

be deeply ambivalent, while stringed instruments possess quite different connotations. Pat Easterling examines evidence for the actor's voice, but the data proves more illuminating for the conduct of politics than for the theatre.

Simon Goldhill's eloquent introduction sets up the proposition that Athens was, to an exceptional degree, a 'performance culture'. He challenges contemporary performance studies for its failure in not having always 'faced up to the historicity of the category of performance', and identifies key semantic categories that seem in Greek terms to have defined the category of the performative. He values the performative because it is bound up with practices of watching and reflecting upon oneself that make democratic politics possible.

I found myself wondering, by the end, how far the frame of 'performance' relates to something inherent in the Athenian world, and how far it relates to the postmodern mindset, preoccupied with the socially constructed human body, the basis of social bonding in signals, and the lack of any centre of agency. Looking at the historically remote but uniquely well-documented world of Athens is a good way to address these problems.

DAVID WILES

*Kathy A. Perkins, ed.*

**Black South African Women:  
an Anthology of Plays**

London; New York: Routledge, 1998.  
ISBN 0-415-18244-1.

This collection brings together plays by both women and men who have made the lives of South African women the focus of their drama. Perkins's editorial introduction offers a personal account of how she came to produce the anthology and an analysis of how and why there have been so few plays published by and about black women of South Africa. Her own story about trips to South Africa and the women she met there in the making of the volume is fascinating, but frustratingly brief – I would have liked to have heard more.

Each of the plays is framed by a profile of the playwright and by interview responses to questions concerning what inspired them to write the play; how the writer sees the role of theatre in South Africa; and whether things have generally improved in the new South Africa. In addition, the women playwrights are asked about the situation for black women in theatre. Responses to these questions form an important and invaluable resource for students beginning work in this field.

The anthology contains ten plays in all: six full-length and four one-acters. These touch on a wide range of social issues. Working conditions for black nurses during apartheid are theatricalized

in Maishe Maponya's *Umongikazi/The Nurse*; the abusive power-play between owner and tenants is given dramatic treatment in Magi Williams's *Kwa-Landlady*; and the conditions for domestic workers in the American South and South Africa are staged in Duma Ndlovu's *Sheila's Day*. I felt instantly drawn to the women's liberation plays, Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mahabarath* and Fatima Dike's *So What's New*. Naidoo's play is especially interesting for its feminist take on *The Mahabharata*.

The plays selected by Perkins also show their writers working through a variety of forms. For example, two pieces are composed in monologue style – Sindiwe Magona's *House-Hunting Unlike Soweto* (written as a short story), and Ismail Mahomed's *Cheaper than Roses*. Lueen Conning's *A Coloured Place* is also a one-woman show, but multimedia in style, working with projections of slides showing images of coloured life in Durban.

Orality and writing from personal experience of hardship are dominant characteristics of many of the contributions. Thulani S. Mtshali's hard-hitting *Weemen* dramatizes domestic abuse based on his experience of an aunt who was badly beaten by her husband, while Gcina Mhlophe's *Have You Seen Zandile* is a moving two-hander which narrativizes childhood memories. Theatre studies and women's studies courses will be the richer for this anthology which helps to address the social and cultural invisibility of South African women.

ELAINE ASTON

*Geraldine Harris*

**Staging Femininities:  
Performance and Performativity**

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.  
£12.99.  
ISBN 0-7190-5263-7.

*Staging Femininities* reads three performances (Rose English's *The Double Wedding*, Bobby Baker's *How to Shop*, and Annie Sprinkle's *Post Post Porn Modernist*) through recent feminist, postmodernist, and poststructuralist theories, aiming to consider theory and practice (both feminist and performance-related) simultaneously and evenly. Despite its claims to address both theory and practice, however, the book's overwhelmingly theoretical vocabulary suggests it is aimed at readers who are primarily theorists.

What it does with and in that vocabulary is sometimes productive, but more often frustrating. Productively, *Staging Femininities* provides very useful summaries of important critical debates and performance histories. It explores the critical problems experienced at the intersections of feminism and postmodernism. It gives succinct introductions to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*,