narratives of the theatrical past with disciplinary interests (like celebrity and stardom) that compel contemporary scholars.

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The President Electric: Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Performance. By Timothy Raphael. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009; pp. 288. $27.95 paper.
doi:10.1017/S0040557411000561

Reviewed by Laura A. Lodewyck, Northwestern University

The legacy of sentimentality, even adoration, surrounding President Ronald Reagan is not lost on Timothy Raphael. *The President Electric: Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Performance* opens with a photograph, from the 1984 Republican Convention, of Reagan's wife, Nancy, raising both hands in adulatory greeting to her husband, whose face is projected onto an enormous screen behind her onstage. So begins an insightful interpretation of the era of the United States' fortieth president, in which Raphael examines Reagan's personal and political motivations through the optic of performance. Raphael illuminates Reagan's actions as those of a perennial performer opportunistically animated by a newly electronic and electrified age. Although others—most recently, show-business biographer Marc Eliot in his 2008 *Reagan: The Hollywood Years*—have attempted to reconcile the story of Reagan the actor with that of Reagan the president, Raphael builds a particularly convincing case that reads Reagan's background as an actor indelibly shaping his path to and tenure as president in a political environment increasingly informed by performance and technology.

In a fascinating narrative, Raphael recounts Reagan's performative expedition from radio sports announcer to film actor to television icon. In the context of a new age of consumer technology, Raphael approaches the eventual arrival of "the Great Communicator" as president as almost inevitable. More important, Raphael applies this seeming inevitability as a way to explain effectively and analyze productively Reagan's ability to captivate a nation. Raphael argues that the president's popularity and his ability to fixate an audience was originally born of a theatrically informed childhood, from the influence of his Chautauqua education to the Reagans' status as "first family of the stage" (44) in provincial Tampico. From this background, young "Dutch" Reagan went on rigorously to pursue a career in the national media, beginning with his initial employment in radio, where he broadcast Cubs games "live" off a telegraph relay from WHO studios in Des Moines. Raphael traces the essential imaginative role of radio in constructing the "electric" body back to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whose fireside chats reshaped his disabled body into an electronically generated "body electric," a healthy body rendered visible in the imaginations of the public through the invisible power of radio.

In documenting the history of Reagan's personal life and performance career, Raphael is persuasive in his observation that performing became—and

arguably always was—Reagan's epistemology. Through his formative experiences with public performance, Raphael argues, young Dutch learned that performance is the crucial method through which to comprehend human existence. He enacted this epistemology not only in his professional acting career, but also in his transition from entertainment to politics. Largely informed by Reagan's autobiography, *Where's the Rest of Me?*, Raphael portrays the president as a skillful negotiator between the worlds of "statecraft" and "stagecraft." Hearkening back to the actor and assassin John Wilkes Booth, Raphael argues that the United States maintains a tradition of connecting performers and their craft with politics and political audiences. Raphael positions Reagan as a political performer poised to repair the damage inflicted by Booth on this historical relationship.

Raphael further explores the successful branding of Reagan in the context of rapidly developing corporate marketing techniques, pioneered by General Electric, for whom Reagan hosted the popular television program *General Electric Television Theater*. Raphael situates the overarching importance of developing technology, the "fiat of electricity" that enabled an unprecedented marriage of corporate capitalism, consumer culture, and electronic media. "Mr. Norm," as Reagan referred to his Hollywood celebrity image, proved particularly adept at negotiating this relationship. Already well known, Reagan instantly bolstered his star power, and became the embodiment of GE's "Total Electric Living" by sharing his completely technologically equipped home with a wide television audience. His annual GE tours, where he traveled the country and made up to fourteen speeches a day, comprised an eight-year-long journey that merged Ronnie the corporate spokesman and agent of technology with Reagan the political performer: the body electric. Highlighting Reagan's well-known role as an advocate of progress, Raphael thus reframes the traditional narrative of the conservative Reagan Revolution as indebted primarily to a nation poised to shift political values, arguing that Reagan's rise to the presidency was also a culmination of his role as consumer media celebrity and corporate ambassador.

This careful and persuasive study leads to a concluding chapter that is richly developed, but feels more like an epilogue to the rest of the text. Drawing on the plot of *Hamlet*, Derrida's concept of hauntology, and Roach's theory of surrogation, Raphael recontextualizes Reagan's journey from one primarily indebted to a material world illuminated by technology, to one critically informed by a nation's collective memory, and by the ephemeral bodies of the dead and their legacy. Reagan, in performing the rites of memory of the nation, used his believability as a performer to claim his political role in representing the nation's (imagined) past. Here Raphael's analysis of the fortieth president as "the memory doctor" (212) of cultural history cites Reagan's authority in the role of actor of a nation's cultural memory, but conspicuously omits any mention of Reagan's own failing memory as a sufferer of Alzheimer's disease. This exclusion potentially places Raphael's reading of Reagan's false anecdotes as merely performative misrepresentation (for instance, Reagan's imaginary account of visiting concentration camps during World War II) in a new light.

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Raphael completes this reflection by circling back to electronic mass media as enabler of the dominant political paradigm mobilized by the era of Reagan – a mimetic condition under which the political actor's body gains legitimacy as a leader by representing other bodies – but this final chapter feels somewhat incongruous, particularly given the book's central premise. This is easily overlooked, however, given Raphael's ambitious project of blending performance studies with American political history in this thorough reexamination of the powerful legacy of Ronald Reagan. Overall, Raphael makes a compelling case that the "president electric," informed by his range of performative experiences in theatre, radio, film, and television, was as profoundly shaped by this landscape as the American political arena was fundamentally altered by his leadership.

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Revenge Drama in European Renaissance and Japanese Theatre: From "Hamlet" to "Madame Butterfly." Edited by Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; pp. x + 290. $90 cloth.
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Reviewed by Dan Venning, CUNY Graduate Center

Revenge is a central theme in the dramatic arts. The oldest Western dramas often focus on wrongs revenged: Clytemnestra revenging Iphigenia, Orestes and Electra revenging their father, Medea revenging herself and her honor. Seneca's bloody dramas of vengeance served as models for Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies, from *The Spanish Tragedy* (in which "Revenge" appears as a character) to *Titus Andronicus* and, of course, *Hamlet*. Gory Senecan vengeance continues to draw audiences, as evidenced by the massive success of contemporary horror films such as the *Saw* franchise. But, as Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. points out in the introduction to *Revenge Drama in European Renaissance and Japanese Theatre*, revenge is also a central feature in Asian drama, especially that of Japan. Perhaps the most famous Japanese drama is *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, the story of the revenge of the forty-seven *rōnin* (former samurai) against the lord responsible for their master's death. In 1748, Chikamatsu Monzaemon turned the story of a real incident in 1701 into a *bunraku* puppet play, which was shortly thereafter followed by a live *kabuki* version. Wetmore's collection proposes to do something fascinating: compare and contrast "the revenge traditions of Japan and England and how those traditions have developed within their own cultures from the early modern era to the present" (2). This is an ambitious goal, and an important one; this book is the first to attempt such a comparative study.

The collection is divided into two parts, and the first six chapters comprise "Revenge Contexts and Comparisons." These essays generally focus on the cultural forces that affect how revenge is portrayed in drama. The first essay, by Leonard C. Pronko, contrasts revenge dramas from Japan, Spain, and England.