Bella Merlin's well-known energy and her long-established admiration for Stanislavsky make her the ideal author for the study of his work, and this book does not disappoint. The author's own training and career have already sounded new notes in our comprehension of this most influential of actor-directors, and here she untangles the knots and lays hold on the slipperiness of potential of actor-directors, and here she untangles the knots and lays hold on the slipperiness of their training and rehearsal practice to life by describing specific exercises. Simple – but certainly effective.

Bella Merlin to write a new introduction? Routledge could reissue it, and even persuade Bella Merlin to write a new introduction?

Jonathan Pitches's work on Meyerhold is also stimulating. We know from his earlier publications that Pitches has done a good deal of practical work with Russian 'masters' of Meyerhold's 'system' (for want of a better term), and this shows here. Particularly useful, perhaps, is the discussion of that vexed, difficult, but seminal formulation of twentieth-century practice, 'montage', and the comparison between Meyerhold and Chaplin is both enlightening and elegant.

Most significant of all is Pitches's insistence that 'Meyerhold's craft is captured in the body of the actor' (my italics). His descriptions ensure that we feel Pitches's own physical understanding in his written exegesis. This study is a very valuable addition to our knowledge of the master of biomechanics, whose true significance is still in the process of being revealed.

Jacques Lecoq may have been apparently less theatrically ubiquitous than either Stanislavsky or Meyerhold, but his influence has still been surprisingly widespread in Europe and Britain over the last decades, even if it has too often gone unnoticed, and even unacknowledged. It still surprises me to discover just how many of my favourite performers and/or teachers were trained in Lecoq's school. In this study, Simon Murray rightly emphasizes the experimental nature of Lecoq's work, a student-centred orientation which co-existed with a precise emphasis on technique and practice. This was perhaps another of Lecoq's paradoxes, or 'dualisms', which find their key expression in his 'pushing-and-pulling' work, which not only enables actors to find themselves physically but also teaches them to know themselves.

The fourth book in the series, Michael Chekhov by Franc Chamberlain, seems rather lightweight after the other three studies. Partly, it seems less visceral, less based in its subject's life – Chekhov's background, his drunkenness, his religious mania, his paranoia, are barely touched on here. Moreover, the implications of some of his ideas, such as 'the incorporation of images', are never challenged, and the level of practice indicated by the given exercises remains rather elementary.

I have myself found some of Chekhov's 'broken' improvisation exercises ('Begin!' – 'End!' –
‘Begin something different!’ – ‘End!’ – etc.) not only liberating but profound, and frightening in their potential for the exploration of buried or dangerous inner impulses. But Chekhov’s ability to penetrate dark or hidden aspects of the psyche is not followed through in this study.

Nevertheless, the project as a whole must be welcomed without reservation. It will be a godsend to drama teachers and their students at all levels from GCSE to postgraduate; it will be invaluable to theatre historians seeking focused discussion of particular practitioners; and it will be an illumination for theatregoers – and others – who want to understand something more of what makes the stage such an infuriating and delightful addiction.

ROBERT LEACH

doi: 10.1017/s0266464x04220371

Heidi Hutner
Colonial Women: Race and Culture in Stuart Drama

The presentation of gender in seventeenth-century dramatic works has long been a focus of scholarly attention; in recent years there has also been a growing interest in the intersection of proto-colonial politics, gender, and race in plays such as Shakespeare’s The Tempest. In Colonial Women, Heidi Hutner attempts to broaden the scope of such studies by looking at the development of a particular strand of colonial discourse – the use of the ‘woman-as-land’ metaphor – during the seventeenth century. She aims to demonstrate that we can trace in its dramatic production the way in which patriarchal culture ‘attempts to define, and for English Royalists after 1660, restore itself over the body of the native woman or the European woman who has gone native’.

The political and the sexual are thereby closely entwined in a network of power and desire, which underlines the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Central to Hutner’s thesis are two influential mythic figures: Pocahontas, who married John Rolfe and was brought to England, and Malinche, translator and lover of Cortes. The study begins in the Jacobean period with The Tempest and John Fletcher and Philip Massinger’s The Sea Voyage, before considering Restoration revisions of The Tempest such as Davenant and Dryden’s The Enchanted Island and Thomas Duffet’s Mock-Tempest. It then examines Dryden’s collaboration with Robert Howard, The Indian Queen, and its sequel, The Indian Emperor, written by Dryden alone, before concluding with a study of Aphra Behn’s The Widow Ranter.

Through these analyses, Hutner traces a continuing narrative of gendered colonial rhetoric. Starting with two plays which are, to a greater or lesser extent, implicated in the disputed and fragile Jacobean project of colonial exploration, the study ends with Behn’s depiction of the well-established, though still politically disruptive, Virginian colony of the late seventeenth century. As this might suggest, one of the book’s strengths is its scope, its depiction of the way in which particular narrative structures and stereotypes are replayed in shifting political, social, and theatrical contexts. To apply the same relatively narrow critical model to all texts risks, however, a flattening out of those differences, and the imposition of an implicitly teleological narrative onto the events of the seventeenth century.

LUCY MUNRO

doi: 10.1017/s0266464x04230378

Louise McCollell
Exit, Pursued by a Bear.

This is a book of reference which claims to be a unique guide to the works of Shakespeare, which it isn’t: there are others such. It is however, fairly exhaustive in its range of entries and contains interesting appendices such as a filmography (a word I’m sure Shakespeare would have eschewed). What I am not clear about is how the information in the book is meant to be used. It is accurate, terse, and distilled; and if you can’t remember the name of the third member of the Watch in Much Ado, you can look it up. But then you could also open the play.

The volume provides a short cut to factual knowledge, but doesn’t go much further. If the Bard is your chosen subject on Mastermind, this would form the basis of a good revision guide. If you hope to be on Who Wants to be a Millionaire, make sure one of your phone-a-friends has the book beside the telephone. Beyond these unlikely contingencies, I am not clear what use it will be to me. I have worked through it to write this review, but I have a feeling that the occasions I might need to refer to it in future will only be those which encourage laziness.

CLIVE BARKER

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Brian Woolland, ed.
Jonsonian: Living Traditions

The subject of this book is succinctly explained in the Editor’s Introduction. The essays attempt to examine ‘what the term “Jonsonian” might mean’
and further to ask ‘what Jonson’s theatre means to us in the early twenty-first century’ and ‘what the “Jonsonian” tells us about our own theatre’.

The book then falls into three sections. The first contains analyses of a group of Jonson’s supposedly ‘untheatrical’ plays – Poetaster, Sejanus, Bartholomew Fair, The New Inn, and The Magnetic Lady. The second and shortest looks at Jonson’s seventeenth-century impact and is perhaps historically, if not analytically, the most interesting since it includes mention of work still not enough known – such as Susannah Centlivre’s powerful play The Basset Table. The final section has essays on Arden, Orton, Barnes, Churchill, and Ayckbourn, and it’s here that the book’s general idea comes rather unstuck.

The editor explains the intention is to see how use of the ‘Jonsonian’ rubric sheds new light both on Jonson and on ‘practitioners whose work is not normally thought of in that way’. By contrast, I found the pursuit of the ‘Jonsonian’ a constraint on the analyses, so that there’s very little that’s new here. And it forces the question of why anyone might want to do this sort of thing in the first place. The book is a bit too recherché for students, perhaps not full enough for early-modern specialists (though there’s a smart essay on the Caroline stuff by Julie Sanders), and a bit off the point for those working in modern theatre (where the challenging current work often doesn’t begin as ‘writing’). If it were attempting to account for modes of historical transmission, one might expect essays theorizing genre and cultural process. As it stands it remains like a collection of conference papers conscientiously addressing the topic of the day.

Clive Barker

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Neil Blackadder

Performing Opposition: Modern Theatre and the Scandalized Audience


When a theatre audience is scandalized by a performance, it often enacts its protest in a highly theatrical way, using catcalls, walkouts, and even fists to express its disapproval. In this superb study of theatre scandals, Neil Blackadder looks at examples of the interaction between stage and spectators between the 1880s and the 1930s, arguing that the ‘unprecedented, short-lived, and probably unrepeatable circumstances’ of this era encouraged ‘works which directly challenged their audiences, and spectators who defied predominant norms of behaviour in order to express their opinion’.

After a sweeping introduction which looks at changes in the audience’s behaviour from ancient times to the nineteenth century, Blackadder devotes a chapter each to the controversial openings of Hauptmann’s Before Sunrise, Jarry’s Ubu Roi, Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World, O’Casey’s The Plough and the Stars before finishing off with a round-up of Brecht’s early work. In each case, he sketches the cultural background and then subjects contemporary reports of scandals to a close reading, which reveals the exact nature of the audiences’ objections to the plays.

It’s fascinating to learn that after the disruption of Hauptmann’s play in 1889, a court found that one of its opponents was justified in shouting ‘Are we in a brothel?’, but not in waving a pair of forceps during a scene in which a baby was delivered onstage. In Ubu Roi, the play’s supporters included women, who may have been ‘most excited by the possibility that the utterance of merdre might function as a catalyst for social change’. Blackadder then compares the Abbey production of The Playboy of the Western World with its 1912 American tour, and concludes that ‘the protests against O’Casey’s play took a more concentrated and violent form than those against Synge’s, yet reverberated less’. Finally, his long chapter on Brecht’s early work shows that while it provoked much protest, it ‘failed’ in its mission to change audience behaviour.

Scrupulously researched, persuasively argued and clearly written, Blackadder’s study of audience behaviour says a lot both about theatre culture in an era of rapid social change and about exactly what words or actions stimulated audiences to per-
form a live public protest during a performance, as opposed to protesting after the event. Students and academics will find this account immensely useful and stimulating.  

ALEKS SIERZ

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Gabriele Griffin
Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain

This is an important book that rightly claims its place as ‘the first monograph to document and analyze the plays written by Black and Asian women playwrights in Britain’; indeed it is commendable for this alone, and stands as a long-awaited addition to the documentation of British theatre. With an overall emphasis on the effect of migration and diaspora space on black and Asian subjectivities in Britain, it examines common themes in a range of plays, mostly by second-generation, British-born, playwrights, including Rukhsana Ahmad, Maya Chowdry, Trish Cooke, Tanika Gupta, Jackie Kay, Valerie Mason-John, Winsome Pinnock, and Zindika.

Following a roughly chronological route, it maps the theatrical representation of changes in black and Asian identity, beginning with discussions of the feelings of displacement, estrangement, and alienation experienced by first and second-generation migrants in the post-war and ensuing years, and ending with debates about how British Asian theatre refigures perceptions of asylum seekers in twenty-first century Britain. Between these points are substantial close textual analyses of the representation of cultural traditions and rituals – such as Obeah or arranged marriages, hybridity, entre-deux (in-betweenness), assimilation, un/belonging, tourism, exile, lesbianism in diasporic contexts, and ‘sexploitation’.

Griffin painstakingly summons up appropriate textual evidence to support her readings, making clear links to broader socio-political contexts and sociological accounts of diasporic experiences. These are all written in an accessible style that will help to make this an important resource for academic researchers and students.

However, theatricality is elided a little in favour of politics, and although she categorically states that ‘diasporic identity generates ambivalence’, she circumvents dealing with the possible ambiguities in the plays, which could be explored with more reference to performance choices and reception. Other interpretations are either ignored or cursorily raised and then quickly dismissed, a notable absence given that Griffin never overtly locates the possible biases of her own perspective.

Production reviews are mentioned occasionally, but are not interrogated fully enough to give a full sense of how theatricality might have inflected upon any understandings of the plays.

The discussions of sexuality and sexploitation loses some of the explicit focus on diaspora, but still offer acute and detailed readings of plays, such as Valerie Mason-John’s Sin Dykes, which have received virtually no previous published critical analysis. Griffin concludes that black and Asian British women playwrights should be seen as ‘constitutive subjects of a changing Britain’. Their work should not be considered ‘other’, but rather should be central to any understandings of contemporary British theatre. She offers pertinent suggestions for future research (such as work on theatre form, staging, and audiences) that are noticeably missing here. It is undeniable that, despite my reservations, and the increasing number of small editing mistakes as she hurries towards this worthy conclusion, this book will be a crucially valuable contributor to that cause.

LYNETTE GODDARD

DOI: 10.1017/s0266464x0428037x

Maria Delgado
‘Other’ Spanish Theatres

For the student of twentieth-century Spanish theatre, familiar mainly with the work of Lorca and Valle-Inclán, this book fills a great void. The playwright is decentred from the locus of study. It focuses on the work of actors, directors, and companies. Its chapters on Margarita Xirgu, Maria Casares, and Nuria Espert celebrate the rich contribution of women. The book’s scholarship is painstaking: at every stage the practice is located precisely in cultural, historical, and theatrical contexts. The ‘other’-ness of its theatres, and the ways in which they can be considered Spanish, are argued with subtlety and conviction; for example, in the account of Maria Casares, whose practice as a Spanish performer is developed mainly on the basis of work created in France or in South America.

The book’s critical interest is not limited to its study of Spanish/Catalan theatre. It addresses with inspiring resource the methodological problems of retrieving and critiquing the ephemera of the past. The early chapters, in particular, sift through the relics of playtexts performed (often unpublished or long out-of-print), contemporaneous critical reviews, and company or personal archives, including some evocative photographs. Even to the Hispanicist, much of this will be rare and valuable material, and the book’s conception of the theatrical terrain a revisionist one. For the
non-specialist it also references (and supplements) an enlightening range of extant academic work, much of it not available in English.

The first study, of the great actress Margarita Xirgu, effectively introduces her to the Anglophone non-specialist reader. In this chapter, Delgado asserts the power of the performer as writer, and delineates the complexities of castellano/Catalan culture and politics in the early twentieth century. The book considers the work of such unfamiliar figures as actor-writer-director Enrique Rambal, who left no legacy of theoretical texts and consequently, according to Delgado, ‘remains a figure conspicuously absent from many significant published studies of the twentieth-century Spanish stage’.

However, one excitement of reading the chapters in sequence is to recognize that Delgado deals increasingly with performances, such as those created by Espert and Pascual, on the basis of personal encounter, vividly rendered. In this respect, the final study, on the work of La Cubana, is a model of critical practice; it evokes, analyzes, and contextualizes with immense panache, demonstrating, as does much else in this groundbreaking book, the enduring value of the theatrical scholar who can simultaneously inscribe and interpret the ephemera of today for future generations.

John Ginman

Maria Jones presents ‘the idea that the cultural object of performance may be authentic in itself and yet still pull back to an original history’, and her study is indeed alert to the historical context of the plays considered (The Taming of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, and Richard II) and how early modern views on gender, foreignness, and monarchy speak to a modern audience. The book will appeal to anyone interested in the interface between text and performance, and a particular strength is Jones’s sensitive readings of the plays themselves alongside important twentieth-century stage and film productions, although arguably a narrower range of productions might have been considered more closely, avoiding the somewhat list-like survey we get here.

The wide-ranging analysis evident in Chapters 2 and 3 narrows in Chapters 4 and 5 to provide genuinely attentive readings of the plays’ use of crucial properties: Ophelia’s flowers and Richard’s throne and crown. In general the book provides detailed and informative accounts of modern productions, but Jones seems uncomfortable with authentic staging practice. Her objection that the replica Shakespeare’s Globe players’ production...
of Richard II (2003) was dictated by the players and ignored ‘a history of women’s performance’ seems unreasonable, since history itself, not the players, tells us that women were not present on the early modern stage.

Unfortunately the clarity of the main chapters is lacking in the introduction, which overuses jargon, and the author’s occasional use of the first-person throughout, although presumably aiming at the personal, jars with the otherwise formal tone of expression. Moreover, it is not entirely clear why Jones chose to consider these plays in particular, omitting those which might have proved especially relevant to her thesis, such as Henry V and The Tempest. None the less, this book will be of value to anyone, student, scholar, or practitioner, wanting informed and sensitive reflection upon the recent productions chosen.

JOAN FITZPATRICK

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Richard W Schoch

Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century

While covering the broad canvas of nineteenth-century popular performance, Robert Schoch finds fascinating focus in the parodic use of Shakespearean drama in the period’s burlesques. He argues that burlesques are at their most telling when aiming their satire at the very ‘summit’ of their culture. His thesis, then, is that ‘there is more at stake in burlesquing Hamlet than in burlesquing … Lady Audley’s Secret’, and that, as a result, burlesques that ‘drew upon Shakespeare’s cultural capital were able to enact and act upon a particularly potent range of political possibilities.’

This is an argument that Schoch builds with detailed reference to mainstream performances of Shakespeare as these evolved and adapted through the century, as well as with full reference to the similar developments on the popular stage – charting, for example, the success of the comedian performer and the rise of the commercial ‘leg show’. Throughout Schoch is concerned to cast the burlesque as more than theatrical adaptation. Debating within discourses of cultural patrimony, respectability, and political reform, he argues for the burlesque as a valuable means by which to unpack culture, cultural production, and cultural values in the nineteenth century: for him, burlesque has the potential to be a revealing two-way mirror for the nineteenth century and the meaning and nature of Shakespeare’s theatrical and cultural legacy.

Schoch is determined to treat his subject with critical robustness and scholarly detachment. He provides an unquestionably serious and worthwhile account of the nineteenth-century popular stage, and is more than convincing in his knowledge of the genre and his understanding of its theatrical and social context, as well as of more modern critical and cultural debates around the nineteenth-century stage and in Shakespeare studies and the performance history of the plays.

I am, though, tempted to note that he is so determined to describe and explain the use of burlesque as a serious source of social, cultural, and indeed political commentary that the form’s ability to delight and amuse is somewhat effaced. It may seem churlish to criticize such an assured historical investigation, such detailed archive research, such theoretical aplomb, but after opening with a racy account of comedian Thomas Blanchard wielding a phallic bassoon while playing Guildenstern, Schoch turns serious. While he notes that the ‘eminent tragedians [of the nineteenth century] were nothing if not earnest’ and that, as such, ‘they were simply begging to be ridiculed’, I find that his study errs to similar gravity. While he sees ‘frenzy’, satire, travesty and eroticism in his subject matter, which he describes as ‘comic misquotations of Shakespeare’ and ‘an explicitly metatheatrical form’, little of the antic or the playful makes its way into his prose.

Nevertheless, there is much to enjoy in his work, not least his use of primary criticism and contemporary accounts of the form and its reception. The relative density of the argument is tempered by the richness of both the visual evidence and textual quotations and references, and his interpretation and analysis is compelling and lively.

ADRIENNE SCULLION