

Rabey, David Ian, and Sarah Goldingay, eds. *Howard Barker's Art of Theatre: Essays on his Plays, Poetry and Production Work*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2013. Pp 238. ISBN: 978-0-7190-8929-9.

This collection of essays on Howard Barker's theatre originates in a three-day conference held at Aberystwyth University in 2009, co-organised by David Ian Rabey and Karoline Gritzner. The volume collates some of the papers delivered at that event and marks an especially resonant critical intervention in the context of the unparalleled surge of Barker-related performances and research activities in recent years. These include the Aberystwyth conference itself; the various exhibitions of Barker's paintings during the 2000s; the extraordinary "21 for 21" celebratory performances of Barker's plays around the world on October 21 2009 to mark the twenty-first anniversary of the founding of the Wrestling School (the company committed to the production of his work); the 2009 Barker season at the Odéon theatre in Paris; Barker's Creative Fellowship at the University of Exeter from 2009-2012, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council; and the first production of a Barker play—*Scenes from an Execution*—at the National Theatre in London in 2012.

Two of the chapters included in this collection reflect on some of the above initiatives: Sarah Goldingay, co-editor of the volume and executive producer of "21 for 21," situates that event as "a breakthrough moment" for Barker while critiquing incisively the "insider/outsider dichotomy" (117) implicated in the notion of "breakthrough"; Christine Kiehl, meanwhile, explores Olivier Py's season of productions at the Odéon, as well as other performances of Barker's work in France, such as Nathalie Garraud's staging of *Ursula*, in order to document the aesthetic variegation in contemporary directorial interpretations of Barker's Catastrophist theatre. Other essays broaden the parameters of investigation to model new ways of thinking about Barker's theatre in the past and present.

Some of the contributions take the form of shorter provocations rather than sustained analytic essays but, overall, this collection is distinctive for three reasons. First, the coverage is impressive: across its twenty chapters, the book embraces the whole of Barker's artistic practice—including his painting, poetry and directing, as well as his playwriting. Second, half of the contributors are based outside the U.K., demonstrating Barker's international reach. And third, the volume focuses principally on work written and staged since the millennium and, in so doing, offers fresh scholarly appraisal of many new pieces.

Rabey's opening essay offers a critical introduction to the "Art of Theatre," orientating the reader to Barker's "counter-Enlightenment" (7) credentials, the tenacity of his theory, and the importance of, for example, aesthetic plethora, temporal dislocation, and linguistic "style" as key components of his theatrical architecture: "Barker's route to the vitality of chaos, and of a philosophical an-

archy, is achieved through scrupulous attention to order of detail, in order to make that sense of chaos more vivid and profound" (3). Subsequent essays widen the scope of Barker studies through innovative methodology and forms of interdisciplinary enquiry. Highlights include Elisabeth Angel-Peres's forensic and elegant essay which revitalizes a familiar trope in the study of Barker's work—namely, his relationship with postmodernism. In tracing the dismemberment and recalibration of narrative and language, Angel-Peres argues that "Barker, if a deconstructionist by method, is also a reconstructionist by credo, and most notably a reconstructionist of one element that tragedy cannot dispense with: the subject" (45). Other scholars shift the emphasis of their enquiries to visual culture. The chapter by Michel Morel undertakes a "triple excavation" (183) by reading across Barker's painting, poetry, and playwriting to attest to his oxymoronic, contradictory, but integrated visual imagination. Heiner Zimmerman discusses the painterly influences and "memories" that constellate in Barker's playwriting—from Goya and Vincentino via Poussin and Baldung Grien to Cranach and Easkins—and thereby adjudicates the terms of Barker's *ekphrasis*: that is, his translation of images into words which illuminates "[the plays'] inscription into the tradition of artistic recreation of central myths, thus stressing the refusal to produce a mimesis of topical reality" (203). Amongst other contributions too numerous to list in full, there are insightful essays on nakedness and nudity (Eléonore Obis), punishment and surveillance (Michael Mangan), history and time (Jay Gipson-King), and aspects of narrative, language, and speech (James Reynolds, Elizabeth Sakellaridou) in Barker's writing and directing practice.

Aside from academics, the volume also includes chapters by the theatre critic Mark Brown, who examines the hostility of London-based newspaper theatre reviewers to Barker's work, and theatre writer George Hunka, who compares the staging of bodies in the drama of Barker, Samuel Beckett, and Richard Foreman. Melanie Jessop, the performer and Wrestling School Associate, recounts her experience of playing Und, focusing in particular on the creative challenge of negotiating Barkerian rhetoric and soliloquy in performance. The final essay, entitled "The sunless garden of the unconsolated: some destinations beyond catastrophe," is from Barker himself in which he discourses on the necessity of "Sacrifice" as an antidote to the humanist impasse of victim/perpetrator. Rabey, as well as contributing a chapter on Barker's poetry to this book, also includes an edited transcript of his interview with Barker, conducted at City University, New York, in May 2010, which reflects helpfully on the various phases of Barker's artistic trajectory.

This collection is an ambitious and major contribution to Barker studies, one that, while widening and deepening the terms of existing scholarship in genuinely exciting ways, is also critically responsive to Barker's recent work across artistic forms. As such, it is an indispensable resource for students, practitioners, and audiences of his theatre.

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