

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Seda Ilter

Mediatized Dramaturgy: The Evolution of Plays in the Media Age

London: Methuen Drama, 2021. 240 p. £85.

ISBN: 978-1-350-03115-9.

During coronavirus lockdowns, theatre-makers have been forced to get to grips with the internet as a platform for performance, prompting new conversations about theatre's relationship with digital media. In this context, Seda Ilter's new book – mostly written before the pandemic – reads as strikingly prescient. *Mediatized Dramaturgy* asks how plays have responded to the expansion of digital media since the 1990s. It's a welcome addition to existing scholarship on theatre and mediatization, which has tended to focus on performance and neglect the play-text. Ilter also makes a valuable move beyond thinking about mediatization in terms of content, arguing that we must pay as much attention to the mode of representation as to the themes represented.

Each of the chapters addresses an individual aspect of mediatized dramaturgy, considering elements such as language, characterization, and plot structure. Ilter examines a range of texts, adopting a refreshingly open definition of what constitutes a play. Practitioners whose work is explored include playwrights like Simon Stephens, Martin Crimp, and Caryl Churchill, as well as such genre-defying theatre-makers as Christopher Brett Bailey and John Jesurun. However, the writers discussed are mostly white, suggesting that there is further work to be done exploring how these mediatized forms intersect with Global Majority perspectives.

Ilter's analysis throughout is driven by a political interest in what plays can do in the contemporary world. She not only traces how playwrights have reflected aspects of our mediatized reality, but also assesses the critical efficacy of these efforts, using Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* and Jacques Rancière's work on dissensus and the distribution of the sensible as key theoretical reference points. Ultimately, Ilter favours 'no-longer-dramatic' texts, arguing that this mode creates openings for critical rethinking.

While the resistance that such plays offer to neoliberal capitalism is perhaps somewhat overstated, *Mediatized Dramaturgy* remains an engaging discussion of a still relatively nascent subset of

contemporary playwriting. The book is at its best in the passages of detailed analysis of specific plays. One of Ilter's most useful critical interventions is her introduction of the term 'mediaturgical plays' to refer to play-texts written through digital media technologies such as Twitter, using the fascinating case study of David Greig's *Yes/No Plays*.

In some ways, this book arrived just before its time. Several more recent plays – such as Jasmine Lee-Jones's *seven methods of killing kylie jenner* and the work of Javaad Alipoor, along with various shows created online during the pandemic – speak to Ilter's analysis, opening up further avenues to pursue in future.

CATHERINE LOVE

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Caoimhe McAvinchey

Applied Theatre: Women and the Criminal Justice System

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2020.

247 p. £75.00.

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Research addressing theatre and the criminal justice system has historically focused primarily on performance practice with male prisoners, as they statistically represent a large proportion of prison populations. This has led to women within the criminal justice system sometimes being overlooked and treated as 'an even more invisible population'. However, this addition to the Methuen Applied Theatre series offers some counterbalance, and is an informative and engaging critical enquiry into applied theatre practice with women affected by the criminal justice system.

The first part of this book is McAvinchey's introduction to the text and the field itself. She contextualizes women and the criminal justice system, and prison theatre, with clarity. McAvinchey highlights that women make up just '6.9 per cent of global prison population', though, as other contributors also note, this population has been growing. This growth appears to relate to stricter public policies for women, rather than a change in criminal behaviour. She acknowledges the context that this field of work is being delivered in, and outlines that gendered experiences need to be considered in the delivery and analysis of this practice. McAvinchey highlights that the varieties of theatre practice included in this book are all examples of sustained