

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rose Whyman

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John Tulloch

Shakespeare and Chekhov in Production and Reception: Theatrical Events and Their Audiences

Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2005. 328 p. \$39.95. ISBN: 0-87745-926-6.

This book is based on a series of case studies of audiences in England, the USA, and Australia, largely using detailed ethnographic and qualitative research. Tulloch is particularly interested in the relationship between spectator positions often constructed in production and social audience readings taking place among actual audiences. 'Liveness' and recent conceptual research around the theatrical event also inform his approach, which applies a post-structuralist focus to the local, while also situating theatre 'as a globalized industry within risk and postmodernity' and drawing on current developments in audience analysis within Cultural Studies.

To demonstrate his theory in action, Tulloch discusses productions at the Q Theatre in Penrith, New South Wales, under the artistic directorship of Mary-Anne Gifford. He considers the way in which Gifford's productions of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, situated within a popular cultural history, impacted on local audiences, including many teenagers. Later, Tulloch turns to the Richard Eyre/Trevor Griffiths television production of *The Cherry Orchard*, based on a series of British, Australian, and American student responses. Situating his own analysis within current academic debates on Chekhov, he considers textual representation, social audiences and their reading formations, and the discursive nature of spectator positions in his analysis of the impact of this production. 'The overall findings might be disappointing to Trevor Griffiths', he says, noting that few of the students surveyed read the production from the spectator positions that Eyre and Griffiths had tried to design.

Tulloch shifts to live Chekhov with discussions of Mary-Anne Gifford's 1996 production of *The Cherry Orchard* at the New Theatre and Neil Armfield's 1997 production of *The Seagull* at Belvoir Street Theatre, both in Sydney. Drawing on a small-group ethnographic method of audience analysis, the specific local associations of both theatres, and interviews with some of *The Seagull*'s cast, Tulloch is able to demonstrate that 'the con-

verging of inner and outer frames at the theatre takes place according to multiple identities', again demonstrating the discursive nature of spectatorship and the range of perspectives that inform it.

Tulloch's discussion of Chekhov performances continues within the milieu of the Theatre Royal, Bath, based around *The Free State* (Janet Suzman's South African version of *The Cherry Orchard*); the RSC's *The Seagull*; and English Touring Theatre's *The Cherry Orchard*. Here Tulloch discovers a multiple horizon of expectations among the playgoers who answer his questionnaires, respond in interview, or form focus groups. As with the Australian Chekhov, so in Bath, the theatrical event, its cultural significance and context, and strategies for the analysis of audience reception combine to memorialize unique theatrical moments and experiences.

The importance of pleasure in performance, 'liveness', and risk in relation to the theatrical event all emerge from Tulloch's study. He demonstrates a variegated approach to audience analysis while also bringing to life a number of productions of Chekhov and Shakespeare at diverse venues. Sadly, after years of struggling for adequate funding, Mary-Anne Gifford has left the Penrith Theatre, but Tulloch's recognition of her under-appreciated work is a fitting tribute to the sort of theatrical activity that so often remains hidden from history. This is one of many achievements in a book that so effectively combines innovative theoretical thinking around the theatrical event with an ability to record the complex reception of the event itself.

jim davis

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James F. McGlew

Citizens on Stage: Comedy and Political Culture in the Athenian Democracy

Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002. 239 p. \$65. ISBN: 0-472-11285-6.

James F. McGlew's *Citizens on Stage* does what it says on the packet: it puts the citizen centre stage in Greek comedy against a background of a political culture where the citizen was the decision-maker of Athenian democracy. McGlew argues that as democracy was developing, Old Comedy had a primary role in interpreting the relationship of private and public citizen. His central contention is gloriously simple: examine the desires of

Aristophanes' heroes of comedy and you will discover 'the citizen', because citizenship exists through the shared desires found in shared experience – including that of the theatre of comedy. Comedic commonality, argues McGlew, is at the heart of democratic ideology. He begins with Cratinus' portrayal of Pericles in his comic play *Dionysalexandros*. In Pericles' funeral oration for the Athenian war dead (as given to us by Thucydides), a new public identity is created for the private dead. Pericles denies the possibility of an independent private life for an Athenian citizen within the context of his new democratic ideology. Cratinus undermines that idea simply by showing us a comic 'Pericles' with the same private desires the real Pericles would deny all citizens.

Subsequent chapters focus mainly on Aristophanes. McGlew suggests that his great contribution to the democratic process was to put the common citizen at the heart of the *polis*. McGlew considers Aristophanes' mocking portrayal of that old political heavyweight Cleon, and sees *Knights* as a battle of political conceptions. Again there is a connection between those ideas represented by Cleon's opponent, our 'hero', the Sausage-Seller – the supremacy of discourse over violence, and the right of all to speak and make collective decisions – and the (shared) political desires of the audience.

In examining *Lysistrata*, although acknowledging the male audience would not share the same vicarious delight as with male heroes, McGlew argues that the female 'hero' Lysistrata has the same passions as her audience. In examining *Wealth* McGlew contends that the play merged the audience's primary personal commercial desires into a new collective whole. He ends this section of the book on an almost romantic note: 'for it is by realizing that they dream together that they become a collective, and it is as a collective that they have the power to realize their dreams'.

McGlew could be accused of a circular argument in trying to recreate his audience from the playtexts ('our best source for reconstructing the expectations of *Wealth's* audience' is 'the comic arguments of Aristophanes' earlier *agones*'). However, he avoids stating exactly what the desires of the audience were. The underlying principle is that politics should be based on citizen wants, and not the wants of politics made the sole aim of the citizen. That in brief is what the comedies are saying, and comedy has a role as part of the democratic process, in shaping emerging ideology. The book's clear and distinct focus is its strength and the drive of the argument refreshingly simple. It will appeal to scholars and social historians and could also be useful for theatre directors who want to find in Aristophanes that Big Idea to shape their production.

steve nallon

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John Stokes

The French Actress and Her English Audience

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

232 p.

ISBN: 0-521-84300-6.

As a student of French language and literature in the late 'seventies, awed by my first visit to the Comédie Française, I was also stunned to discover how little the actors moved, how much and how fast they talked, and how much I worried about being able to follow the performance. Stokes's excellent study, charted meticulously and insightfully from the early nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, informs me that my reactions chime with a century or more of English spectatorship of French theatre.

More particularly, however, the collection seeks to illuminate the 'charismatic influence' of the French actress upon her English audience, which, Stokes argues in his introduction to the study, 'has never been appreciated as the long-lasting phenomenon that it undoubtedly was'. Whatever the differences in language, culture, performance, politics, or sexual politics that threatened to alienate or create some kind of difficulty for English audiences of French theatre, an enduring fascination with the French actress was what invariably and inevitably won them over.

The collection brings together eight actress-based essays (some of which have appeared previously in article form): on Mademoiselle Mars, Rachel Félix, Madame Plessy, Virginie Déjazet, Aimée Desclée, Gabrielle Réjane, Sarah Bernhardt, and Edwige Feuillère. A strength of the collection is that the essays can be read independently or interdependently. I started with the last of the essays, on Feuillère (because I wanted to know more, especially more about the 'end point' of the study in the 1950s), and then Bernhardt (because I'm a fan). 'Behaving' myself as a reviewer, however, I worked chronologically through the study, which builds into a truly fascinating account of the 'otherness' of the French actress and all that this 'othering' points back to in terms of explaining English attitudes to theatre, culture, and gender politics.

Although each actress has her 'own' chapter, she is not presented in isolation: rather, an important point is made of the way in which a particular actress 'played' into the roles and images of other (sometimes rival) actresses. Through this actress framework, Stokes offers discussion and analysis of the very 'unEnglish' French role types; the changing repertoire of an actress linked to national and international politics; the actress and her business affairs (how much money was to be made by a French actress and those managements who booked her in England, for example), and,

crucially, cross-channel attitudes towards female sexuality.

If the French actress is seminal to the collection, then so too is tracing her 'audience', which Stokes 'finds', not just by turning to those reviewing for the press, but also by drawing on a range of writers – novelists and essayists that, among others, include Henry James on Madame Plessy, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë on Rachel, or Stendhal and William Hazlitt writing on Mlle Mars.

This is theatre history at its finest: 'irresistible' reading for theatre scholars, practitioners, and general enthusiasts.

elaine aston

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John McCormick, with Clodagh McCormick and John Phillips

The Victorian Marionette Theatre

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004. 272 p. £18.50.

ISBN: 0-87745-912-6.

John McCormick's detailed and comprehensive account of Victorian marionette shows expertly fills the gap in scholarship concerning a much-neglected area of nineteenth-century popular entertainment. Most Victorians would have been familiar with D'Arc's or Bullock's or Holden's marionette shows. Indeed, as the author demonstrates in references throughout the book, marionettes were patronized enthusiastically by collier and weaver, merchant and clerk, royalty (Queen Victoria and Ellen Terry), adult and child.

If marionettes appealed to the entire strata of nineteenth-century society, they also absorbed the full range of entertainments on offer. In the first chapter, entitled 'Contexts', the author illustrates the links between the marionette show and the theatre, music hall, and circus, and how it is that these exchanges made it so popular and durable: the adaptation of standard dramas to the marionette stage, the inclusion of music-hall songs and their singers (as marionette figures) in variety routines, and the appropriation of circus acts, from pole balancing to juggling and rope-walking, which skilfully manipulated figures performed.

Indeed, McCormick shows how the notion of the discreteness of performance genres is, in fact, a fallacy, and that all forms of popular entertainment are products of repackaging and reframing. Links with the fairground shows and the importance of family and tradition are also discussed, tracing the importance of travelling family connections and marriages in the creation of marionette dynasties.

Those chapters dealing with the actual performances of 'dramas, pantomimes, and screaming farces' and of 'fantoccini and variety' are particularly interesting. McCormick uses extant scripts

written especially for marionettes to show how a nineteenth-century standard such as Henry Arthur Jones's *The Silver King* (1882) was adapted, and how the script of *The Factory Girl of Manchester* gives clues to how the drama might have been staged. The description of the 'producer' figures which, magically, produced numbers of little puppets from pockets and clothes, and the Grand Turk figure, whose body came apart to form smaller puppets (arms and legs transforming into two boys and two girls, the head into a clergyman and the body into an old lady) is fascinating. Figures, scenery, and costumes are carefully illustrated throughout with photographs (including eight colour plates), and diagrams (drawn by Clodagh McCormick). These, in particular, show very clearly the construction, stringing, articulation, and manipulation of the figures.

Any reader interested in popular entertainment forms would find McCormick's book an invaluable resource. For the growing numbers of nineteenth-century performance historians, it is essential reading.

ann featherstone

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Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel, ed.

From Script to Stage in Early Modern England

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 264 p.

£17.99.

ISBN: 1-403-933443-x.

Second of five in the 'Redefining British Theatre History' series edited by Peter Holland, this book is concerned with the early modern processes of writing drama and getting it performed. Its eleven essays are divided into 'Questions of Evidence', 'Interrogating Data', 'What is a Play?' and 'Women's Work'. The self-reflexive objective announced in Peter Holland's series introduction – to 'theorize' theatre history and examine its 'methodological [and] . . . theoretical bases' – is evident in these formulations of the question 'How do we know what we think we know?'

R. A. Foakes thinks that the replica Globe now standing in south London is too indebted to the famous but unreliable 1590s drawing of the Swan theatre. Foakes adds to our knowledge of this evidence's unreliability, and argues that we should be paying more attention to the surviving category of playhouse documents called 'plots'. Foakes's readings of the 'plots' are illuminating, although he wrongly associates them all with Henslowe's Rose – David Kathman has shown that *Seven Deadly Sins* belongs to Shakespeare's company in the late 1590s. Moreover, their importance is moot until we discover how they were used: for reference during performance (as W. W. Greg claimed) or when plays were being cast (as David Bradley holds)?

Looking earlier, Richard Beadle surveys our vast ignorance about how such dramas as the York mystery cycle were performed: on wagons, but facing which way(s) and with or without masks? Claire Sponsler, too, is concerned with the older forms, and reminds readers that the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project that publishes evidence of regional drama has shown that the biblical and morality plays flourished well into the period we think of as the beginning of professional drama, the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Maybe, she wonders, we have overlooked some scripts because we do not recognize the documentary forms they take, as when they are copied into other texts. Carolyn Sale is also concerned with the ways that drama shades off into our cultural forms such as ritual humiliations.

Collectively, these essays admirably survey the mixture of transitions and continuities that marks the rise of Elizabethan drama, and they achieve Holland's aim of helping theatre historians leaven their innate empiricism with some cultural history.

gabriel egan

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Shannon Jackson

Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
266 p. £40.00 (hbk), £16.95 (pbk).
ISBN: 0-521-65189-1 (hbk) 0-521-65605-2 (pbk).

Any academic discipline undergoes periodic shifts in vocabulary: moments when a set of apparently well-worn descriptive and analytical terms are partially replaced by new ones. In Performing Arts, the most recent shift has apparently been from the analysis of artistic genre (drama and theatre) to the analysis of performance – a handy term that covers everything from ritual through to the behavioural patterns of everyday life. In the current climate, drama is seen as monologic, concerned with outdated notions of authenticity and art, and unable to account for the conditions of life in the postmodern world; performance is seen as innately interdisciplinary, polyvalent, flexible, and porous. In these circumstances, Shannon Jackson's book is timely, containing as it does a Foucauldian genealogy of the terms in which the discipline conducts its discussions, both internally and with other disciplines.

Jackson argues persuasively that such an analysis uncovers a number of lacunae and blind spots. It ignores the fact that drama itself has always been something of a dubious term – suspiciously close to discredited ideas of high art and authenticity for those engaged in performance studies, and suspiciously close to the popular, the commercial, the false, the practical, and the fuzzily

interdisciplinary for the rest of the academy. It also forgets that there is nothing new in Performance Studies' implicit interest in what could be termed cultural studies; in fact, this interest was shared by some of the founding fathers of Cultural Studies – Raymond Williams being the most notable example. Jackson uncovers a long history of gaps, misconceptions, and misconstruals in the halting dialogue between theoreticians and practitioners; and she also uncovers, less surprisingly, racial and gendered blindspots in even the most progressive forms of theorization and practice.

The book has a specifically American focus; its analysis, therefore, needs careful transposition to debates in this country. It is also perhaps an unavoidable fault, given the nature of the material under discussion, when Jackson herself occasionally lapses into over-theorized and uncomfortably jargon-rich prose. However, this book is a useful contribution to ongoing debates on performance studies – and a salutary reminder that the study of drama has always been an interdisciplinary undertaking, and that Performance Studies, rather than breaking with previous forms of analysis in the subject area, is a continuation of trends long established in the field.

david pattie

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Michael Balfour, ed.

Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice
Bristol; Portland: Intellect, 2004. 224 p. £24.95.
ISBN: 1-84150-066-6.

Theatre in Prison is a collection of eleven essays describing and reflecting upon drama and theatre practice in prisons from different cultural perspectives. Theatre practitioners, prisoners, prison staff, and psychologists present insights into the rarely visible arena of prison theatre in the UK, Brazil, South Africa, USA, Nigeria, and Australia. In his introduction, Michael Balfour contextualizes the cultural and political landscape of prisons, outlining the shifting paradigms of criminology that shape the field whilst raising ethical questions about the function and expected usefulness of theatre in prisons.

Drama and theatre are acts that encourage participation and freedom of imagination. Prisons are sites that seed isolation, conformity, order, and containment of body and mind. So theatre in prisons appears to be a paradox. This collection of essays reflects on practice that seeks to find ways to address this paradox. From psychodramatic therapeutic work addressing the individual behaviour of sexual and violent offenders through to theatre projects which seek to address institutional and cultural change in the prison systems of South Africa and Brazil, the range of practice

featured in *Theatre in Prison* illustrates that there is no single 'prison theatre' model. Rather, there is a panoply of innovation and reflective practice, some of which is driven by cognitive rehabilitative aims, some of which is about experimentation in an attempt to find the possibilities of theatre practice in sites where issues of power, dignity, and humanity are constantly in question.

Prison theatre researchers and practitioners have a small number of texts upon which they can rely for both an overview of and considered insight into contemporary practice in this area. *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice* is an important addition to this field and will be greatly appreciated by students at undergraduate and graduate levels seeking both a clear introduction and signposts to pathways for further investigation. The book will be warmly welcomed by theatre practitioners and academics working within the criminal justice system and those who are interested in how theatre practice is increasingly being used in sites of social exclusion.

caiomhe mcavinchey

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Tamara L. Underiner

Contemporary Theatre in Mexico: Death-Defying Acts

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. 203 p. \$21.95.
ISBN: 0-292-70250-7.

Arizona State University-based theatre scholar Tamara L. Underiner has written a well-researched and insightful study of contemporary Mayan theatre in Mexico. Drawing on fieldwork with theatre groups in Chiapas, Tabasco, and Yucatan, Underiner traverses in this volume several methodologies and categories of scholarship – anthropology, performance studies, history, cultural studies, and literary theory.

Aimed at fellow scholars in practice and theory, graduate theatre students, Hispanists, and practitioners with a keen interest in the active contradictions of culture in action, Underiner's book does not try to 'set the record straight' on contemporary Mayan theatre. Instead, it seeks to explore the thorny negotiations between 'real' and 'manufactured' aspects of Mayan culture as illustrated in different types of contemporary performance.

Underiner is consistently alert as a writer to the problems inherent in the categorization of work, especially those kinds that are relatively unstudied by scholars, as is this theatre. She acknowledges frequently throughout the volume how 'naming' Mayan performance limits the lens through which the work is seen, and in effect, through which the practitioners see themselves as indigenous theatre artists in confrontation with

the non-Mayan world of which they are necessarily a part.

Divided into four chapters, the book examines pre-Hispanic performance texts and unscripted theatrical gestures in relationship to the dramatic literature of *mestizaje*, contemporary street action, and *campesino* theatre troupes working in regions away from urban centres, and international collaborations that invigorate and re-engage practitioners and their respective communities in quest of positive contestations of their identity. The research is specific to only a few companies' work – Lo'il Maxil, Sna Jtz'ibajom, La Fomma, and Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indigena – though Underiner does mention other key troupes and devotes considerable time to reflecting upon the Zapatista movement and its socio-political impact on the Chiapas region and surrounding territories.

Although at times one wishes for Underiner to synthesize her research slightly more and offer a bolder perspective on her subject, her thoughtful and respectful manner instantly engages the reader, which is especially useful given the undeniably potent but ostensibly limited range of work with which she is dealing. Her reflections on the myriad transcultural signs manifest in the pictorial and linguistic grammar of Mayan theatre at the beginning of the twenty-first century and her rigorous attention to how those signs travel across borders make this book a welcome addition to emerging scholarship in this still relatively unsearched area of theatre studies. This book should be sought out by scholars and students interested in expanding and enriching their knowledge of interculturalism at work and play.

caridad svich

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Loren Kruger

Post-Imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance, East and South

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 414 p. £55.
ISBN: 0-521-81708-0.

Explaining the significance of her title, Loren Kruger describes her desire to examine Brecht's legacy outside the normally dominant critical perspective of North and West, preferring to map his impact and the debates around his work and influence within what she calls 'a field of multi-lateral lines of force' in which the Cold War axis between West and East intersects with the post-colonial axis of North and South. Her primary objective in doing so is to challenge 'the notion of a clear-cut separation of concepts or practices along these axes'.

Central to her methodology and the book's specific concerns is the desire to refute the prevalent understanding of Brecht that she believes has

emerged from the dominant critical perspective, which is that his theory and practice constitute a timeless method 'that can be applied to anything from political theatre to advertising'. Against this she argues for the necessity of understanding the institutional and more broadly socio-historical settings within which Brecht's ideas and practices were originally forged and later developed, as well as their subsequent modification in a variety of global contexts.

Specifically, her earlier chapters deal with such issues as the emergence of key terms and forms such as *episch*, the *Lehrstück*, *Verfremdung*, and the reconfiguration of realism and the notion of the popular between the 1920s and the 1940s; the attempts by Brecht and his main East German legatee Heiner Müller to negotiate the cultural policies of the GDR in the Cold War period; the influence of the *Lehrstück* in Müller's work in the GDR and its fate as a commodified product in the 'unified' Germany of the 1990s.

Kruger then turns her attention to the development of left-wing theatre in South Africa, focusing on the impact of Brechtian practice in the work of Athol Fugard and his black collaborators in the Serpent Players and the next generation of anti-apartheid theatre represented by the distinctively South African genre of the workshopped testimonial play and the productions of the company that has had the most sustained engagement with Brecht, Junction Avenue. After exploring the reverse trend, in the form of Athol Fugard's impact on the theatre of the GDR, Kruger concludes with a chapter that seems to be questioning the limits of Enlightenment-inspired political performance such as Brecht's through its analysis of the work of the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This is a sprawling but often stimulating book. For those of us who know less than we should about Brecht's post-war years at the Berliner Ensemble and East German theatre before the collapse of Communism, Kruger helps open up fascinating territory with which we should all be better acquainted. For those who are interested in

why and how Brecht became an iconic figure in much post-colonial theatre, in Africa in particular, her chapter on his influence on a variety of South African practitioners who made theatre as part of the anti-apartheid struggle offers valuable critical material.

Kruger's discussion of Fugard's popularity and the uses that have been made of his texts in (East) Germany both before and after the fall of the Wall is particularly interesting, and gives substance to her assertion that African 'Brecht' is not just a peripheral supplement to his European afterlife but can be seen as a place where the North-South and East-West axes really do intersect. And her concluding exploration of the real-life performances of the Truth Commission and its problematic implications for the theatre it has inspired, is fascinating both for its description of some of the testimony and its impact, and for posing the crucial question about the limits of a 'Brechtian' theatre that assumes the political efficacy of 'illumination through rational speech'.

Informative and thought-provoking though it is in its parts, *Post-Imperial Brecht* never quite adds up to a satisfactory whole. Its ambitious claim to be conceptualizing a post-imperial world that brings together North-South and East-West axes tends to get lost – except perhaps in the chapter on Fugard in the GDR – in the altogether welcome tendency to dwell in considerable detail on the ways in which particular institutional and ideological contexts have impacted on the 'Brechtian'. For a book with such a grandiose title and subtitle, little attention is paid, even in passing, to Brecht and the Brechtian elsewhere in the 'post-imperial' world – though quite what this means in the new global world order dominated economically, politically, and culturally by the USA is hard to discern. Nevertheless, as a contribution to Brecht studies Kruger's book has considerable merit, especially in reminding us that the blunting of his political edge in the West – or at least parts of it – that has come with his 'canonization' does not necessarily extend to his influence and reception elsewhere.

brian crow