

Book Reviews

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***History of European Drama and Theatre.* By Erika Fischer-Lichte.**

Trans. Jo Riley. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Pp. 351. £19.99 Pb.

Reviewed by Peter Thomson, University of Exeter

I am here reviewing the paperback edition of Fischer-Lichte's magisterial history, first published in German in 1990 and in Jo Riley's conscientious translation in 2002. And I begin, necessarily, with the publisher's decisions on presentation. The book appears in a plain Cambridge-blue wrap with red lettering, as if (like a governmental document) it is, within its own field, sufficiently authoritative to need no meretricious aids. There are no illustrations, and the text, like the Bible and *New Theatre Quarterly*, is set out in double columns. I have to wonder whether the silent encouragement to readers is to approach it (as they might approach the Bible and *New Theatre Quarterly*) out of a sense of duty or with a reluctant recognition of necessity rather than in the expectation of pleasure.

This is a pity, because there is much to enjoy in Fischer-Lichte's scholarly reflections on the evolution of European drama from the Greeks to Heiner Müller. Her binding theme is the fluctuating concept of identity, latent in the *Oresteia*, dominant in the bourgeois theatre of illusion and destroyed by Brecht and Beckett. This is not a 'history' in an inclusive sense, as Allardyce Nicoll's *World Drama* gallantly tried to be. A better comparison would be with Richard Southern's *Seven Ages of Theatre*, here reduced synoptically to five chapters. Chapter 1, 'Ritual theatre', treats Greek tragedy and the medieval Christian drama. Chapter 2, 'Theatrum vitae humanae', features Shakespeare, Golden Age Spain, Molière, Racine, *commedia dell'arte* and Goldoni. Chapter 3, 'The rise of the middle classes and the theatre of illusion', is largely concerned with eighteenth-century Germany – Lillo, Lessing and the *bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, Goethe, Schiller, Lenz. Chapter 4, 'Dramatising the identity crisis', takes us through the rise and fall of the Romantic impulse, from Kleist, Byron and Shelley, through Hugo, de Vigny, Grillparzer, de Musset and Büchner, to the radical attacks on both the family and the idea of the 'great' individual in Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov. The links in the chain, then, are dramatists (Fischer-Lichte's German original was published under the title *Geschichte des Dramas*), and it is not until the twentieth century's 'bold liberation of theatre from the chains of literature' (p. 284) – chapter 5 is titled 'Theatre of the new man' – that Fischer-Lichte dislodges playwrights from the centre. Having proposed Stanislavsky as the last hurrah of the bourgeois theatre of illusion, she now traces the collapse of the

individual through Craig, Meyerhold, Artaud, (eccentrically) O'Neill, Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Grotowski (and Schechner) to a culmination in Müller and Robert Wilson.

The general shaping of the 'history', then, is in accordance with an old tradition. Comedy comes a poor second to tragedy (a brief aside on Aristophanes, nothing on Plautus or Terence), and the sturdily popular forms of farce and melodrama are treated with angry disdain. Fischer-Lichte cannot forgive nineteenth-century theatres for their failure to present the plays of the great contemporary writers, and never considers the possibility that 'mere' entertainment may contain its own commentary on politics, ethics or the concept of identity. She is, nevertheless, alert to theatrical and social circumstance, and she can summarize superbly – as in her brilliant account of *commedia dell'arte* or her analysis of de Musset's *Lorenzaccio* alongside Büchner's *Dantons Tod*. And it may be a source of regret to some British academics that this *History* would have been an excellent companion to the Drama syllabus as it *used to be*. As it is, this is a book that should be read for pleasure (double columns notwithstanding) or not at all.

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***Reading for the Stage: Calderón and his Contemporaries.* By Isaac Benabu.**

London: Tamesis, 2003. Pp viii + 96. £30 Hb.

Reviewed by John Clifford, Queen Margaret University College

A major stumbling block in the studies of Spanish drama of the seventeenth century is the fact that there is no tradition of performing them, and that, as a result, far too often the authors of academic studies are writing about plays that they have never seen performed. Worse still, the English school of Hispanists in particular tended to write about the work of Calderón and Lope and their contemporaries as if they were a kind of novel that happened to have been written in dialogue. So, however beautifully written and inspiring, however full of sensitivity, learning and insight these works often were – and the work of A. A. Parker is a prime example – this massive blind spot tends to vitiate their usefulness.

Benabu is absolutely correct in this initial premise, and absolutely correct in his determination to try to remedy it. As a practising playwright, I totally concur with so much of what he has to say. It is absolutely true, for instance, to assert that working playwrights do not write for their public. We write for our actors, because it is them we have to communicate with initially. It is up to them to communicate with the public; and they do so in a series of transient moments whose richness can never be captured or communicated on the page. That perhaps accounts for the fact that the writer, like the actor, once the run of a play is over, tends to leave it behind and embark on the next, and in the process is not that interested in saving the work for posterity.

It was probably Ibsen who accustomed us to the idea of a play as a book, a frozen artefact. But that was only because while he could find readers for his plays, he actually encountered such difficulties in having them performed on the stage. But the works of Calderón and his contemporaries desperately need to be evaluated as living works of theatre, and so Benabu's book is welcome and timely. I wish I could be as enthusiastic

about its content as I am about its initial premise. Unfortunately Benabu tends to dissipate his energy addressing questions that are all rather beside the point – whether Gutierre of *El medico de su honra* is actually the play's protagonist, or discussing the 'comicity' of the characters of *La devoción de la cruz*. These are questions that belong to the kind of criticism he is trying to distance himself from. Nonetheless, there is a boldness and an originality to his approach that bodes well for studies along the same lines in the future.

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***New Readings in Theatre History*. By Jacky Bratton. Cambridge:**

Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 238. £16.99 Pb.

Reviewed by Jan McDonald, University of Glasgow

When a scholar as distinguished as Jacky Bratton expresses doubts about the health of theatre history as an academic discipline, attention must be paid. In the second sentence of the introduction to this lively and somewhat controversial volume, she asserts: 'We [theatre historians] still do not well know what we are supposed to be doing, what we can seek to know, what, in fact, we are talking about' (p. 3).

The 'villain' who stands accused of creating our confusion is not drawn from the commandants of *Theaterwissenschaft* nor from the seductive sirens of continental philosophy, but is revealed to be none other than 'our very own' Edward Bulwer Lytton, one hitherto cast in the hero's role for his valorous efforts to break the theatrical monopoly of the Patent Houses with his sponsoring of the Dramatic Performance Bill in 1832.

Bratton's thesis is that Lytton and his fellow intellectual Radicals hi-jacked the grassroots unrest among theatre professionals in the early 1830s for their own ends, and, just as working-class discontent was 'bought off' by the First Reform Bill which in the event benefited only the middle classes, the demands by actors and managers for an improvement in their working conditions were subsumed and dissipated in Lytton's ambition to improve the lot of the literary dramatist. The successful outcome of his endeavours, the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843, meant that, according to Bratton, 'the theatre was increasingly appropriated to the middle-class voice in Britain and the received theatre history was written to suit that project' (p. 90).

The alleged confusion among theatre historians is the result of our accepting without rigorous investigation the 'grand narrative' of theatre history constructed in the nineteenth century that privileged dramatic literature over theatrical representation and established a series of dubious binaries between the 'drama' and the 'stage', the 'aesthetic' and the 'popular', 'art' and 'entertainment'. To put it crudely, we lost the plot.

In order to re-construct this hegemonic discourse, Bratton seeks to write 'an unfashionable history from below' (p. 91) and in so doing to exploit source material that has been largely ignored or dismissed as unsound by some of her predecessors. The second part of the volume engages with three case studies: Anecdote and Mimicry; Theatre History and the Discourse of the Popular; and, An Experiment in Genealogical Research. Some innovative insights emerge, for example the observation that if anecdotes are not read for factual evidence but rather as myths of collective memory, they prove

a rich source of information about the inner workings and the ethos of the theatrical profession. If one reads the impersonations of fellow actors in the solo performances of Charles Mathews, the elder, and of Fanny Kelly, not only as popular entertainment but as evidence of how performers viewed each other and how a tradition, an oral history of acting, was passed on, a new and productive seam of archival material is revealed. The domination of the theatre in the nineteenth century (and beyond) by great dynasties such as the Kembles, the Websters, the Terrys and the Robertsons is well known, but Bratton astutely observes that a closer examination of these family trees provides important insights into recruitment to the profession, the organizational structure of companies and, significantly, the contribution, often unacknowledged, of women in the family businesses that constituted the theatre of the time.

Paradoxically, Bratton's book belies her pessimistic assessment of her discipline as does her own acknowledgement of fellow scholars whose work also problematizes the 'grand narrative' of the 'villainous' Lytton. With such champions there is hope for us yet.

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Le Théâtre de Boulevard. By **Brigitte Brunet**. Paris: Nathan, 2004.

Pp. vi + 154. €16 Pb.

Reviewed by John Fletcher, University of Kent

The most recent addition to 'Lettres Sup', Nathan's series aimed at university students, is a lively and informative introduction to the phenomenon known as 'boulevard theatre' in France, roughly equivalent to 'West End' in England and 'Broadway' in America. It is not an easy genre to define, but its most obvious characteristic is that, while being frowned upon by serious practitioners and students of drama, it is immensely popular, enjoying long runs and frequent revivals. It rose to prominence in Paris during the nineteenth century and takes its name from the theatres which sprang up along Haussmann's newly constructed boulevards between Madeleine and République. It catered largely for the rising middle class, whose 'mirror' it became, 'helping it to construct its identity by preaching its values and celebrating its triumph' (p. 24). The message was reassuringly conformist, and in embracing all the formulae of the well-made play, it guaranteed a pleasant evening out for people who could devote the hours between dinner and supper to leisure, and who had the money to pay for the expensive seats, evening dress, carriages and restaurant meals involved. It did not seek to entertain people who worked a twelve-hour day and earned barely enough to cover the rent.

Although it produced no dramatists of genius, it did throw up some highly talented writers: Scribe, Labiche, Dumas *fils*, and Feydeau in the nineteenth century, and Salacrou, Aymé and Anouilh in the twentieth. Their clever plots and witty dialogue still make for enjoyable theatre, even if some of their *bons mots* would be considered politically incorrect by today's audiences. Brigitte Brunet quotes a few choice one-liners, such as: 'If we could see our wives twenty years later, we wouldn't marry them twenty years earlier' (Feydeau) or, from a man to his spouse: 'the day you and a brain manage to walk through the same door, they'll have found a cure for chilblains' (Courteline) (p. 125). And just as

great films can be made from run-of-the-mill novels, the finest opera ever composed, *La Traviata*, was based on Dumas's boulevard success *La Dame aux camélias*. Nor should we forget a remarkable act of homage paid by talent to genius: Armand Salacrou and Jean Anouilh were among the first, at the première in 1953, to salute the originality of *Waiting for Godot*.

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Gaston Baty. Introduced by **Béatrice Picon-Vallin**, postface by **Gérard Lieber**.

Arles: Actes Sud-Papiers, 2004. Pp. 60. €8 Pb.

Krystian Lupa. Interviews by **Jean-Pierre Thibaudat**. Arles : Actes Sud- Papiers, 2004. Pp. 88. €10 Pb.

Reviewed by David Bradby, Royal Holloway, University of London

These are the first titles in a new series subtitled 'mettre en scène' and published in collaboration with the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique in Paris as well as the special director's course at the Théâtre National de Strasbourg. They represent a modest beginning. The Baty volume republishes a text by him of two dozen pages, dating from 1944, and first published in his book *Rideau baissé* in 1949. The text is an attempt to give a comprehensive definition of the theatre director, and is therefore a good choice to open the series. It is prefaced by a ten-page introduction in which Béatrice Picon-Vallin sets out a brief account of the fundamental history and definitions of the director's art, as well as explaining the purpose of the new series: to bring together the insights of both practitioners and theatre historians. Gérard Lieber's fifteen-page postface gives a potted account of Baty's life and work. The Lupa volume consists almost entirely of an extended interview by Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, assisted by Picon-Vallin, in which Lupa recounts his life and work in theatre. This is of special interest, since very little has appeared about Lupa's work in English (apart from the forthcoming special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* (15.1) devoted to Polish theatre). From 1976 onwards, Lupa has been responsible for a range of remarkable adaptations, from Kubin, Dostoyevski, Bernhard, Broch and Musil among others. A follower of Kantor rather than of Grotowski, he nevertheless embodies aspects of the work of both great Polish directors. His account of their work, as well as of his own, is full of insights, mingling practical concerns with a wide-ranging discourse on the purpose of theatre in society today.

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Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice. By **Włodzimirz Staniewski**

with **Alison Hodge**. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Pp. 148 + illus + CD-ROM. £75 Hb; £29.99 Pb.

Reviewed by Paul Allain, University of Kent

This publication's format paves the way for the future of publishing in the performing arts, an exciting prospect. There is a lot to be taken on board, though, for publisher, author/s, and readers or reviewers alike, not just because of the range of Gardzienice's

work that it surveys. The book itself seems slight, with a lurid orange CD awkwardly taped into a plastic case inside the back cover, a brief uncredited introduction, and eleven short chapters of director Staniewski's views on the theatre, collated from edited discussions with Alison Hodge. These are often inspiring, introducing not only the Polish company's praxis but rightly advocating seemingly old-fashioned and discredited notions of the soul, nature, inspiration, in a modernist vision of the function of art. Staniewski's erudition is often stimulating and rich, but the language is at times cryptic, overly metaphorical, and occasionally baffling. Apart from what must be her introduction, rather oddly, Hodge's voice is absent until the surprising appearance of a few statements in the conclusion. But if teachers and students swallow hard at the cost, and Mac-users get over any complexes about why this is for PCs only, they will be richly rewarded by the CD's contents, with sixty-eight minutes of filmed extracts ranging from an expedition in the Ukraine, scenes from *Avvakum* and *Carmina Burana* made for Polish television, as well as vocal and physical training exercises. Some things frustrate, with too little time to read some titles that introduce sections, a poor quality film of *Metamorphoses*, and the short rehearsal of *Avvakum* reveals little. But the video's time-line allows you to pause and refer to the numerous secondary sources that the CD-ROM also contains, including a very useful chronology of Gardzienice's existence, to expand on issues articulated by Staniewski that arise from the practice. Whilst some key texts are overlooked, the CD's extensive resources elucidate his treatises, though they beg some questions – why does the book include poor quality black-and-white photos of training exercises that are shown so much more clearly with movement on the CD? The jacket states that the CD accompanies the book, but in fact it goes both ways. How the two media interconnect needs more thought, but taken together, they open up Gardzienice's work whilst enhancing and questioning how we teach, research, write, and think about performance processes and their documentation.

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Josef Svoboda. By **Denis Bablet**, edited and with a chronology by **D. Monmarte**.
Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 2004. Pp. 238 + illus. No price Pb.
Reviewed by Christopher Baugh, University of Kent

Svoboda died in 2002 still at work on several projects of scenography. For half a century his practice dominated the scenic imagination of the theatre and has inspired countless students. During the 1960s his increasingly international practice introduced us to 'scenography' as the most appropriate word to account for the totality of means and approach that was beginning to be considered by some as the proper mode of work of the theatre designer. Denis Bablet wrote his account of Svoboda as the result of interviews and research undertaken in 1968–9 and it was published in 1970. This is a re-issue of that work with the addition of a valuable and detailed chronology of more than 650 productions for which Svoboda made scenography.

Bablet was undoubtedly the most sensitive and perceptive chronicler and historian of the scenography of the twentieth century. His magisterial *Les Révolutions Scénique du XXe Siècle* (Paris, 1975) and *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale. Mises en scènes années*

20 et 30 (Paris, 1979) remain unchallenged in their ability to combine a presentation of the facts alongside a penetrating and detailed examination of the artistic processes of creating the *mise en scène*. Given the undoubted significance of Svoboda, it is surprising that so little similarly thorough and detailed analysis of his approach and his output has been undertaken. There are several catalogue publications, more or less *raisonné*; there is the predominantly biographical and descriptive contribution of Jarka M. Burian in *The Scenography of Josef Svoboda* (1971) and subsequent chapters and articles; and, most importantly, the writing of Svoboda himself, translated and edited by Burian, in *The Secrets of Theatrical Space* (1993). Burian's contribution is enormous, but he writes with a cool and somewhat uncritical disengagement from his subject. Svoboda's account of his work is, of course, unquestionably crucial, but as with the writing of many artists it is dense and frequently gnomic with regards to the actual artistic processes involved.

Bablet, however, quite rightly worries away at the real fundamentals, at the implications for the totality of the *mise en scène* and the precise nature of the artistic and human collaboration that must take place. The early section of the book attempts to offer definitions and meanings of scenography, and considers in some detail the signification for process that must occur when the scenographer creates *with* the theatre rather than *for* the theatre, and when technologies may serve as means to scenic ends, but also become scenic material in their own right. Bablet was perceptive and detailed in the questions that he asked of Svoboda and especially those that he asked a number of directors (particularly Radok, Krejča and Friedrich) with whom Svoboda collaborated. The resulting account, and the enduring value of Bablet's research, provides the most extended and lucid consideration of the philosophy of scenography and its implications for practice that has been written. This is, therefore, an extremely welcome re-issue and may hopefully serve as a spur to its translation into English.

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***Dodin and the Maly Theatre: Process to Performance.* By Maria Shevtsova.**

London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Pp. xviii + 231. £75 Hb; £25 Pb.

Reviewed by Laurence Senelick, Tufts University

The cult of the director which began in Russia is still vigorous there, despite financial strictures. Of the older generation, Anatoly Vasiliev in Moscow and Lev Dodin in St Petersburg carry on traditions of lengthy rehearsals, dedicated companies and a belief in the transformational powers of theatre. However, unlike their forebears who developed their artistry within Russia and only then revealed it to the outside world, these men, reliant on capitalist funding from abroad, often prepare and open productions in Europe, and are to be seen as participants in an international theatre aesthetic.

Admiring but not uncritical, Maria Shevtsova has tracked Dodin's creativity, for many years attending rehearsals, interviewing actors, and observing how performances change over the years. Yet, for all the engrossing detail, she wisely chooses not to be exhaustive. In each case, she selects those elements most pertinent to a given production

and concentrates on them, moving from the general to the specific and back again. Her handling of Dodin's reception by the critics is exemplary, not merely quoting, but explaining the cultural *données* that inform the reviews.

Her book is clearly structured, beginning with a valuable overview of the political changes in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation and how they affected the theatre scene. After analysis of Dodin's work process, Shevtsova proceeds to examine, first, productions which addressed Russian's historical and present state (*The House, Brothers and Sisters, Stars in the Morning Sky, Dostoevsky's The Devils*); then, what she calls the 'postmodernist aesthetics' of his work with students; and, next, his Chekhov cycle (literally cycle, since the characters in *The Seagull* were often peddling bikes). The final section is devoted to Dodin's less personalized work in opera, concentrating on his interpretation of *The Queen of Spades*.

Shevtsova excels many who write about the theatrical experience, because she recognizes not only how subjective any description has to be, but also how a production shifts, grows and alters over the course of its lifetime. No prose can fully replicate the theatrical experience; but Shevtsova's enthusiastic acumen makes us feel what we have missed if we did not see these extraordinary artistic events. My only cavil is that, in saying that women were 'conspicuously absent from the scene' as directors in Russia in the 1990s (p. 19), she overlooks Genrietta Yanovskaya, who, for many years, was more prominent than her husband Kama Ginkas. Otherwise, Shevtsova's illumination of a theatre that is both highly intelligent and viscerally exciting reflects back on her book, which at once stimulates the mind and the emotions.

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Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China. By **Li Ruru.** Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 305 + illus. \$49.50 Hb; \$29.95 Pb.
Reviewed by *Lingui Yang, Texas A&M University*

This book offers intriguing studies of Shakespeare performances in China. Although its analysis focuses on eleven productions/adaptations, the work reveals practically all aspects of his reception in the Chinese cultural landscape. It is a witness's narrative of Shakespeare's stories on the Chinese stage.

Li's observations of Shakespeare's uses for the Chinese have been supported with documentary evidence of Shakespeare performances in the Chinese theatre. In the major chapters, Li focuses her analyses on technical particulars of four *huaju* (modern drama) productions and five *xiqu* (traditional opera) adaptations. The first generation of the People's Republic's directors established their orthodox *huaju* method in the 1950s by following Russian models – Stanislavski's performing theory and Marxist political interpretations. The far-reaching impact of this methodology was evident in the decades after the Cultural Revolution, as may be seen in the Shanghai Theater Academy's 1979 revivals of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the Central Academy of Drama's 1980 *Macbeth*. These 'superobjective' presentations contain mimetic designs of the *mise en scène*, the typical *huaju* figuration of realism. Although the 1980s *Macbeth* also includes traditional

Chinese theatrical techniques, it does not depart as much from the orthodoxy as the rebellious experiment of Lin Zhaohua's 1989 *Hamlet* and its early 1990s revivals.

Meanwhile, Shakespeare's appearances in the traditional Chinese theatre have posed questions of choice between complete localization of story and westernization, a method after *huaaju* models in designs and story telling, and of authenticity. There are difficulties in both methods. For instance, while *Xie shou ji* provides a successful case of the former approach, it offers both challenges and innovating chances to the *kunju* form. Similarly, *xiqu* adaptors and directors of other Shakespeare plays, including *yueju* (Shaoxing opera) *Twelfth Night*, *Huangmeixi Much Ado*, *yueju Hamlet*, and Peking opera *Othello*, have never found it easy to confront the issue of balance between the Shakespearean content and the Chinese form.

Curiously, the paths along which Chinese theatre professionals approach the western Bard testify to the twists and turns of the indigenous political life and its arbitration on cultural practices. Li weaves her account of Shakespeare's adventures on the Chinese stage with engaging stories of theatrical individuals whose Cultural Revolution experiences have partly determined the ways of their thematic and theatrical appropriations of Shakespeare. The book's general thesis seems to have developed around such argument. This is why chapter 6 reads somewhat inconsistently with other chapters, though the work's discussion of theatrical skills may qualify its inclusion of two other types of intercultural staging.

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***Theatre and Postcolonial Desires.* By Awam Amkpa.** London and New York:

Routledge, 2004. Pp. xiv + 207. £55 Hb.

*Reviewed by Frances Harding, School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London*

This book seeks to identify similarities of resistance and alternative political re-identification through drama and its practice in society across two countries, Nigeria and England (not Britain). Thus Amkpa's quest to provide a theoretical perspective enabling readers to view them through a common prism is an adventurous one.

His stated aim is to turn a 'critical and often personal gaze upon his native culture before applying analytical paradigms forged in the study of Nigeria to political theatre in England' (p. 18). (Here, at least, he does mean England and English playwrights.) He defines the 'postcolonial desires' of the title as the 'act of imagining, living and negotiating a social reality based on democracy, cultural pluralism and social justice' and which 'draws upon the resources of non-formal citizenship to fuel a perpetual act of becoming' (p. 10). 'Non-formal citizenship', he asserts, enables the desire and the struggle for 'multipositionality' in society (p. 10). Acknowledging that some social or ethno-linguistic groups of people within Nigeria are subjected to the same kind of hegemonic discrimination as Amkpa abhors in the 'English' colonizer, in his excellent chapter on 'Theatre, democracy and community development', he ably addresses this, bringing fresh and stimulating material to his argument.

His is a well-worn choice, however, of Nigerian playwrights and playtexts – familiar lines, tensions, narratives and protagonists-but Amkpa brings his own anger, frustration and memories as stimulus to his analytical skills to draw out fresh meanings. For example, in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* he invites readers to consider that Olunde on his return from England now has a 'hybrid identity carrying cultural capital that he can ill afford to squander in a project of Oyo cultural resurrection' (p. 35). Olunde's suicide in place of his father's failed, ritually required, suicide is an assertion of his 'simple desire to defy colonial identification' (p. 36) within which lies 'a sense of agency and identification with the native environment from which he is alienated' (p. 36). However, Amkpa insists that Soyinka is not promoting a simplistic route to a romanticizing of Oyo myth and ritual but challenging the elementary binary construct of 'traditionalist' ('Old Oyo') versus 'modernist' (the 'new English') (p. 37) by inserting 'subtle critiques and doubts' into the presentation. Whilst not an entirely new perspective, the complexity which Amkpa brings to it is indicative of how he enables readers to re-consider the familiar, and as he moves on from Soyinka through Osofisan's and Onwueme's plays, he offers a similarly textured analysis.

In his subsequent analysis of the English plays by John Arden, David Edgar and Carol Churchill, Amkpa applies the same techniques of re-reading familiar material for new meanings and understandings, and here he sees the application of the label of 'post-colonial desires' as a means of identification by which to signify 'an act of refusal to assume the passive, static, essentialist identity of that "Other"' (p. 10).

This is an ambitious project in which the writer partially succeeds. Ironically, his own limited and dated knowledge of the *British* scene, undercuts his seemingly enticing, but ultimately essentialist, aim of practising a 'reverse ethnography' while his extensive and persistent mis-use of 'England', 'the English', 'Englishness' in relation to the colonizer and much else, threatens to place his perspective on an uncomfortable par with those ethnographers who 'know' Nigeria, Nigerian peoples and Nigerian culture after some years' stay in Lagos or Ibadan. His suggestion that the hegemonic performance of 'England' within the British Isles seems 'liberal' in comparison with its enactment in its colonies ignores the histories of Wales, Ireland and Scotland in relation to land use, forced emigration, forbidden languages and cultural formations.

Overall, this is a book whose perspective could stimulate discussion.

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***Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company.* By Colin Chambers. London:**

Routledge, 2004. Pp. xiv + 262.

Reviewed by Dominic Shellard, Sheffield University

There has long been a need for an account of the genesis and recent history of the Royal Shakespeare Company which updates and revises Sally Beauman's *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History of Ten Decades* (1982). Colin Chambers, who was Literary Manager of the Company between 1981 and 1997, seems uniquely placed to undertake this task, but the result is ultimately frustrating and disappointing.

The main reason for this is the two part structure. Part 1 – ‘A Short History of Four Decades’ – is uneven and rushed. Whilst the Herculean efforts of Peter Hall to establish the company are usefully documented and remind the reader of what a pioneer he actually was, the Trevor Nunn years race by. All too soon we are at the recent debacle of Project Fleet, the understandable but cack-handed attempt by Adrian Noble to provide twenty-first century conditions for practitioners and audiences alike by demolishing the old Royal Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford and building a new complex on the site, and I, for one, felt a little short-changed.

This disappointment arises because there should be ample material in this section for the whole of the book. Indeed, the splendid appendix, detailing all the productions between 1960 and 2003, provides a stark reminder of how much has been left out.

Part 2 – ‘Staying Alive’ – attempts to draw out key themes related to the company, such as voice, touring and transfers and the studio, but its progress continually prompts the thought that almost all of this information and analysis could have been subsumed into the chronological account. There are also tantalizingly dangled pieces of information – Trevor Nunn ‘by accident’ wrote the lyrics for ‘Memory’ in *Cats*, thereby contributing to his fortune, but this fortuitous event is never explained – and an insistent denigration of market forces and the evils of capitalism that even this man of the left found wearisome.

The book has received some chilling reviews, but I lament not the paradise lost but the paradise postponed. By calling the book *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, the reader has the not unreasonable expectation that the author will use his experience as the Literary Manager to shed light on the inner workings of the company, but, apart from the political rhetoric, the presence of Chambers himself in the narrative is almost completely absent. And, for once in an academic account, that is a great shame.

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The Theatre of Marina Carr: ‘Before Rules was Made’. Edited by
Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2003.

Pp. xii + 255 + illus. £10.90 Pb.

Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990–2000.

By Elaine Aston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. £45 Hb.

Reviewed by Jill Dolan, University of Texas at Austin

Read together, these volumes provide a thick description of innovative theatre by women in England and Ireland. While Leeney and McMullan’s collection on Marina Carr invites contributors to share their experiences as scholars, dramaturges, performers, directors, and designers, offering a vivid picture of the plays in performance, Aston’s discussion of a decade of work by women playwrights in England connects it thematically, embedding her analysis in a consideration of the national context in which these plays were conceived and received.

In their rich introduction, Leeney and McMullan note, ‘Through a time of . . . unprecedented recognition of, and demand for, Irish theatre abroad, Carr is the primary female playwright working at the beginning of the twenty first century’ (p. xxiv). Essays address the impact of Carr’s *oeuvre* through its ‘constructions of “Irishness”’, studying

her use of dialects and the 'signs' of nationalism. Others discuss how such semiotics have been translated in productions abroad, especially in the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, and the United States. Others raise questions of 'authenticity' in Carr's work, some by comparing her to J. M. Synge and other, more recent Irish theatre notables, establishing a kind of literary genealogy. Readers who don't know Carr's work (as I did not) would do well to first peruse the section 'Apercus', which reprints programme notes and reviews from productions of *The Mai*, as well as *Portia Coughlan, By the Bog of Cats* . . . , and *Ariel*. These offer an absorbing overview of Carr's preoccupations and her eclectic, forceful style, while detailing the plays' content and images.

Some critics associate Carr with Sarah Kane, whose first play *Blasted* caused consternation when it opened at the Royal Court in 1995 because of its graphic violence and 'unfeminine' dramaturgy. Aston's chapter on Kane is one of the best in her book. Aston counters critics who claim Kane for the 'masculinist, new lads' style of late twentieth century British playwriting, suggesting that *Blasted, Cleansed, and Crave* 'form a cycle of plays . . . that variously treats and critiques the damaging and brutalizing force of the masculine – not celebrates it' (p. 97). Aston proposes that Kane's depictions of brutality invite spectators to 'feel differently' (p. 82), not valorizing violence but using it to shock spectators by twisting it, unexpectedly, into tenderness and love.

As in her excellent discussion of *Blasted*, most of Aston's remarks are perceptive and insightful, grounded in an understanding of British political mores that helps readers see these plays through a web of cultural phenomena. Aside from separate chapters on Kane, Caryl Churchill and Timberlake Wertenbaker, Aston groups Sarah Daniels, Bryony Lavery, Phyllis Nagy, Winsome Pinnock, and others thematically under issues like sexual abuse, 'girl power' and its deceits, and lesbian and racial identity. While this format allows her to draw enlightening connections – and provides the reader the luxury of thinking of that only women constellate theatre – the book's organization sometimes narrows, rather than opens, her discussions. The chapter on identity, for example, rehearses some tired theories about essentialism, and the chapter on multiculturalism segregates women of colour within the already marginalized realm of gender. Despite her stated interest in thinking transnationally, Aston's analysis relies on an identity politic that has worn out its welcome as a taxonomy for theatre.

For a good, revealing critical overview of British women playwrights and feminist politics, the theory Aston occasionally drops in does not really help these already interesting, illuminating analyses. Spending more time describing or reconstructing details of the actual performances would have fleshed out the reader's experience of her critical engagement with these plays. Still, the book is a vital documentation of contemporary British women's work.

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***Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights.* By Gabriele Griffin.**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. ix + 291+ illus. £45; \$65 Hb.

Reviewed by Yvonne Brewster, theatre director

This book casts a spotlight on a selection of playwrights' work written during the final fifteen years the twentieth century. Although the volume sheds little light on earlier work,

it may prove a useful source of information on the social, sexual, racial and quasi-political challenges that, arguably, concentrate the minds of Black and Asian women writing in Britain then.

Each of the seven chapters is devoted to analyses of two or three plays and explores themes such as the geographies of un-belonging, the racialization of sexuality, asylum-seeking and arranged marriages. These analyses, however, often consist solely of the author's 'translation' of quoted texts: for example, Meera Syal's 'I'll look fab in a harem, and if my husband the maharajah gets bored he can always swap me for a camel!' mutates to 'a young woman who has grown up in a western environment and who rejects being palmed off to a man with traditional ideas'. Yes.

There is too little qualitative analysis. It appears that once a play has been authored by a Black or Asian woman it is guaranteed place. A deeper understanding of some of the peculiarities of the re-invented English used by first or second generation Black and Asian writers might have proved useful in recognizing themes other than those of victim-hood. The underlying humour and irony which ripple through many of the better crafted plays – the very qualities which appeal greatly to the audiences they attract – are all but totally ignored.

The chapter 'Racing Sexualities' is probably the most satisfying, as it includes informed comment and criticism. However, it sets out 'to challenge hetero-normativity both within and across cultures' and 'focuses on two plays both by mixed race British women' Jackie Kay who is, and Valerie Mason-John who, unfortunately for the thesis, is not.

Obviously, one should not expect the work of Black and Asian male writers to feature, but to dismiss them as having succeeded within theatre only 'in post colonial terms, locating their work over there rather than here, playing out colonial conflicts . . . as opposed to articulating diasporic experience' is to set a hare running which might outdistance this book.

I am sure Griffin intends to celebrate the arrival of these new or nearly new voices on the British theatre scene. However, she presents them as thoroughly problem-ridden and lugubrious; any desire to see them on stage withers on the vine. A pity.

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***Creating Frames: Contemporary Indigenous Theatre.* By Maryrose Casey.**

Brisbane: Queensland University Press, 2004. Pp. xxvii + 372. AUS \$29.95.

Reviewed by Alan Filewod, University of Guelph

Theatre Studies has become intensely focused on questions of indigeneity, aboriginality and cultural positionality. Yet there have been few full-length studies examining the theatre work of invaded and displaced cultures as they reoccupy cultural space in the nations that have formed on their historic lands. The indigeneity that Maryrose Casey examines in this timely and useful study is specifically Australian, embracing the various cultures historically gathered under the label of 'Aboriginal'. While this history of indigenous theatrical production in Australia since the 1960s is directed towards an Australian readership, her thoughtful commitment to the ethics of cross-cultural

scholarship, and the historiographic strategies she has developed to pursue it, are of interest to a much wider readership.

As Casey undertakes the history of an underdocumented field that has been subjected to distortion and marginalization, she also investigates the historical paradigms that have informed the perception of the field. This entails three broad tasks: an exhaustive compilation of indigenous theatre productions; analysis of the changing contexts of theatrical production and reception from 1967 to 1990; and, an examination of the historiographic 'frames' which have been deployed to narrate the historical movement of indigenous theatre work.

Casey begins with an analysis of the historiographies that have narrated Australian theatre development, providing a summary analysis of critical problems in ethnography, cultural studies and politics. The result is more than a history of 'production': it is at the same time a history of the institutional paradigms in which 'production' was enabled (or disabled), and a very clear, useful history of Aboriginal relations with the narrative of 'Australia'. It is also a useful history of the changing paradigms in which all of Australian theatre has operated.

Casey argues that 'indigenous artists' work is remembered and incorporated into the social memory in the context of competing and often intersecting frames 'of experience and positionality' (p. xvii). Drawing on archival research and 'indigenous community knowledge' (p. xviii), she examines, in a series of case studies, the historical movement from recuperative efforts to claim space for indigenous voice and presence in the era of assimilation, to the development of activist indigenous-controlled producing organization through which indigenous artists have bid for professional legitimation. In the subsequent shifts in Australian society, following the emergence of official multiculturalism and the 1993 High Court 'Mabo' decision, which as Casey explains, 'legally set aside the myth of *terra nullis*' (p. 202), the pragmatics of reconciliation have put Aboriginality at the centre of cultural discourse.

With its focus on the methods and structures that produce textualities, this book is a welcome example of the engaged materialist analysis that is a particular strength of Australian theatre studies. With its foundational emphasis on the ethics of cross-cultural research and reception, it is an important addition to the international debates that have moved historically suppressed cultures out of the containment field of 'postcolonialism' into the disciplinary centre of theatre research.

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Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge. By Petra Kupperts.

New York and London: Routledge, 2004. Pp. xi + 176 + illus. \$43.95 Pb.

Reviewed by Ann M. Fox, Davidson College

This is a groundbreaking integration of performance studies and disability studies, significantly advancing each. Importantly, it refuses to delineate disability performance as merely the search for positive imagery. Rather, its purpose is to highlight how disability in performance renders visible both the disabled body and the larger power structures that have effected its circumscription. This is not to say that disability representation is

just reactive here; many of Kuppers's examples subversively reimagine the body and its possibilities.

Kuppers adroitly manages several balancing acts. Disability studies books often reintroduce arguments for the uninitiated; hers historicizes disability (in theory and performance) in a way that is mostly understandable for those new to the topic, yet also significantly advances the theorization of contemporary disability performance. Kuppers's rich analyses invite practitioners and academics alike to understand disability's disruptive potential. She avoids easy assumptions: that audiences are ablest, that dilemmas raised by disability representation within texts automatically apply to performance, or that it is more useful to theorize disability than discuss lived disability experience. Placing communities that have been outside disability thought (with its emphasis on the Anglo-American and the physically disabled) at the centre, Kuppers uses examples that are international in scope and include the cognitively disabled. She builds intelligently on contemporary theory in feminist, disability, and theatre studies; throughout the study she analyses a wide range of performances (including solo performance, television, video, dance, comedy, photography, film, and websites), fully aware of the potentiality and pitfalls that diverse forms of theatrical experimentation pose for disability. In the spirit of fragmentation-as-possibility, Kuppers neither shies away from the questions her readings raise, nor imposes closure on the more problematic of them. Strong when she illuminates her theory through examples, she still has periodic moments in which her theoretical discussion is so highly abstracted as to be opaque. This might prove discouraging to nonacademic members of Kuppers's audience hailed readily elsewhere in the book.

Though the study's scope might seem overbroad for a primer in contemporary disability performance, positing ideas rather than cataloguing companies is its ultimate goal, it is an exciting and provocative invitation to continued in-depth study of disability performance, and is sure to be regarded as a paradigmatic text in the field.

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How the World Became a Stage: Presence, Theatricality, and the Question of Modernity. By William Egginton. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. Pp. viii + 208. \$65.50 Hb; \$21.95 Pb.

Reviewed by John D. Staines, Earlham College

Egginton sets a bold task for himself: to explain modernity through the concept of *theatricality*, thereby replacing the faulty, if dominant, vocabulary drawn from the concept of *subjectivity*. He argues for a phenomenological rather than epistemological approach to the question of modernity, drawing on Heidegger's understanding of *spatiality*, defined as 'the experience of space that underlies [individuals'] interactions in the world and that is specific to their own (culturally and historically specific) world' (p. 4). To explain what makes modernity distinct from what came before it, Egginton posits two modes of being-in-the-world, two modes of spatiality: presence and

theatricality. The medieval experience is characterized by *presence*, where the self perceives no boundaries between the real and the symbolic, between truth and fiction, and the modern by *theatricality*, where the self is constantly aware that it experiences reality and truth through the mediation of signs and fictions.

In a short space, Egginton engages an impressive array of modern theory, taking on deconstruction, pragmatism, historicism, and psychoanalysis to demonstrate the inadequacy of subjectivity as an explanation for modernity. He argues persuasively against calling such theory 'post'-modern, as we still view the world through theatricality, the screens of film, television, and the computer only modifying, not replacing, modern spatiality. Egginton's accounts of his theory are generally lucid and suggestive, well worth the consideration of any student of modernity.

To bolster his theoretical case, Egginton studies examples drawn primarily from France and Spain. His accounts of the stage practices developing in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Madrid and Paris are excellent, though in general his arguments about the transition from the medieval to the modern suffer from the brevity and limited scope of his historical and literary chapters. For example, since he is building his argument on a term taken from theology, the doctrine of the Real Presence, the Reformation debate over the nature of Christian Communion stands out as an important omission. The experience of Protestant England or perhaps the Dutch Republic or the German principalities seems a necessary part of any argument that would, as this does, generalize about the European experience. The British and Dutch rejection of absolutism as developed in Spain and France would likewise prove an important qualifier to his discussion of theatricality and the modern state. Nonetheless, Egginton's account of theatricality provides one useful place to begin a needed reassessment of modernity that will free us from the grip of the 'subject' as the sole way to understand and criticize modern institutions.

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Theatricality. Edited by **Tracy C. Davis** and **Thomas Postlewait**. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xi + 243. £40.00 Hb; £16.99 Pb.

Reviewed by Dean Wilcox, North Carolina School of the Arts

Wrestling with the meanings, connotations, and applications of a concept defined by its 'protean flexibility' (p. 4) is a dauntingly complex task. Signifying everything from the artifice attacked by 'anti-theatrical prejudice' to the modern/postmodern conception of stylization, 'theatricality' is revealed to be an interpretive model, a theoretical concept, and an aesthetic and philosophical system (p. 1). While it is tempting to discuss this as a collection of essays, presented is a set of intertwined and often contradictory approaches that move beyond theatre to incorporate politics, culture, and religion. As the editors acknowledge 'we may fail to deliver a single definition or a systematic understanding' (p. 3) but 'by comparing and contrasting the case studies, readers may be stimulated not only to trace the relationships among the several meanings of the idea of theatricality but also to articulate variations on the theme' (p. 34).

The subjects in the first half, while mingling theory with practice, focus on historical issues such as Jody Enders's exploration of the 'mimetic miracle' of the Valenciennes passion play of 1547, Haiping Yan's analysis of Chinese music-drama that juxtaposes realism and stylization to 'move people with and into deep feelings' (p. 66), and Thomas Postlewait's re-examination of E. K. Chambers's misleading conclusion of anti-theatricalism in Renaissance London. Underscoring his new-historicism Postlewait states, 'Within its own context, especially if we are careful in stipulating a definition, the idea of theatricality allows us to see the relations between theatre and society in interesting and informative ways' (p. 120).

Tracy Davis primes the reader for the subsequent theoretical discussions by questioning the *OED*'s reading of Thomas Carlyle, the term's originator, to discover that theatricality is consistently paired with 'insincerity, but not fakery', showing that it is 'coexistent with a failure to sympathize, but not dissimulation' (p. 143). Like Brecht, whose spectre hovers over this study, Davis argues for the term to be employed 'for enabling effects of active dissociation, or alienation, or self-reflexivity' (p. 153). Jon Erickson's discussion of the never-realized debate between Foucault and Habermas builds on this spectatorial awareness as he dismisses a single manipulative monological perspective to side with Habermas's dialogical notion of 'communicative action', leading toward a melodramatic blending of realism and theatricality.

The final essay by Shannon Jackson concentrates on the rift between theatricality and performativity with a close reading of Diamond, Case, and Butler. Responding to the debates that these authors initiated Jackson illuminates what could be the summation of the entire text, 'delineating the "proper object" of theatricality is a difficult endeavour due both to the terms essentialist flexibility and to the shifting relational contexts in which it is theorized' (p. 210). Offering what Erickson might consider an act of 'communicative deliberation' (p. 157) the diversity of topics addressed present the concept of theatricality as always aware, periodically sympathetic, always self-conscious, and occasionally disruptive to create a 'unified' yet multi-dimensional perspective on an ever-expanding subject.