

# NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

doi:10.1017/S0266464X22000288

Dassia N. Posner and Kevin Bartig, with Maria De Simone, eds.

## Three Loves for Three Oranges: Gozzi, Meyerhold, Prokofiev

Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press,  
2021. 427 p. £40.00.  
ISBN: 978-0-253-05788-4.

This is a delightful book, as scholarly in its method as it is light-hearted in its approach. It is also unique in that it brings together for the very first time in publication history three famous, but not fully excavated and known works by Carlo Gozzi, Vsevolod Meyerhold (together with Vladimir Solovyev and Konstantin Vogak), and Sergey Prokofiev. Accordingly, the book is in three parts, each run by its respective co-editor in collaboration with its participants; Dassia Posner oversees the whole, which contains pithy introductions, a wide range of essays (several utterly captivating), excellent translations from Italian and Russian into English, and the big prize: the actual texts of the creators cited (albeit in translation).

The book's quirky title signals the works at issue, starting with Gozzi's *Love of Three Oranges*, sourced in a North Italian folk fairy tale (*fiaba*). The latter concerns a glum Prince who cannot laugh until Fata Morgana, the wicked witch, slips and falls bottom up. The Prince goes on a quest, finds his lady love in one of three outsize oranges, is tricked by the witch's machinations, loses his love, finds her again, and all's well that ends well. Gozzi's is the historical point of reference for the *Oranges* to follow, and his opus is a fine example of *commedia all'improvviso* – its name ceding soon enough to that of *commedia dell'arte*, which, readers are suitably reminded, Gozzi also used synonymously. He scripted this *commedia's* improvisatory flow as recollections, in 'a memoir format', of Antonio Sacchi and his company's premiere performance under his jurisdiction in 1761 in Venice.

Gozzi's uproarious but vicious satirical tongue – De Simone brings it out beautifully in English – lashes his perceived playwright rivals Pietro Chiari and Carlo Goldoni, giving plenty of room for Ted Emery's sharp contextual essay on Gozzi's aristocratic sociopolitical views. They were also reactionary, which, in tandem with Emery's many pertinent observations, shows the antagonistic

social-class positions emerging powerfully during this period. Worth remembering is that Giorgio Strehler's exquisite productions returned Goldoni to the second half of the twentieth century not from the 'bourgeois' perspective – for Gozzi an 'upstart' class meriting his vilification – but from the viewpoint of the common people.

Meyerhold, Posner suggests, wrote more of *Love for Three Oranges: A Divertissement in Twelve Scenes, a Prologue, an Epilogue, and Three Interludes* than did the two colleagues from his Borodinskaya Street Studio (1913–17) in St Petersburg. She indicates the sequence of events clearly: Meyerhold writes his ironically named play-text in 1912, but does not publish it until 1914 in his journal *Love for Three Oranges*, subtitled, equally in jest, *The Journal of Doctor Dapertutto* (1914–1916); he gives readings of his play, but never performs and directs it, probably for lack of funds. Meyerhold substantially changed Gozzi, and his own material 'reveals a radically new approach to form' – fragmentation, metatheatrical commentary, and other such devices understood to be characteristically Meyerholdian. He converted, in other words, what he needed for his going currency, overwriting Gozzi for the highly physical actor training of his Studio, which, in the previous decade, had taken him to the *commedia dell'arte* and, in the revolutionary 1920s, to biomechanics.

More, indeed, could have been made in the Meyerhold section of his profound engagement with popular theatre, of which, he believed, *commedia dell'arte* was an integral part; further, of how his political commitments and aspirations were embedded in his explorations of popular forms and practices, which had inspired his *new* theatre forms and practices, now on the side of a 'people' recently become a 'proletariat'. The authors seem wary of his activist dimension, including Meyerhold specialist Vadim Shcherbakhov, whose compelling insights into what he calls the 'Russian *commedia dell'arte* myth' point towards Meyerhold's appropriations for his multiple purposes, but essentially place them singly as cultural-aesthetic.

Enter Sergey Prokofiev's parodic, satirical, nutty opera *Love for Three Oranges* in a modernist pastiche fantasia that debunks tired opera conventions, musical and dramatic, while throwing in self-referential mockery. These themes are consistently picked up by all of the writers here, Kevin Bartig noting in his introduction to Prokofiev that Meyerhold had referred his play to him. Prokofiev, very impressed, nevertheless overwrote Meyerhold, thus

coordinating his personalized non-conventional libretto directly with his musical score.

Prokofiev left Russia for the United States in 1918, where he wrote his opera in the abrupt dialogue *Bartig* beats out, like music. *Love for Three Oranges* was premiered in Chicago in 1921, and in Leningrad in 1926, directed by Sergey Radlov – a detail among other necessary details in *Bartig's* map of its itinerary. (Radlov was formerly Meyerhold's student.) Inna Naroditskaya lovingly charts its music, and Natalia Savkina its narrative. The perplexing thing is that Prokofiev and Meyerhold were friends, yet the former never acknowledged, not even at the beginning (before Meyerhold's politics spelled his doom), that Meyerhold's play was his immediate inspiration; and Gozzi, who had become a third degree of separation, was not of direct interest to his artistic ambitions. Posner rightly points out the discrepancy in the Italian and Russian titles, explaining that collaborators had agreed to 'of' in the Italian and 'for' in the Russian because this corresponds with each language.

What is the *fiaba* of this wonderful story, in an erudite book invaluable both for those who know something about its subject and those who would like to know? It is that accrued overwriting gives a complete orange!

MARIA SHEVTSOVA

doi:10.1017/S0266464X2200029X

Lisa Woynarski

**Ecodramaturgies: Theatre, Performance and Climate Change**

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 239 p. £71.50.  
ISBN: 978-3-030-55853-6.

This review was written travelling on a mixture of fossil-fuelled and electrified public transport somewhere between Glasgow and Manchester, major cities in two nations whose wealth was created through colonial exploitation of the Global South that has been used to power unsustainable economic growth while disproportionately contributing to global climate change. I start with this acknowledgment of the material and ecological context of scholarly production, following Woynarski's example in *Ecodramaturgies*. At its core, Woynarski's book makes an impassioned case for taking an intersectional approach to the subject of climate change in theatre and performance.

Intersectionality is taken to be both a politics and a reading practice, as the second chapter demonstrates. Here, intersectionality is understood as a 'multi-level analysis', used to expose how structures of (gendered, racialized, colonial, national) oppression interlock and sustain each other. Woynarski adds to this more common constellation of intersections questions about the position of

non-human nature and the ways in which environmental damage interacts with other distributions of power. In doing so, Woynarski engages with a varied set of case studies, including Canadian Chantal Bilodeau's play *Its starts with me* (2019); the women-led Green Belt Movement in Kenya (since 1977); Nigerian playwright Osonye Tess Onwueme's *Then She Said it* (2002); and two UK-based performances: *Common Salt* by Sheila Ghelani and Sue Palmer (2018); and *salt*. by Selina Thompson (2017).

The huge diversity of case studies – in terms of historical and ecological context as well as aesthetic form – is at once a strength and a weakness of this publication. On the one hand, there is a risk of losing depth in the analysis of how dramaturgical structures interact with local contexts (in terms of theatre history as well as social and natural history). On the other, this approach allows for proliferating connections and interactions between different moments in performance history to manifest, revealing the complex global histories that have produced our environmentally precarious present. To this effect, each chapter is formed around a different, key conceptual idea, namely: 'bioperformativity' (a neologism translating theories of thing-power to a performance-specific context); the politics of exposure; cosmopolitanism; and decolonized ecologies.

While each of these themes is intellectually provocative, and the chapters build on each other in illuminating ways, the final chapter on decolonized ecologies stands out especially. Engaging with Métis playwright Marie Clements's *Burning Vision* (2003), the collaboration between native and non-native groups in *Salmon is Everything* (2014), Bilodeau's *Sila* (2015), and the Idle No More movement in Canada and the USA (since 2012), this chapter enacts ways for non-Indigenous scholars to approach Indigenous practices and epistemologies through careful listening, a thoughtful politics of citation, and directing attention to the power structures which shape extant knowledge systems (that is, insofar as I can judge this as a non-Indigenous scholar myself). As a whole, this publication is an accessibly written, critically thoughtful, and politically astute contribution to scholarship on performance and climate change.

CARA BERGER

doi:10.1017/S0266464X22000306

Howard Webber

**Before the Arts Council: Campaigns for State Funding of the Arts in Britain, 1934–1944**

London: Bloomsbury, 2021. 264 p. £85.  
ISBN: 978-1-3501-6793-3.

In this book, based on a PhD awarded by King's College London, Howard Webber charts a number