

# BOOK REVIEWS

## EDITED BY MARK FEARNOW

*The World Shakespeare Bibliography, 1980–1996*. Edited by James L. Harner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (in association with the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC), 2000. CD-ROM. \$810.

Reviewed by Cary M. Mazer, University of Pennsylvania

In the 1970s, during the first major wave of stage-centered Shakespeare scholarship, *Shakespeare Quarterly* started dedicating so much space to reviews of contemporary Shakespeare productions that it took up a whole issue. Space pressures created a dilemma for editors and contributors: should the reviews document (listing personnel, cuts and alterations, and running time) describe (concept, tone, unusual line readings, and business) or assess (individual actors and overall effectiveness)? That wave, and the annual dedicated issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, passed (with another journal, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, taking up the banner). One legacy of that era has been the continuing efforts of the *World Shakespeare Bibliography*, published annually as a special number of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, to record as much as it can about Shakespeare in the theatre—not just scholarly books and articles, but contemporary productions and journalistic reviews.

Another cumulative database of the *World Shakespeare Bibliography* has just been issued in CD-ROM, covering, in 48,520 entries, 1980–1996, the years when the bibliography's coverage of theatrical production first blossomed. Any machine-readable database is as good as its search engine, cross-referencing, and links, and, as such, the CD-ROM *World Shakespeare Bibliography* is very good indeed, especially for scholars tracking down information, articles, and reviews relating to theatrical productions. Click on "General Shakespeareana" in the index and, under "Productions, Stage History," will be separate sections on (among others) "Actors, Acting, Directing," "Stage and Theatre History," "Stage Productions," and "Theatrical Techniques." Click on individual plays and the same taxonomy applies; click on "Stage Productions" under each play and you will find entries for each major international production, listing the venue, cast, artistic personnel, and the reviews in major newspapers, with the date and the critic's name. Find a book or article that deals with a particular production in detail, and a hyperlink icon will take you to the main entry listing. Use the Search function to find listings under actor, or director, or designer, or critic, or newspaper (far easier than using the author index, which is too large to use without endless scrolling).

What more can one ask for? Well, at this price, only that one's university library has made the investment, or, better yet, that it be made available online (which it now is, at \$50 a year for individuals, plus a 50% discount for *Shakespeare Quarterly* subscribers)—see <http://www-english.tamu.edu/wsb>. Better still, ask that the online version be linked to electronic versions of the articles and reviews themselves (which is now the case for many of the entries),

and to the archives where the photographs, designs, and promptbooks could be viewed through electronic media (for which we can only hope).

How quickly one gets spoiled by technology.



*Actors and American Culture, 1880–1920*. By Benjamin McArthur. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000 (reissue); pp. 289, 11 photos. \$17.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Ron West, Southern Illinois University

It is a curious comment on the evolution of American theatre scholarship when a reissue retains nearly its original force. That, however, seems the case with Benjamin McArthur's *Actors and American Culture, 1880–1920*, originally published in 1984 and out of print for several years. McArthur was considerably ahead of the pack in 1984 and drew together a wide range of generally thorough research, and the work thus remains a principal, and the most thorough, overview of a crucial era. Since Iowa's is a reissue rather than a new edition, hindsight prompts more exceptions than on first issue, but its basic direction and impulse reaffirm the book as a valuable, if slightly problematic, resource.

It seems pointlessly repetitive, and presumptuous, to reiterate Don Wilmeth's thorough 1985 review of the original printing. The book's numerous strengths, broad research, and careful development of the acting profession and the actor's evolution and struggle for a sense of national identity, even citizenship, are unchanged. McArthur's careful treatment of the profession as a metaphor for the American cultural struggle toward plurality remains a milestone and offers encouragement for continued scholarship. His broader cultural analysis achieves a genuine synthesis, rather than a mere parallel comparison of the actor to "everybody else," and directly addresses theatre studies' value to the field of American cultural studies. As a foundation for further research, the book still stands up to Wilmeth's evaluation that it "takes theatre scholarship outside of a narrow interest and places it in the mainstream of historical and cultural study." Ironically, the book's significance in reissue suggests some lag within that mainstream.

What Wilmeth generously called his "minor quibbles" also remain, however, and have gained more force as theatrical scholarship has advanced. Even more annoying, though, and I think that is the appropriate adjective, is the fact that major, and quite serious, problems with the text have not been addressed in the reissue, but simply reproduced, as if those flaws were unimportant. In a work of scholarship, this lack of correction seems inexcusable, particularly as it undermines the book's value both as a basic work and as a source for new scholars or interested nonacademics. The retention of

outright errata, including major name misspellings, is objectionable in a reissue; nor has the publisher troubled to address technical and notation flaws.

Though specific research has developed information unavailable to McArthur at the original writing, it is important to note significant omissions or glosses that may not have been apparent in 1985. Continuing research suggests, for example, that Yiddish troupes penetrated the gentile landscape far more extensively than McArthur's aging, often estimated, and occasionally nonauthoritative, sources suggest. Relying on Hutchins Hapgood's 1965 data, for example, is risky business, and Irwin Howe's is only slightly less questionable, particularly as Howe made no pretension to thoroughness regarding Yiddish theatre. Though McArthur accurately depicts the resistance to Jewish actors, the depiction of early Yiddish players as inexperienced amateurs is particularly troubling, as is McArthur's location of them in the working class based solely on their occupations in America, given that skilled Jewish acting professionals were often obliged to adopt menial trades in an anti-Semitic society. In fairness, however, it should also be noted that McArthur clearly and specifically highlights the American stage's racism and sets it in stark contrast to illusory issues of critical animosity or acting competence. Similar generalizations characterize his brief treatment of African-American theatre, a topic that, given the scholarship produced since 1985, can't adequately be addressed in less than book length.

*Actors and American Culture* is also highly reductive with regard to tent-rep companies, extending well beyond the oversimplified characterization of tents as a pragmatic response to Midwest heat. Indeed, McArthur compresses discussion of a remarkably complex branch of American theatre into a few encompassing categories and depictions. The result is the impression of a monolith where evidence suggests a complex diversity, perhaps the result of overlooking Jere Mickel's detailed 1975 *Footlights on the Prairie*, a work, though itself somewhat problematic, that would have made McArthur's conclusions about the tent-rep companies unlikely.

Of necessity, McArthur relied on sources that were showing their age in 1985, including some in publication as long as thirty years without revision. By 2000, several of those sources had been overlaid by subsequent reassessments as well. The absence of revision in this reissue eliminates, in some cases, nearly fifty years of critical reappraisal and thus risks misleading new readers. In addition, some of McArthur's discussions depend upon unreliable sources, for example, a consideration of contractual disagreements, including the claim that Augustin Daly misled his actors, based upon an account in the *New York Daily Mirror*, hardly an objective source.

Despite these criticisms, McArthur's work belongs in every serious or scholarly theatre collection. The study clearly explains how American actors

became commodities, often through pragmatic choices on their parts, but, more frequently, through the stage's increasing commercialization. Much of the book develops a case for a "professional" acting that is closely linked to commercialism. McArthur provides numerous examples of figures who seem conscious of the tension between art and commerce and seek to resist or eliminate it, for example, Augustin Daly and George Arliss, even while, as in Daly's case, carefully honing the commercial effectiveness of their companies, actors, and plays.

McArthur describes the circumstances that forced actors into an insular culture and parallels those factors with various theatre groups' self-isolating impulses and social practices. With equal care, the work also explores the profession's shift from fraternity, metaphoric family, and loose collective to a corporate model. The constant application of broader social and cultural considerations remain the book's most impressive, and its most useful, feature. Though precariously brief at fewer than 250 pages, excluding notes, *Actors and American Culture* consistently demonstrates American theatre is not merely representative of, but integral to, American culture.



***Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History.*** By Joy S. Kasson. New York: Hill & Wang, 2000; pp. 319. \$26.00 hardcover.

Reviewed by Roger A. Hall, James Madison University.

William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody and his Wild West show have not wanted for ink. There are Cody's own autobiographical accounts of his frontier and his theatrical adventures, Don Russell's well-researched standards on Cody's life and the Wild West shows, Sarah Blackstone's examination of the economic basis of the Wild West show in general, Joseph G. Rosa and Robin May's pictorial biography of Cody, Paul Reddin's overview of Wild West images, and a host of other, related books. In fact, there have been so many books written about "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Wild West shows, it is somewhat remarkable that Joy Kasson has found such a productive new angle on the western hero and his dramatic presentations.

Kasson's book succeeds because she accepts the status of Cody's Wild West as an icon of American entertainment and spends her time productively analyzing how it attained its unique position. Early in the book, the author asks a fundamental question: why did such spectacular fame and fortune fall to Cody rather than to Captain Jack Crawford, Texas Jack Omohundro, or any of a half dozen other western heroes with similar backgrounds? Most of the book seeks to answer that basic question. Kasson emphasizes the interconnectedness of Cody's real-life accomplishments and his theatrical display of them. She points out that Cody was an entertainer supplying a protected version of the West, from

his early days as a guide for hunting parties, through his years as a star in melodrama, to its culmination in his Wild West show.

Cody is often portrayed as a figurehead created by dime novelist Ned Buntline, Wild West manager Nate Salsbury, or press agent John Burke, but Kasson effectively analyzes Cody's contributions to his own success. She acknowledges the frequently overlooked ten years that Cody spent starring in conventional frontier melodramas based on incidents generously adapted from his own life. The author credits those years with allowing Cody to develop his stage persona as well as his confidence as a performer. She also accurately points out that the Buffalo Bill melodramas sparked an abundance of Buffalo Bill dime novels—not the other way around—and that Cody's melodramas became increasingly more dignified and complex, softening their blood-and-thunder plots in a manner that prefigured the Wild West show's emphasis on education and historicity.

Cody was clearly a charismatic figure, and Kasson candidly addresses Cody's handsome physique, which she calls "his own extraordinary body," and she isn't afraid to label his allure as an early example of sex appeal, what nineteenth-century writers used to euphemistically call "animal magnetism." As writers such as Michael Kimmel and Anthony Rotundo have pointed out in their explorations of masculinity in the United States, the late nineteenth century redefined masculine and feminine roles, and Cody was lionized as a prime example of the turn-of-the-century ideal of manliness.

Kasson gives ample credit for the success of Cody's Wild West show to the backstage talents of Cody's partner, Nate Salsbury, and his prolific press agent, John Burke. Salsbury was responsible for taking the show to Europe, where it became an international phenomenon, and for positioning the show as an educational enterprise that offered "the threat of danger without consequences." Burke was responsible for portraying Cody and the show itself as an emblem of the American conquest of the wilderness through virtue, skill, and fire power.

Kasson explains how Salsbury and Burke created "dignity" for the Wild West by stressing its educational values, by obtaining endorsements from noted authorities such as Mark Twain, Philip Sheridan, and Nelson Miles, by hiring Steele MacKaye to restructure the loose-knit assemblage into "The Drama of Civilization," and by arranging the quasi-military designation of "colonel" for Cody. This dignified status was then significantly augmented by the royal patronage Cody received on his European excursions from 1887 to 1892.

In chapter five, Kasson addresses the complex issue of American Indian performers in the Wild West show. She allows the reader to get to know some of the native performers through their own words and actions, from the compliant Two Bears, a Lakota leader who worked with the army and had extensive experiences in the white world, to Sitting Bull, who apparently shared a mutual

respect with Cody, to the rebellious Black-Heart, who championed his right to work for whomever he pleased. Kasson effectively uses photographs of the native performers—especially Gertrude Kasebier’s intimate portraits of Iron Tail and Samuel Lone Bear, Jr., and her artistic image of a blanket-draped figure—to remind the reader of the individuality of these men and women and to support her contention that participation in the Wild West constituted a calculated method for native performers to represent themselves, at least to some extent, as they wished to be seen.

Kasson has written previously about nineteenth-century American sculpture, and she brings to this subject the refined perspective of a visual artist. The volume includes over 130 well-integrated illustrations. In chapter 6, for instance, she shows how the Wild West appealed to the North through its pictorial association with army generals and, simultaneously, to the South by presenting familiar southern themes of chivalry and individual heroism.

The focus of Kasson’s study is Cody, his plays, and his Wild West show. Other Wild West shows, including those of William F. Carver, Pawnee Bill Lillie, or the 101 Ranch show, are mentioned only in connection with Cody—when Cody’s Wild West had legal tangles with Carver, when Pawnee Bill combined with Cody, and when Cody concluded his career with the 101 Ranch show. Besides the melodramas that starred or were about Buffalo Bill, Kasson makes no mention of other frontier dramas such as *My Partner*, *The Squaw Man*, or *The Girl of the Golden West*, which moved the genre from shoot-’em-up thrillers to romance and from Bowery playhouses to Times Square theatres.

While Kasson’s re-examination of Cody is fresh and valuable, she occasionally falls under Cody’s spell. More than once, she writes of the famous exchange of telegrams between Cody and Salsbury in which Cody laments the loss of stock and equipment because of a boat sinking near New Orleans, as though the incident were historically accurate. When she writes about Salsbury’s memoir, “some of which was published in the 1950s,” she seems unaware that all of Salsbury’s reminiscences were published in 1993. The book is well-written and carefully edited, although it lacks a bibliography, which, I assume, was a decision by Hill & Wang and not an oversight by the author. Such quibbles aside, Kasson’s book is a welcome and readable addition to the large and growing library of Cody-ana.



***Joseph Jefferson: Dean of the American Theatre.*** By Arthur Bloom. Savannah, GA: Frederic C. Beil, 2000; pp. 506. Illustrations. \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewed by Benjamin McArthur, Southern Adventist University

The first question to pose of Arthur Bloom’s fine new biography of Joseph Jefferson is, Why did it take so long? Not Bloom’s work, which has been long

awaited for the obvious reason of its exhaustive research, but, rather, why has it taken until the new millennium for any scholarly biography to be written of arguably America's most popular comedian of the nineteenth century? Modern studies of Edwin Booth, Edwin Forrest, and Charlotte Cushman have appeared alongside hosts of books on lesser figures, but, for Jefferson, readers had to be content with appreciations by friends such as William Winter, Francis Wilson, daughter-in-law Eugenie Paul Jefferson, and granddaughter Eleanor Farjeon. And, of course, there was the *Autobiography*. That most delightful of all theatrical memoirs may explain the absence of biographical treatment. It seemed to be all there, a life retold with more charm than any historian could muster.

But Jefferson's self-told life did not tell all, and those aspects it did tell were burdened with the imperfect recollections and self-interest inherent in all such documents. Thus, we must be grateful that Arthur Bloom has undertaken the daunting task of going behind the *Autobiography* to re-create Jefferson's life.

It must be said at the beginning that *Joseph Jefferson: Dean of the American Theatre* may be the most exhaustively researched biography ever produced of an American stage figure. Bloom's use of nineteenth-century newspapers is breathtaking in range. He has scoured theatrical repositories around the country in search of vagrant Jeffersoniana (there is no central repository of Jefferson material). His use of pertinent secondary literature is not as complete, but still wide ranging. His appendix, containing the itinerary of each of Jefferson's tours from 1867 to 1904, is unlike anything of which I am aware. No one should ever again have to re-create the essential details of Joe Jefferson's career.

There are really two books here that must be read in tandem. There is the text of not quite three hundred pages, and there are the appendix and endnotes, comprising another nearly two hundred. If ever there were an argument for the hoary footnote, it is here, where the fascinating material relegated to the endnotes might be more easily scanned. Besides the citations, Bloom tends to insert lengthy quotes from reviews and other contemporaries into the notes, some of which are quite important to his story. The illustrations form a third facet in Bloom's scholarly triad, and they are abundant and wonderfully chosen.

Who is Bloom's Jefferson? On a professional level, Bloom tells the story of a performer born to the stage, who attained the height of stardom only after a long apprenticeship. Bloom documents Jefferson's professional career with great fastidiousness, showing that, though he would ultimately be known for one role, he had mastered a large repertoire, some of which he continued to intersperse, between Rip Van Winkle performances, into his late career (most notably Bob Acres in *The Rivals*). It is of course to *Rip Van Winkle* that Bloom pays closest attention. Re-creating the acting technique of bygone players who left no cinematic record (though the elderly Jefferson did have a couple of

scenes from *Rip* filmed by early cameras) is proverbially difficult. Bloom makes a heroic effort to convey the magic with which Jefferson evidently infused the part of the tippling, improvident sleeper. He draws heavily upon contemporary accounts to sustain Jefferson's historical reputation as a pioneer of acting realism, one who eschewed the scoring of "points" in favor of a nuanced, rounded portrayal. As such, Jefferson's significance goes beyond simply being a highly popular performer in an eccentric play that just happened to catch the public fancy. He must be viewed as a shaper of the American theatre tradition. Bloom does not make this claim directly, stressing Jefferson's quotidian interests in box-office receipts.

Bloom sees the story of the private Jefferson as "an endless search for home by a man who spent his life in rented rooms and railway cars" (xv). More than this, the well-to-do star, with a clutch of opulent homes scattered from Massachusetts to Louisiana to Florida, coexisted uneasily with the rustic who preferred the fishing pole and quiet pond to ceremonious dinners in New Haven. His great role, after all, celebrated the charms of impecunious ne'er-do-wellism. Bloom has his ear resolutely tuned to these contradictions as they appear in the *Autobiography*.

Is there more to be said about Jefferson? I think so. (Full disclosure: I am writing my own biography of Jefferson.) Primarily, I think Bloom might have done more to set Jefferson in the context of his theatre and society. Although he pays due heed to the wider Jefferson acting clan, Bloom's focus remains resolutely on the third named Joseph Jefferson. Important figures with whom Jefferson performed are slighted or absent altogether. Mrs. John Wood, for example, among the nation's great comediennes and an important partner in Jefferson's rollicking burlesques early in the 1860s, gets no mention at all. There is also—except for *Rip*—surprisingly little discussion of plays. Bloom does not intend his biography as a critical study of nineteenth-century drama, yet a reader could better appreciate Jefferson's accomplishments with a fuller discussion of the sorts of play in which he was featured. What of the endless farces—*The Spectre Bridegroom*, *Lend Me Five Shillings*, or *A Conjugal Lesson*—on which the young player cut his comic teeth? A bit more analysis of the roles Jefferson attempted might flesh out his preparation for *Rip* as well as give readers a lively sense of comedy in the antebellum age.

Bloom might also have given his reader a stronger sense of Jefferson's place in the evolution of nineteenth-century theatre. Beginning in childhood, Jefferson was present—and often center stage—at important developments in the theatre: jumping Jim Crow with Dan Rice; helping craft *Our American Cousin* with Laura Keane; portraying the Yankee hero in Boucicault's controversial melodrama *The Octoroon*, and, as mentioned, pioneering a new tradition of acting realism in *Rip Van Winkle*. Jefferson also found himself inadvertently involved in an important court case that helped define stage copyright law, and, famously, he took part in the event that has gone down as a



defining moment in stage–church relations: the “Little Church around the Corner” episode. (Bloom does pay this story close attention.)

Theatre historians know Joseph Jefferson as perhaps the most congenial of theatrical figures, but Bloom refuses to take this self-effacing persona at face value. In the manner of all good biography, he exposes Jefferson’s efforts to give a favorable spin to episodes of his life in his *Autobiography*. In the Mexican–American War, for example, Jefferson could not have been present at the battle of Palo Alto. Why he made the claim offers fertile ground for psychological speculation. Likewise, why Jefferson chose to be out of the country during the Civil War offers a glimpse of the inner man. Joseph Jefferson, an actor whose career proceeded without scandal and with rare public criticism, has found a biographer willing to peek beneath that amiable mask. To Bloom’s credit, he discovers a human with considerably more complexity than “Old Joe” would admit.



***Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography.*** By Barbara Ozieblo. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; pp 345. \$55.00 hardcover, \$22.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Yvonne Shafer, St. John’s University

The past two decades have witnessed an increasing interest in the work of Susan Glaspell. C. W. E. Bigsby’s collection of her plays, published in 1988, introduced many readers to her work for the first time. Reviewing the collection, critic Michael Goldman called Glaspell “the only playwright of her generation worthy of comparison with O’Neill.” Since that time, essays about Glaspell’s work have been published in multiple books: Mary E. Papke published the very thorough and useful *Susan Glaspell: A Research and Production Sourcebook* (1993); a lengthy analysis of Glaspell’s plays, with particular emphasis on their expressionistic qualities, appeared in my book *American Women Playwrights, 1900–1950* (1995); and there have been academic conferences devoted to Glaspell’s work. Now Barbara Ozieblo has written an excellent critical biography that will be of value to theatre scholars.

Ozieblo writes that she worked for ten years to collect material and to try to understand the complex nature of her subject. One of the chief virtues of the book is the depth and breadth of the research. Her many research trips from Spain (where she teaches at the University of Málaga) took Ozieblo to dozens of locations, including Glaspell’s hometown of Davenport, Iowa, the Newberry Library in Chicago, Vassar College Library, Stanford University, and, of course, to more obvious locations such as the Harvard Theatre Collection. Ozieblo discovered the whereabouts of almost every person who worked with Glaspell, or, in many instances, the children of such persons. Of particular interest is the

information she obtained through interviews and/or lengthy correspondence with Joanne Bentley, daughter of Hallie Flanagan, Anna Matson Hamburger (for whom Norman Matson deserted Glaspell), and Sirius Cook, the grandson of Glaspell's husband, George Cram "Jig" Cook. Ozieblo corrects many false ideas about Glaspell and the Provincetown Players that have been printed in the past and accepted as fact. Much of her information in this area was provided by Leona Egan (a longtime summer resident of Provincetown), whose book *Provincetown as a Stage: Provincetown, the Provincetown Players, and the Discovery of Eugene O'Neill* (1994) is a rich resource.

Of course, Glaspell is chiefly of interest to theatre scholars because of her connection with the Provincetown Players and with Eugene O'Neill. Ozieblo provides details about the formation of the Players and Glaspell's contribution. She also presents a picture of the close relationship that developed between Glaspell and O'Neill—so many hours spent in conversation as to make O'Neill's wife, Gladys Boulton, jealous. Ozieblo points out the mutual encouragement between the two playwrights, but also that some critics, particularly in England, placed Glaspell above O'Neill as a playwright.

The information regarding the reception of Glaspell's books, short stories, and plays in England is particularly fresh. Ozieblo describes, for example, a very successful production in London in 1925 of *The Verge*, a play that had a poor reception in the United States. Sybil Thorndike, who played the disturbed protagonist, Claire, viewed the play "symbolically" and felt that in her character "Glaspell had created a genius" (184).

In addition to production information and critical reception regarding the plays, Ozieblo establishes the interconnection between the events in Glaspell's life (particularly her complicated love life), her work as a reporter, her prose writing, and her plays. It is well known, for example, that Glaspell based *Trifles* on a crime that she covered in Iowa, then later turned the play into a short story, *A Jury of Her Peers*. Such remaking of material was characteristic. In the 1940s, when she wanted to return to the theatre and submitted a play, *Springs Eternal*, to her old friend Lawrence Langner (counting on a Theatre Guild production), and Langer rejected the play, Glaspell turned the material into the novel *Judd Rankin's Daughter*. Like most of her novels, it received positive reviews and was a popular book. Ozieblo gives a vivid description of Glaspell's work with the Federal Theatre Project in Chicago, especially her connection with Arnold Sundgaard's daring play about syphilis, *Spirochete*.

Ozieblo's book is both engrossing and informative, and its text is complemented with relevant photographs. Glaspell made efforts to keep her own life and its sacrifices hidden, and the author has done some good detective work to clarify what has previously been unclear. Ozieblo presents a picture of a woman whose life was filled with contradictions between her theories and her behavior. Like many biographers, her fondness for her subject leads her at some

points into a less than objective attitude toward Glaspell (one thinks particularly of the playwright's problems with alcohol), and deals rather hard treatment to George Cram Cook, Norman Matson (Glaspell's supposed second husband), and Hallie Flanagan, director of the Federal Theatre Project. Ozieblo's view of Glaspell is clearly stated on the last page of the text: "My years with Glaspell have convinced me that this self-effacing woman, who was brought up to revere men as her superiors but who never doubted her own power to transform the world, can teach us much about the relations between men and women. In particular, in her plays and novels, she values the woman who, recognizing the transient nature of love, is not afraid to strike out on her own journey of improvement."



***"A Wind is Rising": The Correspondence of Agnes Boulton and Eugene O'Neill.*** Edited by William Davies King. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000; pp. 328. \$49.50 hardcover.

Reviewed by Ronald Wainscott—Indiana University

After all these years I am glad to see that the correspondence (letters, notes and wires) of O'Neill and his second wife Agnes Boulton have finally reached print. I have had occasion to use some of these letters in my research, but many I had not read until this publication. Boulton was married to O'Neill during his most experimental period as a playwright, 1918–29, and some of the letters provide material related to productions and his writing of the plays, but most of the letters focus on the marriage and the daily vicissitudes of living in a volatile, love-hate relationship which vacillates between the euphoric and the accusatory, much like the text of O'Neill's 1924 play *Welded*—a thinly disguised account of their relationship.

The editor divides the letters into three periods, the first of which, 1918–20, is by far the most informative and cohesive. There are few breaks in this correspondence, whereas Part II (1921–6) and Part III (1927–8) are often sketchy, with long silent periods, and much of the letters are given over to clothes shopping, paying bills, travel plans, and repairs around the house. The correspondence is often repetitious. I lost track of the number of times they discussed the same petty household issues or their overwhelming physical attraction for one another (often in the same words). The repetition at times reminded me of some of O'Neill's deliberate repetition in his plays (*Diff'rent*, for example), but without the art.

King has a particularly difficult task in dating and ordering the letters, since many are undated and most are handwritten, leading to numerous transcription difficulties. Anyone who has read O'Neill's scrawl can recognize the magnitude of the task. The editor seems to handle most of this well. He tells

us when he is guessing and many of the conjectures are plausible. Most of the notes and introductory material are sound, with only a few errors creeping in. The most glaring occurs with the play *The Fountain*. Early in the book King correctly dates the production of the play as 1925, but on p. 162 he inexplicably states that no new O'Neill play was produced in 1925.

The editor makes it clear that he is just as interested in Boulton as in O'Neill and King is fascinated with their "intertextual cohabitation" (17). King may, however, overstate the case for Boulton's accomplishments as a writer. Her pulp fiction and proclivity for sensationalism in the short story do not necessarily translate to gripping letter-writing. The same is true of the dramatist, who is not at his best when writing to his wife; indeed, O'Neill's correspondence with Kenneth Macgowan is much more engaging and important to his artistry. The Boulton correspondence, however, is more telling about his adult life, with all of its dependencies, insecurities, and sometimes juvenile emotionality. For her part, Boulton seems fascinated with power in gender relationships and her mood shifts are often monumental.

The title is a reference to the planned third volume of Boulton's memoirs of their marriage, but only one volume, *Part of a Long Story*, was written and published. The editor believes that the title reflects Boulton's "determination that some expression would survive the emotional violence which finally overwhelmed the marriage" (17).

Boulton's ability to see through O'Neill's posturing, when he pretends that he read the riot act to his producer John Williams during the rehearsal period for *Beyond the Horizon*, is particularly striking. She suspects and states that it was probably O'Neill's agent Richard Madden who put Williams on the spot, while O'Neill silently watched. As King aptly observes, "an element of duplicity or convenient fiction runs through both sides of this correspondence" (42–3). Both writers are so insecure that when one redresses the other (which is frequent) the injured party appears to fall apart. At one moment they declare their undying love and uncontrollable craving for one another; in the next, accusations fly with abandon: "You always have kicked me when I was down," O'Neill declares, "do you realize that?" (82). When Boulton suspects that O'Neill's attentions to her may be waning, she brings up a former love interest of his, Louise Bryant, and accuses him of being in touch with Bryant again (this appears as early in the Boulton-O'Neill marriage as 1920).

The collection raises an ethical question regarding researching the lives of the dead through the surviving residue. Some may find the numerous discussions of Boulton's and O'Neill's pet names for their genitalia and sex games to be invasive and voyeuristic. Others may find it silly and sophomoric. It is certainly frequent. At the conclusion of Boulton's most graphic description

of her lust for O'Neill she writes a command: "tear this letter up!" (95), yet here it is for all of us to read, over eighty years later.

One of the most moving passages in the correspondence is O'Neill's impassioned plea for euthanasia while watching his father slowly die in 1920 (150). Equally disturbing, but unflattering to the writer, is his usual sign-off about his children: "Kiss Shane and Oona for me." On one occasion, in 1928, however, he adds, "I love them both dearly and I will prove it in all the years to come" (298). At the time, O'Neill was about to run away with Carlotta Monterey and he eventually disinherited his children.

There is much here that is disparaging to both writers and, although I would not object to some cutting of the repetition and pettiness of some of the letters, the editor was clearly determined to make the record as complete as the surviving letters would allow. Whatever shortcomings the volume may have, I am glad that the important letters presented here are finally being shared with a larger reading public.



***Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s.*** By Angela J. Latham. Hanover, NH, and London: Wesleyan University Press, 2000; pp. 224. Illustrations, notes, and bibliography. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Modrea Mitchell-Reichert, Southwest Texas State University

As women emerged from the constraints of whalebone corsets, trailing skirts, and woolen knickers into skirts that skimmed their ankles or even knees, socioeconomic and political forces were massing against this new physical freedom. The questions *Posing a Threat* asks are how did women test their newborn freedom through fashionable clothing choices—primarily bathing costumes—and what were the lasting consequences of these experiments? "Flappers" and chorus girls were the principle targets of self-proclaimed moralists and socially prominent spokesmen in the twenties. The emergence of the working-class woman and her fashion decisions created an amalgam of conflicting social, economic, and moral attitudes, and forced negotiations with the hegemonic dictators of acceptable female behavior.

The book's sociological orientation is stated in the introduction. Latham writes, "The ways in which female members of a society present themselves and the reactions to such presentations are among the most candid indications of the values and mores of a generation." Latham presents her argument in five chapters, describing a progressive development in women's fashion choices within American society, on and off the stage, and the negotiation of divergent attitudes.

In the first two chapters, Latham reviews existing social and moral doctrines at the turn of the twentieth century. The prevailing attitudes of Victorian mores dictated that a woman's place was in the home. This morality clashed with the revolutionary designs of loose-fitting dresses with sassy short skirts, clothing that provided women physical comfort and the ability to move vigorously. Working-class women's fashions reflected the interests of a growing economic and political segment that sought full integration into society. Diatribes and moral arguments about women's fashion choices, then, reflected a deeper conflict within American ideology. Latham contends that "the female body and, consequently, the fashions a woman wore, were crucial sites for the contestation and negotiation of authority" (96).

Chapter three probes this supposition with a detailed scrutiny of the controversial bathing costume and its long-range implications for the definitions and commodifications of female beauty in America. Illustrations and photographs pepper the chapter, allowing readers a pictorial view of how dramatically the image of female beauty has changed. Florenz Ziegfeld's efforts to establish a new theatrical icon of beauty led to the promotion of the chorus girls in his annual revues, the *Follies*. Ziegfeld and others gained wider social acceptance for their scantily clad chorus girls by theatricalizing the growing popularity of swimming and beauty contests.

Chapter four, subtitled "The Right to Bare—Containing and Encoding American Women in the Popular Theatre," offers a look at the divergent, almost schizophrenic, position taken by the theatrical community in the early 1900s. Serious dramas by Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell played simultaneously with Avery Hopwood's farces and Ziegfeld's revues. The chapter probes the contradiction between acceptable, "modest" apparel for women in general and permissive expectations for women who went on the stage. The sources provided by the author support and underscore the insidious manner in which the revues produced by Ziegfeld and the Shuberts objectified and commodified women's bodies, revues presented with ostensive finesse and decorum that offered more female nudity than the low-status, shadow world of burlesque.

The exploitation of young women in commercial theatres during the 1920s—in particular, the objectification of women's bodies for financial gain—is explored in Latham's fifth chapter through an examination of Avery Hopwood's popular sex farce *Ladies Night*. The play's simple story of exaggerated male sexual desire for women who wore new, revealing fashions is set in a Turkish bathhouse, leading Latham to "interpret the play as a coded, public text excerpted from a much larger underground narrative of homosexual resistance to heterosexual hegemony" (132).

Latham's investigation of the socioeconomic and political environment that existed in the 1920s, in relation to the divergent definitions of acceptable fashion for women in and out of the theatre, provides a telling picture of the

position of women in society. The author has conducted extensive research into period newspapers and periodicals to create a solid base for her suppositions. Fashion's ability to manipulate, identify, and control a particular segment of the population is an ancient and always relevant topic.



***Gielgud: A Theatrical Life, 1904–2000.*** By Jonathan Croall. New York: Continuum, 2000; pp. 580. \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewed by David J. Loehr, Independent Scholar

This exhaustive, but by no means exhausting, book about John Gielgud is well-titled. Jonathan Croall has taken Gielgud's career, rather than his personal life, as his focus and, in so doing, provides a valuable look at English theatre as it grew and evolved through the twentieth century.

Gielgud's was truly a theatrical life. On his mother's side, he was part of the famed Terry family, as close a thing to theatre royalty as one could get at the turn of the nineteenth century. This simple fact may have been enough to ensure his future. One of his earliest toys was an elaborate theatre in which he designed and built sets, effects, even actors. Croall describes Gielgud's "shows" in detail, right down to which toys from which sibling had been pressed into service. Gielgud's childhood was also filled with trips to the theatre that transported and enchanted him. The privilege of sitting in a special box with an illustrious cousin or two, or going backstage to meet yet another Terry, only added to the allure.

After a section that deals primarily with Gielgud's childhood, detailing the family and their own rich history, Croall launches into the actor's theatre career, much as Gielgud himself had, utterly and completely. While Croall discusses Gielgud's family throughout the book (in particular his mother Kate and his brother Val, who eventually became the head of Radio Drama at the BBC), Croall concentrates on the public life of performance. From Gielgud's earliest role onstage as a walk-on at the Old Vic when he was just seventeen, to his entry into the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, this section paints the portrait of a young man rich in talent but also rich in self-consciousness, a man still learning how to use the former effectively and lose the latter entirely.

Later, Gielgud joined the newly formed Oxford Playhouse of J. B. Fagan. In the course of six weeks, he went from Shaw's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* to Congreve's *Love for Love* to Milne's once-banned *Mr. Pim Passes By*, and, finally, to Young Marlowe in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. One director from this season remembered Gielgud as having "an awkward stance that prevented his performances reaching perfection" (51). His notices were brief, but positive, and by the end of the season, he was praised for his

versatility. In particular, his performance as Valentine in the Congreve play inspired several undergraduate actors to imitate his already distinctive voice. Croall points out that “[t]hey were not to be the last” (51).

We are also treated, in this section, to an abbreviated history of repertory theatre, then a newly revived concept. Croall gives a glimpse into undergraduate life at Oxford, reminding us that while Gielgud passed up college in order to act, his experience of the Playhouse was not unlike college life. This quality was further enhanced by the Playhouse’s close connection to the Oxford Undergraduate Dramatic Society, where Gielgud would later have his first chance at directing.

On the eve of his twentieth birthday, Gielgud faced his first audition, and was offered the lead in a London production of *Romeo and Juliet*. His Juliet was to be Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, who had just made her name in the successful opera *The Immortal Hour*. This experience, a trial by fire for Gielgud, was to forge a lifelong friendship and frequent stage partnership with Ffrangcon-Davies. His natural awkwardness made him nervous and clumsy in the fight scenes, and his self-consciousness in an ill-fitting costume and unflattering makeup soon caused a crisis of confidence.

Croall is cautious in sorting among reminiscences and reviews. In the case of his first *Romeo*, Gielgud implied that the critical reception was universally poor. Many critics did indeed find fault with the production and his performance in particular, but many others noted his promise, his possibilities, and his clear perception. Several note a tendency to effeminacy, a criticism that would worry Gielgud all his life. In the end, he felt his attempt at the role was a failure. In spite of this, Gielgud grew more determined to succeed and live up to his promise. When he finally returned to London in *Richard of Bordeaux*, he followed through on that promise.

From here on, the pattern of the book is set. We learn about various productions in reasonable detail: descriptions of the setting, listings of primary cast and crew members, and critical reactions. Gielgud spent the majority of his acting life on the stage—he felt uncomfortable with film acting until late in life, and indeed only appeared in eight films between 1924 and 1955. The bulk of this stagework was in costume drama and comedy.

Gielgud soon found his bearings and subsequent success with Shakespeare, showing off his versatility in the process. Early known for his Hamlet and Richard II, he would also become the consummate Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* (most often opposite Peggy Ashcroft as Beatrice). Gielgud would come to be identified with his readings of Shakespearean verse, touring later in life in a one-man program of speeches called *The Ages of Man*.



Further, he would be instrumental in bringing Chekhov to the London stage, his sensitive adaptations and direction winning audiences, who had written off Chekhov as inaccessible.

The book deals with these successes, as well as with Gielgud's wartime efforts for the theatre, touring to boost morale at home and abroad. *Gielgud: A Theatrical Life* also addresses the fact that he was increasingly identified with period plays, comedy or tragedy. Gielgud's inability to find a suitable modern role left him frustrated, often leading to a revival of a past success (such as Valentine in *Love for Love*, John Worthing in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, or Joseph Surface in *The School for Scandal*) or a retreat into Shakespeare.

In addition to Ashcroft and Ffrangcon-Davies, Ralph Richardson, Hugh Beaumont, Edith Evans, and Laurence Olivier all play reasonably large roles in Gielgud's life, and, thus, in Croall's book. We learn that it was Gielgud who, having become equally adept at direction, set Olivier on a course of classical roles when no one else would cast him. Croall offers a balanced view of the two actors' relationship and rivalry, a rivalry that seems to have been more in Olivier's mind than Gielgud's. Croall also illustrates the genuine, though platonic, love between Gielgud and Richardson, frequent partners onstage throughout their lives.

Balance is Croall's watchword throughout the book. He doesn't shy away from Gielgud's homosexuality, but neither does he go into graphic detail. This is clearly a book for theatre scholars, as opposed to those interested primarily in scandal. Croall does touch briefly on an event that threatened Gielgud's career—a 1953 arrest and charge of “persistently importuning male persons for immoral purposes.” Croall uses the incident to investigate the difficulties of being homosexual in an intolerant society, a fact faced by many in the English theatre at that time. The stress of this incident nearly pushed Gielgud to suicide. He attempted to withdraw from a production of *A Day by the Sea*, but Beaumont wouldn't let him quit. Fearing the audience reaction, Gielgud's first entrance was rewritten so that Richardson could accompany him onstage. To everyone's surprise, they were met with a standing ovation.

Gielgud's renewal and subsequent growth as an actor were shown in his willingness, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, to experiment with directors such as Peter Brook and playwrights like Albee (*Tiny Alice*) and Pinter (*No Man's Land*, with Richardson). Gielgud's choice to play against type as Spooner in *No Man's Land* thrilled critics and audiences alike.

Through his innovations as a director and actor, Gielgud helped to bring the English theatre out of the nineteenth century. He continually sought quality and, if possible, perfection. His life and career spanned an amazing period of change both in the theatre and in public life, a period leading to greater freedom

of expression onstage and off. Croall's book—written with Gielgud's blessing and, perhaps more importantly, his cooperation—offers a thorough, balanced, documented narrative of this theatrical life.



***Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century.*** By Alan Sinfield. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000; 407. \$29.95 hardcover.

***Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality.*** Edited by Calvin Thomas. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000; pp. 290. \$49.95 hardback, \$18.95 paperback.

Reviewed by James Fisher, Wabash College

Playwright Tony Kushner has called the remarkable generation of gay and lesbian playwrights examined in these two books a “weird little golden age” of dramatists, filmmakers, and theorists. Each book deals with aspects of this twentieth-century gay–lesbian renaissance and, for scholars, opens the field of sexuality and gender to an emphasis on theatre history, culture, and literary theory. Of these two works, Alan Sinfield's *Out on Stage* stands out as an essential critical history of homosexuality in modern drama, while *Straight with a Twist*, edited by Calvin Thomas, is an interesting collection of a dozen essays on aspects of Queer Theory (embracing variant definitions of the term from Rimbaud to Foucault) viewed through the prism of the heterosexual gaze and its complex relation to the gay–lesbian “other.”

*Out on Stage* tracks gay–lesbian subjects and characters in modern American and European plays, beginning, not surprisingly with the definitive gay forerunner, Oscar Wilde. Sinfield treads well-worn ground here, but, in a chapter titled “Emergings,” he compellingly traces a surprising number of pre–World War II plays with gay–lesbian themes and characters, from Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Mae West's *The Drag*, to Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* and works by less familiar authors. “Emergings” includes both plays in which the homosexual content is overt and (arguably) implied. As Sinfield states in his introduction, the point “is not to decide who is a lesbian or gay writer. My focus is on *representation*. I am concerned mainly with the production and circulation of concepts and images in a wealth of plays, and with the sense of possible lives that they create” (3). Sinfield locates numerous examples of these concepts and images, but, occasionally, his connections are less than compelling.

Subsequent chapters feature a thorough examination of Noël Coward's plays and other gay–lesbian dramas of his era. These are fascinating, though, aside from Coward's oeuvre, many of these plays are obscure and unlikely either to be produced or to become a significant part of the dramatic canon. *Out on Stage* blooms from chapter ten, which offers a penetrating study of Tennessee

Williams's work. As arguably the first American dramatist seriously to examine the subject in mainstream theatre, Williams is the key to appreciating post–World War II—and especially post-Stonewall—gay–lesbian dramatists. Most contemporary dramatists, either gay or straight, acknowledge a debt to Williams, but none owes him as much as those fiercely “out” dramatists, from Harvey Fierstein and Larry Kramer through Terrence McNally and Tony Kushner, who have dominated the last two decades.

After Williams, Sinfield surveys a diverse range of gay–lesbian plays from the 1950s to the 1990s. Chapter titles suggest his approach—“The All-American Family,” “The Problem of the Problem,” “Politics and Anger,” “The Sixties,” “Subcultural Work,” “AIDS: Crisis and Drama,” “Dissident Strategies”—with playwrights and plays dropped into the most appropriate category. This is largely effective, though certain plays defy compartmentalization. Many of these difficult ones turn up in the final chapters on AIDS-inspired and activist plays, which, like Kramer's *The Normal Heart* or Kushner's *Angels in America*, could easily serve as representative examples in *all* of the categories. Generalizations made about some of the plays do not always hold up under closer study, as when Sinfield suggests that “Most plays featuring AIDS are less ambitious in form and theme: they aspire to represent the human reality of the epidemic” (317), a view exploded by the aforementioned Kramer and Kushner works, among others.

Sinfield's categories are generally effective in pulling together many disparate issues and distinctly individual plays. In each category, Sinfield presents the expected plays along with some less obvious choices. Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy*, for example, despite its basic thematic mendacity and old-fashioned dramatic techniques, is not a surprising choice for the chapter entitled “The All-American Family”; whereas Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, which, Sinfield suggests, explores the “link between immaturity and homosexuality” (220), is also featured, despite being a play rarely thought of in a gay context. Sinfield may go a bit too far when noting that Biff's “over-assertive” (222) masculinity qualifies *Death of a Salesman* for inclusion as a gay play. This is merely one example of the book's greatest strength and weakness: straining to tie in the “classics” of American and British drama that Sinfield apparently feels are necessary to add a legitimizing air to the lesser-known dramas belonging here. At the same time, the inclusion of these works allows him to argue, quite reasonably, that gay–lesbian issues and characters are present on the modern stage, even when not mentioned by name.

A few implausible connections to undeniably “straight” plays do not undermine the effectiveness of this important study, for Sinfield has unearthed many little-known gay–lesbian plays—many of which deserve closer study—and his excellent analysis throughout certainly transcends any minor flaw. The text is persuasively written, thoroughly researched, and even when one disagrees with a viewpoint expressed, Sinfield never fails to offer a full and articulate

explication of his ideas. His illumination of the gay–lesbian elements in works by such early twentieth-century writers as Wilde, Maugham, Coward, Hellman, Eugene O’Neill, Rattigan, Djuna Barnes, Agatha Christie, and Tennessee Williams logically proceeds to more contemporary figures, from Le Roi Jones, Hansberry, and Orton through Fierstein, Kramer, Kushner, Churchill, Holly Hughes, Paula Vogel, and others.

Sinfield offers a valuable critical history of gay–lesbian drama. Moreover, he shows that the field offers many surprises and opportunities for scholars to explore in greater depth. The text is handsomely bound, with copious notes and a valuable index of plays. Unfortunately, illustrations, which would enhance Sinfield’s descriptions of key moments in particular plays, are not included, perhaps owing to the book’s length.

The bold sweep and inclusiveness of *Out on Stage* is significantly narrowed in *Straight with a Twist*, a volume introduced by its editor, Calvin Thomas, as an attempt to broach the “permeability of boundaries” (4) among definitions of sexuality and gender. The book also addresses the problem inherent in heterosexual scholars attempting to negotiate the terrain of Queer Theory and so risk the accusation, as Thomas worries, of “appropriating” a field that may rightly be better articulated by gay–lesbian scholars and artists. The volume is divided into three sections: “Theory,” “Literature,” and “Culture,” and the essays, all written around 1995—the “queer moment” (1) as Thomas suggests—are as varied in quality as they are in subject. The interesting angle of heterosexual views of Queer Theory raises intriguing issues in some of the essays, as in Thomas’s own in the first section of the book. Jacqueline Foertsch provides a similar perspective in approaching lesbian theory as a straight feminist, while Clyde Smith, a dancer, contributes a charmingly personal essay, “How I Became a Queer Heterosexual,” offering a glimpse of one artist embracing the “community of queerness” (67). The “Theory” section concludes with Lauren Smith’s rather dry study of the problem of reproducing the “normative” at the level of “self-expression” in composition classes.

The “Literature” section of *Straight with a Twist* features four focused and individually effective topics. Goran V. Stanivukovic’s insightful queer reading of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* stands out. Robert Nemesvari’s examination of male homosocial desire in the character of Robert Audley in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, John N. Duvall’s study of John Updike’s response (and its influence on his own work) to heterosexual (and, conversely, homosexual) aspects in the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Mary M. Wiles’s exploration of lesbian issues in Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* are well-written and cogently argued, but add comparatively little to the articulated mission of *Straight with a Twist*.

The “Culture” section proceeds similarly. Katherine Gantz amusingly demonstrates queer elements in the television program *Seinfeld*, Jane Garrity

offers a survey of straight-versus-lesbian issues in a range of current television and film, and Joseph Aimone attempts to straddle the dividing line between literature and culture in an essay that improbably weds William Butler Yeats's poetry to the film *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*. *Straight with a Twist* concludes with a somewhat superfluous dialogue between the editor and Catherine MacGillivray, touching on issues raised in the volume as they relate to their own personal experiences. Thomas stresses that *Straight with a Twist* aspires to be for "human beings and that the queerer world that the contributors to this volume collectively desire would, indeed, be a more human world for all" (6).

While *Straight with a Twist* pays only marginal attention to theatre and drama (focusing instead on aspects of literature and popular culture), many of the issues raised relate to those explored by Sinfield in *Out on Stage*: negotiating the meanings of sexuality, modes for expressing these meanings, and the inviting prospect of reassessing the meanings of drama, literature, performance, morality, politics, and society. As Sinfield notes, for "queer people, in special ways, the drama on the stage is intimate with the dramas of our lives" (353).