

# NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Alison Jeffers

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D. A. Hadfield and Jean Reynolds, ed.

**Shaw and Feminisms: On Stage and Off**

University Press of Florida, 2013. 240 p. £57.00.

ISBN: 978-0-8130-4243-5.

This volume in the 'Florida Bernard Shaw Series' presents a series of essays re-examining Shaw's reputation as a feminist icon. In part, this collection is a continuation of the work begun in *Fabian Feminisms: Bernard Shaw and Women* (1977), edited by Rodelle Weintraub, who writes the foreword to this volume, noting the timely nature of this reflection on Shaw's feminist status in the light of a new generation of feminists who grew up admiring Shaw as one of their own.

The essays are divided into three sections which consider Shaw the man, the playwright, and his international influence. The volume examines Shaw's delineation of his female characters as well as his relationships with women – notably actresses and female playwrights – and the impact of his feminist idealism beyond the British stage. The essays are authored by highly respected Shaw scholars and Victorianists, and this is reflected in the impressive range of new insights and interpretations of his work.

Leonard W. Connolly's chapter reveals previously unpublished letters between Shaw and the actress Mary Hamilton, in which Shaw counsels the actress not to give up her independent life to care for her ailing parents by quoting a line from *Man and Superman* which cautions against 'sacrificing yourself to those you love'. Ann Wilson reflects on Shaw's dramatization of the New Woman in *Mrs Warren's Profession* to indicate that the highly self-conscious and performative depictions of Vivie and Mrs Warren in the play suggest that both characters remain constrained by contemporary constructions of femininity. Vivie, instead of being an exemplary 'New Woman', shows rather how much she remains 'deeply indebted to the middle-class values of her mother'.

D. A. Hadfield's essay reveals a less generous Shaw; his written responses to the work of some female playwrights, in particular his inamorata Janet Achurch, are often not supportive or encouraging. Kay Li traces the importance of the premiere of the Chinese production of *Mrs Warren's Profession* in 1920 during the Chinese intellectual revolution. Although this production was unsuccessful (some patrons walked out of the performance) Li points out that it did inspire much of the subsequent new drama in China,

which depicted female emancipation and 'freedom from family control' for young women. This collection offers thoughtful analysis and commentary to Shaw scholars and students alike.

MICHELLE C. PAULL

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Milija Gluhovic

**Performing European Memories:**

**Trauma, Ethics, Politics**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 322 p.

£55.00.

ISBN: 978-0-230-29790-6.

Milija Gluhovic's work maintains a consistent narrative in its preoccupation with European histories, trajectories, and consciousnesses, as is also evident in the recent collection *Performing the New Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, co-edited with Karen Fricker (Palgrave, 2013). In this ambitious monograph Gluhovic is concerned with the ways in which individual and, by extension, national experiences of conflict, trauma, and reclaiming identities have manifested themselves in different forms of representation telling the story of Europe in recent and contemporary times.

That story, as is here recognized, has frequently been one of tension and persecution, as well as of a quest for personal and collective freedoms. Gluhovic's approach is refreshing: he does not separate practitioner – *auteur* – from playwright's theatre, allowing, rather, the theme and not the form to be his guide in selecting the primary case studies. So we are given extensive analyses of seminal work by, primarily, Heiner Müller, Tadeusz Kantor, Harold Pinter, and Artur Zmijewski. Gluhovic's conclusion rightly serves as a bridge to the present by considering its own historiography and ways forward, while discussing *Sarajevo Theatre Tragedy*.

Both the Introduction and Conclusion are of critical merit in their own right. As the book reaches its moving denouement, it brings the kind of personal or intimate experience that has been crucial in all the main chapters to the evaluation of the present day as both challenge and promise. This extensive study is exemplary in its scholarly and contextual rigour, particularly in terms of the robust theoretical debate to which the author submits his arguments, confidently negotiating different perspectives that are given suitable space to provide us with the fuller picture.

The question of 'histories' over 'history' is paid due attention as the author both engages with existing scholarship and takes the analysis to the next level. We cannot quite argue that the case studies are obscure, in fact often quite the opposite, but Gluhovic's analytical methodology shows as much an understanding of recent developments in the field as of the historical treatment. Judith Butler and Sigmund Freud rightly emerge as key references and the former, especially, sets the tone for the enquiry, though it would be reductive to say that Gluhovic's theoretical framework is anything but thoughtfully nuanced throughout. The book, suitably pitched at the advanced postgraduate level, will appeal to scholars working in memory studies and the stage, while its consideration of lived-through, embodied, and represented trauma in the context of sociopolitical crises and fluid identities is incisive and urgent, making this an important critical source in the broader field.

VICKY ANGELAKI

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Claire Warden

### **British Avant-Garde Theatre**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 232 p. £50.00.

ISBN: 978-0-230-28578-1.

Claire Warden's book makes a useful intervention into both British theatre histories and those of the (predominantly European) avant garde. The decision to use the framework of the avant garde – traditionally associated loosely with experimentation, disregard of traditional form, and counter-culture in nature – as opposed to 'modernist', at times seems at odds with some of the practice the volume investigates. It is however, a decision inspired by the desire to place together aspects of British theatre practice typically separated out by aesthetic categories or by politics.

The book includes chapters that focus on the work of the Group Theatre, the Workers' Theatre Movement, and on Ewan MacColl and early Joan Littlewood. There is also a valuable underlying agenda to explore the significant cross-overs and influences between the European avant-garde as we might know it – the German Expressionists or the Russian Blue Blouses, for example – and the more experimental work that was going on in Britain between the end of the nineteenth century and the mid-1900s. Warden successfully identifies the operation of cross-fertilization across European forms and theories of the social function of theatre as well as those focusing on aesthetics.

The work on MacColl is particularly useful in its breadth and depth. Perhaps more emphasis on the complex dynamics of both British history during the early twentieth century and the shifts

in the focus of the political left would have been useful in locating the 'social' in an understanding of the changing forms and practices among the more avant-garde theatre and performance makers of the period. Similarly the referral to the work of the commercial sector as 'escapist' somewhat impoverishes arguments around the popular and populism. But while Palgrave's pricing policy will make *British Avant-Garde Theatre* inaccessible to most, it is both good and a must-read. There are far too few books on this period of British theatre which genuinely attempt to reform our understandings of the significance of theatre cultures and theatre as a cultural product. This volume ought to be made available in paperback so that people can actually use it.

MAGGIE B. GALE

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David Pattie, ed.

### **Modern British Playwriting: the 1950s**

London: Methuen, 2012. 281 p. £16.99.

ISBN: 978-1-408-12927-2.

Whatever choices one makes of playwrights to represent a decade, somebody will always find grounds for saying 'Well, why choose *those?*' In this volume on the 1950s, the case for both Rattigan and Wesker is made convincingly, that for Osborne over-enthusiastically, and that for Eliot with a surprising air of detachment. The book overall is both readable and worthwhile, and though its primary target audience is probably undergraduate, it contains some thought-provoking insights for an academic reader.

David Pattie's brief account of the achievements and shortcomings of successive Labour and Conservative administrations is useful, and would serve a student reader particularly well as a source of contextual material. The following section on culture and society is perhaps less successful, though Pattie provides a strong sense of the triumph of American influences in the shape of consumerism and jazz.

The overview chapter on British theatre of the period sets up two compelling binaries, one between playwrights – headed by Beckett and Brecht – and the other between theatres – headed by the Royal Court and Theatre Royal, Stratford East. The volume then takes a structural path that I think is a mistake – in common with some of the other volumes in the series – since the editor sometimes anticipates his contributors on specific playwrights. This risks duplication and confusion – exacerbated by the date-system used in the sub-heads: 'Arnold Wesker (1932–58)' for example is surely a trap for the unwary.

Turning to the essays on individual playwrights, in Sarah Bay-Cheng's piece on Eliot's plays the case for regarding Eliot as a proto-