

[sic] are (by association) in need of political conversion' (157); in *Wrecked Eggs*, Loelia, by accepting marriage, 'has conformed to Robbie's standards of sexual (and by association, political) conservatism' (174–5); in *Paris by Night*, Simon is 'an innocent victim of Clara's actions (and by association, her ideology)' (178–9); and in *The Secret Rapture*, Isobel 'suffers and dies because her virtue (and by association political ideology) is inimical to the contemporary society presented' (191).

The accumulation of solecisms—'a challenge to the patina of the text' (143), 'the underlying focus of the text' (155), *argumentum ad hominum* [sic] (157, 160), 'less from debate or sentiment, but from a more traditional literary trope' (166), 'the institution of media' (*passim*)—and of reiterated critical shibboleths in sentences overburdened with jargon obscures whatever insights the author has to offer and calls into question the editorial policy that could allow this study into print without radical revision. One further curious feature of a book published in 1996 is the omission of all reference to the major additions to Hare's dramatic corpus since 1990.

ROBERT WILCHER
University of Birmingham

SIGNS OF PERFORMANCE: AN INTRODUCTION TO TWENTIETH-CENTURY THEATRE. By Colin Counsell. London & New York: Routledge, 1996. Pp. viii + 242. £10.99 Pb.

Marketed as 'a 'how-to' book of performance analysis', Counsell's study joins the well-established, burgeoning field of introductions to understanding theatre. Counsell's project is two-fold: i) to examine twentieth-century theatre/s of the West, by ii) offering contemporary, critical perspectives on performance. The title indexes the author's use of theatre semiotics

as the principal lens through which to frame his study.

The opening chapter offers students a thought-provoking introduction to theatre as a semiotic model of meaning-making sign-systems which operate and circulate in the dialogic relationship between performer and audience. The author stresses the difficulty of analysing theatre as a live art form, and proposes a mode of performance analysis for his study which concentrates on models of production, rather than actual productions. Some very complex ideas, however, are condensed into this introductory detail (for example, on 'Abstract' and 'Concrete' registers, and the 'Law of the Text'), and beginning undergraduate students may find it difficult to access the condensed history of semiotics and the modelling which Counsell advocates.

The introduction also sets out the author's rationale for choices made in the selection of material. Acknowledging that it is impossible to document the whole of twentieth-century theatre, Counsell opts to select key practitioners who are likely to figure on drama degree programmes. He has specific chapters on Stanislavsky, Strasberg, Brecht, Beckett, Brook and Wilson, and, in contrast, finishes with a more broad-based chapter which examines postmodernism and performance art, via Lyotard. By concentrating mainly, although not exclusively, on what he terms 'Dead White Bourgeois Males', Counsell's aim is to re-examine critically the canon of 'cultural producers' (though perhaps further qualification of inclusions and omissions would be helpful).

In each case study Counsell sets out the key ideas of a practitioner, examines their implications for theatrical practice, and analyses the sign-systems produced. In this way, Counsell encourages readers to think beyond their received, often oversimplified explanations acquired at secondary-level studies of performance models, of, for

example, Stanislavsky's 'system' or Beckett's philosophizing on the universal human condition. Especially welcome are the sections which treat the sociocultural histories of the human subject, and the introductions to the ideological and political implications of subjectivity in specific models.

While some of the theoretical framings may prove a little difficult, Counsell offers the student-reader the alternative possibility of re-routing readings from practice to theory. For instance, in the Strasberg chapter, in a section on 'the iconography of neurosis', a discussion of film stars associated with Method acting uses the practice of performers and cinematic texts to encourage students into a semiotic-based model of performance analysis. The study is peppered with tantalizing glimpses of what are potentially fascinating avenues to pursue: issues of gender representation and neurosis raised in a brief analysis of Jane Fonda as a Method Studio actress; sign-systems of gender and the body; the work of women artists in the postmodern chapter.

The book is promoted as appealing to a 'broad audience', although I suspect that its target audience is more specifically theatre studies. In brief, a dense and condensed resource, rich in ideas for guided student study.

ELAINE ASTON
Loughborough University

SCOTTISH THEATRE SINCE THE SEVENTIES. Edited by Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996. Pp. viii + 240. £12.99 Pb.

The story of Scottish theatre since the 1970s should be a breathtaking roller-coaster ride of cultural activism, ideological commitment, aesthetic experimentation and political pragmatism. Its telling should be both celebratory and