

Book Reviews

Kafka and the Yiddish Theater: Its Impact on His Work. By Evelyn Torton Beck. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1971. xxi + 248pp.

It seems decidedly odd to imagine Franz Kafka, the writer whose work has taught us what it means to be utterly alone in the world, as a participant in that most communal of arts, the theatre. But Kafka was in fact an avid theatre-goer in his native Prague, and one of the most startling poetic images in his work is the "Nature Theatre of Oklahoma" in his novel *Amerika*, in which the theatre figures as an (albeit faintly ludicrous) instrument of transcendence and salvation.

Evelyn Torton Beck's study of Kafka's involvement with the Yiddish theatre remains after 20 years the last word on the impact of the stage on this writer, and to read (or re-read) it should be doubly rewarding, both advancing a fuller understanding of Kafka's work and allowing a view onto a theatre tradition which fell victim to the vagaries of history at the moment of its greatest vibrancy.

The assertion that there is a dramatic or theatrical element in Kafka's prose is not new; in fact, Walter Benjamin was the first to impressionistically remark upon it, and Heinz Politzer took up the matter in a scholarly investigation in the 1950's. Since Ms. Beck's book, James Rolleston has argued the case in a more intrinsic and metaphorical fashion (*Kafka's Narrative Theater*, 1974). But Ms. Beck does the logical thing: she seeks out the incidents of Kafka's concrete exposure to the theatre in hopes of finding an explanation for his stylistic idiosyncrasy, and hits paydirt. As is amply documented by his diary entries and letters, catching traveling Yiddish theatre troupes performing at the Café Savoy was one of Kafka's favorite pastimes between 1910 and 1912, coinciding with the composition of his first mature works. On the makeshift stage of the Savoy, he saw plays by Avraham Goldfaden, Yosef Latayner, Zigmund Faynman, Avraham Sharkanski, Yakov Gordin, and Moyshe Rikhter, and struck up a friendship with the actor Yitskhok Levi (Löwy).

Ms. Beck devotes an (unfortunately rather brief) chapter to Kafka's theatregoing and liberally excerpts his impressions of the plays. He seems, as she remarks, most attracted by "the intensity of the action and its seeming in-

evitability, the passion of the actors, and the sense of tradition and community which the plays evoked and upon which they depended" (21). The Yiddish theatre is no trifling thing to Kafka: his admiration is fervent, his visits frequent, his friendships with actors such as Levi strong and formative. The chapter holds its greatest interest for the theatre historian because it manages to convey a snapshot of the Yiddish theatre at its apogee, as reflected in the sometimes amused but quite sincerely affectionate observations of the assimilated urban Jew Franz Kafka.

The historiography of the Yiddish theatre has had to battle inherent circumstances almost as adverse to its survival as its attempted erasure in the wake of Eastern European Jewry's destruction and Diaspora, circumstances such as the problematic character of Yiddish itself (with chiefly Germanic roots, but written in Hebrew characters), a corrupted textual tradition, and so forth. Ms. Beck's study commendably retrieves much material lost to the English-speaking reader, frequently gives capsule versions of plots, and adds appendices with reviews and other descriptions. (We are since fortunate to have Nahma Sandrow's well-informed world history of Yiddish theatre, *Vagabond Stars* [1977], which of course was not available to the author).

However, the book is conceived not as a piece of theatre history but as a contribution to Kafka criticism, and there's the rub. The study's virtues lie fairly close to its limitations, which are severe. For, having construed a connection between Kafka's two nocturnal occupations, theatre and writing, Ms. Beck now largely throws scholarly caution to the wind and proceeds to explain the one entirely through the other. Thus her discussion of Kafka's early "A Commentary" insists quite vehemently on the presence of theatrical elements, even though the story is a first-person narrative and reminiscent more of a silent film vignette than a stage play, or she dismisses a story such as "Description of a Struggle" as "marred by . . . stylistic confusion" (54) and "inadequate" (64) simply because it does not achieve the kind of "dramatic" closure she has posited as Kafka's emergent *modus scribendi*. She measures him, in effect, purely against her own critical prejudice. Indeed, a rambling style, perspective shifts, and subjectivity, are all present in "Struggle," but to attribute them to a yet lacking formative influence of the theatre seems far-fetched. (One profound weakness of this part of the study is Ms. Beck's incomplete grasp of the constituents of drama; on one page she will cite the Aristotelian unities as if they were still universally in effect [107], on another assert that an open ending is "typical of the drama" [46].)

The analysis of the story "The Judgment" (1912) becomes the centerpiece of her essay. Observing that Kafka was impressed by the plays of Yakov Gordin in which he detected a detail, order, and logic akin to his own work, she compares Gordin's quasi-Faustian Yiddish morality play *God, Man and Devil* to "The Judgment." On occasion, this yields a profound insight, as when she discovers that a startling narrative gesture--Georg picking up his father and carrying him to his bed like an infant--is in fact prefigured in the play (77).

But the more insistent and detailed the comparisons of thematic and structural analogies become, the more it is obscured in what ways Kafka's writing is precisely *unlike* the Yiddish theatre, because not melodramatic or morally pat. It is an overstatement at best to conclude that "The Judgment" is fixed upon "a pre-existing framework provided by the Yiddish plays" (120).

Much the same holds for the discussion of "The Metamorphosis"; Ms. Beck makes a convincing case when she finds in Gordin's *The Savage One* a fraternal character to Gregor Samsa, also an outcast from the family, beset by demons, mired in an incestuous and stunted sexuality. But in her desire to align the two themes she undersells Kafka. For even if he indeed drew inspiration from Gordin's character constellation, by transposing the melodramatically deranged Lemekh--very much a 19th century figure--into the buglike Gregor, he created a cardinal modernist icon of estrangement far surpassing in ambiguity and depth the idiom of Yiddish domestic drama. Similarly, it would be bold to assert, as she does implicitly, that Kafka's acquaintance with Talmudic problems of law and justice which informs "In the Penal Colony" and *The Trial* had to be facilitated by the negotiation of such themes in Yiddish drama. Finally, the later work shows correspondence to the Yiddish theatre only in scattered details, a fact that seems to belie Ms. Beck's conclusion that "the plays of the Yiddish theatre exercised a lasting influence on Kafka's style" (210).

The book has not aged well. Ms. Beck almost always fails in my view where she tries to argue that Kafka's prose grows inherently dramatic, or his style theatrical, in a more than vaguely metaphorical way. (Whoever has seen adaptations of Kafka for the stage [Barrault's *Trial*, Berkoff's *Metamorphosis*] knows that the theatre is ultimately unable to render those largely ineffable traits that make Kafka "kafkaesque.") The book's greatest flaw seems to me that Ms. Beck does not meaningfully distinguish between a coincidental or trivial analogy and a profound one and thus swamps the study with (no doubt well-researched) minutiae which create the impression that Kafka had been taking notes at the Savoy. While it remains worth seeking out for its contributions to the scholarship on the Yiddish theatre, *Kafka and the Yiddish Theatre* has been surpassed as Kafka criticism.

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The Gothic Impulse in Contemporary Drama. By Marybeth Inverso. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990.

Author Marybeth Inverso has accomplished something very provocative and useful in her book, *The Gothic Impulse in Contemporary Drama*. She uses synthetic technique and logic to extrapolate a generalizing structural principal

from specific instances of the drama of the last three decades. This principle ties together aspects of its vision, illuminates it in a new light, and, at the same time, links modern drama to the growing body of scholarship concerning Gothic literature and related popular literary forms.

Inverso posits that the nineteenth century's dramatic adaptations of Gothic novels and stories failed to capture the genre's ethos; that the translation of those narratives into melodrama (the prevalent dramatic form that was ultimately called upon to house them) was incapable, for structural and formal reasons, of conveying the "aesthetic orientation and moral cosmology" (Preface, x) of the Gothic. She contends that those elements, rather than becoming defunct, have, through a redefinition of their functional attributes, found their way into the alternative drama of the latter part of our century, where they may be found operating as, in her term, a New Gothic or "NeoGothic" aesthetic. Elements of this aesthetic include, among others, the reinscription of the melodramatic within a framework of extreme realism, the assertion of the horrific against a backdrop of the reassuringly banal, the conscious breaking down of order, the use of circular as opposed to linear plot movements, and problematic closure. Inverso goes on to demonstrate convincingly that melodrama was unable to carry the force of these structural elements, but that they can be found informing the work of Pinter, Weiss, Barnes, Stoppard, other dramatists from England and, to a lesser extent, the Continent and America. The ultimate point of her well-argued position is that only in the problematic and disturbing theatre of the last few decades can the dramaturgical and performative structures be found as well as an atmosphere of moral ambiguity, questioning and attack, that makes potent use of the dark moral ethos of the Gothic vision.

The book is organized in a logical manner. Inverso begins with introductory chapters that set forth the reasons for isolating the NeoGothic aesthetic and defines its paradigm; she then proceeds to apply that paradigm to careful analysis of eighteenth and nineteenth century narratives and their stage adaptations, utilizing much of the contemporary critical work in the fields of the Gothic novel, the literature of horror and terror, and melodrama. She comes to the well-supported conclusion that the formal structures of early melodrama acted to subvert the ethos of the Gothic, rather than objectify it in dramatic form. She then moves on to long chapters of careful analysis of the Gothic/NeoGothic's sociopolitical manifestations, and how the NeoGothic aesthetic informs the theatrical usage of onstage and offstage space. These chapters, firmly grounded in the theatrical by direct citations from a wide range of plays and playwrights, provide strong buttressing for her central thesis--that it is in the theatre that the cultural phenomenon called the "Gothic" finds its performative and contemporary voice.

The interdisciplinary nature of Inverso's work provides one of the book's most overt positive values; students and scholars of many disciplines in addition to those theatrical, ranging from analysis of the novel and its history, popular

culture (including television and film), to those interested in the literature of terror, will find much to ponder here, and use for their own work. A second positive value of the book is in its synthetic statement of an overarching organizing principle in the modern and post-modern drama. There is a very convincing quality to the body of argumentation and support that posits a substantive link--expressing an underlying, cultural ethos--between the work of such seemingly disparate artists as Pinter, Stoppard and Weiss.

The greatest value of this readable, meaningful book is that it points out that, indeed, however unwittingly and without design, much contemporary theatre gives expression to a vision of the world seen through a distinct aesthetic--in this case, a disturbing vision that we have encountered once before in our cultural history, and to which we have assigned the descriptive term, "Gothic."

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David Hare: Theatricalizing Politics. By Judy Lee Oliva. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990. xv + 200.

In many ways Oliva's study of David Hare is a timely one and especially so in the American market. While Hare is widely discussed in studies of contemporary drama as one of Britain's leftist/socialist playwrights, his work has been produced more often in the U.S. than others who are contained by the same label and, indeed, his recent *The Knife* received its première in New York. His films have, as well, attracted considerable attention in North America and have been available at least to the audiences of independent movie theaters. Furthermore, Hare has been the subject of or included in several doctoral dissertations undertaken at American universities and his plays have begun to appear in some of the anthologies used in North American drama/literature courses.

Given Hare's emergence in all these different forms in North America, a book on the playwright by an American author seems particularly appropriate and something which would make a useful contribution to the study of Hare's work in general. But Oliva's book is rather disappointing. It covers little more than one might expect from the much slimmer "Writer-Files" series produced by Methuen. The author devotes much of her energy to providing detailed synopses of the various plays which she arranges in more or less chronological order and to describing how they have been reviewed. She covers nineteen years of Hare's work and divides this into three chapters--"Individual Concerns, 1969-1974," "National Concerns, 1975-1979" and "International Concerns, 1980-88." Her division of Hare's work into various "periods" seems a reasonable strategy, but I would have welcomed a fuller

discussion of the implications of these "concerns" and less description of the plays themselves. At the beginning of the chapter on national concerns, for example, Oliva indicates "larger stages allow broader theatrical possibilities, which contribute further to the development of content, form, and style as a means of theatricalizing politics." (43) This is surely so and thus begs some elaboration in terms of the specific material conditions of production in the various "periods" of Hare's drama. Oliva's argument nevertheless relies almost solely on *textual* analyses, despite the admirable inclusion of many photographs of actual productions, a full listing of play reviews and a detailed interview with the playwright. In her discussion of *A Map of the World*, Oliva comments: "The point Hare wishes to reinforce with this exchange is how easily things are misinterpreted" (101)--a point which might have served as a warning to her own reliance on interpretation.

The structure chosen for *Theatricalizing Politics* is an interesting one. Oliva backs her critical chapters with the interview, photographs from British and American productions as well as film stills, an appendix listing more than two hundred reviews of the plays covered and a seven page bibliography. These apparently secondary components are suggestive of another project--a more obviously critical reading of Hare's work where the 'othered' elements might be used to position the plays in light of other contemporary/British/Brechtian/social(ist) drama and in light, perhaps, of contemporary theory. But, as it stands, *Theatricalizing Politics* indicates some uncertainty as to its intended audience. Is the book intended to serve as an introduction to Hare and his drama (thus the predominantly descriptive style) or is it intended to provide a first full-length study of Hare's dramaturgical strategies for those already familiar with and interested in contemporary British (and other) drama? *Theatricalizing Politics* seems to be directed at the latter market, yet more obviously fulfills the conditions of the former.

Passing references to Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson and Susan Sontag suggest to the reader the potential in engaging with at least some of the contemporary debates in critical theory but, in fairness to Oliva, this is a lacuna in almost every study of contemporary plays and playwrights. Specifically, however, a more thorough (and theoretical) analysis of gender relations in Hare's drama might well have been particularly illuminating to Oliva's topic. Only in conclusion does the author mention "the issues of the uncertainty of patriarchy and the confusion of gender and role" as evident in Hare's writing. (256) Beyond this Oliva suggests to Hare in their interview that all his work relies on "shaking up expectation," (167) a statement with which Hare apparently agrees. Again this is an area which might well have been pursued. Whose expectations? And shaken in what ways? Hare has written for different theatres, for television and for film. Each has its own and likely distinct audience: how does Hare engage these audiences with the political concerns? John Caughie, in his article "Rhetoric, Pleasure and 'Art Television'--Dreams of Leaving" (*Screen* (1981) 9-31), draws attention to the

"focal key" of Caroline (played by Kate Nelligan) in *Dreams of Leaving*, a television drama. He notes that "Kate Nelligan's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' is justified by the composition rather than directly by her sexuality. The spectator's fascination with her is given an excuse in art which masks its motivation in desire." (24) While Oliva asks questions of Hare about the many roles Kate Nelligan and more recently Blair Brown have played in his dramas, Caughie's assertion suggests the potential in exploring the particular effect(s) of their performances as well as their relationship to particular audiences. Such a discussion might well have strengthened Oliva's critical survey.

Theatricalizing Politics certainly indicates the impressive scope of David Hare's work and undoubtedly his writing deserves much critical attention. As a first full-length study, Oliva's text provides a useful background and provokes further thought on Hare's dramaturgical strategies. Perhaps the next stage is a book which provides a more interrogatory account of Hare's participation in (inter)national contemporary theatre and film.

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American Playwrights Since 1945. Edited by Philip C. Kolin. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989. xiii + 595.

It is eternally fashionable to pronounce the American theatre dead. Critics continue to lament what they see as the dearth of new plays and writers. Each year, articles appear either pointing out the fact that only a few straight dramas have survived the current season on Broadway or that the few interesting dramas to appear are British. American theatre historians often tend to describe the period between the two World Wars, from the emergence of Eugene O'Neill and concluding with the demise of the Federal Theatre Project, as something of a golden age in American theatre. Indeed, it was. However, what clearly emerges from *American Playwrights Since 1945*, a guide to scholarship, criticism, and performances of plays by contemporary dramatists, edited by Philip C. Kolin, is that there has been a second golden age since World War II, a period of stunning diversity and accomplishment by our leading American dramatists.

Kolin's forty contributors have assembled an honor roll of significant American playwrights of the post-World War II era. This period coincides with the Chekhovian lyricism of Tennessee Williams and the socially-conscious dramas of Arthur Miller, and, as Kolin notes in his introduction, "Edward Albee's existential games, Sam Shepard's mythic narratives, David Mamet's energized street poetry, and David Rabe's failed rituals of war and drug-torn America." (p. ix) It is also an era that has marked the rise of women and

minority writers, from Lorraine Hansberry to Maria Irene Fornes and from Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) to August Wilson. As well as reflecting the growth of gender and ethnic diversity, Kolin's selections also illuminate regional diversity, as the American theatre has undergone a period of unprecedented decentralization since 1960, moving away from New York to nearly every section of the country.

Each of the forty playwrights in this scrupulously researched, well-written, and essential volume is examined by an individual scholar who offers an assessment of the writer's reputation, a bibliography of primary and secondary sources, a production history, a survey of influences on the writer, an examination of principal works, and suggestions for future research opportunities. Although some sections on each writer are necessarily brief, the commentary is consistently cogent and intriguing. The bibliographies and production histories are extremely thorough, reliable, and illuminating, and are especially welcome on writers who have, thus far, generated little scholarly attention. Although primarily a valuable research tool, this a highly readable volume as a survey of contemporary American drama. Readers may also wish to acquire *In Their Own Words. Contemporary American Playwrights* by David Savran (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988) as a companion volume. It collects fascinating interviews with many of the subjects examined in *American Playwrights Since 1945*.

The only, and very minor, flaws to be found in *American Playwrights Since 1945* are inherent in any work of this sort. The entries on still active playwrights will quickly become dated. Neil Simon's entry, for example, concludes with his 1986 play, *Broadway Bound*. He has written several plays and screenplays since then, including the recent *Lost in Yonkers*, his first Pulitzer Prize-winning play. Another problem is limits on length which mean that, invariably, important playwrights must be omitted. Significant playwrights like Charles Ludlam, Joan Holden, Charles Busch, Luis Valdez, Wallace Shawn, and David Hwang are not to be found, while Stephen Sondheim, a composer and lyricist, is included. Perhaps periodic updates of this volume, which is clearly destined to be a perennial resource, can address such omissions. These minor flaws aside, it must be noted that in every sense, *American Playwrights Since 1945* is an important resource, necessary on the shelves of research libraries as well as in those of scholars and practitioners interested in the eternally fascinating world of the American playwright.

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Modern and Post-Modern Mime. By Thomas Leabhart. New York: St. Martins Press, 1989. xii + 157 + illus.

Fans of mime know Thomas Leabhart mainly from his (now sadly defunct) *Mime Journal*. His expertise ranks among the finest in the field, and he writes with verve; hence this attractive book makes for authoritative and delightful reading. The brief but trenchant "Introduction: Mime and Pantomime" covers both the major ambiguities those two terms contain, plus highlights of the history. In the seven other chapters Leabhart treats the styles of Jacques Copeau, Etienne Decroux, Jean-Louis Barrault, Marcel Marceau, Jacques Lecocq and Mummenschanz, Post-Modern Mime and "New Vaudevillians, New Mimes." The 6-page bibliography offers some rare jewels, especially in little-cited articles. Handsome pictures give an appealing survey of the field's complexity.

One of Leabhart's most engaging features is his breadth of vision. Unlike too many semioticians, who discuss mime in brutally technical terms, he skillfully invokes the manifold significance he sees in the body in motion. For instance, the chapter on Post-Modern Mime starts with a brilliant definition of the word "modernism" by John Updike. This introduction to the styles of the present thus links them to the past that they transform: we bear in mind Proust, Joyce, Kafka and Rilke as we focus on the innovations of R.G. Davis, Merce Cunningham and Peter Schumann. Here and in the last chapter, Leabhart also sets mime in the context of "difficult" contemporary painting. De Kooning, George Segal, Francis Bacon, Johns and Rauschenberg all have their analogues in the newly eclectic styles of The Pickle Family Circus, Bill Irwin, Paul Zaloom, The Flying Karamazov Brothers and many others. Leonard Pitt, as infatuated with Balinese dance as Artaud was, now integrates Asian stylized movements and mask work into his Decroux-trained technique. Daniel Stein may well represent Decroux's continuator, for he extends the corporeal-mime tradition into contemporary abstraction. Leabhart's discussion of several such new performers and groups furnishes welcome up-to-date information and analysis.

In sum, this book offers a wealth of deft interpretation on material both familiar--Decroux through Marceau--and novel--Lecocq through the Heggen/Marc *Théâtre du Mouvement*. On every page Leabhart expands and enriches our understanding of an art too little appreciated.

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The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-13. By Theodore B. Leinwand. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986. viii + 233.

Since the publication of Brian Gibbons' *Jacobean City Comedy* in 1968, scholars have generally conceded the existence of a sub-genre of Renaissance drama: the so-called "city comedy" that emerges around the time of the accession of James I, flourishes in a few masterpieces by Middleton and Jonson, and then virtually disappears about ten years later. The obvious satirical texture of such plays, their reliance on contemporary pamphlet literature for source material, their portrayal of conflict between landed gentry and the "New Men" of the City--all these have invited a criticism sensitive to the relationship of drama and its social context. Many of the examples considered in L.C. Knights' well-known *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (1937) were city comedies; and these plays (most, though not all, performed at the private theaters) also epitomized that alleged "rival tradition" of mean-spirited class animosity which Alfred Harbage contrasted to the more humane drama of Shakespeare and the public theaters (*Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, 1952).

More recently, the critical response to Jacobean city comedy has tended to focus on one or the other of two rather different aspects of it. Some critics, including Gibbons, emphasized its formal and conventional texture, its self-conscious allusions to a range of literary sources: Greek and Roman New Comedy, the English morality plays, the "snarling satires" of Donne and Marston. Other critics put more emphasis on city comedy's dynamic relationship with the new social mobility and class antagonisms of Jacobean London, an urban environment which these plays reflected in the classical "mirror of nature" and shaped through the living institution of the theater. Both approaches force us to question the intention and effect of city comedy: that is, are the social conflicts between merchant and gallant which it brings to the stage merely a recasting into contemporary terms of ancient and conventional comic situations, or do the plays truly take sides, becoming themselves a form of theatrical class warfare?

Theodore B. Leinwand's *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-13*, the most recent book to reconsider city comedy, contributes significantly to our understanding of the genre, its social context, and its brief but intense historical career. Although leaning toward the second of the two critical tendencies outlined above, Leinwand also tries to come to terms with the plays as self-conscious theatrical artifacts. He argues, and most critics would agree, that city comedy does not simply express (in the terms of Harbage's famous thesis) the alleged anti-bourgeois social prejudices of the gentry who attended the private theaters. But Leinwand also insists that city comedy does have a powerful social effect precisely in the way it allows or forces its audiences "to consider its assumptions" about class conflict and social roles. (56). His approach is generally in the critical tradition now more or less solidified as

"new historicism," but the book also reveals Leinwand beginning to move from the now-familiar "subversion-containment" model toward a focus on what he and others call "negotiation." What happens in literary texts, Leinwand would argue in a more recent article, is a dynamic social process of "ostensibly antagonistic parties negotiating toward settlement, adjustment, even alteration" ("Negotiation and New Historicism," *PMLA* 105:3 [May 1990], 479). In the book, Leinwand suggests that "city comedy moved onto the London stages when Londoners were beginning to reflect on . . . social roles and their urban setting" (43). Thus the plays do force contemporary merchants and young gentry into pre-established, conventional roles inherited from the classical tradition; yet they also parody and exaggerate those types so as to "reveal the foolishness of constructing actual social roles according to the requirements of the theater" (24). Finally, "what is parodied, satirized, or caricatured is not the evil citizen, or the evil usurer, but the type of evil citizen, the conventional usurer, the authorized version of the merchant" (59).

Leinwand's argument is persuasive, and the book is also illuminating in its citations from a range of non-dramatic literature to illustrate prevailing social images of what he calls "merchant-citizens," "gentleman-gallants," and "wives, whores, widows and maids." The book is structured into chapters which examine each one of these "gender or status groups" in turn, and Leinwand concedes that this methodology "splinters the readings of individual plays" (9). There are also, perhaps, a few revealing moments in which Leinwand is forced, by the logic of his own critical presuppositions, to exclude from the canon of what he revealingly calls "successful" (24) or "mature" city comedy (8;119) plays that do not exemplify the kind of social dynamic which he feels is essential to the genre. He argues, for example, that "*The London Prodigal* does not encourage the linkage between moral roles . . . and social roles . . . that characterizes mature city comedy" (8); and that the famous comic subplot about Cocledemoy in Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* "robs us of the distance that our mature judgment requires" and therefore "takes us in and allows us to preserve our certainties" (62). Thus Leinwand is forced to maintain a sometimes precarious balance between historicism and aesthetics: for if the overall questioning of social roles allegedly going on off-stage in Jacobean society produced a particular kind of challenging (and hence "successful") social comedy, then how do we explain the emergence and contemporary popularity of these simpler, more overtly propagandistic (and hence less "mature") plays within the same social context?

Moreover, the explicit paradox of Leinwand's argument (in which the overt social categorization going on in city comedy embodies a questioning of just such categorization) itself embodies a deeper paradox. That is, despite his insistence that city comedy must be situation "in a social, or extratheatrical context" (170), Leinwand also finally sees the plays as meta-dramatic, works which self-consciously turn back on their own generic conventions. On the one hand, the plays satirize the ironic theatricalization of society, the imposition of

dramatic roles onto social life; on the other hand, "a *Catch the Old One* is not simply one more play about avarice . . . but a play about traditional 'power of money' plays" (59). An argument focusing on the plays as vehicles of social transformation and negotiation, carried to its own complex and useful conclusions, finds itself forced back to questions of genre, literary convention and semiotics--the process in which theatrical signs interact with the broader spectrum of social signification. Thus this approach perhaps raises as many questions as it answers. For after all, how do Renaissance plays orchestrate the variety of textual and theatrical devices at their disposal so as to produce the ironic manipulation of audience response that Leinwand describes? How and why do city comedies, even in the radically different social environment of late twentieth-century America, still provoke striking critical disagreement about their basic social viewpoint and moral stance? The continuing exploration of such questions will need to add the insights of linguistics, semiotics, even psychoanalysis, to the data of historical research; and the historicist approach itself invites a renewed attention to the complex interaction of rhetoric and gesture, text and performance, that constitutes the extraordinary achievement of Renaissance drama.

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Actors and Onlookers: Theater and Twentieth-Century Scientific Views of Nature.

By Natalie Crohn Schmitt. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990. 130 pp.

Natalie Crohn Schmitt's work, *Actors and Onlookers: Theater and Twentieth Century Views of Nature*, is an account of a major shift in theater of the twentieth century. The book describes the theatrical phenomenon as corresponding to a shift in the scientific view of nature from an Aristotelian model of biology to a Heisenbergian model of physics. As she quickly points out, it is less a matter of an influence of science on art than a correspondence between the models of understanding in science and art and a mutual paradigm shift from a closed to an open world view. Such a position allows the book to define categories for radical differences while recognizing a similar quest for accuracy in the description of "nature" or reality. She states this explicitly at the beginning of a chapter on "John Cage, Nature, and Theater": "Both Aristotle and Cage assume that art should imitate nature's processes. There the similarity ends, however, for the two men see nature so differently that their views of art are antithetical. Yet because Aristotelian concepts are so entrenched in our culture, Cage is often depicted as having set out not to imitate nature, but to defy Aristotle." (5)

Many discussions of contemporary theater, and indeed of new theater movements in general, define new aesthetics, new politics or new forms in terms of what they overthrow, as though change were entirely a matter of constant revolution. By assuming only an "oppositional" relation between the new and the old, such a notion as "breaking the rules" (which is the title of David Savran's nevertheless excellent book on the Wooster Group) tends to maintain the normative authority of the old while valorizing the new. To some degree this insures that the cycle of old/new will continue in concepts of history; the new will become old and new news will appear. Schmitt breaks that cycle by holding Aristotelian categories of order next to John Cage's categories of chance and indeterminacy. In offering examples of a wide variety of performance and textual styles that includes the Wooster Group, as well as John Cage, Pinter, Beckett, Joseph Chaiken, and Viola Spolin, Schmitt exemplifies the ways in which this diverse group furthers rather than simply overturns a notion of theater as a perspective on "nature" in the same way that Thomas Kuhn recognizes the new scientific paradigms do not refute as much as designate the limits of prior ones. The implication here is significant: an understanding of mimesis, for example, might well include the recursive positions of "actors" and "onlookers" and recognize mimesis as an epistemological practice rather than a system of given conditions which comes to be known. By setting "nature" as the base, Schmitt does not maintain the authority of Aristotle nor define new theater practices as antithesis alone. Rather, she allows the practices, exemplified in the first instance by Cage, to present fundamentally different paradigms in order to do the "same" thing. She suggests that those practices which at first glance are "unrealistic" and which challenge norms of production are in fact further experiments in producing the means by which to understand the indeterminate and positional aspects of reality.

In the post-modern theater conditions of nature and the real are those of indeterminacy, of chance, of the recursive positions of both viewers and doers, of process over teleology--elements that Aristotle excised from his theories of action. As in post-Heisenberg physics, the new theater participates in the understanding of reality as a shifting, perspectival, objectless "event" rather than an understanding based on an idea of reality as a unified object to be viewed from a single perspective. Schmitt offers liberal quotations from such physicists as Niels Bohr, Heisenberg, Percy Bridgman, even historian Jacob Bronowski to provide the scientific corollaries to a variety of contemporary theater practitioners. The displacement of a point of view, the switch from text to process, the status of the text from an interpretable object to a documentation of a performance, the change from actors embodying a role to performers working out images rather than "action": all illustrate Heisenberg's notion that the "object" of both contemporary science is not "nature itself but man's investigation of nature." The Heisenberg principle is compared to Richard Foreman's statement that art "should be about the author's attempts

to create it." (40) The performer thus appears not as the medium but as the subject matter of the event.

An article by Schmitt published in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 1987) supplements the book and could have usefully been included but the publisher apparently considered it superfluous. The article is a clear and elegant summary of Aristotelian categories of nature and its relation to his poetics. The chapter in the book on John Cage demonstrates the radical alteration in the categories of action, causality, teleology, unity and order, and other forms of epistemology. Cage's articulate if sometimes gnomic statements about his work in relation to the real illustrate the radical differences in the idea of nature, particularly in relation to causality, temporality, "interpenetration" and "unimpededness."

The comparison leads to some appropriate juxtapositions throughout the book as in the comparison of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and Spaulding Gray's "similar" and family drama, *Rumstick Road*. This is one of the fullest chapters in the book and describes the change from text-based drama to performance based theater in works that have the same impulse to recover a traumatic family history. It names the ways in which the work of Gray and the Wooster Group enact the idea that the process or performance is itself the "subject" of the work; that the work is not separable from the performance; that the author has no privileged point of view; that meanings shift and are indeterminate; that, quoting Bronowski, "the universe is totally connected, that every fact has some influence on every other fact. . . ." (71)

In other chapters Schmitt examines how similar features occur in the popular box-office success *A Chorus Line*. She uses such contemporary authors as Beckett and Pinter to describe textual instances of the same ideas though does not devote a whole chapter to them. In keeping with a certain post-modern principle, in other words, Schmitt does not maintain high art/low art distinctions nor separate theory and textuality per se from practices. In another chapter she suggests that Stanislavski's system maintained a "hierarchical" relationship between the play and the actor as well as between parts and the whole of a role in an Aristotelian fashion. In contradistinction to that model, the work of such non-naturalistic practitioners as Grotowski and Schechner as well as the common practices of Viola Spolin and Joseph Chaiken are "non-hierarchical," discontinuous, based on impulse rather than intention (that is, non-teleological), process and transformation. From another perspective it is possible to see greater continuity than Schmitt allows between Stanislavski and the experimenters of the 60's and 70's in terms of the actor developing an authentic presence in performance, explaining why current actor training is often, as Schmitt recognizes an "amalgam of Stanislavski and contemporary improvisational techniques." But given the model at the base of the book, the distinction between them is apt.

Some readers may question the appearance of Cage as a kind of "spokesman" for the others, and there is of course some danger in a false kind

of unity that comes from throwing all these distinct works and people under the same rubric called "nature," but Schmitt's point is not the unity of the practices but the pervasiveness and permutations of the principle. The book illustrates the way in which paradigm shifts are manifest in particulars. Since it was in press before much "chaos" literature was published, *Actors and Onlookers* does not take advantage of current discussions of chaos theory, as in James Gleick's popular book *Chaos*, or N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science*, but this book gives specific theater practices a place in such discussions.

If there is any fault in the book, it may be that it makes these complex issues so clear, but that is also the pleasure and ease of reading it. Schmitt never lets even John Cage seem mystical though she acknowledges the Zen aspect of his un-thought. It is a work full of implications in the simple and direct iteration of its basic principle. And it is never pretentious in a field of possible pretensions. As a text or a supplement to study of contemporary theater practices and their place vis a vis naturalism, it is a model of clarity and insight.

In clarifying the basis on which the post-modern theater is based on a shared perspective, many differences are understandably suppressed. Another book might ask questions about differences among those practitioners who are not self-conscious of their "view of nature" to the degree that Cage is. It is understandable, for instance, that Aristotle's view of nature and poetics would share a singular perspective. One might ask, however, to what extent a work or worker can participate in a view of nature without a certain self-consciousness of that participation or an awareness that it is "nature" one is viewing. And to what extent do audiences for almost any play recognize its status as an event rather than an object and its recursive relation to perspective? How does theater technology of any period determine the quality of the phenomenal presence of the event? If indeterminacy has indeed replaced teleology, does indeterminacy not simply become a telos of the present such the present itself becomes a terminus of perception? How can the "new" theater position political and ideological questions, or how does it fail to? How can the specific theatrical practices of "new" theater alter even those conventional texts that seem to be "determinate?" Although Schmitt does not raise such questions, part of the value of the book is that it provides a place to begin to ask them. It is as important for the issues it implies and leaves open as for the clarity of its premise and well worth reading.

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Renaissance Drama as Cultural History: Essays from Renaissance Drama, 1977-1987. Edited by Mary Beth Rose. Evanston: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library Center for Renaissance Studies, 1990.

Renaissance Drama as Cultural History, a collection of seminal articles which first appeared in *Renaissance Drama*, is a welcome addition to any library. The title says it all: the essays address English, Spanish, French, and Italian drama, offering a variety of post-modernist perspectives. Rose's insightful organization of the essays denotes the direction in which Renaissance Studies has moved over the last fifteen years. Each represents some form of historicism. What is most interesting, however, is the common thread that runs throughout the collection, namely an examination of cultural conflict and its effect upon both the drama and theatrical forms which developed during the early modern period.

The first section, "Revising Authority: The Politics of Intertextuality and Influence," offers refutations of well-known works such as L.C. Knights' *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, as well as readings of theatrical history. I must admit that this section surprised me, for I was expecting essays which focused solely upon the text. Don Wayne picks up where Knights left off: "Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson: Shifting Grounds of Authority and Judgment in Three Major Comedies" is an invitation to reread *Bartholomew Fair* and enjoy it one more time. By linking it to *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, Wayne juxtaposes Jonson's self-representation as high-minded poet/playwright and the emerging capitalist system to which the artist was financially bound, a connection which Knights skirted around. James Shapiro's "'Steale from the deade/': The Presence of Marlowe in Jonson's Early Plays" encourages me to direct *Every Man out of His Humor*. His analysis of Jonson's mastery and eventual demystifications of his contemporaries' forms is well argued and quite insightful. Do not attempt to direct one of Jonson's plays without soliciting the dramaturgical services of James Shapiro. Ruth El Saffar's reading of Calderon's *La vida es sueno* discusses the transition from theatre street performances to those staged for a courtly audience. Applying a Derridean model, "Way Stations in the Errancy of the World," explores how Calderon, through the use of metaphors for violence, passion, and chaos, reveals the extent to which the literary, hence paternal, culture extracted itself from the oral culture, the world of the mother. Productions of *La vida es sueno* have abounded in the last five years; I advise anyone wishing to direct this marvelous drama to consult El Soffar's essay for new insights into the characters of Segismundo and Rosaura. "Arcadia Lost: Politics and Revision in the Restoration *Tempest*" is a feast for theatre historians and Shakespearean scholars alike. Katherine Eisaman Maus offers not only an excellent textual comparison of the two works, but goes on to elucidate Dryden-Davenant's text in sociopolitical terms. Her interpretation of the iconographic scenery used during the Restoration production is quite astute and well worth incorporating

in seventeenth-century theatre history lectures. Gordon Kipling's essay, "Triumphal Drama: Form in English Civic Pageantry" expands upon the works of George Kernodle and David Bergeron, for he explores the sense of theatricality that pervaded the *entire* English culture. Pageants and royal entries were opportunities for everyone to participate in the self-fashioning of the monarch. He convincingly argues that Roman celebrations of military victory were appropriated by Renaissance cultures and transformed into civic dramas of moral triumph. This is another supplemental essay for theatre historians, for it brings to light new evidence about staging techniques.

The second section--"Ideologies and Aesthetics of Gender"--should be subtitled "the patriarchy's invisible mechanisms of correction and control." Three of the four essays build upon one another nicely in their discussions of the male containment of female sexuality. Gail Kern Paster juxtaposes *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* to *Bartholomew Fair* to argue that the process of differentiation through etiquette and decorum, which forms class boundaries, also functions in the construction of gender. "Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy" effectively leads into Mary Beth Rose's discussion of dramatic representations of love and marriage as informed by courtesy books and nondramatic literature, "Moral Conceptions of Sexual Love in Elizabethan Comedy." Catherine Belsey's essay, "Alice Arden's Crime," seems to stem from Rose's argument, for she discusses the nature and treatments of women who found their marriages intolerable. Alice Arden's case is only a starting point however, for Belsey examines additional contemporary evidence to argue that the nuclear family served as a model for the proper distribution of correction and control. I must admit that this subject matter--incontinent, sexually active, and unfaithful women--provided me with an afternoon's worth of pleasurable reading.

"Transgression and Rebellion" brings together yet another series of insightful essays which examine historical events as rebellions or violations of cultural norms. G. K. Hunter's "The Beginnings of Elizabethan Drama: Revolution and Continuity" examines the university wits' attempt to appropriate the popular theatre audience. He argues that Marlowe went beyond his university fellows to create a hero who allied the audience with humanist sensibilities, one who is not a plotter, but rather a product of natural selection. From a directorial point of view, his reading of *Tamburlaine* is a refreshing and invaluable treatment of the title character. Jonathan Dollimore takes up the case of female transvestites, and in particular, Mary Frith. "Subjectivity, Sexuality, and Transgression: The Jacobean Connection" closely examines *The Roaring Girl*, *Hic Mulier*, *Haec Vir*, and *Love's Cure*. In light of the fact that much has been written about these works over the last ten years, Dollimore's work offers an enlightening interpretation: he cuts to the quick and argues that the female transvestite scrutinized sexual difference; unable to transcend such a difference, she operated only in terms of transgressive inversion and reinscription.

The final section--"Class Conflict and Social Mobility"--addresses the tensions that arose because of the change in the class system, and in particular, the development of the entrepreneurial classes. "Celebration and Insinuation: Sir Philip Sidney and the Motives of Elizabethan Courtship" is yet another fine example of Louis B. Montrose's scholarship. He offers not only informed readings of *The Lady of May* and *The Fortress of Perfect Beauty* in terms of Sidney's strained relationship with Elizabeth, but also includes those charming bits of court gossip which add panache to his essays. Who else but Sidney would give to Elizabeth a gold pin, fashioned in the shape of a whip and ornamented with diamonds and seed pearls? And who else but Montrose would draw our attention to it? Such tidbits only serve to make his arguments about Sidney's ingratiation that much more convincing and entertaining. Martin Butler's rereading of *The City Madam* examines its contemporary audience. His analysis reads like a society column--who attended the performances, their social connections, and fiscal worth. "Massinger's *The City Madam* and the Caroline Audience" also discusses the theme of marriage of city and court as one of cooperation under conditions of mutual respect and benefit. He dismisses the claims that Massinger was writing with pro-Catholic sympathies to argue that the playwright was actually playing to a Puritan sensibility. This essay is an insightful rethinking of Massinger as court playwright.

I cannot recommend *Renaissance Drama as Cultural History* enough. The essays present informed readings of both historical and literary materials which are of tremendous value to theatre historians and directors, as well as Renaissance scholars. The topics--playwrights, the nature of the audiences, scenographic analysis, and good old cultural gossip--are fascinating. The range of the dramas discussed includes old favorites, as well as a few of those which never sparked your interest on the first reading. After perusing Mary Beth Rose's collection, I suspect that those previously neglected titles may be reexamined. Furthermore, it is a delight to find all of these articles in one collection, for no one wants to search through a bookshelf, through ten years' worth of journals, for a particular edition which you think might contain that essay about *La vida es sueno* that you needed yesterday.

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Supplement:
Censorship, Film History, and Film Theory

