The ‘violated bodies’ of Pascale Aebischer’s title are ones, she writes, that have been shoved ‘out of the frame of the picture, creating an empty space’. ‘Victims of [Shakespeare’s] plot’, these bodies are ‘silenced, stigmatized, mutilated, erased’. To set up this arresting image (and the argument of her book), Aebischer invokes a production photograph of the 1990 National Theatre King Lear, which shows Brian Cox’s Lear manhandling Eve Matheson’s Cordelia, ‘pushing a woman down . . . effectively throwing her out of the play’. Of course, what the photograph actually captures is a paradox, and one that documents the persistent, indeed, the occupational tension in theatre between text and performance: readers may supply the missing textual ‘caption’ to the photograph, may know that Cordelia is being banished, shoved out; but caught in the moment, in this violent performance, she remains very much in the frame, not erased. Indeed, in the performance that constitutes the photograph, Cordelia is the centre of attention.

It is this tension between textual absence and performance presence that occupies Aebischer, who sees that ‘Performance challenges the erasure of Shakespeare’s violated bodies and offers the attentive spectator alternative narratives, viewpoints, and protagonists’ – and she is certainly one such ‘attentive spectator’. She produces for us a series of textually alert, body-conscious readings of Titus Andronicus, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear that consider a range of what we might think of as problematic ‘textual performances’ – rape, race, suffering. How do you ‘do’ the rape scripted in Titus; being ‘done’, what does it mean? Then she reads these texts in performance – Taymor’s Titus on screen; Rachel Nicholson’s Ofelia in Red Shift’s Hamlet on tour; John Kani’s Othello at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg; Sally Dexter’s Regan in the RSC’s King Lear. Aebischer’s theme may be textual absence, but she packs in the performance: there are eight Tituses in this book, eight Hamlets, seven Othellos, and eight Learss, embracing English Shakespeare, foreign Shakespeare, and Shakespeare on film and TV.

Frequently, it sounds like two people are talking in this book, one a mind-crunching theorist, the other a savvy theatre reviewer who returns ‘gone and lost’ to view Shakespeare on the stage of her own dazzling performances. Where she plays on it, Aebischer’s feminist rage sounds oddly déjà vu. (Or maybe it’s just my feminist rage that’s ‘been there, done that’.) The excitement of this book lies elsewhere: see, for starters, the wonderful recovery of performances she gathers around the story of Yorick’s (real) skull – a gift, post mortem, to the RSC by a ‘wannabe actor’; see too, the anecdote of the gravedigger’s daughter that frames the book. If ‘writing about performance’ is, as Aebischer says, ‘like dancing about architecture’, with this book she signals her entrance as a prima ballerina.

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do: 10.1017/s0266464x06220335

Steve Nicholson

The Censorship of British Drama 1900–1968: Volume I, 1900–1932
360 p. £39.50.

Steve Nicholson

440 p. £39.50.

Steve Nicholson’s heroic archival work has resulted in the extraordinary and consistently rich detail contained within these two volumes. Originally intended as a two-volume publication, The Censorship of British Drama is set to extend to three, taking us finally to the point at which the official practice of stage censorship was withdrawn. The material for the volumes has come largely from the Lord Chamberlain’s files and correspondence held in the British Library, but the second volume also makes use of the correspondence files held in the Royal Archive at Windsor.

One could not previously have imagined the phenomenal amount of state-funded time spent on censorship practices, as evidenced by the sheer volume of correspondence through which Nicholson has sifted. Nor might one have imagined the lack of consistency in the treatment of plays sub-
mitted, or the public complaints dealt with by the censor’s officials. From the infamous case of a licence being granted for Mordaunt Shairp’s *The Green Bay Tree* to the demand that certain words or phrases be removed from plays before licence be granted, censorship was a contentious practice in continual debate.

That the censoring of British drama was so dependent on the class, education, social awareness, and perceived level of moral righteousness of the elite few is no surprise. But the level of pomposity and the presumptuousness with which the censors saw fit to change author’s words, delete scenes, and demand that authors’ intentions generally conformed to an outdated perception of the sexual, moral, and political standing of the populace is still remarkable. In part this is because it verifies the fact that theatre and performance were seen as influential, controversial, and at times counter-cultural — even during periods when theatre historians have traditionally viewed British drama as having been elitist or at least tediously middle-class in its outlook.

Nicholson divides the material into both periods and themes. In the first volume there are chapters on the early years of the century, one of which deals in detail with the correspondence surrounding the Government Enquiry of 1909, and there are also more overtly themed chapters dealing with ‘The Immoral Maze’ and ‘Domestic’ and ‘International’ politics. The second volume splits the data from 1933 to 1939, 1939 to 1945, and 1945 to 1952 with themes such as ‘The Nazis Onstage’, ‘Naming the Homosexual’, and ‘The Nude in Wartime’. That such an immense amount of material has here been processed is again commendable and it is extraordinary that having persuaded a university press to publish two volumes, Nicholson has got them to agree to a third.

However, the method of coverage presents a problem in some respects. The material is mostly themed and although the themes are drawn from content analysis they still lack a certain objectivity: many of the themes dealt with are framed by our contemporary categorizing impulses. Although a great deal of the material in the archives is quoted verbatim — very useful for other scholars when archival research itself is so expensive — one wonders how much has in fact had to be left out. This comes about partly because Nicholson has, rightly or wrongly, chosen not to theorize the material to any great extent. So we pick up that Lady Violet Bonham Carter was asked to become an adviser at least tediously middle-class in its outlook.

Equally, the chapter in the second volume on the censor’s continual insistence that the stage should not provide the opportunity to offend through stage portrayals of Hitler’s regime, even up until the late 1930s, doesn’t really theorize the ruling classes’ attitudes either to Fascism or anti-Semitism. Perhaps it is the job of the reader to do something more with the materials Nicholson has collated. Perhaps in fact, it is enough that he has woven together a number of histories, those of the varying generations of censors and their advisers and those of the various individuals and societies who both wrote to, and were consulted by, the censor’s office, in such an erudite manner. The moments where Nicholson ventures outside the ‘drama’ to variety and revue shows are tantalizingly few; here the archives show a working process of censorship interfacing with non-textual performance.

These volumes do however make compelling reading, even if the way they are put together does not invite reading in one sitting — there is just too much detail to take in and not enough conjecture to make for pensive reading. Everyone studying twentieth-century British theatre should have access to these volumes, and Nicholson should be given an award for working so painstakingly through the thousands of archive files which document the archaic process of censorship which held such power over what the public were permitted to see in the theatre until 1968.

**maggie b. gale**

*Mario Erasmo*

**Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality**

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. 224 p. £34.50.


Erasmo’s book presents a chronological study of the development of Roman tragedy, followed by an appendix of the tragedies themselves. He acknowledges the difficulty of using the often fragmentary evidence on texts, performance, and audiences and sets out a working method in which *contaminatio* (the fusing of plots from different originals) is to be explored through philosophical analysis and informed by semiotic theory and audience reception. He also sets out distinctions between ‘intended meaning’ (authorial intention) and ‘understood meaning’ (audience interpretation and topicality), placing particular emphasis on the development of a closer relationship between the two, when the ‘reality’ of the audience’s situation enters onto the stage, itself becoming a strand in *contaminatio*.

Erasmo argues that this relationship developed chronologically, so the book starts with chapters on the fragments of Livius Andronicus (thought
to have presented the first Roman tragedy in 240 BC), Naevius and Ennius ('Creating Tragedy'), followed by studies of Pacuvius and Accius, ('Theatricalizing Tragedy'), and by discussion of historical tragedy, the fabula praetexta, which he relates both to Greek texts such as Aeschylus' Persians and to Roman traditions of staging history in funeral processions ('Dramatizing History'). There follows a useful discussion, entitled 'Creating Metatragedy', on the relationship between theatre and other forms of public entertainment in the late Republic and Early Empire. The final chapter places Seneca within the tradition of Roman tragedy rather than as an imitator of the Greeks (contra Beare, 1964).

Through this chronological approach, Erasmo seeks to show that Roman tragedy progressively eroded the distinction between the staged play and the offstage world of the audience. This erosion of borders was marked by the increasingly rhetorical nature of drama on stage and by the offstage development of rhetoric and public events as performance culture (although he does not theorize the concept).

Erasmo argues that tragedies based on myth were made extra-theatrical by allusion to historical events and individuals, and were appropriated for association with contemporary figures and their ancestors (some of whom were represented on stage). This intensified in a political climate in which the Emperor Nero could, according to Suetonius, wear a mask modelled on his own features while acting on stage. Erasmo concludes that offstage 'reality' became so theatrical that onstage drama could no longer compete.

Erasmo's discussion often raises important questions and does have implications for issues of reception of drama both within antiquity and subsequently. However, his argument is sometimes circular and the sources he uses need more critical evaluation. In spite of his emphasis on semiotics, there is little attention to how the semiotics of staging can be reconstructed, and his discussion of audience reception does not seem to be informed by modern scholarship (Bennett, Pavis, and Schoenmakers are absent from the rather scanty Bibliography). A disappointingly long list of errors and mistranslations is set out by Cowan in Bryn Mawr Classical Review, 2005.07.53.

Nevertheless, Erasmo's ideas will contribute to the reintensification of interest in Roman drama. Theatre studies researchers and classicists alike will profit from comparing his methods and conclusions with the forthcoming work of A. J. Boyle (Roman Tragedy, 2005) and the recent article by T. Ziolkowski, 'Seneca: a New German Icon', in International Journal of the Classical Tradition, II, No. 1 (Summer 2004), p. 47–77.

Lorna Hardwick

A new book spotlighting the works of a major but sparsely represented playwright is to be celebrated. This book acquires a special and rather desperate significance in the light of Peter Barnes's sudden demise last summer.

One major benefit of the book is Woolland's enthusiastic presentation of the expansive range of Barnes's work from his epic dramas to his smaller-scale shorter plays, to his radio and television work, and even his recent blockbusters of classic stories for American TV. In a refreshing democratic spirit, worthy of Barnes himself, Woolland treats each work, whether theatrical epic or TV short, as a viable and revealing expression of the author's drives, skills, and concerns.

It is difficult, however, to ascertain the readership for which this book is designed. This is partly because of surprisingly poor editorship, which has led to an overload of often unnecessary footnoting, inconsistency of chapter-headings, and a presentation and referencing of theorists which often reads as if the Barnes play in question is being used to demonstrate the author's understanding of the theorist rather than the relevance of the theory in elucidating Barnes.

Although the use of theorists is often arbitrary, a few are of significance, and Woolland instigates interesting and far-reaching discussions, which might have benefited from further development. In some instances, Bergson's definition of comedy as a response to deflation and/or mechanicalization is pertinent and revealing. Barnes's work does, however, arguably offer the opportunity to reassess some of these ideas. For example, while Bergson asserts that comedy cannot take place simultaneously with emotion, one of the defining qualities of Barnes's work is his use of comedy to elicit emotional responses in his audience.

Similarly, Woolland accurately notes Barnes's passion for Ben Jonson, and elaborates Jonson's influence on the form, perspective, and theatrical vision of Barnes's works. He points out their common emphasis on the relationship between personal dreams and actuality, and comments that for both Bergson and Jonson much comedy evolves from the deflation of characters' puffed-up dreams. However, one could argue that Barnes's perspective differs in that his characters often transcend their dreams. In contrast to the classical norm, they become more than they had imagined. Perhaps Barnes's ability to meld humour and emotion emanates from this very insight. Though these discussions are stimulated
by Woolland’s insights, their further elaboration in the text would have been welcome.

One of Woolland’s most original contributions to the pathetically small published discussion of Barnes’s work is his superb discussion of the television series Revolutionary Witness, in which Woolland argues for the significance of television plays in the development of Barnes’s skills and the elaboration of his concerns, and including the demands and effects of this specific medium as significant contributions to the dramatic experience. Woolland also gives considerable thought and space to the unforgettable power of rarely mentioned stage epic, The Bewitched, reinstating it in its rightful place in Barnes’s opus by providing extensive and sensitive analysis.

The structure of the book, however, also casts doubt on the identity of the projected reader. Woolland divides his discussion into ‘issues’, such as ‘Dramatic Strategies and Concerns’, but there is a tendency to jump into the middle of a play to demonstrate. It is often hard to tell whether the writer is projecting a reader who knows the plays or one who is unacquainted with them. It is almost as if we are attending a lecture where only some plays have been previously assigned. Consequently, it is, sadly, unlikely that a reader who has no knowledge of the works of Peter Barnes would be inspired to seek them out, although Woolland offers considerable richness and space to the unforgettably powerful but rarely mentioned stage epic, The Bewitched, reinstating it in its rightful place in Barnes’s opus by providing extensive and sensitive analysis.

The reader will gain a sense of the extra-ordinary range of Barnes’s work, his concerns, and his consummate theatricality, and be touched by Woolland’s heartfelt appreciation. Let us hope that it is the first of many valuable contributions to the understanding and discussion of the unique and extraordinary works of Peter Barnes.

Elaine Turner

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Brandon and Leiter present a selection of texts chosen as ‘outstanding’ from a previous four-volume series of fifty-one plays: Kabuki Plays on Stage (2002–3). This book’s succinct fifteen-page introduction offers a comprehensive historical overview of Kabuki’s development since its inception at the start of the seventeenth century, through the banning of women and young boys from the stage in 1629 and 1652 respectively and the return of women to the stage, to the modernization of Kabuki in the nineteenth century. The relationship between Kabuki and political changes throughout the centuries is made clear in the introduction, including the impact of contact with the West during Meiji period.

Reading the playscripts in this volume is enhanced by the introduction’s discussion of aspects of the performance and writing style of Kabuki. Different verbal techniques are explained, such as the ‘Nanori’, the heroes’ introduction, and ‘monogatari’ (long narrative descriptions of past events). Trends such as the introduction of slow-motion pantomime scenes and the ‘aesthetic of cruelty’ (that is, making violence ‘beautiful by abstraction’), are linked to particular periods in Kabuki’s development, and the reader is advised which texts illustrate those trends. For example, Kasane (1823) represents a highly developed version of this ‘aesthetic of cruelty’. The Woman Student (1877) represents the new ‘modern’ playwriting by Mokuami, dealing with modern life in Japan, as opposed to feudalism.

The plays are presented in chronological order with a grey-shaded title page at the start of each for ease of reference. Woodblock prints and black and white photographs illustrate certain characters or significant moments from the play and give a sense of Kabuki’s aesthetic and acting style. A short introduction to each play outlines its history and the ‘memorable moments’ for which the text has become famous. A useful glossary of Japanese terms is provided.

From this selection, spanning two centuries, of the Kabuki plays that are already available in the editors’ earlier and more extensive volume, one can experience a broad spectrum of Kabuki writing, and its ever-changing nature as an art form.
Community theatre, as Peter Billingham’s introduction makes clear, trades on a term that has now been soiled by overuse; notions of community, in the theatre as elsewhere, have been detached from any troubling associations with the radical, the transformative, or (heaven forbid) the socialist. The essays in this book, alongside John Bull’s introductory essay, attempt, through the discussion of specific examples of community theatre work, to assess the radical – even the utopian – possibilities that the form opens up. As one of the contributors, John Salway, notes, theatre is the art form closest to the textures of everyday life, and as such, it is uniquely placed to refract and reflect on the processes of everyday life.

The five contributors (and the five projects they describe) do not set out to impose a version of community theatre on the communities they address; in fact, in only one case is there evidence of a mismatch between group/facilitator and audience, and in this case (Gunduz Kalic’s group, Taking Liberties, performing a satirical attack on government corruption in the Australian parliament) this mismatch is entirely intentional. The real strength of the collection is the evidence that each of the described projects stems from a dedication to the concept of interventionist community theatre, but that the work done in the projects creates more than a temporary engagement with the issues that performers and community wish to raise.

This desire to create work whose impact lasts is manifest in each of the case studies; and the problems and difficulties that this can engender are dealt with honestly (John Salway’s contribution is particularly good in this regard); and the achievements of the work, which are also the community’s achievements, are carefully and sensitively discussed (Carole Christensen’s contribution is particularly strong).

Bill McDonnell’s essay on Belfast Community Theatre encapsulates the strengths of this collection most clearly. It is fully contextualized; the formation and dissemination of the work is analyzed in depth; and the impact of the work in context is well indicated. There are few critiques that manage successfully to blend passion for the work with analytical rigour; McDonnell’s essay succeeds memorably in both.

Adrienne Kennedy, one of the most innovative modern American playwrights, is probably best known for her highly experimental off-Broadway play, Funnyhouse of a Negro (1964). Philip Kolin offers a close study of Kennedy’s works, primarily from the point of view of their interrelationship with her life. A volume in the series ‘Understanding Contemporary American Literature’, the book is planned as a guide or companion for students as well as ‘good non-academic readers’.

This is a fine introduction to a highly complex writer, which in a lucid, jargon-free language brings out the multiple aspects of Kennedy’s work – be it her engagement with the issues of race and gender as a Black Arts movement writer, or the presence of African theatrical elements together with Christian symbolism in her work, or the intensely personal and autobiographical nature of her writing.

Divided into eight chapters, Understanding Adrienne Kennedy provides in-depth analyses of her plays, short fiction, the highly acclaimed experimental autobiography People Who Led to My Plays, as well as the lesser-known novel Deadly Triplets. The Introduction, ‘Adrienne Kennedy and Dreams Noir’, brings out the connections between her work and her personal, social, and creative life, and broadly discusses the significant aspects of her plays – their surrealistic plots, violent imagery, and fragmented characters. The following seven chapters discuss the works singly or in clusters, analyzing themes, symbols, experiments with dramatic form, and the various influences on her work. In the case of Funnyhouse of a Negro, Kolin also gives a summary of major productions – it would have been valuable if similar information had been given for other plays.

Kennedy’s more overtly political work, which has been relatively ignored by literary scholarship, is discussed here in a separate chapter entitled ‘Kennedy’s Political Morality Plays’, which includes some of her recent work such as Sleep Deprivation Chamber and Motherhood 2000. This challenging body of work, dealing addressing the contested issues of race, gender, and identity in American culture, needs to be interpreted and contextualized in order to be understood, and this is achieved with clarity and without simplification.

david pattie

nita n. kumar
This, the first in the ‘Redefining British Theatre History’ series, is an odd mixture of essays, many of which deal more generally with questions of theatre history formation and practice rather than more specifically with British theatre history. This in itself is not problematic but, thought-provoking as it is, one wonders, for example, why Una Chaudhuri’s ‘Zoo Stories: “Boundary Work” in Theatre History’, which deals almost exclusively with American examples, is included. Of course it raises pertinent questions, but the solutions are not worked out in relation to British performance.

Equally, in her chapter, ‘Improvising/History’, Susan Leigh Foster is exquisitely erudite in her attempt to think around the possibility that the process and practice of improvisation might ‘provoke a reconsideration of history writing’, but the examples she uses are all derived from an American context. What would have happened if she had also used an examination of the work of British-based dancers such as the X6 group in the 1980s or the work of Julian Hamilton? I do not want to come over ‘all imperialist’; but it is odd that in a volume for a series which claims to redefine British theatre history there is quite so much which doesn’t address British theatre at all.

Some of the chapters theorize materials the choice of which needs to be re-examined. Kruger might have gone beyond the standard examples in her chapter, ‘History Plays (in) Britain’. There are some chapters which offer real insight, however: Roach’s, ostensibly on Pepys and masturbation, is grotesquely hilarious as well as being very shrewd, and both Worthen’s and Bennett’s chapters, on ‘The Imprint of Performance’ and ‘Decomposing History’ respectively, are inspiring and will create reverberations within the discipline.

Thus there is much to offer in the volume and I would heartily recommend it to anyone working in theatre and performance history; but it doesn’t really do what the series title suggests it might. This may simply be to do with the packaging and marketing practices of the publishers – the projected future volumes in the series promise to be more focused and refined in their coverage.

maggie b. gale

As usual Shakespeare Survey presents an impressively wide-ranging collection of essays from international scholars focusing on a specific aspect of Shakespeare studies, and here concentrating on Macbeth, both the text and the play in performance. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the latter dominates and there is a distinct international flavour to the volume, with Ruth Morse’s ‘Monsieur Macbeth: from Jarry to Ionesco’, Natasha Distiller’s ‘The Zulu Macbeth: the Value of an “African Shakespeare”’, and Ruru Li’s ‘“A Drum, a Drum – Macbeth Doth Come”: When Birnam Wood Moved to China’.

Performance history is considered by Simon Williams in ‘Taking Macbeth out of Himself: Davenant, Garrick, Schiller, and Verdi’ and in Paul Prescott’s ‘Doing All That Becomes a Man: the Reception and Afterlife of the Macbeth Actor, 1744–1889’; while in one of the volume’s most absorbing pieces Deanne Williams gives a perceptive and thoroughly readable analysis of Roman Polanski’s underrated film version of the play, ‘Mick Jagger Macbeth’.

Although the volume’s theme is Macbeth, the book also contains essays on Love’s Labour’s Lost and Henry IV, Part One. E. A. J. Honigmann’s ‘Shakespeare, Sir Thomas More, and Asylum Seekers’ is a welcome contribution to the debate surrounding the play’s various hands, and although his argument that the play was planned by Christopher Marlowe is not entirely convincing, Honigmann provides a sensitive and persuasive reading of Shakespeare’s contribution (known as ‘Hand D’), entirely demolishing Paul Werstine’s rejection of the attribution.

The volume also provides an entertaining survey of Shakespeare performances in England during 2003 by Michael Dobson and a useful list of professional Shakespeare productions in Britain during 2002 by James Shaw. At £60.00, this book is by no means cheap, but scholars will find it an invaluable source of reference and it should also prove of interest to intelligent theatregoers.

Joan Fitzpatrick