

Theatre Project and Welles, and its extensive, well-researched appendix of *Macbeths* with nontraditional casts. *Weyward Macbeth* emphasizes how strongly theatre reflects and informs America's political history; the book enhances both American theatre and Shakespearean scholarship.

• • •

No Safe Spaces: Re-casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater. By Angela C. Pao. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010; pp. 305, 12 illustrations. \$80.00 cloth, \$32.50 paper, \$29.95 e-book.

doi:10.1017/S0040557412000269

Reviewed by Tiffany Noell, independent scholar

Nontraditional casting practices have been a subject of discussion and controversy for several decades, yet Angela Pao's *No Safe Spaces: Re-casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater* is the first to examine these practices across a wide range of theatres and texts, from an all-black production of *Hello, Dolly!* (1967) on Broadway to the National Asian American Theatre Company's production of *Othello* (2000). Nontraditional casting is not just a point of historical discussion but is still a navigation among vehement positions that may change according to the production in question. Pao's book does more than present some examples of nontraditional casting and the arguments both for and against the practice; she interrogates as well the subtle nuances of nontraditional casting, the effects it can have on a play, and how it is received by audiences and critics. Pao argues that nontraditional casting, in many situations, can call into question perceptions of race, ethnicity, and nationality while using the existing text to manipulate an audience's semiotic interpretations. Additionally, she provides an extensive bibliography that is a wonderful scholarly resource.

While Pao purports to explore a wide range of nontraditional casting practices, the main flaw I found with this book is that the sources on which it draws—interviews, statistics, and reviews, for example—almost entirely relate to African American, Latino/a, and Asian American performers, while neglecting other groups of actors, such as Native American, Arab American, and Persian American. There may be less information about these latter groups; however, I felt that their absence from the book (apart from mention in the book's introduction) reifies the hegemonic erasure of these groups from societal narratives and, ultimately, undermines Pao's arguments, which in large part I found convincing and well supported.

Early in the book, Pao clearly defines multiple terms collected under the umbrella concept of "nontraditional casting," including color-blind casting, conceptual casting, cross-cultural casting, and societal casting. Having fully explored these terms, Pao interweaves them in later chapters to illuminate her arguments about the effects that casting has on productions. She also explores the slippage

between terms such as race, ethnicity, and culture that result from centuries of layered rhetoric, thereby providing a base for the rest of her book. In Chapter 2, she investigates how theatre is socially and culturally encoded, especially in regard to nontraditional casting instances in which the race, ethnicity, or nationality of an actor and character do not match. Pao uses two controversial disputes, the August Wilson–Robert Brustein debates of 1996–7 and the *Miss Saigon* protests of 1990, to investigate the multiple possible interpretations that can result from such instances, and which can affect audience reception.

Having laid her theoretical foundation, Pao uses the rest of her book to examine historical productions. In Chapter 3, she analyzes classical forms of drama, as these were among the first plays to be cast nontraditionally. She explores alternating examples of nontraditional casting in which one or more casting choices make a significant semiotic difference. For example, the choice to have black actors play Emilia and Iago in *Othello* is read by Pao as a move that supports Othello's cultural separateness instead of emphasizing his difference. In Chapter 4, which focuses on nontraditional casting of modern plays, Pao argues that complete cultural transpositions of plays, which divorce plays from their original nations, languages, and people, are more socially acceptable than partial transformations such as those resulting from mixed-race or color-blind casting. Pao argues that positive audience reception of the former type of production occurs in part because these productions have made the effort to translate cultural nuances, whereas the latter type of production effectively destabilizes notions of static national identity, which can produce anxiety. Pao also argues that nontraditional casting often challenges whiteness and perceived racial neutrality when specifically applied to canonical plays by white writers, and that plays by nonwhite playwrights are often cast according to script indications. I felt that a chapter on nontraditional casting in works by nonwhite playwrights would have provided an interesting point of comparison for Pao and, indeed, would have enriched her contentions and brought to light additional complexities in the debates surrounding casting practices.

In Chapter 5, Pao claims that many critics have argued against nontraditional casting for antirealistic plays because the setting may thus become too socially and historically situated. To delve into this and other casting issues with antirealistic plays, Pao examines nontraditionally cast productions—or attempts at such productions—of works by Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, Jean Genet, and Thornton Wilder. Many of the tensions discussed in previous chapters come to a head in Chapter 6, which concentrates on Broadway musicals. Critics have often shown an anxiety regarding nontraditional casting on Broadway, situated as it is within the “regime of verisimilitude” (176), and reflective of the perceived notions and expectations of its audiences. Pao explores the performance genealogies and evolving ethnic characterizations that led to all-black productions of *Hello Dolly!* (1967) and *Guys and Dolls* (1976). In the case of these productions, nontraditional casting brought to the forefront the Jewish aspects of both musicals, of their writers, and of several of their characters that previously had been unmarked. These casting and text interactions correspond with Pao's subsequent discussions of two nontraditionally cast versions of American musicals that are firmly situated within Jewish culture and community, NAATCO's all-Asian

Falsettoland (1998, 2007) and David Leveaux's 2004 Broadway revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*, which featured a mixed cast of Jewish and non-Jewish actors.

Positing that theatre, as a sociocultural institution, is part of a politicized process, Pao argues that it is therefore in the position of being able to challenge cultural power through nontraditional casting interrogations of text and production. As such, *No Safe Spaces* provides a key exploration of the potential shifts in cultural power that may result from meaning-making casting practices, as Pao reopens questions of nontraditional casting and repositions previous debates for a new generation of theatre practitioners and scholars.

• • •

Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance. By James F. Wilson. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010; pp. 262, 12 photographs. \$27.95 paper.

doi:10.1017/S0040557412000270

Reviewed by Susan Stone-Lawrence, University of Central Florida

James F. Wilson's *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies* "focuses on the ways in which depictions of blackness and whiteness, male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, highbrow and lowbrow merged and coalesced in the theater and performances of the 1920s and 1930s" (3). In his "Introduction: 'It's Getting Dark on Old Broadway'," Wilson identifies the "often highly ambiguous, ambivalent, and bewildering" Harlem Renaissance performances of race and gender as "central" to his study (3). Through his examination of the period, Wilson describes stereotypes, extremes, and the superfluity of identities that exists along the borders of difference. He achieves his goal of showing the variety and complexity of defiant portrayals, which (sometimes blatantly and other times subversively) transgressed legal and social limitations to offer statements of autonomy usually not permitted decades before the civil rights movement and Stonewall. Actually, several of the artists Wilson highlights—were they still working today—might bring a welcome change to current stages and screens through their gifts of enacted courage, because many of the oppressive forces dominant during the early twentieth century continue to wield considerable power.

One of the strengths of this book is that Wilson draws in his study on a wide knowledge base and an extensive bibliography. His research derives from a range of biographical, critical, historical, sociological, philosophical, literary, dramatic, lyrical, and archival sources; these sources represent points of view within and around the Harlem Renaissance, current perspectives on race and sexuality, and significant works that have influenced both discourses during the past century. However, Wilson's concentration on quotations—although they are richly informative—often eclipses the reader's ability to discern Wilson's own stance on the subject. Sometimes he even fails to provide commentary on the blatantly biased and offensive statements that he reproduces in his text. Certainly, an author