes, more rewarding.

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Review by Christopher Olsen, *Johns Hopkins University*

David Crespy’s account of Off-Off Broadway’s roots in New York City is a welcome addition to a growing body of scholarship on this vibrant period in
American theatre history. Many authors writing on this era have limited themselves to focusing on particular theatre groups, such as the Living Theatre, Café Cino, and the Open Theatre, or on the work of specific playwrights, such as Maria Irene Fornés, Sam Shepard, and Edward Albee. More historical accounts are needed to examine a cross section of theatre practitioners in the context of the political and artistic movements of the 1960s. Crespy has managed to do this to some degree, and has even convinced the elusive Edward Albee to write a foreword.

Crespy organizes his book around four prominent Off-Off Broadway theatres: Café Cino, Café La Mama, Judson Poets’ Theatre, and Theatre Genesis. He devotes a chapter to each and provides comprehensive information and background on the theatre’s activities. He prefaces these chapters with an explanation of the historical antecedents of Off-Off Broadway and follows them with a description of what he calls “the second wave.” Finally, he devotes his last chapter to helping the reader understand how to find contemporary Off-Off Broadway groups and how to create one’s own Off-Off Broadway theatre.

Crespy gives due recognition to Albee’s New Playwrights Unit, which precipitated the “discovery” of works from Off-Off Broadway beyond the boundaries of Greenwich Village. He makes the point that Albee’s *Zoo Story* became an early model for the Off-Off Broadway one-act. He also offers a convincing connection between early poets’ theatres, such as Amiri Baraka’s American Theatre for Poets, and the later Off-Off Broadway coffeehouses. Indeed, Crespy states that the coffeehouse was the definitive icon for Off-Off Broadway.

Of the four chapters on specific theatres, the one on Café Cino appears the most comprehensive. Crespy provides a full picture of this mad factory of plays, which produced excellent work from numerous playwrights. The names might not all be instantly familiar, but their work and styles are immediately recognizable: Doric Wilson, Robert Patrick, Lanford Wilson, Rochelle Owens, and H. M. Koutoukas are just a few of the many playwrights who presented their early works at the Café Cino. Crespy is helped by the fact that Joe Cino actually ran a fairly organized and homogeneous creative ship—many of the playwrights knew each other, shared a gay sensibility, and moved on to other recognizable venues where they continued to write. Crespy is less successful with Ellen Stewart’s Café La Mama, which was a more haphazard and porous operation. Understandably, it is more difficult to research a theatre whose mission and philosophy may have been as simple as producing theatre from around the world. (Stewart rarely read scripts and made decisions based on trust.) Crespy suggests correctly that Judson Poets’ Theatre and Theatre Genesis were defined primarily by their founders’ idiosyncracies (Al Carmines and Ralph Cook) and their relationships with specific playwrights. Indeed, Crespy is most successful at chronicling the numerous playwrights and their works that graced these four stages.

So far, Crespy delivers admirably in his book (and provides some great photos), but his final two chapters deviate a little from his desire to provide the reader with a better understanding of the ethos of 1960s Off-Off Broadway. His
description of the “second wave” of Off-Off Broadway focuses on theatre groups devoted to producing new plays, such as the New Dramatists, the O’Neill Playwrights Conference, and Joe Papp’s Public Theatre. These institutions certainly kept the spirit of new and innovative theatre work alive, but, frankly, the impetus in Off-Off Broadway theatre of the 1970s was to provide platforms for new identities. Crespy spends only a few pages on African-American and Hispanic theatre and ignores the huge contribution of women and gay activists. Women writers, directors, and actors—who had been denied their share of the limelight in the 1960s—came forward and started numerous Off-Off Broadway theatres in the 1970s. Gay and lesbian writers, feminists, and performance artists found platforms to produce their work during that second wave.

Finally, Crespy ends the book by discussing current alternative theatres in the United States, and offers guidance to starting such a theatre in one’s own community. This is a laudable exercise; and I presume that it mirrors Crespy’s own work in this area. The problem is that it belongs in a different book. Setting up an “Off-Off Broadway” theatre in the twenty-first century—particularly outside New York City—is a very different enterprise from what it was thirty-five to forty years ago. The idealistic and creative drive may be identical, but the sociopolitical context is wholly different. This enterprise deserves a book on its own. In any case, Crespy’s book has provided a useful service by furthering the inquiry into a most innovative decade.

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Reviewed by Shan R. Ayers, Berea College

American Puppetry: Collections, History and Performance, edited by Phyllis T. Dircks, is a valuable collection of essays on the state of puppet theatre in America and useful documentations of extant collections that will serve puppeteers. Dircks identifies the need for this work in her introduction when she, rightly, comments that “[f]ortunately, thousands of puppets from various cultures and many time periods have been collected by scholars, enthusiasts and curators, who wisely realized that these material images can teach us much about the society for which they were crafted” (4). Her careful and thorough collection chronicles the well-known, such as Bread and Puppet, the Muppets, and Howdy Doody, as well as the lesser-known facts in the field of puppetry—for example, Peter Arnott’s use of puppets to stage plays from classical dramatic literature. The volume is also up to date; the work of Julie Taymor is discussed for its fusion of human performers with the surreal and for its highly imaginative puppet creations.

The first section, “American Puppetry Today and Yesterday,” contains two essays outlining the major events and movements within the field. The first, “A
Snapshot of Puppeteers of the United States and Canada” by Vincent Anthony, discusses companies, academic programs in puppetry, and other opportunities for puppeteers. The second essay, “A Short View of American Puppetry” by Lowell Swortzell, outlines the puppet arts in American history from their beginnings in Native American cultures through all facets of entertainment and production including the use of puppets in television, film, and contemporary theatre. Swortzell leads the reader through several periods of historical significance, including the use of puppets at the Provincetown Playhouse (27) and the formation of the Marionette Unit of the Federal Theatre Project (27). Rightly included in this informative essay is a brief description of the work of Bil Baird, “arguably the twentieth century’s seminal puppeteer” (28).

Section II, “Significant Collections,” includes fourteen essays devoted to puppetry museum collections located across the United States. The collections covered are Harvard Theatre Museum, the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, the Center for Puppetry Arts Museum, the Bread and Puppet Theatre Company, the Brander Matthews Collection at Columbia University, the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Bil Baird World of Puppets at the Charles H. MacNider Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, the Burr Tillstrom Collection at the Chicago Historical Society, the Marionette Theatre of Peter Arnott at Harvard University, the Boston Public Library, and the National Museum of American History. While most of these collections contain puppets from cultures other than the United States, their inclusion in a book on “American Puppetry” is warranted given the aim of documenting curatorial practice as well as performance and history.

The final section, “Puppetry in Action,” offers richly crafted essays that shed light on the work of Julie Taymor, the collection of the Jim Henson Company, and a very interesting essay on the custody battle over the “original” Howdy Doody. The essay “The Fundamentals of Marionette Care” seems the most out of place, where the scholarly nature of this volume is concerned, in that it deals with the proper care and maintenance of marionettes. It is the only “how-to” essay in the whole volume. However, if this essay is intended to give information to those who wish to begin a museum-quality collection, then the essay’s inclusion is in fact merited.

The closing essay, Mary Flanagan’s “Puppetry in Cyberspace: Developing Virtual Performance Spaces,” drives us well into the twenty-first century. When readers get to this point in the text, they have been through the broad history of the puppet in our country. Flanagan reveals the magic that can be created when contemporary puppeteers employ modern technology in their work. Lest readers get too caught up in modern technology, they are reminded near the end of the essay, in a quote by Robert Smythe of Philadelphia’s Mum Puppet Theatre, that “[t]he true magic lies within those who create so much from so little, and in those who are willing to believe us when we do” (284). Dircks has also added two appendixes—Appendix A: Selected Additional Puppetry Collections and Appendix B: Films and Videos on Puppetry at the Donnell Media Center of the New York Public Library. The bibliography provides the reader and researcher a valuable resource from which to draw a great deal of material. The text is also
impressively indexed, making it very accessible to researchers at any level who might find themselves lucky enough to get into this text. The text’s fifty-eight illustrations are a valuable addition, although the reproduction quality of many is very poor. Dirck’s collection is a valuable addition to research libraries, providing scholars and practitioners with a foundation for additional study.


Reviewed by Jan Cohen-Cruz, New York University

Theatre and Empowerment is a collection of essays about theatre projects worldwide that engage local people in addressing their own concerns. Editors Richard Boon and Jane Plastow explain how they selected the essays: All are written from the perspective of writers’ experiences in the field; they embrace diverse communities, issues, and practices; and all are “profoundly subversive of established power,” including the authority of the artist-facilitators themselves, “in favor of more open-ended, democratic and meaningful learning processes” (3–4). Paulo Freire’s spirit hovers over the collection, which emphasizes both reflection and action. The editors write that the processes described in the collection require “people to think and to analyze . . . [and] question the root causes of their problems and oppressions” (7).

What is the pattern these essays make together? I see the book moving from lesser to greater empowering experiences, each essay embodying particular principles of such work while simultaneously reinforcing overarching ideas. These include the establishment of spaces for many points of view, communal ownership of work created, the belief that reflection and expression can lead to mobilization for change and self-reliance, and the significance of people’s human as well as economic development. Gerri Moriarty’s essay on The Wedding, cocreated by Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, evinces the aesthetic experimentation often unacknowledged in community-based work with social-justice goals. The production pushes “the concept of promenade theater to its extremes,” with busloads of spectators traveling to real Catholic and Protestant homes, to a church, and to a pub for the reception (15). Spectators listen in on the joys and tensions of a mixed marriage in this highly polarized context. Though the play garnered attention and was successful aesthetically, Moriarty questions how much empowerment it engendered. Rather than being grounded in collective ownership with professionals supporting first-time actors, The Wedding, while still informed by people at the lived level, was more about than of the community, keeping artistic decisions in professional hands. The production so depleted resources that they never got to critical follow-up activities, such as postproduction discussions. In terms of the entire collection, this account represents the low end of the empowerment spectrum.
The next two essays describe theatre projects that provide communities with ways to articulate their responses to large sociocultural trends. Richard Andrews tracks a series of plays by the people of Monticchiello, Italy, about their community’s dramatic transformation from a peasant economy and culture. Participation in the plays offers a way for people to go through these changes consciously and an economic base for some to stay in the village. Michael MacMillan writes about theatre workshops on black masculinity in Great Britain that give participants the opportunity to make “an articulated response to structural inequality” but not to find alternatives to “hegemonic definitions of power and control” (60).

A number of essays exemplify community performances that both facilitate self-expression among marginalized people and mobilize them against oppressive forces. Stephanie Marlin-Curiel describes Bongani Linda’s Victory Songoba Theatre Company in South Africa and Linda’s shift from fighting injustice with violence as an African National Congress activist to fighting it with a cultural weapon. Casting individuals with lived experience of a play’s topic and who live and work in the same community as the audience is highly valued; the actors serve as models for other people in the same situation. Ricardo Villanueva examines contesting views of the U.S. Thanksgiving commemoration in his essay on two processions in Plymouth, Massachusetts, one by the descendants of the Mayflower and the other by Native Americans. Villanueva explains that the vigorous U.S. civil rights movements of the 1950s–1970s spurred Native Americans to insert their perception of European entry to the United States into the official version.

Numerous essays foreground performance’s value within economic development efforts. Rather than providing charity and risking overreliance on NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), the Adjuna Community Dance Theatre in Ethiopia, according to Jane Plastow, develops youth voices, skills in traditional and contemporary African and Western dance, and leadership, through a five-year training program. Although only eighteen youths are involved, they become fully enough prepared not just in dance but also in self-esteem and facilitation to extend the work to other groups. Michael Etherton realizes the difference between needs and rights while working with young people in South Asia. The model of funding agencies coming in already knowing which needs they are going to address, be they the creation of schools or clinics, fosters reliance on outside agencies rather than on developing skills necessary for people to take on their own struggles. While appreciating NGOs for supplying necessary resources, Etherton articulates a key role for community performance in preparing people to actively change their world.

Sanjoy Ganguly, Director of the Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed in India, makes a poignant case for performance’s ability to debate rather than reinforce dogma. Ganguly frequently encounters political workers—whether affiliated with the local ruling party against which he positions himself, or with the Communist Party with which he had been allied—who are confident of their sense of their own superiority and think that they know what is best for the destitute masses. When someone comes in with the answers, the act of
everyone questioning the status quo is lost, and with it, empowerment. At risk is a process of engagement that produces what Ganguly describes as the courage to embark on the search for alternatives (256).

I wish that the editors had provided more glue for the collection, such as alerting us to the significance of key terms. Empowerment, for example, is often framed as “giving voice to the voiceless” when in fact these essays evince processes through which people themselves come to analyze, articulate, and change their situations. But this is a minor quibble. This valuable collection shows community theatre’s deep usefulness for development purposes without shying away from problems encountered along the way.

Shannon Jackson’s bracing, intelligent new book historicizes the study of performance in American colleges and universities from the advent of the theatre major about a century ago to the present. Using Foucault’s notion of genealogy, Jackson is ever mindful that concepts such as theatre, theatre studies, performance, discipline, and so on, cannot be understood outside of their “enabling enunciative conditions” (30)—the contexts and institutions in which they are constituted. Is performance “a vehicle of community formation . . . [or] a site of social transgression”? Is it “an intentional realm of purposive action [or] an unintentional realm of spontaneous or habitual enactment” (14)? Saying “both” is probably correct, but to read Jackson’s investigation of the “vagaries of the term ‘performance’” (11) is to appreciate how limited such a facile answer is, absent a nuanced grasp of the territorial battles that defined the terms at key points in our collective past.

Theatre studies entered American universities on the tail of a shift in the last third of the nineteenth century from a narrow curriculum of what would now be called classics to something we would recognize as liberal arts. To avoid accusations of being useless or effete, the softer realms of these new studies—notably English—were particularly concerned with establishing themselves as “professional, rigorous, scholarly, rational, theoretical, disciplinary, modern” (154). Jackson’s case study is George Pierce Baker, the onetime professor of argumentation and rhetoric who almost singlehandedly installed theatre studies at Harvard and later at Yale. Baker’s task was to show “drama to be scientific and systematic . . . in a professionalizing university climate” (60). Ironies abound, as the “rigor” of professing performance in theatre studies depended on a rejection of performance as it had been taught by nineteenth-century “rhetoric-and-oratory professors . . . responsible for ‘introducing boys to the golden passages in Shakespeare and the poets’” (53). Rhetoric and oratory, along with elocution,
were retroactively out—both too amateurish and too feminine for the new university. But performance practice on the new model was also fraught with pitfalls. Universities that embraced rather than resisted praxis—namely Carnegie Tech—illustrate how “the constitution of knowledge, like performance, is site-specific” (64).

Theatre studies endured mid-twentieth-century battles that either allied it with or used it as a weapon against mainstream culture. On one hand, New Criticism shored up the difficulty and necessary specialization for proper study of dramatic literature as a kind of nouveau philology. Raymond Williams, on the other hand, saw drama as the ideal vehicle for the “transition from literary to cultural studies,” as it was for him the medium par excellence “to articulate realms of affective experience that matched but exceeded the conventions of literary critique” (98). Jackson points out, though, that despite the force with which cultural studies took hold, it did little to reposition drama, which still remains suspect “due to its occasional vulgarity, its embedded practicality . . . and its hypercontextual and relentlessly non-autonomous status as an epistemological object” (105).

Jackson goes on to suggest that postmodernism shares this modernist antitheatricality. “To the extent that postmodern performance theory has focused on intertextual, parodic, and appropriative reworkings, its paradigmatic analyses thus repeat rather than reject the professional habits of modernist art criticism” (134). Drawing on the criticism of Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg, she illustrates modernism’s disdain for theatre both because of its failing to be a single discipline and its forcing an encounter with literality. Meanwhile, postmodern artists’ statements often fail to coincide with those of the theorists. Jackson spells out that “any appeal to what sounds like a presential term [the artists’ statements] can easily be denounced as anti-intellectual, anti-interpretive, and naïve . . . .” Her caveat is not that we throw out critical vocabulary, but that we use “more care and caution before knee-jerkedly going on deconstructionist autopilot” (144). On the way from the advent of cultural studies and the birth of performance studies to the present, concerns with gender, race, and identity threw the final monkey wrench into trying to understand performance of any stripe via the either–ors of authentic–inauthentic, pure–mongrel, figurative–literal.

In her final chapter, “Identities and Performance,” Jackson takes up questions that no one professing performance today can ignore. In her focus on racialized subjectivity, Jackson boldly asserts: “Performativity names the iterative processes that do the ‘institutionalizing’ in institutional racism and that do the ‘internalizing’ in internalized oppression. Racism is thus the ultimate performative” (183). Her case studies include work by Adrian Piper, Anna Deavere Smith, Cherrie Moraga, and Ntozake Shange. This chapter, perhaps because it might be said to be ripped from today’s performance-theory headlines, is the book’s most provocative. Jackson heeds Peggy Phelan’s warning that “using visibility to rectify invisibility often misfires” (204), but she does not fully escape a position in which whiteness becomes an essentialized site of privilege. In this schema, the white spectator’s options exist on a spectrum
between an unproblematized Butlerian paranoia in which “the residue of a subject’s estranged desire becomes conflated with an externalized (presumably judgemental) encounter” (187) and a state of “disavowal” in which a spectator’s response to not being directly addressed is either to resist or to capitulate to disorientation (195). Despite the fact that the theatre Jackson discusses so often exposes speech as an “act” (200), the white spectator emerges as always already unable to parse the act, learn the speech, or construe the encounter as anything other than a narcissistic experience of dismissal. If fluid cultural borders have taught us anything, they have exposed that multiplicity and not unity is the definition of identity. An experimental, subculturally specific performance piece may yield more to the reading of a critic than to a bilingual audience member who has never seen a show that wasn’t a Broadway musical.

My criticism is, however, not a disappointment in Jackson’s book, which is at all points both deft and deep. Rather, it is a bid to be in the conversation, for which this book has permanently raised the bar.